Building a Nation Branding Image through Social Media Strategy: What does Gen Z say?

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A B S T R A C T

This study explores how digital diplomacy, particularly through digital content and social media campaigns, impacts Indonesia's nation brand image in Pakistan, with cultural curiosity among Pakistani Gen Z acting as a mediating factor. Using a quantitative research approach, data were gathered from 545 respondents selected via purposive sampling and analyzed with Structural Equation Modelling. The results show that digital content and social media campaigns do not directly improve Indonesia's nation brand image. Instead, both significantly increase cultural curiosity among Gen Z audiences. An important insight is that cultural curiosity effectively mediates the relationship between social media campaigns and the nation's brand image, while digital content has no significant effect. This indicates that successful digital nation branding relies on culturally engaging social media campaigns that foster familiarity and meaningful cognitive connections. Theoretically, the study advances the literature on nation branding and digital diplomacy by identifying cultural curiosity as a key psychological mechanism linking diplomatic stimuli to brand outcomes, supporting the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework and consumer multiculturation theory. Future research should incorporate mixed and experimental methods, expand to broader contexts, and use applied behavioral and participatory data to capture genuine digital diplomacy engagement better. Overall, the study highlights the strategic importance of digital diplomacy in sparking curiosity and shaping positive international perceptions among younger audiences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Branding in marketing is a strategic process through which organisations establish a unique identity and meaning that sets their products or institutions apart from competitors, creating strong associations in consumers' minds. Through branding, companies build functional, symbolic, and emotional value that encourages loyalty, preference, and long-term competitive edge (Keller, 2021). In today's practice, branding is no longer just about businesses communicating their products and services to consumers. Increasingly, branding has become a key strategy for nations aiming to enter international markets through exports, services, commodities, investment, and socio-cultural and tourism activities (Nye, 1990). Nation branding plays an essential role in shaping a country's image, which in turn helps boost bilateral trade and people-to-people connections (Anholt, 2007; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

In South Asia, particularly in Pakistan, renowned automotive brands like Honda, Toyota, Suzuki, and Yamaha have contributed to shaping a positive perception of Japan as a leader in technology on the world stage. At the same time, China has expanded its influence in Pakistan through the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project and by increasing cultural and culinary exchanges. Chinese restaurants and Chinatowns are prevalent in major cities, bringing economic advantages and boosting China's cultural visibility. Given this context, a key question is whether Bali, a popular tourist destination, or other national development initiatives can effectively foster a favourable image of Indonesia among Pakistani consumers.

Global branding indicators suggest Indonesia maintains a relatively strong international image. The 2020–2023 Nation Brand Strength Index (NBSI) ranks Indonesia 14th out of 192 countries, while the Nation Brand Index (NBI) by Anholt-Ipsos assesses factors like exports, governance, investment, immigration, culture, people, and tourism, placing Indonesia at 44th among 60 major nations (Anholt, 2007). However, the applicability of these global surveys to Indonesia's branding effectiveness in Pakistan is uncertain. Data from the Bureau of Statistics Indonesia (BPS) show that Pakistani tourists visiting Indonesia in 2024 totalled 23,133, indicating a rising trend. Still, this number is low compared to visitors from other Asian countries India with 710,207 visitors, Japan with 338,900, South Korea with 435,975, and China with 1,197,534. Moreover, Pakistan's Ministry of Overseas

Pakistanis reports that in 2021, only 1,411 Pakistanis were living in Indonesia, far fewer than in neighbouring countries such as Malaysia (61,912), Thailand (6,500), and Singapore (5,000).

Data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (www.pbs.gov.pk) for 2020 to 2024 indicates that Indonesia consistently ranks among Pakistan's top five import sources, underscoring Indonesia's important economic role in supporting Pakistan's needs for goods and services. This standing was reinforced by Indonesian President H.E. Prabowo Subianto's official visit to Pakistan in December 2025, which aimed to strengthen Indonesia's role as a strategic partner. The visit also emphasized expanding cooperation beyond trade, with efforts in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, education, literacy, and joint actions against illicit drugs. Nonetheless, there remains a noticeable gap between the strength of economic relations and the limited depth of societal linkages. This gap is reflected in the relatively low numbers of Pakistani tourists and diaspora members visiting Indonesia, especially compared to neighboring countries such as India and China.

This situation demonstrates that Pakistan's Gen Z, as a digitally savvy and highly mobile group, has not yet developed sufficient awareness of Indonesia. This is supported by an independent survey conducted by the Indonesian Consulate in Karachi in January 2025, involving 300 Pakistani university students. The results show that most respondents' knowledge of Indonesia is limited to Bali as a tourist destination and Indonesia's identity as a Muslim-majority country, along with low levels of digital engagement with Indonesia-related content. In literature, existing studies on nation branding primarily adopt broad, multilateral approaches, while research on single-country nation branding and digital diplomacy remains scarce. This gap raises important questions about the level of digital literacy regarding Indonesia in Pakistan and how Pakistani Gen Z perceives Indonesia in the digital age. To address this gap, the present study employs a quantitative method to evaluate the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies, specifically social media content and campaigns, in shaping Indonesia's brand image among Pakistani youth. By sparking cultural curiosity among Generation Z, who are mostly digital natives (Prensky, 2001), this study aims to provide empirical insights into how digital diplomacy and marketing communication can transform abstract national brand strength into concrete engagement and perception at the bilateral level.

Literature Review

Nation branding is a strategic effort to shape and manage a country's image among both domestic and international audiences (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Ishii & Watanabe, 2015). It relies on visual, verbal, and behavioral expressions to create meanings associated with the nation. Policymakers increasingly view it as a tool to attract tourists, foreign investment, skilled labor, and export opportunities while enhancing soft power (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). By embedding national culture into brands, countries can create symbols that represent shared values and identities, as seen in iconic brands like Havaianas and Harley-Davidson, which demonstrate culturally grounded brand strength (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2013; Steenkamp et al., 2003; Steenkamp, 2019; Holt, 2004).

Digital diplomacy strategically uses digital technologies, particularly the Internet and social media, to achieve diplomatic goals and manage international relations (Gilboa, 2016). Evolving from traditional diplomacy, it studies how digital tools shape perceptions, engagement, and policy outcomes (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Its core functions projection of national narratives and retrieval of international feedback often operate together to influence global image and soft power (Cull, 2013; Holmes, 2015; Hocking & Melissen, 2015; Manor, 2022). Social media campaigns and engaging digital content, such as Twiplomacy and Sweden's @Sweden initiative, humanize states, foster cultural familiarity, challenge stereotypes, and enhance nation branding through multimedia storytelling and interactive tools (Hurn, 2016; Kalsın, 2023; Baltezarević, 2021).

Cultural Curiosity reflects the emotional and motivational drive that encourages individuals to explore, appreciate, and sometimes adopt cultural elements beyond their own, fostering openness, adaptability, and new cultural experiences (Kashdan et al., 2009; Litvin et al., 2004). The Consumer Multicultural Orientation framework explains why some consumers are drawn to multicultural products, experiences, and brands through cultural openness, hybridity, emotional bonds, and global cultural attachment (Seo & Gao, 2015; Kipnis et al., 2019; Ibarra-Cantu & Cheetham, 2021). Culturally curious consumers often act as cultural mediators, resisting homogenised culture and promoting hybrid expressions, making Cultural Curiosity pivotal in consumer behaviour, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding (Ibarra-Cantu & Cheetham, 2021).

Hypotheses Development

Engaging digital content has become a crucial tool in shaping a country's brand image, influencing how international audiences perceive its culture, policies, and global presence (Smith, 2024). Narrative Transportation Theory highlights that immersive storytelling through videos, infographics, articles, and gamified media strengthens emotional bonds and improves message retention. For example, Indonesia uses platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to showcase its cultural heritage, tourism, and economic initiatives as part of its digital diplomacy efforts in Pakistan. Despite increased visibility, the actual impact of these campaigns on audience perception remains largely unexplored. Digital diplomacy offers a framework for understanding how online platforms enable direct communication between states and the public, transforming traditional diplomacy (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Gilboa, 2016).

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) further explains that Pakistani Gen Z interacts with Indonesian content to fulfill personal needs such as entertainment, information, and identity formation (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Previous studies support the significance of digital content in nation branding. Whyke, Chen, and Lopez-Mugica (2022) reveal that Li Ziqi's YouTube vlogs portray China authentically while blending self-orientalism and grassroots cultural diplomacy. Song et al. (2023) note that heritage-focused videos foster positive perceptions, especially when they are entertaining. Lund, Cohen, and Scarles (2018) show that social media storytelling allows audiences to participate and co-create emotionally resonant brand identities. Similarly, Chen, Shen, Huang, and Li (2021) find that culturally aligned, entertaining, and informative content strengthens brand identity and purchase intent. Perera, Nguyen, and Nayak (2022) also demonstrate that both user-generated and company-produced content increase engagement and brand equity through emotional and social connections. Overall, these findings highlight how digital content and social media serve as powerful tools for nation branding and cultural diplomacy.

H1: Positive and significant effect of Digital Content on the Nation Brand Image (NBI)
H2: Positive and significant effect of Social Media Campaign on the Nation Brand Image (NBI)

Engaging digital content is vital in shaping consumer multiculturation by fostering cross-cultural understanding and curiosity among international audiences (Green & Brock, 2000). In Indonesia's digital diplomacy, videos, infographics, and gamified content showcasing cultural heritage, tourism, and economic initiatives encourage Pakistani Gen Z to explore and engage with Indonesian culture (Smith, 2024). Digital Diplomacy Theory emphasizes how online platforms allow governments to communicate directly with audiences, bypassing traditional intermediaries (Bjola & Holmes, 2015), while UGT explains that audiences choose content to meet entertainment, informational, identity, and social needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) further boosts content credibility, increasing interest and adoption of foreign cultural elements (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Studies show that culturally authentic digital content, including user-generated stories, effectively motivates audiences to learn about and embrace foreign cultures (Wijaya, Wijaya, & Jaolis, 2025; Ben Aicha & Bouzaabia, 2023; Rainu & Baskaran, 2025). Social media campaigns enhance cultural curiosity by providing interactive platforms that feature host cultures and encourage active participation (Gilboa, 2016). Pakistani Gen Z interacts with posts, videos, and influencer-driven content, improving cross-cultural understanding (Yazdanparast et al., 2018; Jung & Lee, 2024). By combining informative, entertaining, and culturally rich content with participatory features, these campaigns motivate cultural learning, promote indirect engagement, and strengthen Indonesia's reputation among young Pakistani audiences (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

H3: Positive and significant effect of Digital Content on Cultural Curiosity
H4: Positive and significant effect of Social Media Campaign on Cultural Curiosity

Cultural curiosity plays a vital mediating role in how engaging digital content influences a nation's brand image. Immersive formats such as videos, storytelling, and interactive media stimulate curiosity and promote a deeper exploration of a country's culture, values, and identity. Through this process, Generation Z audiences absorb cultural meanings, boosting cross-cultural understanding and emotional bonds. Studies indicate that participatory and emotionally resonant digital content enhances positive national perceptions by encouraging engagement and cultural openness (Ayalew, 2017; Sohaib et al., 2023; Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Therefore, cultural curiosity turns digital content consumption into a meaningful assessment of the nation brand. In social media campaigns, cultural curiosity plays a key role in linking digital engagement with the nation's brand image by inspiring users to interact, share, and co-create cultural stories. Interactive and participatory efforts motivate audiences to explore other cultures, aiding in identity formation and fostering positive views of the country. Evidence indicates that engagement, electronic word of mouth, and user-generated content boost brand perception through emotional and cognitive involvement (Masa'deh et al., 2021; Stojanovic et al., 2018; Pamment & Cassinger, 2018). Consequently, social media campaigns rich in cultural content enhance nation branding by offering curiosity-driven multicultural experiences.

H5: Positive and significant effect of Digital Content on the NBI mediated by Cultural Curiosity
H6: Positive and significant effect of Social Media Campaign on the NBI mediated by Cultural Curiosity
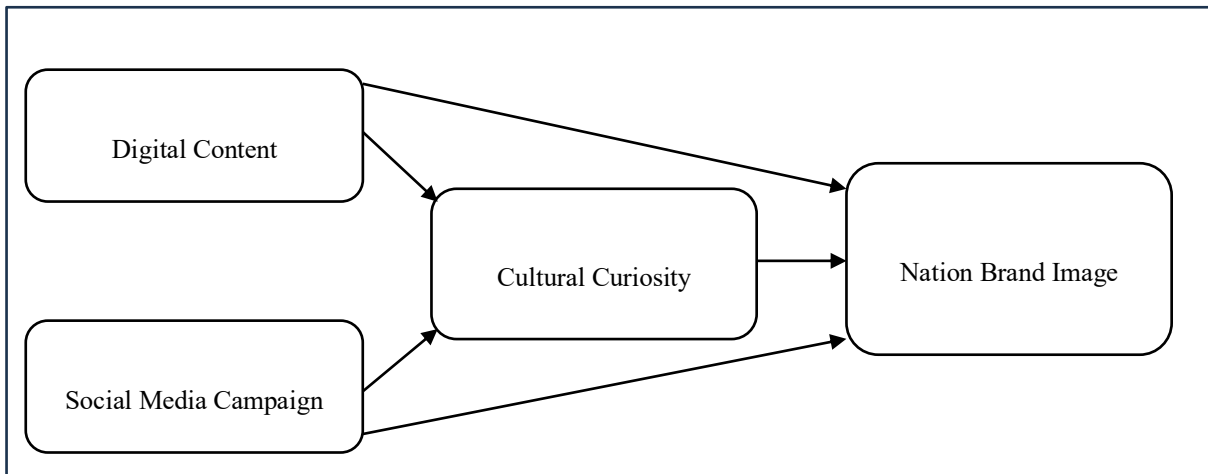
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative, positivist, and deductive methodology to examine how Indonesia's digital diplomacy through its online content and social media strategies affects the country's brand by influencing perceptions among Generation Z in Pakistan. The positivist approach is appropriate because it emphasizes objectivity and measurable data, while the cross-sectional survey design allows for hypothesis testing at a particular point in time.

The focus of this study is the Pakistani Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, who in 2025 will be between 13 and 28 years old, comprising approximately 69 million people or 27% of the population. As digital natives, these young individuals are highly active on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Prensky, 2001), making them a key audience for evaluating Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiatives. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling to ensure they were digitally engaged. Using Cochran's formula, the minimum required sample size was set at 385, but to account for non-responses, the target was increased to 545 respondents. Recruitment was carried out via social media, educational institutions, and Indonesian diplomatic channels in Pakistan to ensure participants' exposure to relevant cultural content. Accordingly, the researcher included a screening question in the survey instrument to assess whether respondents had a digital interest in Indonesia. The survey instrument included five indicators related to digital content and social media campaign strategies; ten indicators on cultural curiosity; and five indicators concerning the national brand image, all measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The survey gathered responses from 545 participants to assess their familiarity with Indonesia and their demographic traits. The researcher included a screening question to identify whether respondents had a digital interest in Indonesia. Most respondents (81.28%) reported being familiar with and interested in Indonesia digitally, while 18.72% were not. The gender distribution was balanced, with 57.43% male and 42.57% female participants. Regarding occupation, students made up the largest group at 61.65%, followed by employees (27.52%), others (6.06%), and entrepreneurs (4.77%). These results suggest that the sample primarily comprises students with a high level of awareness of Indonesia, providing helpful context for assessing perceptions and engagement with Indonesian digital diplomacy initiatives.

The variables were derived from established scales, with content validity confirmed through forward–backward translation and expert evaluations. Reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (both > 0.70), while content validity was supported by confirmatory factor analysis, convergent validity, and discriminant validity measures (Hair et al., 2017; Cain et al., 2017). Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4, utilizing PLS-SEM to evaluate measurement model fit, analyze the structural model, and test hypotheses.

Table 1. Reliability, Convergent validity, and AVE tests

Indicators	Questionnaire	References	Loading	AVE	CR	α
DIG1	I can find Indonesian diplomatic activities (e.g., meetings, expos, festivals, tourism, cultural events) advertisements or promotions online.	I can search for products in the retailer's offline store through its online store.	Gao, W., Fan, H., Li, W., & Wang, H. (2021).	0.787	0.631	0.895	0.854
DIG2	The Indonesian content promotion on social media is attractive	The brand I follow on social media is attractive	Büyükdağ, N. (2021).	0.824			

Indicators	Questionnaire	References	Loading	AVE	CR	α
DIG3	The Indonesian content promotion on social media is reliable	The brand I follow on social media is reliable — Büyükdağ, N. (2021).	0.828			
DIG4	The Indonesian Embassy's social media accounts regularly post updates on its diplomatic activities.	"The Brand's" Facebook page keeps updating product information. — Khan, M. F., & Jan, A. (2019)	0.762			
DIG5	I can easily recognize Indonesian culture through its music, clothing, and language on social media pages.	I can easily recognize "The Brand" by its profile picture on its Facebook page. — Khan, M. F., & Jan, A. (2019)	0.770			
SMC1	I will definitely try Indonesian food after it runs a social media campaign I follow.	I will definitely try the brand I follow on social media. — Büyükdağ, N. (2021).	0.773			
SMC2	I introduce the Indonesian Culture Campaign I see on Social Media to others.	I introduce the brands I follow on social media to others. — Büyükdağ, N. (2021).	0.802			
SMC3	Indonesian embassy shares interesting feeds/reels (pictures/videos/graphics) on their social media pages	"The Brand" shares interesting product photos on Facebook. — Khan, M. F., & Jan, A. (2019)	0.711	0.637	0.897	0.856
SMC4	Social Media helps create a positive image of Indonesia	Social media helps create a positive image of my preferred brand — Faisal, A., & Ekawanto, I. (2021).	0.846			
SMC5	Social media helps me understand the culture of Indonesia	Social media helps me understand the quality of my preferred brand — Faisal, A., & Ekawanto, I. (2021).	0.850			
CMC1	I like learning Indonesian Culture	I like learning new things — Bluemke, M., Engel, L., Grüning, D. J., & Lechner, C. M. (2024).	0.841			
CMC2	I like to explore the distinctiveness of Indonesian culture compared to other countries.	I like to figure out how different ideas fit together — Bluemke, M., Engel, L., Grüning, D. J., & Lechner, C. M. (2024).	0.844			
CMC3	I intend to continue experiencing the Indonesian culture	I intend to continue experiencing the culture — Lin, J., Kang, Y., Hong, L., & Huang, Y. (2022)	0.853			
CMC4	I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures, like those in Indonesia.	I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures. — Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018)	0.829	0.663	0.952	0.943
CMC5	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures, like those in Indonesia.	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures. — Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018)	0.804			
CMC6	I try to find the uniqueness of Indonesian culture online to make it easier for me to differentiate it from other ASEAN countries.	If I do not understand something, I look for additional information to clarify it. — Bluemke, M., Engel, L., Grüning, D. J., & Lechner, C. M. (2024).	0.771			

Indicators	Questionnaire		References	Loading	AVE	CR	α
NBI1	Indonesia's overall quality is high.	This brand's quality is high.	Junfeng, W., Zesheng, Y., & RuQiang, L. (2022).	0.836			
NBI2	Indonesia has its unique strengths compared to other countries.	This brand's features are better than its competitors'.	Junfeng, W., Zesheng, Y., & RuQiang, L. (2022).	0.853			
NBI3	Indonesia's characteristics set it apart internationally.	This brand's characteristics can be distinguished from those of its competitors.	Junfeng, W., Zesheng, Y., & RuQiang, L. (2022).	0.885	0.727	0.930	0.906
NBI4	Indonesia generally meets the expectations of international visitors and partners.	This brand does not disappoint its customers.	Junfeng, W., Zesheng, Y., & RuQiang, L. (2022).	0.860			
NBI5	Indonesia is considered one of the top nations in its region.	It is one of the best brands in the industry.	Junfeng, W., Zesheng, Y., & RuQiang, L. (2022).	0.828			

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study evaluated both data quality and measurement instruments. As detailed in Table 1, reliability was strong, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.854 to 0.943 and composite reliabilities exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Convergent validity was established, as all average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50. Discriminant validity was also confirmed through the Fornell–Larcker criterion and factor cross-loading analysis.

Table 2. Model of Fit

Parameter	Rule of Thumb	Parameter Value	Remark
SRMR	<0.10	0.052	Fit
GoF	≥ 0.10 Small Fit ≥ 0.25 Medium Fit ≥ 0.36 Large Fit	0.646	Large Fit

The variables were derived from established scales, with content validity confirmed through forward–backward translation and expert evaluations. Reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (both > 0.70), while content validity was supported by confirmatory factor analysis, convergent validity, and discriminant validity measures (Hair et al., 2017; Cain et al., 2017). Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4, utilizing PLS-SEM to evaluate measurement model fit, analyze the structural model, and test hypotheses.

The model demonstrated a good overall fit with the data. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.052, comfortably below the recommended cutoff of 0.10, and the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index reached 0.646, indicating a "large" effect size. Predictive accuracy was also strong, with Q^2 values of 0.609 for Cultural Curiosity and 0.508 for Nation Brand Image, both surpassing the conventional threshold of 0.35. Additionally, PLS Predict analysis showed that the proposed model outperformed linear benchmark models. Overall, these findings suggest that the constructs were measured reliably and validly, and the model offers robust explanatory and predictive capabilities.

Structural Model Analysis

In PLS-SEM, the R-squared (R^2) value indicates the extent to which the latent independent variables explain the variation in the latent dependent variable(s), effectively measuring the model's explanatory power. R^2 values range from 0 to 1, with higher values signifying greater predictive ability. Hair et al. (2021) classify R^2 values above 0.75 as substantial, showing that the independent variables explain a large portion of the variance. Values of 0.50 or higher are considered moderate, while values of 0.25 or higher are considered weak, suggesting the model accounts for only a limited share of the dependent variable's variability.

Table 3. R Square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Cultural Curiosity	0.633	0.628

| Nation Brand Image | 0.587 | 0.579 |

The analysis indicates that the R-squared value for Cultural Curiosity is 0.633, meaning the model explains 63.3% of the variation in this construct, with the remaining 36.7% likely influenced by external factors. This demonstrates a moderate relationship between the independent variables and Cultural Curiosity. Likewise, the R-squared for Nation Brand Image is 0.587, indicating that the model accounts for 58.7% of its variance, with 41.3% remaining unexplained, likely due to external influences. These findings suggest that the model offers meaningful explanatory power for both primary endogenous constructs, supporting the proposed theoretical framework. Simultaneously, the unexplained variance suggests that other factors, such as additional mediators, moderators, or contextual influences, may also significantly impact Cultural Curiosity and Nation Brand Image, offering opportunities for further research to improve and expand the model.

Hypothesis Testing and Discussion

In PLS-SEM, significance testing determines whether the relationships between latent variables are statistically meaningful. This is usually done through bootstrapping, a resampling technique that estimates path coefficients and their standard errors. A path is considered significant if its p-value is below the predetermined threshold, typically 0.05. Bootstrapping is especially valuable in PLS-SEM because it is a nonparametric method, making it robust for testing significance even when the data do not follow a normal distribution (Hair et al., 2002).
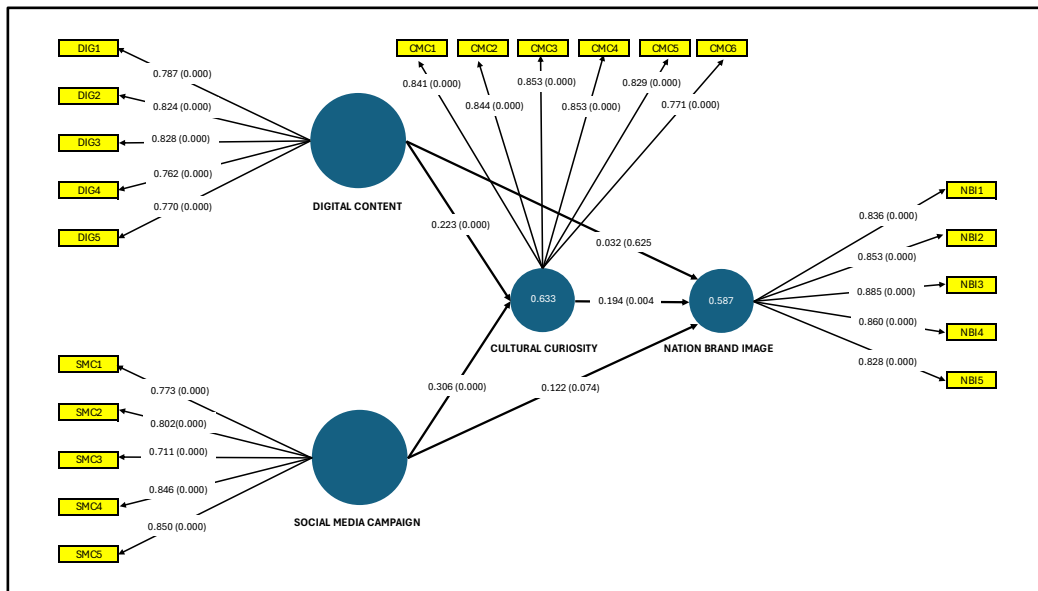

Figure 2. Output model PLS SEM Bootstrapping

Direct Effect

Table 4. Path Coefficient Bootstrapping Direct Effect

Hypotheses	β	Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Path Coefficient		Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|) >1.96 (5%)	P values <0.05	F²
			Lower (2.5%)	Upper (97.5%)				
Digital Content -> Nation Brand Image	0.032	0.028	-0.099	0.157	0.066	0.489	0.625	0.001
Social Media Campaign -> Nation Brand Image	0.122	0.120	-0.015	0.255	0.068	1.790	0.074	0.011
Digital Content -> Cultural Curiosity	0.117	0.115	0.009	0.222	0.055	2.127	0.033	0.014
Social Media Campaign -> Cultural Curiosity	0.306	0.303	0.194	0.411	0.056	5.451	0.000	0.087

The findings indicate that Indonesia's current digital outreach has not yet enhanced its nation brand image among Pakistani Gen Z. Hypothesis 1 is dismissed, as Digital Content has an insignificant impact on Nation Brand Image (p = 0.625 > 0.05; t = 0.489 < 1.96), despite a weak positive coefficient (β = 0.032), a maximum estimated

impact of only 0.157 points, and a tiny effect size ($f^2 = 0.001$). These findings imply that, in its current form, digital content has little influence on the national image. Although digital soft power highlights the potential of online narratives and visual storytelling to improve a country's image (Manor, 2019), its success depends heavily on consistency, cultural relevance, and emotional resonance. Indonesia's digital content still lacks linguistic and cultural alignment with Pakistani Gen Z, who favour entertaining, socially relevant, and culturally engaging content (Yousaf et al, 2020). In contrast, countries like South Korea have demonstrated that integrating digital storytelling with cultural assets can significantly bolster nation branding (Kim, 2020).

A similar pattern emerges when examining Hypothesis 2, which explores the direct impact of Social Media Campaigns on shaping the Nation Brand Image. This hypothesis is also not supported, as the relationship remains statistically insignificant ($p = 0.074 > 0.05$; $t = 1.79 < 1.96$), though it is close to significance. The positive path coefficient ($\beta = 0.122$) and a modest maximum estimated impact of 0.255 points suggest potential that has yet to be realized, rather than a confirmed effect. The effect size is small ($f^2 = 0.011$). While social media is a crucial tool in modern public diplomacy because of its interactive and participatory characteristics particularly for digital-native audiences (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Manor, 2019) its success depends on factors such as cultural proximity, language accessibility, platform-specific features, and influencer credibility (Sevin, 2017). In practice, Indonesia's social media diplomacy toward Pakistan lacks localization and emotional engagement, which hampers its ability to convert exposure into meaningful brand perceptions, despite Pakistani Gen Z's preference for authentic, visually engaging content.

The focus shifts to Cultural Curiosity as a psychological outcome. Hypothesis 3 is supported, indicating that digital content significantly increases Cultural Curiosity among Pakistani Gen Z ($p = 0.033 < 0.05$; $t = 2.127 > 1.96$). The positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.117$) and an estimated maximum impact of 0.222 points suggest that exposure to Indonesian digital media can foster interest in Indonesian culture. However, the overall effect size remains small ($f^2 = 0.014$). This aligns with the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, where digital content acts as a stimulus that elicits curiosity as a psychological response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), and with the Cultural Curiosity Model, which emphasizes the importance of novelty and emotional allure as key motivators of intrinsic interest (Litman, 2005). Empirical exposure through Indonesian films, culinary shows, and media initiatives led by the consulate demonstrates how visually and emotionally engaging material can stimulate curiosity. Nonetheless, the modest effect size indicates these initiatives are still in development, as earlier research underscores the need for stronger visual appeal, novelty, emotional engagement, relatability, and interactivity to sustain curiosity among Gen Z (Loewenstein, 1994; Green & Brock, 2000; Jenkins et al., 2006; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

Hypothesis 4 clearly supports the claim that Social Media Campaigns significantly influence Cultural Curiosity, with statistical evidence showing $p = 0.000$ (less than 0.05) and $t = 5.451$ (greater than 1.96). The path coefficient ($\beta = 0.306$) indicates a strong positive link, with an estimated maximum effect of 0.411 points and a small-to-moderate effect size ($f^2 = 0.087$). These results highlight that social media, especially when combined with engaging visuals, novelty, and emotional cues, effectively stimulates cultural interest among Gen Z (Litman, 2005). Features like comments, challenges, and polls enhance engagement and reflect the participatory nature of young people's media use (Carson, 2010). Additionally, storytelling fosters emotional immersion (Green & Brock, 2000). Nonetheless, the effect size suggests growth potential, as factors such as limited localization, inconsistent narratives, and weak platform differentiation continue to limit Indonesia's social media diplomacy. These issues align with earlier research on digital communication among youth (Duffett, 2017).

Indirect Effect

Table 5. Path Coefficient Bootstrapping Indirect Effect

Hypotheses	Original sample (O) β	Sample mean (M)	95% Confidence Interval of the Path Coefficient		Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|) >1.96	P values <0.05
			2.50%	97.50%			
Digital Content -> Cultural Curiosity -> Nation Brand Image	0.023	0.023	0.001	0.058	0.015	1.549	0.121
Social Media Campaign -> Cultural Curiosity -> Nation Brand Image	0.059	0.058	0.017	0.109	0.024	2.521	0.012

Hypothesis 5 is rejected, indicating that Digital Content does not significantly influence Indonesia's Nation Brand Image (NBI) through Cultural Curiosity among Pakistani Gen Z ($p = 0.121 > 0.05$; $t = 1.549 < 1.96$). Although a weak positive indirect effect ($\beta = 0.023$) exists, the results reveal an asymmetry: Digital Content significantly impacts Cultural Curiosity ($t = 2.127$; $p = 0.033$) but does not directly affect NBI ($t = 0.489$; $p = 0.625$), and the mediated effect is not statistically significant. This contradicts the assumptions of the Stimulus–

Organism–Response model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which propose that curiosity should lead to attitude change. Indonesia's digital diplomacy in Pakistan remains formal, only modestly localized, and focused on institutions, which limits emotional engagement and outreach (Manor, 2019; Yousaf et al, 2020). While visually appealing content can spark curiosity, the lack of coherent storytelling, language adaptation, and ongoing influencer involvement prevents curiosity from transforming into a stronger nation brand image, aligning with findings from digital public diplomacy research (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Kim, 2020).

Hypothesis 6 is supported, demonstrating that Indonesia's passive social media campaigns such as formal photos, documentary-style coverage, or content in Indonesian or English without Urdu subtitles are largely ineffective in shaping Nation Brand Image (NBI) among Pakistani Gen Z (p = 0.074; t = 1.79). One-way content that lacks emotional engagement fails to resonate with a generation that seeks culturally relevant, interactive experiences. In contrast, campaigns designed to stimulate cultural curiosity significantly influence NBI, with cultural curiosity as the mediating variable (p = 0.012; t = 2.521). Empirical examples include official Instagram accounts such as @indonesiainislamabad, @indonesiainkarachi, and @wonderfulindonesia, which feature reels on Ramadan festivals, live scholarship discussions, and behind-the-scenes batik-making. These strategies encourage binge-watching, active engagement, and immersive experiences, aligning with stimulus–organism–response theory, which holds that psychological engagement drives attitude change, and narrative transportation theory, which emphasizes the power of storytelling in shaping perceptions (Green & Brock, 2000). Uses and Gratifications Theory further explains that curiosity-driven, identity-related content is more effective than formal promotion in converting digital engagement into positive NBI perceptions (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Kim, 2020). By incorporating interactive elements such as polls, challenges, and user-generated content, Indonesia's campaigns transform audiences from passive recipients into active participants, fostering cultural curiosity and ultimately strengthening the nation's brand image in the perception of Pakistani Gen Z.

This study reveals an important finding: a clear distinction between the roles of Digital Content and Social Media Campaigns in shaping Indonesia's Nation Brand Image among Pakistani Gen Z, mediated by cultural curiosity. The results indicate that while Digital Content is effective in stimulating cultural curiosity, its indirect influence on Nation Brand Image is not statistically significant. This suggests that much of the digital content is consumed passively and functions mainly as brief visual or informational exposure. The curiosity that emerges tends to be short-lived and does not develop further because the content lacks strong narrative depth, emotional connection, and cultural adaptation relevant to the Pakistani audience. Within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, this condition shows that the stimulus can trigger an initial psychological reaction in namely curiosity. However, it is insufficient to produce a deeper attitudinal response toward a positive nation image.

In contrast, Social Media Campaigns play a more effective role because they encourage active audience engagement. Rather than simply delivering messages, campaign-based communication creates spaces for interaction through storytelling, live sessions, ongoing narratives, and user participation. This form of engagement allows audiences to experience Indonesian culture in a more dialogic and meaningful way. As a result, cultural curiosity does not remain at the level of visual interest but gradually develops into understanding and positive perceptions of Indonesia as a nation. These findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between passive content consumption and active engagement in digital communication. Cultural curiosity can function as an effective mediator only when audiences are genuinely involved in the communication process. Therefore, future digital nation branding strategies should place greater emphasis on culturally relevant, interactive campaigns, rather than relying solely on the dissemination of digital content.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that Indonesia's digital diplomacy has not yet succeeded in creating a strong image of the country among Pakistani Gen Z. Merely watching digital content or engaging with social media campaigns is not enough to significantly change their perceptions. However, the results reveal that digital platforms are effective in sparking curiosity about Indonesian culture, especially when they offer higher levels of interactivity and engagement. This cultural curiosity serves as an important pathway that increases openness and interest, which can, in turn, help improve Indonesia's image. The study also emphasizes a clear difference between passive consumption of digital content and active participation through social media campaigns, where only the latter allows curiosity to grow into deeper understanding and more positive perceptions of the nation. Although Indonesia's current digital efforts are limited in terms of local relevance, language adaptation, consistent storytelling, and emotional depth, culturally meaningful and interactive campaigns show strong potential to connect with young audiences. Overall, the findings highlight that nurturing sustained curiosity and active engagement is far more effective for nation branding than simply sharing digital content.

Theoretical Suggestion

This study indicates that future research should use more rigorous methods, such as combining surveys with in-depth interviews or focus groups, and employing longitudinal or experimental designs to obtain more

precise results. Theoretically, the findings improve understanding of nation branding and digital marketing by demonstrating that consumers' cultural curiosity is a key connection between diplomatic efforts and the country's image. This supports the idea of consumer multiculturation (Kipnis et al., 2014) within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). It emphasizes that the success of digital diplomacy largely depends on how audiences interpret and internalize the content they see. Future research should examine digital diplomacy through content or social media campaigns as a mediator for other diplomatic activities, like promoting education, culture, gastronomy, tourism, and entertainment. Broader research across different age groups and countries would provide more complete insights. Furthermore, including behavioral data and participation in cultural activities is essential to accurately measure how audiences genuinely engage with and respond to digital diplomacy.

Practical Suggestion

To enhance Indonesia's nation branding in Pakistan through digital platforms, collaboration between the government and the private sector is essential, supported by culturally sensitive, well-targeted strategies. The Indonesian government should strengthen digital diplomacy by consistently producing engaging content in Urdu that aligns with Pakistani Gen Z's preferences. Long-term partnerships with trusted influencers, cultural groups, educational institutions, and youth organizations can further build trust and emotional connections with young audiences. Campaign strategies should move beyond monotonous content and instead be delivered through engaging formats like talk shows, interactive games, or live streams that actively involve the audience. This kind of engagement, combined with the cultural curiosity it sparks, acts as a catalyst for boosting tourist visits, including from the Pakistani diaspora to Indonesia. The private sector, such as Indonesian companies with established products in the Pakistani market, can support these initiatives by promoting their products, culinary offerings, tourism, and creative economy sectors through localized social media campaigns. Consistent and culturally relevant digital interactions with Pakistani youth are essential to turning interest into positive perceptions of Indonesia. Greater awareness of Indonesia will, in turn, boost its competitiveness and create opportunities to reach the largely young and highly consumer-oriented Pakistani market.

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