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Do Pakistani Gen Z Consumers Know Indonesia? Examining the Impact of Gastro-Tourism Marketing on the Nation Brand Image

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ABSTRACT

The study examines how Gastronomy and Tourism Diplomacy, as a global marketing strategy, influences Indonesia's nation brand in Pakistan, with Gen Z Pakistan's cross-cultural understanding (CCU) acting as a mediator. Using a quantitative research approach, 545 responses were collected through purposive sampling to select respondents most relevant to the research goals, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used. The study finds that gastronomy and tourism diplomacy strategies do not directly improve Indonesia's nation brand image among Pakistani Gen Z. Their impact appears only through enhanced CCU, which significantly boosts brand perceptions. Effective nation branding, therefore, relies on culturally engaging initiatives that deepen familiarity and foster meaningful cognitive connections for sustained positive evaluation. This research highlights how cultural engagement influences perceptions, indicating that diplomatic efforts are more successful when they promote CCU among young audiences. The findings guide policymakers and marketers in designing programs that better communicate national identity and generate positive international perceptions.

Keywords: Gastronomy, Tourism, Diplomacy, Nation Brand Image, Cross-Cultural Understanding, Gen Z

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely viewed as a country with great potential, thanks to its abundant natural resources and rich culture. Various international rankings show that Indonesia holds a strong global position. For instance, Fetscherin (2010), with the Country Brand Strength Index (CBSI), and Lahrech, Juusola, & AlAnsaari (2020), using the Modified Country Brand Strength Index (MCBSI)—which considers exports, tourism, foreign investment, immigration, governance, and human development—rank Indonesia 79th out of 131 countries. The Nation Brand Strength Index (NBSI) for 2020–2023 ranks Indonesia 14th among 192 nations. Another measure, the Nation Brand Index (NBI) by Anholt-Ipsos (2007), evaluates exports, governance, investment, immigration, culture, people, and tourism, placing Indonesia 44th among 60 prominent countries. The FutureBrand Country Index (FBCI) also ranks Indonesia 52nd out of 75 countries, based on a survey of 2,500 individuals. These rankings demonstrate that Indonesia's global image benefits from effective perception management and strategic initiatives (Kotler & Gertner, 2017).

TABLE 1. Number of Pakistani Diaspora Overseas in ASEAN Countries

| Country/Year | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Indonesia | 700 | 710 | 710 | 1411 | 1411 |
| Malaysia | 75,235 | 75,235 | 75,235 | 61,912 | 38,394 |
| Singapore | 5000 | 5000 | 5000 | 5000 | 5500 |
| Thailand | 6500 | 6500 | 6500 | 6500 | 3500 |
| Brunei Darussalam | 1500 | 1600 | 1600 | 143 | 143 |
| Philippine | 1500 | 1506 | 1506 | 1200 | 1270 |

Source: Annual Book of the Minister of Overseas Pakistan (<https://ophrd.gov.pk/>)

Although Indonesia has built a global image, this perception does not fully resonate in Pakistan. According to survey data from the Indonesian Government's representative office in Karachi, Pakistani Gen Z's knowledge of Indonesian affairs remains limited, despite Indonesia being among the top three exporters to Pakistan. Awareness of Bali as a tourist destination tends to be superficial, and data on the Pakistani diaspora suggest that Indonesia is not a preferred destination for migration. This reveals a gap between Indonesia's international reputation and its perceived cultural, historical, and religious connections. Scholars emphasize that soft diplomacy, beyond geopolitics, is vital for building a strong national image (Melissen, 2005; Nye, 2004). However, youth-focused initiatives are underdeveloped, leaving current bilateral relations largely dependent on older generations. As a result, Indonesia's soft diplomacy efforts, as tools for global marketing, have yet to be fully utilized to increase cultural awareness and interest among Pakistani Gen Z.

Recent research in nation branding and public diplomacy highlights the importance of cultural familiarity and experiential engagement in shaping global perceptions. Nation brands are co-created through ongoing cultural interaction rather than top-down messaging alone (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Similarly, gastronomy has been examined as a strategic instrument connecting food, diplomacy, and tourism, with gastrodiploacy—the use of national cuisine in public diplomacy—effectively showcasing cultural identity and fostering mutual understanding between countries (Suntikul, 2017).

However, earlier studies reveal notable limitations. Much of the existing research examines gastronomy, tourism, or soft diplomacy separately, without considering their combined or complementary effects as integrated global marketing strategies. Furthermore, previous publications often rely on qualitative case studies or macro-level indices, providing limited empirical insights into how these strategies function at the micro-level of perception formation, especially among digital-native youth audiences. The role of cross-cultural understanding as a mediating mechanism also remains insufficiently theorized and empirically tested, despite its significance in intercultural communication frameworks (Deardorff, 2006; Bennett, 2013).

Building on this gap, this research develops a comprehensive assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of two global marketing strategies implemented through soft diplomacy—gastronomy and tourism—as complementary approaches to strengthening a nation's image and market value (Nye, 1990), as well as their influence on cross-cultural understanding among young people (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). The novelty of this research lies in its focus on examining whether these dimensions operate jointly or independently in shaping perceptions of Indonesia and how they contribute to Indonesia's image and cross-cultural understanding among Pakistani Gen Z. This cohort was chosen because they are digital natives (Prensky, 2001) with high openness to cross-cultural experiences and make up approximately 27% of Pakistan's population (PopulationPyramid.net, 2025). Using a quantitative approach, this study seeks to empirically assess the effectiveness of Indonesia's strategies in influencing the nation's image among Pakistani youth.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Gastronomy Diplomacy

Gastronomy diplomacy has become vital for strengthening a country's brand by showcasing its culinary heritage to enhance cultural appeal, drive economic development, and foster global engagement. Research shows that participatory culinary activities, such as cooking events, foster emotional and cognitive connections to a country's origins, promoting cross-cultural understanding and reinforcing national identity (Özel & Filiz, 2024). Likewise, digital platforms, including tourism websites, utilize authentic culinary content, visual storytelling, and engaging narratives to shape destination images and influence tourists' decisions (Uçkan Çakır & Özbay, 2022). Both theoretical and practical studies emphasize the strategic importance of gastronomy in public diplomacy, illustrating how initiatives like Thailand's "Global Thai" successfully raise international awareness of the cuisine and boost cultural prestige (Suntikul, 2017; Gienow-Hecht & Donfried, 2010). Moreover, culinary diplomacy enhances economic growth and cultural exchange through food tourism, energizing local industries and drawing overseas visitors (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Szondi, 2008).

Tourism Diplomacy

Tourism diplomacy has become a vital strategy for enhancing a nation's global reputation and strengthening its brand image by using tourism for cultural promotion, economic development, and international relations. Practical tourism efforts, such as participating in international expos and cultural festivals and utilising digital marketing, can significantly boost visitor numbers and foreign exchange earnings, as demonstrated by Indonesia's Wonderful Indonesia campaign (Amellia, Nashir, & Hikmawan, 2023). Sustainable tourism also supports national branding by linking environmentally friendly practices, such as ecotourism and cultural conservation, with long-term economic success and global competitiveness (Kálmán & Grotte, 2023). Research further shows that consistent branding through visual identity, slogans, and cultural stories enhances a country's international visibility, trust, and economic attractiveness, even though tourism may sometimes be seen as a secondary outcome (Pop, Baba, Năstase Anysz, & Tohanean, 2020). Moreover, tourism diplomacy encourages cross-cultural understanding and respect by showcasing cultural heritage and fostering international exchanges, which boosts a country's soft power (Huang & Hsu, 2010; UNWTO, 2021).

Cross-Cultural Understanding

Cross-cultural Understanding is a complex cognitive and adaptive skill that enables individuals to recognize cultural differences, interpret meanings across cultures, and adjust their behavior accordingly. Experts highlight that this skill relies on awareness of cultural biases, self-reflection on one's own identity, and a thorough understanding of other cultural norms (Seo & Gao, 2021). Foundational theories indicate that openness, reflection, and flexibility are essential for effective intercultural interactions, beyond mere exposure to different cultures (Bennett, 2013; Deardorff, 2006).

Recent research in consumer culture reveals that individuals navigate overlapping local, global, and foreign influences, shaping their identities and consumption habits through mechanisms such as cultural frame-switching, legitimacy negotiation, and multicultural affiliation (Kipnis, Broderick & Demangeot, 2019). Digital spaces also impact this process by influencing how cultural identities are created, challenged, and transformed in transnational contexts (Ibarra-Cantu & Cheetham, 2021).

UNDERPINNING THEORY AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Social Identity Theory and Cultural Dimension Theory

Social Identity Theory states that people tend to evaluate nations more positively when they feel an emotional or symbolic connection to them, classifying countries into in-groups or out-groups based on cultural symbols and sensory cues (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Food serves as a potent cultural symbol that ties emotion, identity, and social values together; thus, enjoying authentic and appealing dishes can lead to more favorable views of a country's origin. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory holds that values such as collectivism, indulgence, and long-term orientation influence reactions to foreign cuisines (Hofstede, 1980). For example, Indonesian dishes like rendang, satay, and nasi goreng resonate well with Pakistan's family-focused, collective cultural norms. Evidence supports this: Thailand's Global Thai campaign boosted Thai restaurant numbers worldwide by over 300%, significantly improving Thailand's global image (Gienow-Hecht et al., 2010). Additionally, engaging culinary experiences foster cross-cultural emotional connections (Özel & Filiz, 2024), and digital food content boosts destination appeal (Uçkan Çakır & Özbay, 2022). Overall, cuisine proves to be an effective diplomatic instrument, promoting psychological bonds and enhancing a nation's reputation.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive and significant effect of Gastronomy Diplomacy on Nation Brand Image

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive and significant effect of Gastronomy Diplomacy on Cross-Cultural Understanding

From a gastronomy perspective, Tourism Diplomacy can be understood through Social Identity Theory, which suggests that exposure to a country's symbols, stories, and cultural experiences fosters emotional bonds and identification with that nation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory further clarifies how Pakistan's cultural values shape Gen Z's perceptions of Indonesian destinations, particularly Indonesia's emphasis on family, cultural diversity, and social harmony (Hofstede, 1980). In societies with high uncertainty avoidance, tourists prefer destinations that are safe and well-organized, as seen in the Wonderful Indonesia campaign. Evidence of this is Indonesia's tourism diplomacy efforts in Singapore, which increased arrivals from 1.51 million in 2016 to 1.93 million in 2019 through expos, media campaigns, cultural festivals, and stakeholder collaborations (Amellia, Nashir, & Hikmawan, 2023). Additionally, sustainable tourism enhances the nation's brand image (Kalman & Grotte, 2023), and consistent national branding boosts global visibility and trust, making tourism a key added benefit (Pop et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive and significant effect of Tourism Diplomacy on Nation Brand Image

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive and significant effect of Tourism Diplomacy on Cross-Cultural Understanding

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) states that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence behavioral intention. In gastronomy and tourism diplomacy, TPB explains how enjoyable culinary or travel experiences cultivate positive attitudes, social influence from peers or influencers, and confidence in engaging with foreign cultures (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Jang, Ko, & Kim, 2019). This aligns with Social Identity Theory, which suggests that meaningful cultural contact boosts emotional closeness and identification with foreign cultures, thereby supporting Cross-Cultural Understanding as a key link between diplomacy and Nation Brand Image (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). TPB also complements Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, as cultural values influence how cross-cultural experiences are perceived and assessed (Hofstede, 1980; Minkov & Hofstede, 2012). Overall, these frameworks explain how cultural experiences lead to positive perceptions of a nation's brand (Quintal et al., 2010; Bianchi & Pike, 2011).

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive and significant effect of Cross-Cultural Understanding on Nation Brand Image

Hypothesis 6: There is a positive and significant effect of Gastronomy Diplomacy on Nation Brand Image mediated by Cross-Cultural Understanding

Hypothesis 7: There is a positive and significant effect of Tourism Diplomacy on Nation Brand Image mediated by Cross-Cultural Understanding

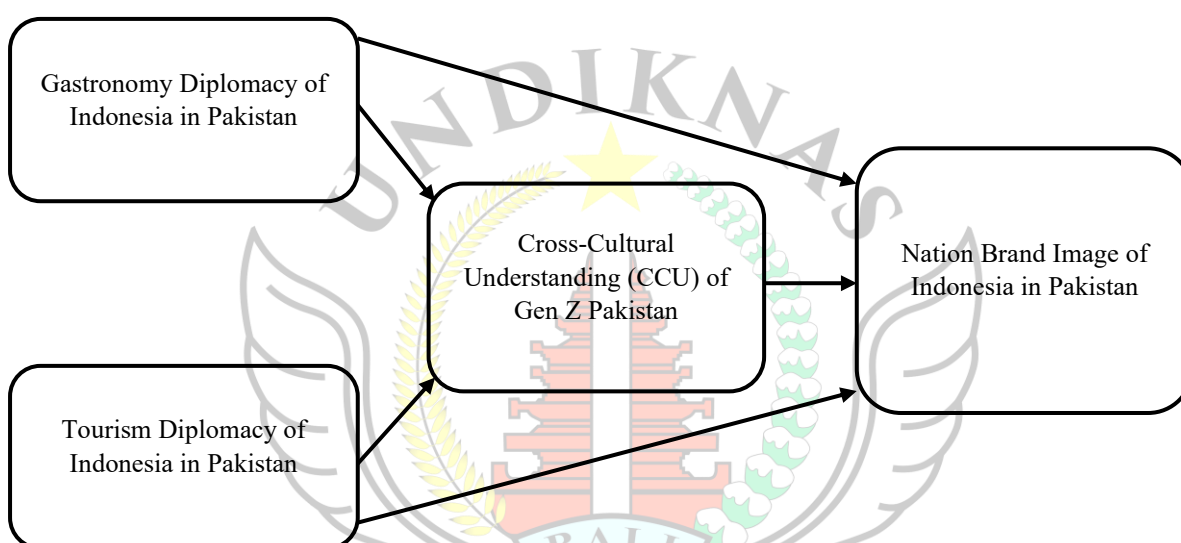


FIGURE 1. Conceptual Model

METHODS

This research employs a quantitative, positivist, and deductive methodology to examine how Indonesia's gastronomy and tourism strategy influences the nation brand through perceptions of Generation Z in Pakistan. The positivist framework is appropriate because it emphasises objectivity and quantifiable constructs, while a cross-sectional survey design allows for hypothesis testing at a single point in time.

The focus group comprises Pakistani Generation Z individuals (born between 1997 and 2012), aged 13 to 28 in 2025, totalling around 69 million people (27% of the population). As digital natives, they actively engage on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, underscoring their importance in evaluating Indonesia's digital diplomacy efforts. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who are digitally engaged. Using Cochran's formula, the minimum sample size needed was calculated to be 385; however, to account for potential non-responses, the target was increased to 545. Participants were recruited through social media platforms, educational institutions, and Indonesian diplomatic channels in Pakistan to ensure exposure to relevant cultural materials. The survey instrument was divided into four sections: gastronomy strategy, tourism strategy, cross-cultural understanding, and nation brand image, all assessed using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = doubtful, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

TABLE 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=545)

| Profile | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Familiarity with Indonesia: | | |
| Yes | 443 | 81.28% |
| No | 102 | 18.72% |
| Gender: | | |
| Male | 313 | 57.43% |
| Female | 23 | 42.57% |
| Occupation: | | |
| Employee | 150 | 27.52% |
| Student | 336 | 61.65% |
| Entrepreneur | 26 | 4.77% |
| Others | 33 | 6.06% |
| Domicile: | | |
| Sindh | 286 | 52.48% |
| Punjab | 154 | 28.26% |
| Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | 64 | 11.74% |
| Islamabad | 28 | 5.14% |
| Balochistan | 13 | 2.39% |

The variables were derived from established scales, with content validity confirmed through forward-backward translation and expert evaluations. Gastronomy and Tourism Diplomacy, as a global marketing strategy, each served as an independent variable with five indicators. Cross-cultural understanding, acting as a mediator, included 10 indicators. The dependent variable, Nation Brand Image, was measured by five indicators, yielding a total of 25 in the final questionnaire. 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 via SmartPLS 4, utilising PLS-SEM to evaluate measurement model fit, analyse the structural model, and test hypotheses.

TABLE 3. Reliability, Convergent validity, and AVE tests

| Indicators | Questionnaire | References | Loadings | AVE | CR | α | |
|------------|--|---|--|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| GAS1 | I can recognise Indonesian food among the international food festival | I can recognise this brand's phone among other competing brands | Mishra, A., Dash, S. B., & Cyr, D. (2014); Onem, S., & Selvi, M. S. (2024) | 0.839 | 0.681 | 0.914 | 0.883 |
| GAS2 | I love and enjoy Indonesian Food | I love and enjoy this culture. | Lin, J., Kang, Y., Hong, L., & Huang, Y. (2022) | 0.841 | | | |
| GAS3 | I will likely buy the Indonesian Food (e.g, snacks, candies, biscuits) that I saw on social media. | I will likely buy the brand I follow on social media. | Büyükdağ, N. (2021). | 0.814 | | | |
| GAS4 | Indonesia has gastronomic activities to attract tourists | The area has an attractive gastronomic culture and tradition, contributing to the development of the hospitality and tourism sector | Kalenjuk Pivarski et al, 2024 | 0.804 | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|---|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|--|
| GAS5 | Indonesian food is available at the Gastronomy event in Pakistan | There are gastronomic events where local products are presented | Kalenjuk Pivarski et al, 2024 | 0.827 | | | | |
| TOU1 | I can recognise an Indonesian tourism destination among other competing destinations. | I can recognise this brand's phone among other competing brands | Mishra, A., Dash, S. B., & Cyr, D. (2014); Onem, S., & Selvi, M. S. (2024) | 0.785 | 0.684 | 0.915 | 0.884 | |
| TOU2 | The Bali promotion makes me want to visit Indonesia soon | This mobile always makes me want to use it | Mishra, A., Dash, S. B., & Cyr, D. (2014) | 0.81 | | | | |
| TOU3 | Travelling in a place where the culture is fully preserved is an authentic experience. | Travelling in a place where the culture is fully preserved is an authentic experience. | Lin, J., Kang, Y., Hong, L., & Huang, Y. (2022) | 0.853 | | | | |
| TOU4 | The Differentiation of Indonesian Tourism is a combination of cultural tourism and modern entertainment that offers significant opportunities. | Promoting and using cultural tourism to differentiate the existing tourist facility, opening new market opportunities | Gaonkar, S., & Sukthankar, S. V. (2025) | 0.846 | | | | |
| TOU5 | I will recommend visiting Indonesia for a holiday to other people | I will recommend others to buy this mobile brand | Mishra, A., Dash, S. B., & Cyr, D. (2014); Büyükdağ, N. (2021). | 0.838 | | | | |
| CCU1 | Watching the Indonesian promotion made me better understand its culture. | Using this retailer's omnichannel service gives me more information about products, prices, and promotions. | Gao, W., Fan, H., Li, W., & Wang, H. (2021). | 0.841 | 0.588 | 0.909 | 0.883 | |
| CCU2 | I am aware of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, such as those in Indonesia. | I am aware of the cultural knowledge I draw on when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. | Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018) | 0.844 | | | | |
| CCU3 | I expand my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from unfamiliar cultures, such as Indonesia. | I expand my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from unfamiliar cultures. | Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018) | 0.853 | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|--|
| CCU4 | I know the legal and economic systems of Indonesia. | I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures | Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018) | 0.829 | | | | |
| CCU5 | I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of Indonesia | I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures | Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018) | 0.804 | | | | |
| CCU6 | I know the marriage systems of Indonesia. | I know the marriage systems of other cultures | Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018) | 0.771 | | | | |
| CCU7 | I know the arts and crafts of Indonesia | I know the arts and crafts of other cultures | Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018) | 0.796 | | | | |
| CCU8 | I am confident I can socialize with locals in unfamiliar cultures, such as Indonesia. | I am confident I can socialize with locals in a culture unfamiliar to me. | Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018) | 0.828 | | | | |
| CCU9 | I change my non-verbal behaviour when a cross-cultural interaction requires it. | I change my non-verbal behaviour when a cross-cultural interaction requires it. | Gozzoli, C., & Gazzaroli, D. (2018) | 0.78 | | | | |
| CCU10 | I am interested in learning more about people who live in Indonesia | I am interested in learning more about people who live in other countries | Lamberti, Lopez-Sintaz, & Katz-Gerro (2025) | 0.789 | | | | |
| NBI1 | I am willing to pay more for visiting Indonesia than other countries | I am willing to pay more for this mobile brand than for others in the market | Mishra, A., Dash, S. B., & Cyr, D. (2014) | 0.78 | 0.727 | 0.930 | 0.906 | |
| NBI2 | I will recommend others to study in Indonesia | I will recommend others to buy this mobile brand | Mishra, A., Dash, S. B., & Cyr, D. (2014); Büyükdağ, N. (2021). | 0.853 | | | | |
| NBI3 | When I think about holidays, Indonesia is the country that comes to my mind quickly. | Some characteristics of this brand's phone come to my mind quickly | Mishra, A., Dash, S. B., & Cyr, D. (2014) | 0.885 | | | | |
| NBI4 | I would recommend the Indonesian local culture to those who come to me for advice. | I would recommend this local culture to those who come to me for advice. | Lin, J., Kang, Y., Hong, L., & Huang, Y. (2022) | 0.86 | | | | |
| NBI5 | I will publish positive information about Indonesia as a | I will publish positive information about this | Lin, J., Kang, Y., Hong, L., & Huang, Y. (2022) | 0.828 | | | | |

| | |
|--|---|
| major country on various online platforms. | culture on various Internet platforms (such as WeChat and Weibo). |
|--|---|

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study analysed the quality of the data and measurement. In Table 1, the reliability statistics were strong, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.883 to 0.906 and composite reliabilities all above 0.70. Average variance extracted (AVE) values were comfortably over the 0.50 threshold, demonstrating convergent validity, while discriminant validity was established using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and factor cross-loadings. Table 4 presents the fit of the research model.

TABLE 4. 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 model also demonstrated satisfactory fit. The Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.052 fell below the recommended 0.10 cutoff, while the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index reached 0.646, placing it firmly in the “large” category. The model also performed strongly in predictive accuracy, with Q^2 values of 0.655 for Cross-Cultural Understanding and 0.508 for Nation Brand Image, all above the conventional threshold of 0.35. PLS Predict further confirmed that the proposed model outperformed linear benchmarks. These results confirm that the constructs were measured with reliability and validity, and that the model offered strong explanatory and predictive potential.

Structural Model Analysis

In PLS-SEM, the R-squared value indicates how much the latent independent variables in the model explain the variability of the latent dependent variable(s). R^2 suggests the model's overall predictive power. Its values range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating better explanatory power. According to Hair et al. (2021), an R^2 value of > 0.75 is considered substantial (strong), indicating a high level of variance explained by the independent variables. An $R^2 \geq 0.50$ is classified as moderate, while an $R^2 \geq 0.25$ is regarded as weak, implying that the model explains only a limited portion of the variance in the dependent variable.

TABLE 5. R Square

| | R-square | R-square adjusted |
|------------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Cross-Cultural Understanding | 0.674 | 0.67 |
| Nation Brand Image | 0.587 | 0.579 |

Based on the analysis, the R-squared value for Cross-Cultural Understanding is 0.674, indicating that the model explains 67.4% of the variation in this variable. The remaining 32.6% is affected by factors outside the model. This suggests a moderate relationship between the independent variables and Cross-Cultural Understanding. For Nation Brand Image, the R-squared value is 0.587, meaning the model accounts for 58.7% of the variation, leaving 41.3% unexplained and probably due to external factors. This also points to a moderate relationship, showing that the model can explain a significant part of the factors influencing Nation Brand Image. Overall, these R-squared values demonstrate that the model has substantial explanatory power across key endogenous constructs, supporting the theoretical framework. However, the unexplained variance suggests that additional mediators, moderators, or contextual factors not included in the current model may also be influential.

Hypothesis Testing and Discussion

Significance testing in PLS-SEM assesses whether the links between latent variables are statistically meaningful. Typically, this involves bootstrapping, in which the data are resampled to estimate path coefficients and their standard errors. A relationship is deemed significant if the p-value falls below the chosen threshold (0.05 in this case). Bootstrapping is widely regarded as a robust nonparametric approach for significance testing in PLS-SEM, especially when the data distribution is unknown or non-normal (Hair et al., 2002).

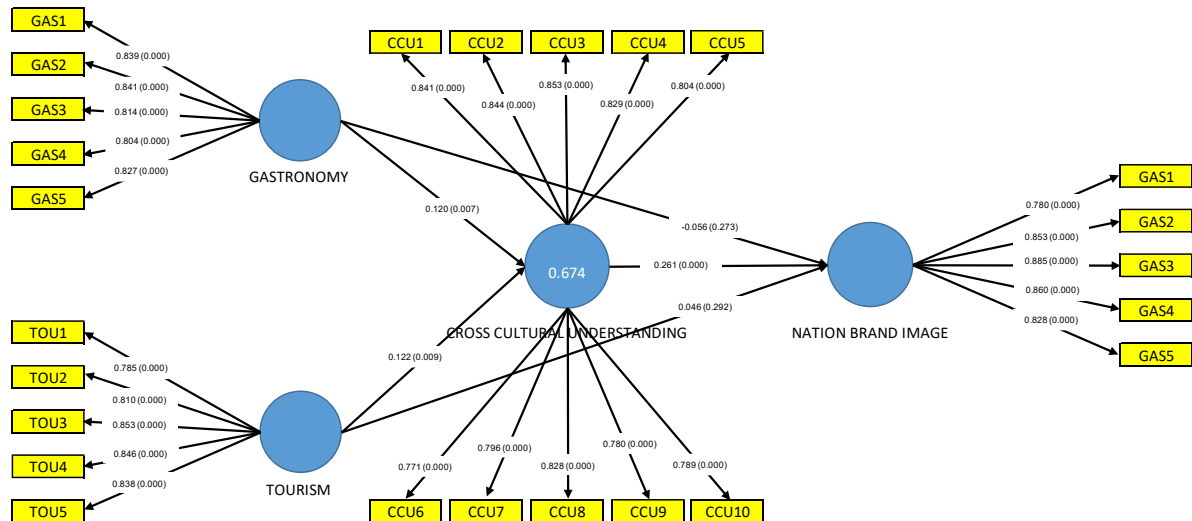


FIGURE 2. Output model PLS SEM Bootstrapping

Direct Effect

TABLE 6. Path Coefficient Bootstrapping Direct Effect

| Hypotheses | Path Coefficient | Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Path Coefficient | | Standard deviation (STDEV) | T statistics (O/STDEV) >1.96 (5%) | P values <0.05 | F ² |
|--|------------------|--------|---|---------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | | | Lower (2.5%) | Upper (97.5%) | | | | |
| Gastronomy -> Nation Brand Image | -0.056 | -0.056 | -0.156 | 0.047 | 0.051 | 1.096 | 0.273 | 0.003 |
| Tourism -> Nation Brand Image | 0.046 | 0.049 | -0.036 | 0.136 | 0.044 | 1.054 | 0.292 | 0.003 |
| Gastronomy -> Cross-Cultural Understanding | 0.120 | 0.120 | 0.029 | 0.206 | 0.045 | 2.682 | 0.007 | 0.02 |
| Tourism -> Cross-Cultural Understanding | 0.122 | 0.123 | 0.03 | 0.212 | 0.047 | 2.614 | 0.009 | 0.024 |

The results indicate that H1 is not supported, as Gastronomy Diplomacy does not significantly influence Indonesia's Nation Brand Image (NBI) among Generation Z in Pakistan. This is evidenced by a p-value of 0.273 (> 0.05), a t-statistic of 1.096 (< 1.96), and a negative path coefficient of -0.056. While statistically insignificant, the negative coefficient suggests that increased exposure to Indonesian gastronomy may slightly decrease perceptions of the nation's brand rather than enhance them. However, this effect is practically minimal, with the highest estimated impact roughly 0.047 points and an effect size (f^2) of 0.003, which is well below Cohen's (1988) threshold for a small effect ($f^2 \geq 0.02$).

This weak and negative relationship probably indicates Indonesia's limited culinary visibility and contextualisation in Pakistan. Indonesian food diplomacy primarily involves small-scale, embassy-organized events with a narrow reach. Additionally, unfamiliar dishes like bubur ayam or gudeg might not resonate with Pakistani Gen Z's tastes, possibly creating more cultural distance than interest. Conversely, countries like Thailand and China have proven effective through structured, large-scale gastronomic strategies. Thailand's Global Thai initiative helped establish over 15,000 Thai restaurants globally (Kratingdaeng, 2015; Yasmeen, 2006), while China's international culinary growth has expanded via diaspora restaurant networks (Wu & Cheung, 2020). These examples emphasize the importance of consistency, visibility, and strong symbolic links—elements currently

missing from Indonesia's efforts. As Ali and Abbas (2021) explain, Pakistani Gen Z mainly shapes perceptions through familiar, visible, and culturally relevant cues, which is why gastronomy diplomacy alone cannot effectively enhance Indonesia's NBI.

The findings also confirm that H2 is rejected, showing that Tourism Diplomacy does not directly significantly influence Indonesia's Nation Brand Image among Pakistani Gen Z. This is supported by a p-value of 0.292 (> 0.05) and a t-statistic of 1.084 (< 1.96). Although the relationship is slightly positive (path coefficient = 0.046), the maximum effect is only 0.136 points, with an effect size of $f^2 = 0.003$, which is well below Cohen's (1988) threshold. These outcomes imply that activities such as digital campaigns or travel expos may raise awareness but are insufficient to substantially alter brand perceptions.

Countries like Turkey and the United Arab Emirates have effectively built their national images among Pakistani youth through high media presence, emotional appeal, and easy accessibility. Turkish TV dramas create a sense of emotional familiarity and cultural connection (Irfan, 2021), while Dubai is closely linked with luxury, modernity, and a global Muslim identity (Melodena, 2008). As Anholt (2007) states, tourism diplomacy boosts national branding only when visibility, accessibility, and emotional engagement are aligned, primarily when supported by strong soft power assets (Nye, 2004). Indonesia's limited exposure, poor connectivity, weak media portrayal, and lack of culturally relevant narratives (Setiawan, 2022) help explain why Tourism Diplomacy has a statistically insignificant impact despite its positive coefficient.

In contrast, different patterns appear when analyzing the mediator variable. The findings support H3, indicating that Gastronomy Diplomacy significantly boosts Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) among Pakistani Gen Z. This is evidenced by a path coefficient of 0.120, a t-statistic of 2.682 (greater than 1.96), and a p-value of 0.007 (less than 0.05). A one-unit increase in gastronomy diplomacy leads to a 0.120-point increase in CCU, with a potential maximum impact of 0.271 points (95.7%). The effect size ($f^2 = 0.034$) suggests a small but nearly moderate influence (Cohen, 1988).

These findings reinforce the idea that food acts as a neutral and universal form of soft power, capable of fostering emotional and sensory cultural exchanges beyond language barriers (Rockower, 2012). Gastronomy resonates particularly well with Generation Z, who prefer visual and experiential content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Fromm & Read, 2018; Statista, 2023). Moreover, shared staple ingredients and flavor profiles—such as rice dishes, spices, and coconut—help foster cultural familiarity between Indonesian and Pakistani cuisines. To deepen this connection, Indonesia could expand its restaurant presence, launch more youth-oriented digital campaigns, and develop interactive culinary experiences tailored to Pakistani audiences.

Support for H4 is also established, confirming that Tourism Diplomacy significantly enhances Cross-Cultural Understanding. This is evidenced by a path coefficient of 0.122, a t-statistic of 2.614 (greater than 1.96), and a p-value of 0.009 (less than 0.05), with an estimated maximum impact of 0.212 points (95.7%). The effect size ($f^2 = 0.024$) indicates a small but meaningful structural influence (Cohen, 1988). These findings bolster theories that view tourism as a form of soft power, providing emotionally engaging cultural experiences through imagery, narratives, and symbolism (Nye, 2004; Anholt, 2010; Richards, 2018).

Tourism content resonates strongly with Gen Z's preference for experiential learning through travel vlogs, virtual tours, and visually engaging storytelling (Fromm & Read, 2018; Statista, 2023). Indonesia's efforts, such as Wonderful Indonesia and digital partnerships, enhance this appeal (Maulida, Wahyuni & Rasyidah, 2024). Shared cultural values, such as hospitality and communal traditions, further strengthen cultural connection (Hofstede, 2001). However, tourism imagery often sparks emotional interest more than deep cognitive understanding, limiting its impact unless supported by educational and dialogue-oriented programs.

Ultimately, the study affirms H5, showing that Cross-Cultural Understanding significantly improves Indonesia's Nation Brand Image among Pakistani Gen Z. This is supported by a p-value of 0.000, a t-statistic of 3.507, and a path coefficient of 0.261, with a maximum estimated impact of 0.399 points and an f^2 of 0.041, indicating a small-to-moderate effect. These results align with earlier research indicating that increased familiarity with a country's cultural values and practices fosters more positive perceptions of the country (Foscht et al., 2008; Koç et al., 2017).

Overall, the findings indicate that Gastronomy Diplomacy and Tourism Diplomacy do not directly improve Indonesia's Nation Brand Image among Pakistani Gen Z, mainly because of limited exposure and weak cultural ties. However, both approaches significantly enhance Cross-Cultural Understanding, thereby positively impacting nation branding. This supports the idea that Indonesia's soft diplomacy is more effective when pursued through indirect methods, with Cross-Cultural Understanding acting as the crucial mediator that turns cultural and tourism efforts into more positive perceptions of the nation.

Indirect Effect

TABLE 7. Path Coefficient Bootstrapping Indirect Effect

| Hypotheses | Original sample (O) Path Coefficient | 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% | | | |
| Gastronomy -> Cross-Cultural Understanding -> Nation Brand Image | 0.031 | 0.031 | 0.005 | 0.066 | 0.016 | 2.005 | 0.045 |
| Tourism -> Cross-Cultural Understanding -> Nation Brand Image | 0.032 | 0.032 | 0.006 | 0.066 | 0.016 | 2.04 | 0.041 |

The study confirms that H6 is validated, showing that Gastronomy Diplomacy has a meaningful indirect influence on Indonesia's Nation Brand Image (NBI) through Cross-Cultural Understanding among Pakistani Gen Z. This is supported by a p-value of 0.045 (<0.05), a t-value of 2.005 (>1.96), and a path coefficient of 0.031, although the direct effect is not significant ($p = 0.273$; $t = 1.096$; $\text{path} = -0.056$). Gastronomy Diplomacy significantly enhances CCU ($p = 0.007$; $t = 2.682$; $\text{path} = 0.120$) by using food as a non-verbal, emotionally engaging tool that stimulates cultural curiosity and appreciation. This aligns with Gen Z's preference for immersive, visual, and participatory content on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Fromm & Read, 2018; Statista, 2023; Rockower, 2012). Examples include Indonesian Embassy events in Islamabad featuring dishes such as rendang, satay, and nasi goreng, which, along with cultural storytelling and shared culinary traditions between Indonesia and Pakistan, help foster familiarity and cross-cultural understanding (Wilkins & Schwartz-DuPre, 2019; Cwierka, 2013). However, the limited availability of Indonesian cuisine in Pakistan's food scene restricts its direct branding impact. Therefore, the main contribution of gastronomy is promoting cross-cultural understanding, which, in turn, enhances Indonesia's national image.

The study supports H7, confirming that Tourism Diplomacy has a significant indirect impact on Indonesia's Nation Brand Image (NBI) through enhancing Cross-Cultural Understanding among Pakistani Gen Z. This mediation is evidenced by a p-value of 0.041 (< 0.05), a t-statistic of 2.040 (> 1.96), and a path coefficient of 0.032, even though there is no significant direct effect ($p = 0.292$; $t = 1.054$). Tourism Diplomacy notably improves Cross-Cultural Understanding ($p = 0.009$; $t = 2.614$; $\text{path} = 0.122$) by providing immersive, narrative-driven, emotionally engaging cultural experiences that align with Gen Z's preference for visual and digital content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Fromm & Read, 2018; Statista, 2023). Activities such as Indonesia's participation in the Pakistan Travel Mart, virtual travel expos, and influencer collaborations foster emotional and cognitive bonds, reduce cultural distance, and reinforce shared values such as environmental harmony, community solidarity, and spiritual tolerance (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Nye, 2004). These results highlight Cross-Cultural Understanding as a vital mediating factor through which Tourism Diplomacy enhances Indonesia's soft power and national image in Pakistan.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that, despite Indonesia's high rankings on international lists like the Nation Brand Index (NBI) by Anholt-Ipsos and the Future Brand Country Index (FBCI)—which regard Indonesia as a developed country and a key economic partner for Pakistan—these broad perceptions do not necessarily foster a strong nation brand image among Pakistani Gen Z, especially in social and cultural aspects. Specifically, Gastronomy and Tourism Diplomacy, as primary tools of Indonesia's soft power, have limited direct effects on Gen Z's Nation Brand Image due to low exposure, little cultural familiarity, and limited visibility of Indonesian culture. However, both strategies notably enhance Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU), a key mediating factor. Gastronomy diplomacy cultivates cultural familiarity and emotional bonds through hands-on culinary experiences. In contrast, tourism diplomacy offers immersive, story-driven, visually appealing experiences that resonate with Gen Z's preference for participatory, digitally mediated learning. The increase in CCU positively affects Indonesia's Nation Brand Image, demonstrating that Indonesia's soft diplomacy primarily operates indirectly. Its effectiveness relies on culturally meaningful, relevant, and carefully tailored engagement strategies that foster emotional and mental connections.

Theoretical and Practical Suggestion

This study recommends that future research adopt more rigorous methods, such as combining surveys with in-depth interviews or focus groups, and using longitudinal or experimental designs to achieve stronger results. Theoretically, the findings enhance the literature on nation branding and soft power by highlighting Cross-Cultural

Understanding as a key internal mechanism connecting diplomatic efforts to the national image, aligning with consumer multiculturalization (Kipnis et al., 2014) within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This emphasizes that diplomatic impacts are mediated through audience interpretation and internalization processes. Future research should explore factors influencing this process, such as prior knowledge, national identity, language skills, and cultural differences, and expand to include various age groups and national settings. Incorporating behavioral data and participation in cultural activities is essential for accurately understanding real engagement patterns.

This study confirms that Indonesia's soft diplomacy through gastronomy and tourism is on the right path. However, it needs to improve consistency, quality, and relevance to better shape a positive image of Indonesia among Pakistan's Generation Z. Cultural, culinary, educational, and tourism programs should be designed in a more participatory manner and tailored to local contexts. Meanwhile, digital diplomacy should be enhanced by consistently producing content in Urdu and aligning with Gen Z preferences, including long-term collaborations with credible influencers. The findings also encourage Indonesian businesses to focus on authenticity, cultural experiences, and engaging digital interactions, as well as using storytelling and local partnerships in their international marketing strategies. For Pakistan, these results highlight opportunities to strengthen strategic partnerships with Indonesia through cooperation in trade, education, and cultural exchange. Overall, consistent, professional, and localized strategies are expected to boost Indonesia's image while also generating sustainable economic benefits and stronger bilateral relations.

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