

# Pakistan's Digital Shopfront: Engaging in Digital Diplomacy and Nation Branding through Websites

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## Abstract

*The importance of a good website design and performance while branding commercial products has been a focus of many researches, however, their role in branding countries is an overlooked subject. For the countries involved in nation branding, the websites of their foreign missions play a role of digital shopfronts. By analyzing the page loading speed, color schemes and ease of navigation to the social media channels and the main elements of nation branding, the researchers in this article examine the role of Pakistani embassy websites around the world in branding Pakistan as a positive and favorable country. The findings indicate that Pakistan needs to work more on this area especially in presenting its culture, history and traditions in order to promote a softer and stable image and boosting its tourism and foreign investment. Similarly, Pakistan needs to improve its presence and performance in the social media world as well, as very few units were involved in its use and very limited platforms were being utilized.*

**Keyword:** Nation branding, Digital Diplomacy, Website Design, Social Media, Pakistan

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## Introduction

“My God, this is the end of diplomacy!”. These were the words exclaimed in wonder by Lord Palmerston (British Foreign Secretary) in 1860 when the first telegraph message was received (Melissen & Hocking, 2015). And as we all know diplomacy didn't die with it. Later came radios, telephones, televisions, fax machines and computers and diplomacy not only survived all these innovations but also adapted itself according to the changing technological scenarios. These innovations which were once thought to be a threat to diplomatic practice became a necessity and now the practice of diplomacy without these innovations is unimaginable (Faye, 2000). The biggest technological change at global level has been brought about by the Internet as it has impacted almost every field of life. The use of the Internet in International Relations, particularly in diplomacy, has become inevitable (Kassim, 2012), as the new innovations have created new prospects and challenges for the diplomats. The revolution of Information and Communication Technologies or the ICT's not only changed the way people used to communicate and exchange information individually at public and private levels but also

changed the political, economic and social landscapes at a global level (Adesina, 2017). The use of the Internet and the ICT's in the regulation of foreign affairs has introduced a new term known as “digital- diplomacy” (Ansari, 2014).

During the past many years, digital diplomacy has been interpreted and defined in many different ways (Sotiriu, 2015) and there is no single widely accepted definition of this term. Recent studies on the subject primarily deal with its way of working (Bjola & Jiang, 2015). Simply put, digital diplomacy is the use of the Internet and the ICT's to achieve diplomatic goals (Tutt, 2013). Lewis (2014) referred to it as “the use of digital tools of communication by diplomats to communicate with each other and with the general public” and according to Potter (2002), digital diplomacy refers to the diplomatic practices through digital and networked technologies which include the Internet, mobile devices, and social media channels. Manor and Segev (2015) refer to it as the increased use of social media platforms by a country with an aim to achieve foreign policy goals and manage its image and reputation. Digital diplomacy involves the usage of digital devices, digital processes and digital platforms, however, in this paper, only website design and presence on social media pages is taken into consideration.

Manor and Segev (2015) have also outlined two levels of digital diplomacy; (i) foreign ministry, and (ii) its embassies and the consulates in other countries. Social media and ICT's are being used at these two levels by countries to promote their image through publicizing their history, traditions, values and cultural diversity. World leaders, politicians, celebrities and diplomats all use different social media platforms, especially Twitter, to speak to and directly engage a larger public crossing national boundaries. The digital age has not only brought forward new issues and routines for diplomatic missions but has also redefined the previous ones. Today's challenges demand strategies that integrate both on-line and off-line platforms. An interesting example is of the Chinese government, which has locally blocked Twitter, but encourages its missions abroad to take advantage of this platform to build relationships with the foreign publics (Melissen & Hocking, 2015). Embassies and ambassadors are using social media in their personal capacities as well. There are official Facebook and Twitter accounts, YouTube Channels, LinkedIn profiles and Instagram pages. Many new terms have also evolved like Twiplomacy, Digital Diplomacy, Facebook Diplomacy, Twitter Diplomacy and the like.

Apart from engaging with the foreign audiences through dialogue, digital diplomacy has also proven to be a great tool for nation branding too. It helps nations to draw their own portrait and mend the negative image that has taken roots in the minds of foreign publics (Manor & Segev, 2015). Owing to their similarities to brand products, like differentiation and reinvention, countries are being branded as commercial products (Gudjonsson, 2005). As the concept of branding is rooted in marketing (Kotler & Gertner, 2002), many of the rules and strategies of product marketing also apply to nation branding. Just as an embassy is the first impression of a country in a physical setting, the embassy's website is its first impression in a digital setting. People often turn to business websites when they intend to buy a certain product and it is from this place that they get the basic information for making the buying decision. Winter et al. (2017) suggest that websites are the “electronic storefronts” which leave a strong impression in the minds of the clients and provide frames of symbolic representation of the related firms. If the website is unappealing, the visitors would hesitate to buy from that firm. This might not be the exact case when people visit the embassy website in order to apply for a visa or to get some general information, but it does set an impression of a country's identity. For example, in case a country is trying to promote itself for touristic purposes, if the website is not appealing and vibrant, the potential visitor, who has some other options in his mind too, might turn to some

other country's website which is also trying to boost its tourism. So, the importance of web design cannot be ignored as it leaves a strong impact on how a visitor perceives a country's brand (Webfx, 2020). A good website design is important in branding, as it not only sets the first impression, but also helps in giving positive, correct and relevant information, building trust and differentiating a country's brand from that of its competing countries.

While analyzing the propriety of the website designs of Pakistani embassies three things are taken into consideration in this research. First, their page loading speed, second the color shades used and their consistency and third the ease of navigation to certain elements that are considered essential from the perspective of nation branding. As far as the page loading speed is concerned, marketing experts say that the website visitors are influenced by the loading speed and form an opinion about the brand in about 0.5 seconds (Corona, 2019). Anderson (2020), limits the best page loading speed to 3 seconds and asserts that a slow loading speed is a negative factor in any website performance. If it takes more than 3 seconds, the visitors are likely to leave the page (Corona, 2019). Similarly, Google considers a speed of less than 3 seconds to be the best (Thekkethil, 2020).

Likewise, regarding the colors, it is a widely known fact that they can have a powerful effect on human behavior, and that is why they are used by marketers to create an impact on the buying decision of their customers (Burst, 2014). It is linked with color psychology which studies the impact of different hues on human behavior. Continuing for millions of years, humans have associated different colors with different emotions. These meanings are rooted in psychological effects, cultural developments and biological conditioning (Lundberg, 2019). Owing to their ability to stimulate areas of the brain which cause excitement and tranquility, they are considered an important tool in marketing (Yang, 2020 & Burst, 2014). Customers believe that the color of the brand or the logo represents the personality of the product or service being offered (Elliot & Maier, 2014). Whitfield & Wiltshire emphasize on the importance of colors that are used in the window displays as they entice the customers to make purchases. Thus, in case of online marketing or websites which are the digital storefronts of the firms, the different color combinations create different atmospheres and help in conveying strong messages subtly (Coffin, 2011). They affect how a given information is interpreted by the readers (Ferreira, 2019). Apart from the right choice of colors, consistency in all branding elements is also necessary. According to Yang (2017), two things must be kept in mind when building a brand; first, a color must fit with the desired associations, second, there must be consistency with the chosen color in all its branding elements like logo, advertisements, websites and the ilk. Similarly, Morrison (2017) & Odjis (2017) also affirm that it is crucial to keep the color consistent for the sake of brand identity. The official colors of Pakistan are dark green and white as represented by its flag (infopak.gov.pk, 2008). The green color, which is also known as Pakistan green, is a representation of Muslim majority and the white color represents the religious minorities living in Pakistan.

The dimensions that are used for the nation branding index as proposed by Anholt (2008) include investment and immigration, culture, governance, tourism, people, exports, and culture and heritage (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, 2011). Investment or the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is seen as an important element in the development of countries economically, so they strive to portray an image of their country that is fit for investment and attracts foreign investors (Matiza & Oni, 2014). Culture is one of those elements of nation branding which help in establishing and maintaining ties with foreign audiences using different forms of national culture (Ansari, 2019). Similarly, tourism can facilitate the process of nation branding as people

are naturally attracted to visit places that are geographically beautiful and historically significant (Giannopoulos, Piha & Avlonitis, 2011). Governance refers to the policies that are made and implemented in order to run a country or a state. In this regard, the form of government i.e., democracy might be visible from the website but the policies are beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, from the section of governance present in the websites, only the structure of the government is studied in this article. Similarly, the element of “people” refers to the talents and nature of people and might be expressed in posts of social media and a specific button for this element on the website is too rare to be found. Similarly, ‘exports’ is mainly included in the investment and commerce section. The researchers have thus limited this research to investment, culture, government, and tourism only. The availability of details of these elements on the main page of the Pakistani embassy websites would be analyzed in this paper. This study also focuses on provision of address or buttons of social media on the embassy web pages. So, this article also investigates which social media platforms were being used by the embassies of Pakistan.

### ***Purpose of the Study:***

The literature on usage of new media, especially social media, in diplomacy is evolving. The research in this field has been and is still being conducted on various aspects of this subject, however, there is almost no research which highlights the importance of website design in branding a nation. Similarly, the literature related to Pakistan's digital diplomacy; its embassies' website designs and social media usage is very scarce. There are many facets which need to be researched to suggest a structured and centralized approach for digital diplomacy to be implemented in Pakistan, but before proposing any policy measures, it is necessary to evaluate the current position of Pakistan in this field. Keeping in view the importance of website design and the usage of social media by the Pakistani embassies in other countries, this paper aims at providing a very brief and basic outlook on the state of Pakistan's digital diplomacy in terms of branding itself through official embassy websites.

### ***Literature Review:***

This section contains a review of literature present on the topics of digital diplomacy, social media and digital diplomacy, Nation branding and marketing and website design in marketing.

### ***Digital Diplomacy***

There is a plethora of literature on how the Internet and ICT's have transformed human life. The revolution of diplomacy and the usage of digital tools in the diplomatic practice are also among the subjects of this literature. Adesina (2017) gives an overview of digital diplomacy in her article, discussing its definitions, usage by different countries, opportunities, and the challenges of this field. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) and the Internet led to the revolution of diplomacy by making the world smaller and enabling every person to easily communicate with everyone else. This gave rise to public diplomacy and from public diplomacy arose digital diplomacy which is the use of digital media in order to obtain objectives of foreign policy. Diplomats around the world use Twitter and other social media to engage their foreign publics. The US State Department was the first one to establish a unit for digital diplomacy in 2002 and other countries followed suit. She stresses that in a world where state and non-state entities are able to compete for influence, digital diplomacy must be incorporated in a state's foreign policy. However, the risks of diplomacy which include hacking, information leakage, and anonymity should also be kept in mind.

Brian Hocking and Jan Melissen, in their book “Diplomacy and the Digital Age” pen down that with the development in the ICT sector, diplomacy has also been changing to mold itself in

accordance with the needs of changing scenarios. The digital tools and networking sites giving rise to new problems and routines, presence of hybridity in contemporary media and diplomatic environments, integration of on-line and off-line environments for strategy planning, and the connection between government and the society in such a digital age are some of the main discussions in the book. They even assert that the foreign offices that do not go digital, jeopardize their survival. Similarly, Hayden (2018) and Abbasov (2007) also discuss the concept of digital diplomacy, difference with related terms, how it challenges the concept of traditional diplomacy and the nature of practice of diplomacy in different countries in their articles.

### ***Social Media and Digital Diplomacy:***

Hayden (2012) discussed the usage of social media in public diplomacy practices of the US State Department. He asserted that at the level of strategy planning and practice, new media and ICT's pose to be a challenge for policy makers, owing to their power to transform the context of global politics and transnational and inter-cultural relations. The power in this digital age does not belong to one person or one entity but to many entities or even every individual who has the capacity to use social media. This leaves the relevant institutions with a need to engage with more and more people. In a time where there is an information explosion, without a check on veracity, the relevant authorities are in a constant competition for dispersing credible information about their country, and that too really quickly. He discusses that in a new world where maintaining control on information is out of question, the governments need effective strategies to defy the incorrect and negative information. Some of the relevant examples in this field by the US are recruitment of university students to help the State Department in its new media and other campaigns for regional development and women empowerment.

Harris (2013), examined case studies of implementation of Twitter Diplomacy and also the use of Twitter for crisis management by the Obama administration. He claimed that Obama's use of social media was the most important contributing factor to its campaign's success in 2008. Similarly, he discussed the usefulness of social media in connecting a government to its own as well as foreign publics. Further, he asserted that the usage of social media in times of crisis by embassies can help garner support for the home country but the risk of false or negative information sharing by other users through social media is also there. So, the diplomats and policy makers should have their eyes on social media campaigns which help opinion makers influence the public and create an image of the host country in order to make and keep a good reputation.

Like Harris (2013), Manor & Segev (2015), also hold the view that digital diplomacy helps in mending national image after a crisis and changing the prevalent image. It is very difficult to alter a long standing negative image of a country, but efforts through nation branding can help improve it. Although it cannot be done in one magical stroke, digital diplomacy practices prove to be useful in this regard. Nations throughout the world are using social media in their diplomatic affairs. Apart from directly communicating and engaging with foreign audiences, social media plays an important role in nation branding as well. The manner in which foreign ministries are using social media still needs to be explored more. These researchers investigated the US in their article. As branding is an effort to draw its own portrait in the minds of others, they name this as "Selfie Diplomacy" and then they analyze America's selfie as presented through its social media accounts. America was once liked for its values like freedom, democracy, and human rights, however, after 9/11 its image changed to being a country that is imperialistic, arrogant and a threat to global peace. Their study showed that digital diplomacy channels like Facebook and Twitter were being used in efforts to improve this negative image.

### *Nation Branding and Marketing:*

In simplest words nation branding is the self-representation of a country (Ansari, 2014). There is an ongoing debate on whether nations should be treated as products or not. However, seeing nations different from commercial products but applying branding techniques to them is a middle ground (Manor & Segev, 2015). Simon Anholt who is considered the father of Nation Branding (Szondi, 2008) asserts that the key premise of nation branding is that images of countries are like brand images of companies and products and are equally important (Anholt, 2007). An unbranded state faces a difficult time attracting attention in economic and political fields. Nation branding is about applying marketing and branding communication techniques to promote a nation's image (Fan, 2006) or as per Gudjonsson (2005), it is the usage of branding tools to alter the attitude, behavior or identity of a nation in a positive way. Applying branding techniques to nations has become a subject of interest in this decade.

### *Website Design in Branding:*

Among the branding techniques, one of the most important things is an appropriate website design (Gehrke & Turban, 1999). The performance of websites strongly influences visitors and helps in retaining traffic (Tarafdar & Zhang, 2016). Although there is a reasonable amount of research present on website design and its impact on sales and brand image, unfortunately, the impact of websites on nation branding is almost nonexistent. In the absence of relevant research in national branding context, the findings from the product branding can be generalized to nation branding through foreign office websites.

Winter (2017) asserts that although businesses reap economic advantages through their websites, most of the website designs fail to address issues of identity formation and branding. Many of the firms were found not getting their expected outcomes due to flaws in the graphic layout. The research suggests that websites play the role of “electronic storefronts” by creating certain images of the brand or company in the minds of the visitors. As they say, “Website visitors encounter symbols that are compared to mental models stored in memory and used to form impressions of the site and to draw inferences about the firm” (Winter, 2017, p. 1) The influence of these impressions on purchase behavior is proven in various studies. Similarly, Hasan (2016), examined the visual, navigational and informational characteristics of website designs and their impact on perceived irritation of the visitors. Gehrke & Turban (1999) investigated the determinants of an effective website and indicated the major categories of these determinants to be page loading speed, navigation efficiency, content, security and customer focus. As far as the design and look are concerned, Webfx (2019), cites that most of the consumers/page visitors want to see something beautifully designed rather than a plain and simple page. Website design is considered important for an on-line identity as it provides the first impression of any brand. The value and importance given to the website reflects the value and importance that would be given to the visitor or the potential client. An unappealing look and outdated information set a negative image of the brand and the visitors might jump to the competitors' page or website. As it says, “If your website is bright, modern, and inviting, your audience will feel more welcome on your page. You’ll give the impression that you are open and welcoming to new people who visit your website.” Bonnardel et al., (2011) & Cyr et al. (2010) studied the influence of website colors on the minds of the visitors. Colors have the potential to affect emotions and behaviors (Cyr, et al, 2010). The findings indicated that colors had an impact on user behavior and on the cognitive process of memorizing the information provided on the website (Bonnardel et al., 2011) and the website colors play a significant role in determining the trust and satisfaction of the visitors (Cyr, et al, 2010).



### ***Dimensions of Nation Branding Index:***

There are many countries now involved in Nation Branding practices and an assessment mechanism for these activities is required. The Anholt Ipsos Nation Brands Index is designed to help governments in understanding, measuring and thus building a positive national image and reputation. It involves six dimensions: Export, Governance, Culture and Heritage, People, Tourism and Investment and Immigration. 'Export' deals with foreign public's perception associated with products and services originating from the country in discussion. It measures the extent to which the consumers from other countries either seek for or avoid the products or services of firms associated with this country. 'Governance' refers to the government's competency and commitment to global issues of security, justice, poverty and environmental problems. 'Culture and Heritage' refer to the perceptions held by foreign publics about a nation's heritage and appreciation of its culture. This includes all forms of culture like music, art, cinema, architecture, literature and sports. The dimension of 'people' refers to that country's people's reputation as competent, open, friendly and tolerant. 'Tourism' refers to the level of interest the foreign publics hold in wanting to visit a country for its natural and man-made attractions. The dimension of 'investment and culture' deals with the power of a country to attract foreign publics to live, study or work in that country. It's an index to measure the quality of life and work as perceived by foreign nations (Ipsos, 2019). Alam et al. (2013) in their article on Nation Branding of Pakistan states that 'People' includes history, education, religious affiliation and character of its people; 'Governance' refers to the situation of law and regulation, consideration of public opinion and involvement and organization of public and private sectors; 'Export' refers to products and services offered by its people; 'Tourism' refers to its natural and beautiful landscapes, its geography, topography of its cities and famous landmarks; 'Culture and Heritage' involves political history, language, art and literature, and film and music; and 'Investment and Immigration' involves external and internal investors.

### ***Limitations:***

Pakistan has 86 embassies and high commissions and 79 consulates working all around the world (EmbassyPages, 2020). The web-pages of some of these embassies are linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)'s main website and some are running independently by the related embassy staff. Those web-pages that are linked to MOFA, comprise of only a single page that gives just some basic information regarding the embassies in those countries. So, it was not possible to include these web-pages in this study as they were lacking the required information. Thus, this study is limited to only those embassy websites that are running independently. Also this study does not include the websites of Pakistani consulates. Similarly, this study only depends on the data created through [www.geekflare.com](http://www.geekflare.com) for the page loading speed of the websites. Other online tools might give different results. Also, this study takes into consideration only those social media accounts that were mentioned in the official websites of the embassies, as if there were other social media accounts being used by the embassies, but were not mentioned on the official page, it was not possible to check if they were authentic or fake accounts.

### ***Research Questions:***

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- R1: How good is the page loading speed of the websites of Pakistani Embassies?
- R2: What are the colors used and are they consistent in each of these websites?

R3: Does the design allow easy navigation to tourism, culture, government and investment sections and social media pages of the embassies?

### Research Methodology

As already mentioned Pakistan has 86 embassies and high commissions working around the world, however, not all of them have websites running independently. Out of 86 units only 28 had their websites independent from MOFA and in working condition. So the data for all the three research questions is taken from only these 28 websites. These include embassies and high commissions of Kenya, Nigeria and Tunisia from Africa, USA from The Americas, Afghanistan, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Nepal, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Turkey from Asia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom from Europe and Australia and New Zealand from Oceania.

The page loading speed, which is being analyzed in the first research question, is dependent on many factors like page size, speed of the internet and the browser being used. Thus, for the measurements to be accurate a specialized tool is always better than taking measures manually. There are many online platforms available for website auditing which measure the loading speed of web-pages along with other elements. So, for the first research question, the researchers have used Geekflare (<https://gf.dev/website-audit>), an online website auditing platform to measure the page loading speed of embassy websites. The website test includes three types of speed tests: overall loading time, Time to First Byte (TTFB) and, first contentful paint. For the purpose of this study only the “overall loading time” was recorded. For each website, three readings were taken and a mean of those values was calculated. The values were taken for mobile websites as well. For the second research question, colors used in the embassy website design were analyzed and coded and it was checked if all the websites of Pakistani embassies worldwide were using the same shades or not. The colors present on the main page of the websites were entered in the coding sheet through inductive coding, i.e. the codes were derived from the data. Instead of having a pre-coded sheet with color codes as Green, White and other, the codes emerged with the data. Thus four shades of Green i.e. Dark green, light green, medium green, bluish green, one shade of white and one shade of gray, that emerged in the sample of this research, were the color categories for this research question. For the third research question, it was checked if the buttons for tourism, culture, investment and government, which should be the main elements of promotion of Pakistan from a nation branding perspective, are present on the main page of the website or not. They were then coded on a coding sheet. Also the presence and position of buttons of embassy social media pages was checked.

### Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the three research questions of this article.

#### ***R1: How good is the page loading speed of the websites of Pakistani Embassies?***

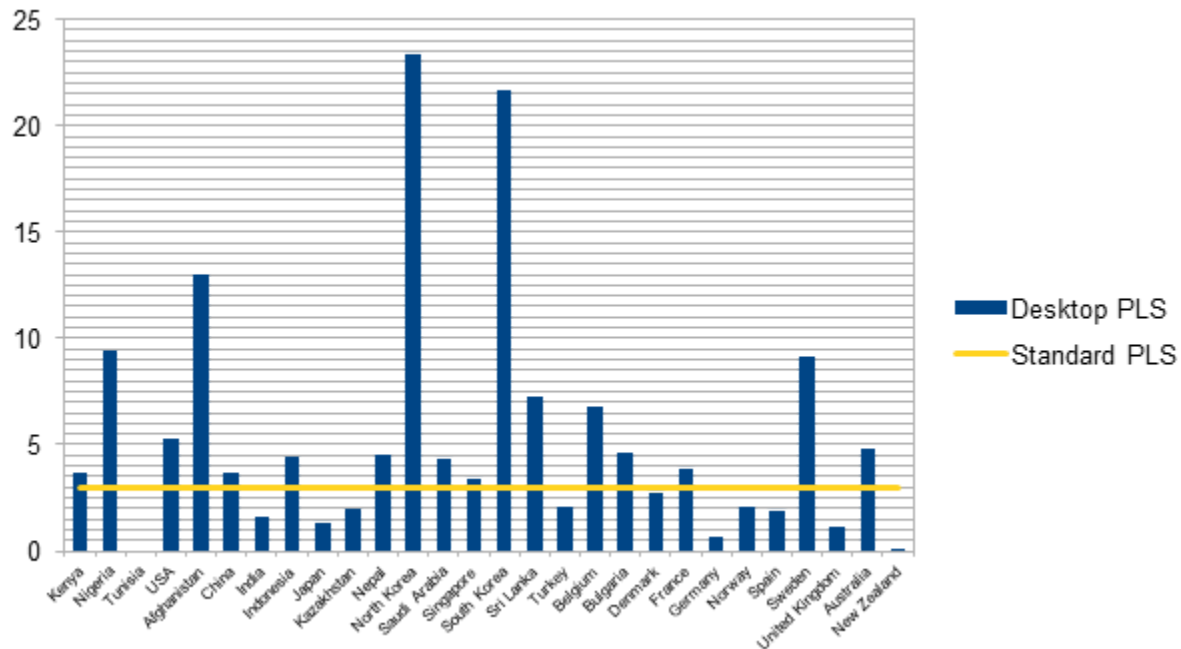
As stated earlier, a Page Loading Speed (PLS) of 3 seconds or less is considered to be good for a page to load. Thus in this study, the speed of 3 seconds would be termed as Standard PLS. The following table shows the page PLS of the websites of Pakistani embassies on a desktop computer. The speed measuring tool faced problems while analyzing the website for Tunisia, thus it is excluded from this test. In Figure 1, the columns show the corresponding speeds of the websites while the horizontal line represents the standard PLS (3 seconds). Note that only 10 websites were having PLS less than the standard PLS which makes it only 37% of the total



websites considered in this study. Some websites had a PLS as high as 23 seconds which is very high considering the standard PLS of 3.

**Figure 1**

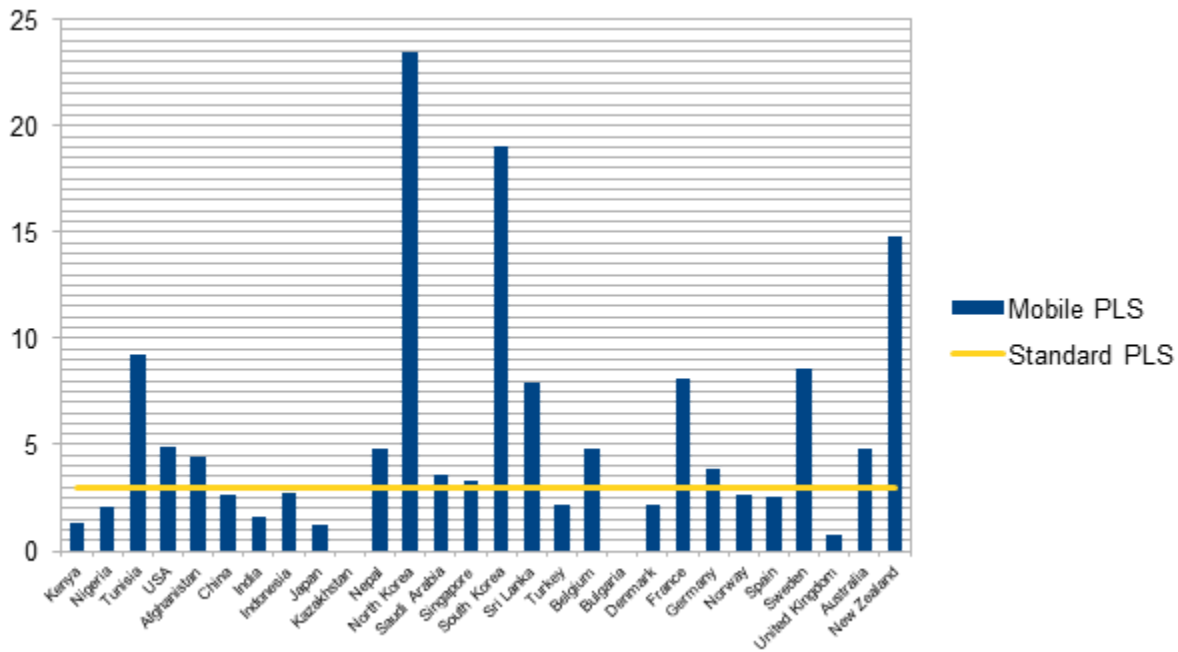
*Page Loading Speed (PLS) of Pakistani Embassy websites on a desktop device in comparison with Standard PLS (3 seconds)*



Nearly 50% of the web traffic comes from the mobile devices (Enge, 2019), so apart from desktop sites, the speed was measured for mobile devices separately. Figure 2 below shows the PLS of the websites on a mobile device including smartphones and tablets. There were problems in analyzing the speeds of Kazakhstan and Bulgaria, so only 26 readings were taken here. In comparison to desktop PLS, some websites in the mobile devices had lower loading speeds while others faced the opposite trend. But in general, almost 42% of the websites had PLS less than 3 which makes it comparatively better than the desktop devices.

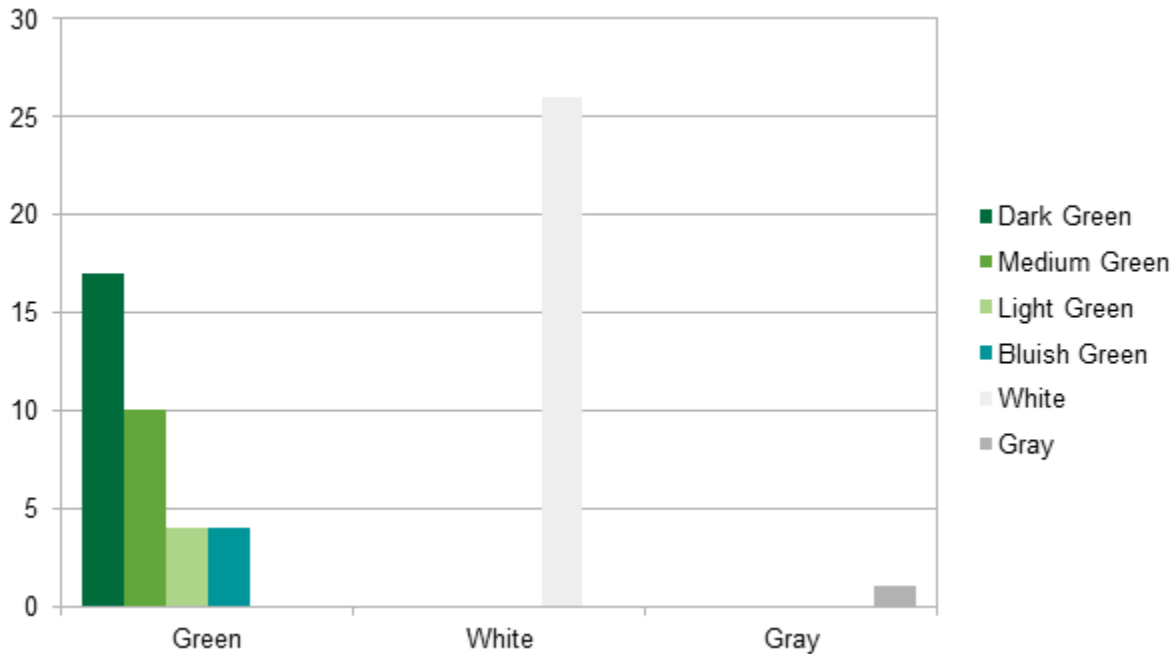
**Figure 2**

*Page Loading Speed (PLS) of Pakistani Embassy websites on a mobile device in comparison with Standard PLS (3 seconds)*



***R2: What are the colors used and are they consistent in each of these websites?***

Almost all the embassies were using green as their basic color, as it is the color of Pakistani flag. White was also oftentimes used as a background color and gray was used occasionally too. Figure 3 indicates the colors used by Pakistani embassy websites across the world. Note that white color was used by all the embassies, apart from two, as one of their main colors. Green was also used as primary color, however, the shades varied from dark green to medium, light and bluish greens. One of the websites also used *Ajrak* in its background instead of using the traditional white and green color scheme.

**Figure 3***Colors used by the Pakistani Embassies' websites*

Green color is found to be associated with tranquility, nature, health and freshness (as stated by Burst, 2014; Bourn, 2011 and Coffin, 2011). In terms of promoting Pakistan's tourism, using this color is helpful in portraying it as a peaceful, naturally beautiful and relaxing place. Similarly, due to this color's psychological association with wealth, growth and fertility (as stated by Ferreira, 2019 and Burst, 2014), the color green is very suitable for the promotion of investment and trade. Although all the websites were using the green color, the shades were varying and there was very little consistency in the websites. Some were using dark green, which is also the official color of Pakistani flag and logo, while others were using medium green, light green and bluish or grayish green. Coffin (2011) asserts that different shades of green convey different meanings. As she states "There is a big difference between a green associated with wealth and a green associated with the environment. (Coffin, 2011, p. 9)". Although the other shades of green were also communicating positively, there was inconsistency in the website colors and the embassies should have used a single official color. The chart above shows the different shades of green used by the Pakistani embassies. Similarly, the color white is associated with cleanliness, purity, innocence, safety and peace and the color gray symbolizes solidarity and practicality (as stated by Burst, 2014; Ferreira, 2019 and Hauff, 2018). Thus according to color psychology, as discussed in the introduction section, these colors are very suitable colors to portray Pakistan as a peaceful and safe country for the visitors to come and invest in here. Thus it can be said that in terms of color shades and their combinations in the website designs, the performance was satisfactory.

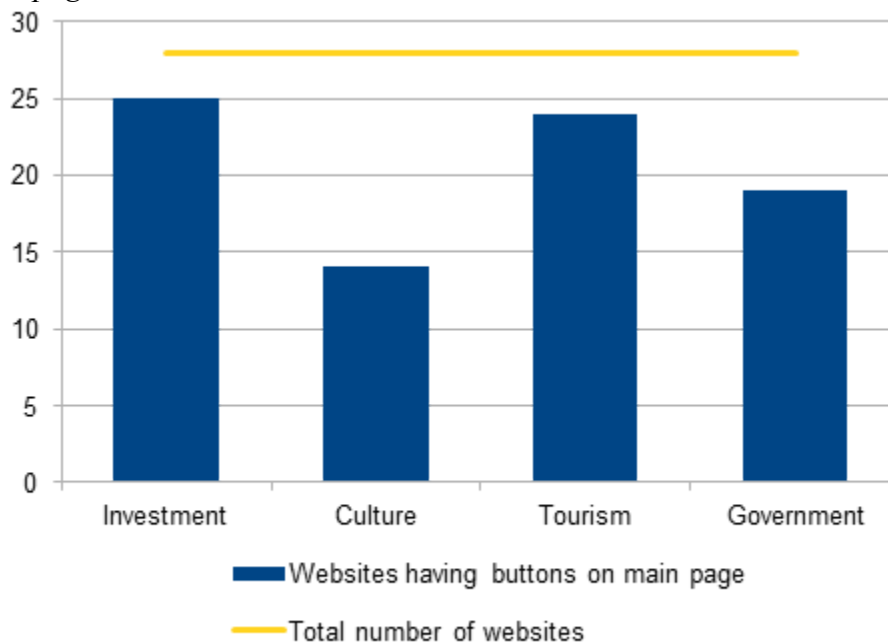
***R3: Does the design allow easy navigation to tourism, culture, government and investment sections and social media pages of the embassies?***

For the third research question the ease of navigation for the chief components of nation branding including tourism, culture, government and investment was analyzed. Also it was

analyzed which of the social media platforms were being used and if their buttons were present on the main page or not. In Figure 4, the horizontal line represents the total number of websites while the columns show the number of websites having buttons on their main page for the mentioned components of nation branding. According to the findings, 89 % of the websites had buttons for investment, 50% had buttons for culture, 85.7% had buttons for tourism and 67.8% websites had buttons leading to the government section at their main pages. These buttons were at varying positions on the page, some had them at the top, some had at the left or right side while some had them at the bottom of the page. In all cases they were accessible conveniently. However, not all of these websites were facilitating their visitors to provide the information on all these aspects. Investment and tourism were overtaking other sectors, the sector for government was also satisfactory, however, only half of the websites were providing information regarding the culture of Pakistan. Even the websites that had buttons for culture were mostly leading to another official website related to culture and heritage of Pakistan but that too was not working. Keeping in view the increasing importance of soft power and public diplomacy, especially cultural diplomacy, there is a dire need to work on this section and provide necessary information regarding Pakistan's culture, heritage, traditions and history. This would not only boost the tourism sector but also prove to be beneficial economically.

**Figure 4**

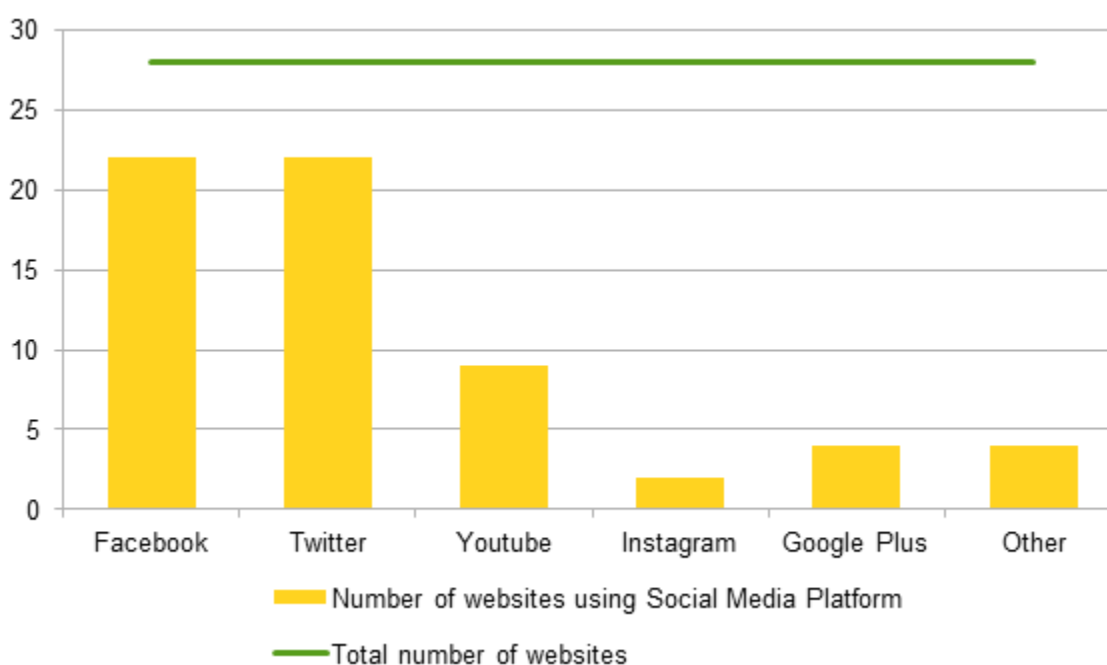
*Websites of Pakistani Embassies having buttons for the four main elements of Nation Branding on their main page*



The last research question also deals with the social media usage and their buttons on the main page. Out of 28 websites considered in this study, 4 had not mentioned any official social media platform on their website. These four included important countries as Japan, Denmark, Germany and Spain. The other websites used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Flickr and some

other regional social media platforms. In Figure 5, the horizontal line represents the total number of websites while the columns indicate the embassies' usage of different social media platforms. Twitter is used as a mini blog for sharing ideas, information and trending news in 140 words or less while Facebook is generally used more for stuff related to personal lives of the users without any limit to the word count (Forsey, 2019). Although Twitter may also be used for such purposes and vice versa but the trend indicates that on general terms Twitter is more used for sharing things related to mind while Facebook is used for sharing things closer to heart. Google Plus is also more like Facebook but has comparatively less users. Instagram is specific to sharing photos and videos and also has a larger user base. Keeping in view the nature and type of social media users and the content and availability of the social media platforms, it is considered important for the foreign offices and their representative units to have accounts in all major social media platforms in order to engage a larger public. However it was found that Facebook and Twitter were being used by 78.5% of the websites, while YouTube was being used by 32% and Instagram and Google Plus were being used by 7% and 14% respectively. Some other platforms like Flickr, podcast and some other regional social media platforms were also being used by some embassies and are indicated as "other" in the figure below.

**Figure 5**  
*Social Media Platforms used by Pakistani Embassies*



### Conclusion:

Digital diplomacy holds a great potential to brand nations and to further countries' foreign policies (Manor & Segev, 2015). Social media and attractive website designs have enabled nations to engage themselves in branding and promoting positive images to their audiences. Though it cannot mar the effect of negative foreign policy decisions, it can certainly help in clarifying the misconceptions held related to a country (Harris, 2013). Many countries around the world are using digital diplomacy to promote their unique identities (Basha, 2017). For



countries who are struggling with creating a positive identity for themselves, digital diplomacy can prove to be the formula to the aspired favorable outcomes. Pakistan is such an example, who is coping with managing its poor reputation and is in a dire need of practicing effective digital diplomacy (Ramay, 2019, Adeel, n.d., & Ittefaq, 2019). Unfortunately, not only is Pakistan's digital diplomacy quite new, but there is also no centralized approach to monitor and practice digital diplomacy in Pakistan (Ittefaq, 2017). Moreover, the academic data related to digital diplomacy and nation branding of Pakistan is also scant.

In this study, the researchers tried to analyze the situation of digital diplomacy and nation branding in Pakistan with a focus on website design of Pakistani embassies working around the world. The study included an examination of website performances through page loading speed, ease of navigation to four main elements of nation branding viz; investment, tourism, government and culture, as well as the presence of official social media accounts and the platforms in use. Another aspect of website design, i.e. color shades and their combinations was also examined. As many as 58, out of total 86 embassies and high commissions of Pakistan working around the world, were not having proper websites being run by them in an official capacity. Thus the likelihood of these foreign office units being involved in active digital nation branding was ruled out in the first stage. The percentage of remaining websites having a page loading speed less than or equal to the best considered speed of 3 seconds, was also very low, indicating an unsatisfactory performance in this area. Although the color scheme was good in all the websites keeping in view the impact of colors on the psychology of the visitors, there was little consistency in color shades. In case of the presence of buttons related to the four elements of nation branding considered in this study i.e. investment, tourism, culture and government, the section of culture seemed to be overlooked. Acknowledging the increasing importance of soft power and public diplomacy, especially cultural diplomacy, there is a dire need to work on this section and provide necessary information regarding Pakistan's culture, heritage, traditions and history. This would not only boost the tourism sector but also prove to be beneficial economically. Similarly, apart from the absence of those 58 embassies -that couldn't be taken into this study- in the social media sphere, the unavailability of buttons or links related to the official social media pages of important countries like Japan, Germany, Denmark and Spain on their websites is in itself an indication of a failure to make use of this crucial, cost effective and gainful resource that can be used to handle misunderstandings and promote a more positive and friendly image of the country.

The author does not intend to say that working only on the website design would get the ultimately desired outcomes but all the components of nation branding and public diplomacy need to be put in coherence in order to achieve the goal. Website design is one such component and in case of Pakistan, dealing with an image problem, this is no less important than any other front.

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## Appendix 1

**CODING SHEET****Page Loading Speed (Desktop)**

Country	Website	Loading Time	Average

**Page Loading Speed (Mobile)**

Country	Website	Loading Time	Average

**Colors used at Homepage**

Country	Website	Colors used	Frequency

**Presence of Social Media**

Country	Website	Buttons of Social Media platforms present on main page	Frequency

**Nation Branding Index Dimension Buttons**

Country	Website	Dimensions				Frequency
		Culture	Government	Investment	Tourism	