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COKE STUDIO: A STRATEGIC TOOL FOR PAKISTAN'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

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| Corresponding & Author 1: | MUHAMMAD RAFI KHAN, PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations, Minhaj University Lahore. Email: realrafijamal@gmail.com / rafi.ro@mul.edu.pk |
| Author 2: | DR. SAJID MEHMOOD SHAHZAD, Professor, Vice-Chancellor, Minhaj University Lahore, Email: Commodore.shahzad@gmail.com / vc@mul.edu.pk |

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Abstract

The popularity of music in Pakistan has been a consistent and continuing phenomenon throughout its history. This element is of utmost significance in customary gatherings, celebratory occasions, and religious and sacred assemblies. It is also extensively used in memorialization, conflicts, and military engagements. The surge in popularity and widespread acceptance of music paved the way for exploring new domains in the quest for musical discovery. As a result, in 2008, Coke Studio (CS) emerged as a significant platform to promote Pakistan's music with its modern form and applications. The remarkable triumph of Coke Studio, coupled with its widespread acclaim on a global scale, has provided additional impetus for other music labels and franchises to explore and innovate within the realm of music, thereby enhancing the overall artistic landscape. Owing to its global achievements, Pakistan has acquired fresh opportunities to strategize and implement cultural diplomacy with a new perspective. This study explores the popularity of CS within the country and analyzes how CS can be used as a strategic tool for Pakistan's cultural diplomacy. The study is based on constructivism and aligns with the approaches of modern constructivists, particularly Wendt (1992; 1999). Constructivists think that shared ideas, rather than tangible forces, define the forms of human relationships.

Keywords: Culture, Music, Diplomacy, Strategy, Constructivism

Introduction

Music as a Common Language

Music can be considered a strategic tool for creating cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration (Einbinder, 2013). It is vital to emphasize that viewing music culture as a resource, capital, and power has increased people's awareness of how it influences national cultural identity, making it a critical policy problem (Jamnongsarn, 2014). Because music is widely recognized as a universal language, it transcends all limits of formal languages and their interpretations (Feld, 1984). Using a common language has promoted mutual territory exploration (Einbinder, 2013; Fosler-Lussier, 2020). Individuals can participate in a collective human experience by sharing, listening, and playing together (Einbinder, 2013). Music has the power to inspire and elicit emotional responses. The human element can be found in the broad spectrum of music produce (Ahrendt, Ferraguto, & Mahiet, 2014) d, reflecting the inherent diversity of human beings.

Music Diplomacy

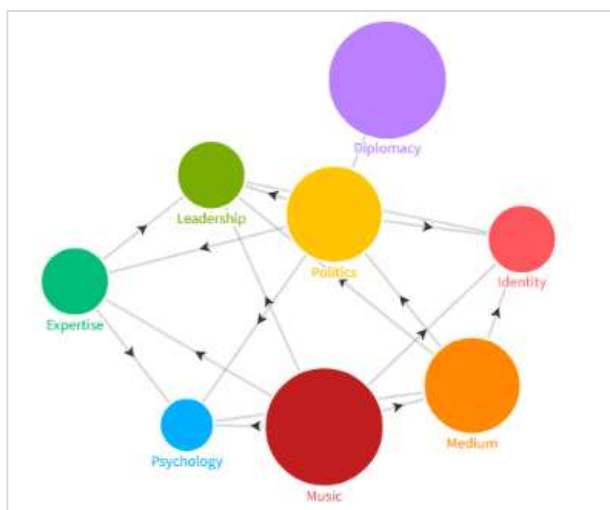
Music diplomacy facilitates the interchange of ideas, artistic expressions, and various cultural elements (Hurn & Tomalin, 2013), all with the principal goal of cultivating mutual cultural understanding through musical notions. Through the strategic use of music as a diplomatic instrument, nations try to fortify their diplomatic relations, establish connections, and cultivate favorable associations with other countries (Tyler, 2007). Music shows a nation's cultural legacy, artistic aptitude, and innovative areas internationally, expanding its global perception and standing (Lianu, 2016). It presents societies with valuable prospects to foster informal engagement, establish connections based on shared social tropes, and strive toward a more comprehensive understanding of cultural and political difference (Dunkel & Nitzsche, 2018) s.

Emergence of Coke Studio

Coke Studio is a renowned Pakistani music television series presenting a wide range of live and studio-recorded music performances, offering a platform for diverse musical expressions. The presented performances serve as a stage for the convergence of highly skilled musicians from various musical backgrounds (Collier, 2014), encompassing a multitude of genres, including folk, classical, rock, pop, jazz, and hip-hop (Kibria, 2020; Qaisar, 2019). The concept was subsequently adopted by Nadeem Zaman, the Marketing Head of The Coca-Cola Company, in collaboration with Rohail Hyatt, a distinguished former member of the renowned Pakistani band Vital Signs and the first producer of the show, to establish a localized version of the show in 2008 (Asad-Ullah, 2020; Abid, Bilal, & Begum, 2022). The initiation of the inaugural season was characterized by the presence of a live audience, an occurrence that gathered significant praise and success (Chocano, 2022) from audiences and musicians worldwide. The sessions of Coke Studio involve the execution of live music performances by a diverse collection of artists within the limits of a closed studio. These performances are subsequently recorded and disseminated across multiple media platforms, catering to various languages and dialects widespread throughout Pakistan (Nair, 2010). The present initiative functions as a tribute to the rich musical diversity within the nation, skillfully integrating Eastern traditional folk music influenced by regional notes with contemporary Western elements (Chocano, 2022; Abid, Bilal, & Begum, 2022). After the tragic incident of 9/11, in the aftermath of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), Pakistan faced a terror outbreak due to the unprecedented surge in terror-bound groups along its Western borders and their activities within the country (Abbasi, 2013; Javaid & Kamal,

2012), amid this terrorism, which prevailed for over a decade. Pakistani needed a breathing space, a fresh air of calm. It was when CS was launched (in 2008) with an extraordinary emotional slogan, "Sound of the Nation" (Coke Studio, 2020; Khurana, 2016). During the period of the GWOT, and specifically the Global Financial Crisis, Coca-Cola's brand effectively leveraged the sentiments of the Pakistani population by associating itself with Coke Studio through sponsorship (Collier, 2014). As a strategic social investment and branded concept, Coke Studio surpassed initial projections and achieved remarkable success (D'Souza, 2021; Monie, 2011). The present investigation aims to examine the untapped cultural resources of Pakistan and their potential to enter diplomatic channels within the international system (Fosler-Lussier, 2020), as shown in Figure 1. Music diplomacy is being reviewed globally as a potentially influential soft power tool to identify compatible and feasible avenues within the global diplomatic framework (Fosler-Lussier, 2012). The discourse surrounding the concept of music as a strategic tool is anticipated to bolster Pakistan's existing landscape of cultural diplomacy (Qaisar & Hashmi, 2013).

Figure 1: The Music-Diplomacy Connection



Source: (Fosler-Lussier, 2020)

Constructivist Approach

Constructivists believe that the "structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces" and that the "identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature" (Wendt, 1999). Constructivists "focus on its meaning for the actor and its role and function within society" (Guzzini, 2000). A constructivist perspective acknowledges that Coke Studio is not an isolated platform. It exists as part of a network involving individuals, such as musicians, producers, audiences, and policymakers. Each participant interacting with the platform is influenced by it, contributing to its message and impact as it evolves. Examining Coke Studios' discourse – including its lyrics, visuals, and public reception – is crucial for understanding how it shapes and reshapes reality. Beyond being a source of entertainment, Coke Studio constructs an identity that challenges stereotypes and narratives imposed both internally and externally. It brings together elements celebrating regional traditions while creating a unified national fabric. By fostering shared experiences, Coke Studio nurtures a sense of belonging and empathy, bridging gaps between groups and communities. This inclusive space encourages dialogue and critical engagement, with issues prompting audiences to reevaluate existing norms and power structures.

Literature Review

The discussion of D'Souza (2021) encompasses a broad range of topics, including diplomatic horizons, i.e., cultural diplomacy and the utilization of music for behavioral management and social construction. The implications discussed pertain to the domestic or national context and possess significant potential for music integration into global cultures via formal and informal diplomatic channels (Abid, Bilal, &

Begum, 2022). The present investigation mainly concerns scenarios closely associated with the subject matter. It is worth noting that cultural diplomacy's efficacy is contingent upon utilizing formal and informal diplomatic channels across various hierarchical levels (Nair, 2010). Furthermore, attributing human characteristics to music as a proficient mediator is significant due to its prompt and unbiased reception, devoid of discriminatory elements such as race, gender, ethnicity, language, and religion (Fosler-Lussier, 2012). The concepts exemplify the inherent popularity of music and its universal presence within the essence of human beings. Specifically, they highlight the inclination toward humane qualities automatically prioritized over emotional and materialistic explanations (Campbell, 1997). The study conducted by Marc (2020) is of significant interest due to its examination of the stimulation of transboundary cultural programs, such as cultural discourses through academia and media, specifically emphasizing using music as a foundational element to initiate meaningful cultural dialogue. The study aims to promote a more favorable national image at regional levels, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and success of foreign policy initiatives (Monie, 2011). The current study explores the strategic use of Coke Studio, which "is a myriad of 'text-video-audio' objects in the digital age, and how the consumers of Coke Studio actively participate in developing new narratives about South Asian history and Pakistani modernity" (Williams & Mahmood, 2019). It is a record label that opened a different paradigm of cultural diplomacy, using virtuality as a carrier and choosing the internet as a primary medium to project Pakistan's impressive music genres (Kibria, 2020). Additionally, the research seeks to address gaps and challenges within diplomatic relations by leveraging cultural exchanges while also exploring the potential

for branding a nation's image on a global scale. The object at hand relates to understanding one another more profoundly, intending to reduce the disparities between various culture (Constantinou, Kerr, & Sharp, 2016) s. Additionally, it aims to encourage more robust connections between nations by exchanging artistic expressions, cultural practices, and educational endeavors (Eggeling & Adler-Nissen, 2021; Faucher, 2016).

Methodology

The present investigation exhibits a level of complexity in both its selection of materials and the methodology employed. The domain of culture necessitates a more profound qualitative understanding, encompassing both national and international entities. Acquiring surveys from national or domestic actors is imperative to conduct a thorough analysis. These materials serve as crucial resources for obtaining authentic data. The utilization of surveys in this study has proven instrumental in facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the association between Coke Studio and the domestic music culture as well as the citizenry of Pakistan, whether through direct or indirect means. The surveys were administered using a random sampling technique, with participants being selected in a manner that ensures equal probability of inclusion. The survey instrument utilized an essential 3-point Likert Scale, allowing respondents to express their agreement or disagreement with the given statements. Table 1 presents the questionnaire that has been carefully developed to conduct these surveys.

Table 1: Standard Questionnaire Based on 3-Point Likert Scale

| # | Question | Agree | Disagree | Neutral |
|---|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | I like songs produced by CS. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2 | CS's songs reflect true Pakistani culture. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

| | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 3 | CS's experimental music promotes classical music. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4 | It is good for Pakistan that CS is popular worldwide. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5 | CS is Pakistan's modern cultural diplomat. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

For all responses, the sources, i.e., public, academia, music industry, etc., the percentage of respondents and reactions has been calculated in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentage Tally of Respondents

| Sr. No. | Category | Sources Tally | % | Responses Tally | % |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | General Public | 3 | 37.5 | 85 | 58 |
| 2 | Academia | 2 | 25 | 44 | 27 |
| 3 | Media Industry | 2 | 25 | 23 | 14 |
| 4 | Music Industry | 1 | 12.5 | 9 | 6 |
| Total | | 8 | 100 | 161 | 100 |

All the surveys were done through the WhatsApp polls. These polls produce accurate and instant results. Responses were collected in an Excel sheet for each survey, and the Google Chrome extension "Export WhatsApp Surveys" was used. Table 3 shows the distribution of all responses.

Table 3: Distribution of Responses

| Distribution of Responses | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|--------|
| Sources | Public | | Academia | | Media Industry | | Music Industry | | Total |
| Sources Tally | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 8 | |
| No. of Respondents | 85 | 44 | 23 | 9 | 161 | | | | |
| Scale/Opinion Options | Agree | Disagree | Agree | Disagree | Agree | Disagree | Agree | Disagree | |
| Sr. Questions | Neutral | Neutral | Neutral | Neutral | Neutral | Neutral | Neutral | Neutral | |
| 1. I like songs produced by CS. | 53 | 25 | 29 | 8 | 18 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 108 36 |
| 2. CS's songs reflect true Pakistani culture. | 49 | 29 | 30 | 9 | 18 | 3 | 8 | 1 | 105 42 |
| 3. CS's experimental music is promoting classical music. | 55 | 19 | 29 | 12 | 15 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 106 38 |
| 4. It is good for Pakistan that CS is popular worldwide. | 60 | 22 | 31 | 11 | 21 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 121 35 |
| 5. CS is Pakistan's cultural diplomat. | 58 | 20 | 25 | 15 | 17 | 5 | 8 | 0 | 108 40 |

The demographic inquiry was calculated for all responses and made an essential part of the survey to improve clarity, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Demographic Information of Respondents

| Sr. No. | Category | Count | % |
|---------|-------------------|----------------------|--------|
| 1 | Gender | Male | 115 71 |
| | | Female | 43 27 |
| | | Transgender | 3 2 |
| | | | |
| 2 | Area | Punjab | 112 70 |
| | | KPK | 23 14 |
| | | Sindh | 4 3 |
| | | Baluchistan | 2 1 |
| | | Gilgit/Baltistan/AJK | 3 2 |
| | | Federal Territory | 17 10 |
| | | | |
| 3 | Employment Status | Employed | 141 87 |
| | | Unemployed | 3 2 |
| | | Self-Employed | 17 11 |
| 4 | Education | SSC/HSSC | 2 1 |
| | | Undergraduate | 119 74 |
| | | Postgraduate | 40 25 |
| 5 | Age | 15-25 Y | 98 61 |
| | | 26-40 Y | 39 24 |
| | | 41-60 Y | 23 14 |
| | | Above 60 Y | 1 1 |

Results

The results were called in on an Excel sheet described in the Methodology Section. The following results were calculated in response to each question individually.

"I like songs produced by CS."

Most respondents agreed with the argument that they are indeed cherishing Coke Studio. However, more work and awareness are required as 36 individuals do not agree with the notion, which becomes over 22 percent of the survey population.

Figure 2: Percentage of Responses for Question 1***"CS's songs reflect true Pakistani culture."***

The results of the second inquiry show that approximately three percent of responses were in favor, but the disagreement increased by four percent compared to the previous investigations. This disagreement indicates that more awareness is required in certain areas to understand the significance of music diplomacy and soft power image.

Figure 3: Percentage of Responses for Question 2***"CS's experimental music is promoting classical music."***

Coke Studio is the pioneer music label that began experimenting with genre fusion. It is a great success for the show that over 65 percent of individuals like it in a country where traditional classical and folk genres have always flourished. Pakistanis have accepted the experimentation with their folk and classical styles.

Figure 4: Percentage of Responses for Question 3***"It is good for Pakistan that CS is popular worldwide."***

This inquiry was among the most essential questions regarding the presentation of music by Coke Studio that Pakistan can use to brand its culture and improve its international image. A high percentage of respondents agreed that it would be good if CS was an acclaimed music show on a global scale.

Figure 5: Percentage of Responses for**Question 4*****"CS is Pakistan's modern cultural diplomat."***

In a country like Pakistan, where religious diplomacy has been at the forefront of foreign policy, culture, and, most specifically, music diplomacy is finding its place. It may be considered as a significant achievement. The result shows that 67 percent of individuals agree that Pakistan's foreign policy must have cultural elements like music.

Figure 6: Percentage of Responses for Question 5

Figure 6 shows a statistic (number of total responses) in a stacked bar chart, which shows that 548 responses (cumulative) were in favor of all arguments developed for this study. The chart also shows the number of responses for each category of source. The chart also shows the total responses for each category and their inclination to agreement, disagreement, and neutrality.

Figure 7: Total Number of Responses including Cumulative Result**Discussion**

Coke Studio received significant popularity among the youth of Pakistan and its citizen's abroad (Beg, 2020). The exploration has revealed a previously hidden component of Pakistan, which had been minimized by the dominant orthodoxy common within our local community (Syed & Bhutta, 2020).

Promoting openness and enhancing Pakistan's image is crucial in reviving interest in the country's abundant musical heritage (Dhanwani, 2014). Concerning this, CS has catered to the five prominent characteristics, as stated in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Primary Characteristics Coke Studio

Source: Derived from the discussions by



Multiple Sources

Social Strategic Investment

Coke Studio has gained significant prominence within the cultural landscape of Pakistan, affecting various domains ranging from corporate-sponsored music events to exciting wedding festivities and even university "culture nights". The process involves "repackaging Pakistani traditional music" as an object of culture, aiming to enhance marketability among a global and younger demographic (Beg, 2020). This "investment turned cultural institution" can be seen as a "commercial contra-flow that champions free-market capitalism" and creates an acceptable face for it by positioning Coke Studio as a "strategic social investment" in Pakistan (Dhanwani, 2014). As a melody that goes beyond boundaries, Coke Studio has gained international recognition for its commendable efforts in showcasing Pakistan's rich traditional music and effectively promoting the nation's culturally diverse and harmonious identity (Khan & Humayun, 2022). The image of Pakistan has been thoughtfully created by employing a fusion aesthetic and self-branding strategy

that positions itself as the embodiment of the nation's musical identity (Collier, 2014).

Promoting Music Legacy

Considering its mission, Coke Studio assumed the crucial role of facilitating the curation and widespread propagation of Pakistan's abundant musical and literary legacy (Williams & Mahmood, 2019). It has gained considerable recognition for its pivotal role in reinvigorating the praise and admiration of Pakistan's multifaceted musical heritage (Raja, 2020). In the initial stages of recording technology, the auditory aspect of music consumption held a prominent position, as individuals would primarily engage with music through media such as cassettes or CDs. However, in contemporary times, the experience of encountering a Coke Studio song has expanded beyond the limits of sound, encompassing various media platforms, and engaging multiple senses. In this digital era, the traditional format of televised music videos has evolved (Williams & Mahmood, 2019). The audio component of these videos is now closely connected with the visual element while also being interconnected with various online platforms such as YouTube comments, WhatsApp conversations, Facebook likes, and hyperlinks to associated videos, audio clips, and external websites. Thus, Pakistan's music legacy is being promoted through broadcasting as well as narrowcasting (webcasting).

Preserving Cultural Identity

The phenomenon of popular music in Pakistan, mainly through the platform of Coke Studio, has emerged as a prominent manifestation of global youth culture. This cultural phenomenon has united different generations and acted as a unifying force, transcending class and cultural boundaries (Chocano, 2022; Abid, Bilal, & Begum, 2022). The observed phenomenon can be understood as a plausible strategy for preserving and augmenting cultural traditions or cultivating a sense of regional or

community identity (Asad-Ullah, 2020). Significantly, it is essential to note that audiences are not anticipated to possess knowledge as expert listeners within a particular genre. Consumption primarily aims to provide an easy and enjoyable audio experience (Williams & Mahmood, 2019). The widespread accessibility of Coke Studio has facilitated its emergence as a global phenomenon, thereby influencing how the nation and its cultural traditions are re-envisioned within the arena of musical media.

A Collaborative Platform

Coke Studio has successfully established a conducive platform for collaborative endeavors by incorporating a diverse range of accomplished musicians and up-and-coming talent, leading to significant accomplishments and successes (Qaisar & Hashmi, 2013). The observation of the phenomenon of seamlessly integrating ability has garnered considerable attention due to its captivating effect on a continuously growing viewership, consequently leaving a lasting impression on the music industry (D'Souza, 2021). Coke Studio boasts various songs that go through multiple genres, showcasing a diverse combination of musicians with a range of training in various musical styles. These musicians converge to engage in collaborative efforts, thereby fostering a unique and dynamic musical experience (Chocano, 2022). The jamming sessions and musical conversations are carefully created to produce an atmosphere that is both global and multicultural, deliberately hiding the differences between traditional and modern, provincial, and international (Nair, 2010; Asad-Ullah, 2020).

Ingenious Experiment

Coke Studio has emerged as a highly influential platform in televisual, digital, and musical media, playing an essential role in shaping narratives surrounding Pakistani modernity. It is noteworthy that Coke Studio has assimilated specific attributes from pre-

existing music genres, such as Popular, Sufi, and Classical (Monie, 2011). However, it has ingeniously combined these genres with other diverse types, employing extensive experimentation to produce a culturally embraced fusion. The element that proved to be most invigorating was incorporating the "text-video-audio" format (Williams & Mahmood, 2019).

Conclusion

The introduction of the innovative sonic aesthetic by Coke Studio has profoundly impacted various television programs within the country, including Nescafe Basement, Velo Sound Station, and Strepsils Stereo, among others. Furthermore, this influence has extended beyond national borders, creating Coke Studio franchises worldwide. The integration of commercial branding and artistic expression in the show resulted in a remarkable unification, thereby generating an extraordinary degree of visibility for traditional folk and Sufi music that surpasses the geographical boundaries of South Asia. The present creative responsibility has effectively facilitated a significant and worthwhile interchange of musical knowledge and cultural influences, thereby cultivating an environment that promotes cross-cultural interactions and enhances the process of musical education. Thus, Coke Studio is effectively spreading Pakistan's rich cultural traditions globally, strengthening its image and strategically projecting its soft power. This is particularly useful for contemporary and future diplomacy for Pakistan to consider alternate and parallel avenues to reach the international system with a more collaborative, cooperative, and positive image.

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