
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Moving Beyond Official Cultural Diplomacy: Unleashing the Potential of Moroccan Students as Unofficial Cultural Ambassadors

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diplomacy plays a pivotal role in international relations, enabling states to project their soft power and shape their global image. This paper explores the current state of Moroccan cultural diplomacy, highlighting the need to go beyond official approaches and embrace unofficial cultural diplomacy. While extensive research exists on official cultural diplomacy, little attention has been given to the contribution of Moroccan study-abroad students in bolstering their country's cultural diplomacy and soft power. More specifically, this paper argues that Morocco's cultural diplomacy is primarily politically oriented and institutionally based, relying heavily on the monarchy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The strategic utilization of Morocco's cultural and religious heritage and diaspora politics showcases the government's efforts to secure its regional and global influence. However, these initiatives are largely driven by official institutions and lack the involvement of ordinary citizens. By examining the limitations of official cultural diplomacy, this paper argues for the inclusion of Moroccan study-abroad students as unofficial ambassadors in the service of their country's cultural diplomacy. Drawing inspiration from successful examples of unofficial diplomacy, this paper advocates for the active participation of Moroccan study-abroad students as unofficial cultural ambassadors. Their unique perspectives, connections, and grassroots status can offer valuable contributions that official diplomats may not possess. This research paper contends that Moroccan study-abroad students have many resources of power that qualify them to leverage their country's cultural diplomacy. These resources are informality and grassroots engagement, volunteering and community service, and the power of the virtual sphere. By utilizing these power resources, these students have the potential to foster cross-cultural understanding, build relationships, and enhance Morocco's soft power. In conclusion, this paper highlights the need for a paradigm shift in Morocco's cultural diplomacy, advocating for a combination of both official and unofficial cultural diplomacies.

KEYWORDS

Track II diplomacy, cultural ambassadors, Moroccan students, cultural diplomacy, soft power.

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1. Introduction

Cultural diplomacy has become an increasingly important aspect of international relations and politics, with states using their cultural capitals to promote their image and exert their influence abroad. Morocco is no exception, as its government has placed significant emphasis on cultural diplomacy as a tool to strengthen Morocco's global influence, enhance its soft power, and secure its place in the world's geopolitics. Generally speaking, this paper seeks to investigate the current situation of the Moroccan cultural diplomacy machine and the strategies that are being adopted by Morocco to carry out its cultural diplomacy. However, we have recognized that although extensive work has been done on the dynamics of Moroccan cultural diplomacy and a lot of research has been done about official cultural diplomacy, little attention has been paid to unofficial cultural diplomacy, especially when it comes to the contribution of Moroccan study-abroad students to enhancing Morocco's cultural diplomacy and soft power.

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More precisely, this paper claims that Track I cultural diplomacy, or official cultural diplomacy, alone is not enough. Official cultural diplomacy needs a supplement, an extension. The world we inhabit is too complicated to handle it with one instrument or to approach with one theory. And truth is too big to be conceived by one individual or grasped by one institution. It is almost impossible that today's world's political and cultural problems can be solved without some combination of Track I diplomacy and Track II diplomacy. A combination of Track I diplomacy (official diplomacy) and Track II diplomacy (unofficial diplomacy) is, then, a must (Chataway, 1998: 272).

The main claim of this paper is that Morocco's cultural diplomacy is politically oriented, and institutionally based, and the Moroccan state depends heavily on political and official institutions such as the monarchy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote its cultural image abroad. For example, the main strategy that the Moroccan state, especially the monarchy, adopts is exploiting Morocco's cultural and religious heritage (Islamic/Jewish heritages) to polish up Morocco's external image and to secure its rule over the Western Sahara (Wüst & Nicolai, 2022). In the same vein, Morocco also utilizes diaspora politics and religious diplomacy to reach its diaspora groups in European countries and to strengthen its regional and global influence (Kaya and Drhimeur, 2022).

As for religion and its role in Moroccan cultural diplomacy, Islam has been a traditional tool in Morocco's cultural diplomacy (Tadlaoui, 2015). The monarchy has utilized Islam in its foreign policy in three different ways: emphasize the religious legitimacy of the monarchy, export a model of Islam based on moderation and interpretative openness, and use an international network of transnational organizations based on the Moroccan territory, as the Tijaniyya Brotherhood (Hernando de Larramendi, 2017). El Founti (2021) claims that Morocco's "spiritual diplomacy" has been used as an alternative to the hard power counter-terrorism measures adopted by Western countries and was directed to go hand in hand with Morocco's economic cooperation with African countries (El Founti, 2021: 40). However, this faith-based diplomacy, as this paper contends, is still relying heavily on the efforts of the official institutions of the Moroccan state and the royal activities of King Mohammed VI himself. For instance, Morocco has made many religious programs for training imams to enhance its religious diplomacy in African countries such as Guinea, Nigeria, and Mali (Hmimnat, 2018: 22). This policy also includes building and reconstructing mosques (Tadlaoui, 2015), designing, and renewing religious curricula and rehabilitating religious schools (Hmimnat, 2018: 22). In most cases, these initiatives are either taken by the king of Morocco himself as in the king performing the Friday prayers in many African countries or by other institutions such as Mohamed VI Foundation of African Oulemas and the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs (El Founti, 2021: 40).

Another example that shows that Morocco's cultural diplomacy is politically oriented is the country's religious policy in Africa, which can be seen as a reaction to the geopolitical circumstances of the 21st century. This policy was meant "to both contrast with and limit the propagation of the ultra-conservative brand of Wahhabi Islam sponsored by Saudi Arabia, which has inspired numerous extremist groups spawning instability in the region" (Tadlaoui, 2015: 2). Again, this diplomacy was strongly determined by the political circumstances of the 9/11 events and was designed to "reposition itself geopolitically and raise its profile in relations with key Western allies on which Morocco's economy and security still largely depends" (Tadlaoui, 2015: 5). The Moroccan state also regulates, through its intelligence agencies, the religious market of foreign countries to achieve foreign policy goals (Wainscott, 2017). Not only that but festivals such as the Marrakech International Film Festival and the Mawazine music festival in Rabat are sponsored by the Moroccan state and have been used by the state as vehicles for promoting its cultural diplomacy (Dines, 2020).

As we have seen from the literature, Morocco's cultural diplomacy is politically oriented, and it emanates either from the authority of the monarchy or from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This policy either uses Morocco's Islamic cultural heritage or Jewish heritage (Wainscott, 2017), or Moroccan diaspora in Europe (Kaya & Drhimeur, 2022), or Cinema and music festivals (Dines, 2020), or Sufi organizations such as Tijaniyya Brotherhood (Hernando de Larramendi, 2017). This means that Moroccan cultural diplomacy still works according to the principles of traditional or official cultural diplomacy and that the Moroccan state still depends heavily on the monarchy and the official institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote its cultural image and soft power.

All in all, it seems that there is a quite significant gap in Moroccan cultural diplomacy practice. For this reason, this paper has two ambitions. Firstly, it will try to point to that gap by revealing the limitations of Morocco's official cultural diplomacy and, secondly, it will propose an alternative approach and suggest some strategies for improving Morocco's cultural diplomacy and enhancing its soft power overseas. In a more concrete terms, this paper will try to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the limitations of Morocco's official cultural diplomacy?
2. Can Moroccan ordinary citizens, especially study abroad students, contribute to the enhancement of Morocco's cultural diplomacy?
3. What added value do unofficial Moroccan ambassadors like study abroad students have that official ambassadors do not?

4. What material and symbolic benefits could the Moroccan state reap from combining official cultural diplomacy with unofficial cultural diplomacy?
5. How can Moroccan study abroad students, playing the role of unofficial ambassadors, help in extending the work and complementing the efforts of their fellow Moroccan official ambassadors and diplomats?

2. Official Cultural Diplomacy vs. Unofficial Cultural Diplomacy

Official cultural diplomacy is a deliberate and structured policy taken by the government or official institutions of a country to promote its cultural values, heritage, and image abroad. It is “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding” (Cummings, 2003: 1). The main objective of any official cultural diplomacy is to strengthen relationships, build bridges, and make an impact on the perceptions of foreign audiences. This type of diplomacy may take various forms, such as cultural events, exhibitions, exchanges, performances, or media campaigns, and is usually implemented by diplomats, cultural attaches, or other government officials.

Although this kind of cultural diplomacy has its own strengths, it has also its limitations. We opine here in this paper that the heavy reliance on official cultural diplomacy on the part of the Moroccan government and the negligence of unofficial or track II diplomacy is due to a misconception and a misperception of what diplomacy is really about. Chataway (1998) points out that “in the past, diplomats often perceived [ordinary] citizens who engaged in diplomatic activities as “the enemy” [of the state] or just “meddlers”” (Chataway, 1998: 271). And this probably why we do not very often see ordinary Moroccan citizens engaged in one way or another in enhancing their country’s image and soft power. There is also probably the prevalent fear or anxiety among official diplomats that ordinary citizens “will get in the way, be taken hostage and complicate the situation, [or] encourage resistance to compromise” (Chataway, 1998: 271). It is high time ordinary Moroccan citizens reviewed their perception of Track II or unofficial diplomacy as an extension of Track I or official diplomacy.

If cultural diplomacy is a form of soft power, then Moroccan cultural diplomacy should move one step further beyond that and become a form of “smart power.” In diplomacy and foreign policy studies, smart power is “the capacity to combine hard and soft resources in an efficient way and according to a specific foreign strategy” (Nye 2004 cited in Zamorano, 2016: 175). In the context of this paper “smart power” means the situation where Morocco’s cultural diplomatic policy goes smart and extends its official cultural diplomacy by depending not only on its official institutions and diplomats, but also by recruiting unofficial diplomats among its ordinary citizens, especially Moroccan students studying abroad.

There are many cases around the world where ordinary citizens have greatly contributed to the enhancement of their countries’ images and reputations. Biltekin (2020) points out that Swedish women in the United States have contributed to Sweden’s cultural diplomacy by participating in activities that relate to their country of origin. These Swedish women created a non-state network called the Swedish Women’s Educational Organization (SWEA) to encourage interest in Swedish culture among American citizens “by organizing public cultural events and financially supporting causes that aim to increase engagement with Swedish culture” (Biltekin, 2020: 1). What is relevant to the claim of this paper is that instead of top-down cultural diplomacy enacted by the Swedish state, these women have put Swedish cultural diplomacy upside-down; they have looked at cultural diplomacy from a “bottom-up perspective.” They have created spaces of action and acted as diplomatic agents for their country of origin (Biltekin, 2020: 9).

Now, if they ever want to promote Morocco’s cultural diplomacy and soft power, all the stakeholders in Morocco should opt for more creative diplomatic strategies that work in parallel with official cultural diplomacy. And this paper suggests that Moroccan study-abroad students could play the role of unofficial cultural ambassadors of Morocco to promote their country’s soft power and enhance its image abroad in ways that are more effective than official cultural diplomacy ways. There is then an urgent need for an alternative and creative diplomatic policy that would work in parallel with official cultural diplomacy. This paper suggests that Moroccan study abroad students can fill in a gap in this official cultural diplomacy.

Unofficial cultural diplomacy, also known as Track II diplomacy, alludes to non-governmental or non-official efforts used to enhance cultural exchange and understanding between nations, usually done by civil society associations, higher institutes, or individuals (Butcher, 2012). Unlike official cultural diplomacy, which is designed and carried out by governments or official institutions, unofficial cultural diplomacy is typically more decentralized and autonomous, and can include a variety of actors and initiatives. In their seminal article, Davidson & Montville (1981) point out that Track II diplomacy as it is a form of “non-official, unstructured interaction. It is always open minded, [and] often altruistic” (Davidson & Montville, 1981: 155–156).

And because unofficial cultural diplomacy is about cultural exchange and engagement that take place outside the political institutions or formal government channels, this cultural diplomacy has several advantages that make it more effective than official cultural diplomacy. These advantages are mutually beneficial and apolitically oriented. The mutual benefit and non-political features lie in the fact that the two parties being involved in unofficial cultural diplomacy base their relationships on trust, respect,

and exchange of benefits, rather than a focus on political issues or an adherence to political agendas. This can make it easier to engage in cross-cultural dialogue and build relationships between people with different political views and cultural perspectives.

Another advantage of unofficial cultural diplomacy is that it can be a more workable diplomacy for promoting a country's cultural image and soft power. This type of diplomacy involves engaging non-state actors or agents, such as civil society organizations, artists, and scholars, to exhibit the diversity and richness of a country's culture. The result is a more authentic and grassroots representation of a country's culture, which can resonate more with audiences around the globe.

In this way, unofficial cultural diplomacy is used to complement and to fill the gaps or compensate for the limited scope and effectiveness of government-led cultural diplomacy. It is a form of parallel cultural diplomacy. By involving a diverse range of stakeholders and perspectives, unofficial cultural diplomacy paves the way for more diverse and more inclusive avenues for exchange of ideas and beliefs between nations. Also, unofficial cultural diplomacy can be more economical and less costly than official or Track I diplomacy. By engaging non-state actors, in this case Moroccan study abroad students, the Moroccan government can liaise its expertise and resources to involve them and fully engage them in promoting the country's soft power.

Some examples of unofficial cultural diplomacy involve academic exchanges, international youth programs, citizen diplomacy initiatives, cultural festivals, or online platforms for cross-cultural dialogue and learning (Akli, 2012: 40). These initiatives often work independently from government or official bodies, but they can still play a crucial role in promoting cross-cultural understanding, building relationships, and shaping public perceptions.

Parallel or unofficial cultural diplomacy can also serve as a complement or alternative to official cultural diplomacy. Many countries use parallel cultural diplomacy to promote their soft power. For instance, the United States uses the Fulbright Program to promote academic and cultural exchanges between the U.S. and other countries, and the International Visitor Leadership Program to bring emerging leaders from around the world to the U.S (Bettie, 2020) (Sustarsic & Cheng, 2022).

Japan and Germany make heavy investments in parallel cultural diplomacy. Japan and Germany use Japan Foundation and Goethe Institute to support Japanese language education and German language and culture, respectively (Gehrig, 2022). Both countries use their respective cultural agencies as parallel-cultural-diplomacy channels. They use these channels to strengthen their global influence and propagate their values, especially by offering international students program exchanges, language courses, cultural events, and cultural classes.

3. Students as Unofficial Cultural Ambassadors

The number of Moroccan students at the tertiary level studying abroad was estimated at a peak of 56,730 in 2019 (Statista, 2023a). This is a good number that needs to be channeled towards promoting Morocco's unofficial cultural diplomacy. For example, in the academic year of 2019/2020, 147,345 U.S. university students studied abroad in that year (Statista, 2023b). All these students headed towards the four corners of the globe exploring different cultures, having new experiences, making new contacts, and getting involved in thought-provoking encounters. The point here is that when these students come back to the United States, they do not come back empty handed. Rather, they return, and their heads are loaded with ideas, experiences, and conceptions that might benefit them as well as their home country. So, before suggesting what is to be done in Morocco to promote its unofficial cultural diplomacy, here are some questions that need pondering:

1. Are there any alternative ways to promote Morocco's cultural diplomacy other than the official way?
2. Is the Ministry of Education involved in Morocco's cultural diplomacy?
3. Has the Ministry of Education integrated cultural diplomacy into school curricula?
4. Does the Ministry of Education have formal training programs to raise Moroccan international students' cultural diplomacy awareness?

Such questions need more exploration because they do not confine cultural diplomacy to the political circles in the state, but they also aim at figuring out how less formal and less state-like approaches to cultural diplomacy might be implemented. And this less formal approach is nothing, as this paper suggests, but involving Moroccan study abroad students in promoting Morocco's cultural diplomacy.

Moroccan international students studying overseas could be very productive cultural ambassadors of Morocco if the government provided them with the right training and the right tools. Akli ((2012: 32) points out that,

study-abroad students should be at the center of cultural diplomacy [because they may] cause a shift from formal soft power, traditionally concentrated in embassies and the diplomatic corps, to informal soft action in daily life abroad.... they are the potential agents of a paradigm shift regarding cultural diplomacy [...] they are today's new unofficial cultural diplomats."

To translate this unofficial cultural diplomacy into concrete practice, Moroccan students can organize activities such as movies, painting workshops, theatre, music, exhibitions, technology events, conferences, lectures, exhibitions, artistic performances, and sports events (Garamvölgyi & Dóczy, 2021) to brand Morocco's image abroad. These students can also exploit social media platforms to exhibit their country's culture and engage with international audiences as "cultural brokers" (Wang, 2018). In contrast with official ambassadors, students as cultural ambassadors epitomize a more informal and grassroots form of cultural diplomacy, where individual students or groups of students take the initiative to share their own cultural views, experiences, and traditions with other people in the host country. Students may involve themselves in this type of cultural diplomacy investment without necessarily having an official endorsement or institutional backing.

It is true that official cultural diplomacy is backed by the huge financial and logistic capabilities of the state or the government and, therefore, has a stronger influence and a large outreach. However, unofficial cultural diplomacy embodied in students acting as cultural ambassadors of their country has also strengths that official cultural diplomacy does not. Student cultural ambassadors can be closer, more personal, more authentic, and more relatable. And if official cultural diplomacy usually serves the views and caters to the interests of the government, student cultural ambassadors can represent a wider range of perspectives and voices. And in this way, this unofficial cultural diplomacy has the qualities of spontaneity, flexibility, and naturalness.

Here are some effective strategies that Moroccan students can adopt to enhance their country's soft power: Students should know they are abroad not only to pursue their studies but also to promote the cultural image of their country. And one way to make this initiative come true is by making Moroccan students studying abroad play the role of unofficial cultural ambassadors. They can share their unique cultural perspectives and experiences with their classmates, professors, and community members in the host country (Lee, 2007). By doing so, they can foster greater cultural understanding and appreciation, help deconstruct stereotypes, tear down cultural barriers (Akli, 2012: 43-45), and build bridges that contribute to a more diverse and inclusive learning environment (Guo & Chase, 2011) (Glass, 2012) (Palmer, 2016). Moreover, Moroccan international students can also serve as important representatives of their home country by helping to establish relationships between different cultures and academic institutions around the world.

Also, Moroccan international students can promote Morocco's cultural diplomacy by engaging in activities such as movies, painting, and music. Exhibitions such as fairs, and events such as sporting events, conferences, lectures, literary readings, and theatre performances could also play a role in enhancing Morocco's soft power. And the big advantage that students have here over official cultural diplomacy is that the informal approach of students is less costly, does not require big budgets or complicated planning. So, students' parallel (or unofficial) diplomacy is cheap, spontaneous, and efficient. These actually constitute the unofficial cultural diplomacy's assets, something we will elaborate in detail in the pages to come.

4. Points of Power

When we say that Moroccan study abroad students can play the role of Morocco's unofficial cultural ambassadors more effectively and with less costs than any other form of traditional cultural diplomacy, it is because this unofficial cultural diplomacy has many points of power that potentially qualify it to play such a role. Some of these points of power are informality and grassroots engagement, volunteering and community service, the power of faith, and people-to-people communication.

4.1. The Power of Informality & Grassroots Engagement

As far as informality, spontaneity, and flexibility are concerned, we can say that when students share their country's traditional foods, music genres, dance, and arts with their peers and community members through cultural events and activities; or when these students participate in international students' organizations, clubs, associations, and organize cross-cultural events/programs to promote cultural exchange and learning, these students can make serious infiltration through associations and international organizations. This kind of people-to-people connections that students can make with their peers abroad helps build trust and goodwill between Morocco and other countries, and this is a very effective strategy for promoting economic, political, and social ties.

The informal and spontaneous features of the way Moroccan study abroad students conduct their cultural diplomacy make relationships and connections flexible. Students' unofficial cultural diplomacy is often more flexible than official cultural diplomacy because it is not bound by formal government structures, bureaucratic procedures, and state protocols. Unlike official diplomacy, parallel or unofficial cultural diplomacy is a more effective form of soft power which has "the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals. It differs from hard power, the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will" (Nye, 2003, para. 2). So, if parallel or unofficial cultural diplomacy has any striking features that distinguish it from official diplomacy, it is these features of informality and flexibility. And informality and flexibility allow for more creative and innovative approaches to cultural exchange that can adapt to the needs and interests of different communities and different contexts.

In fact, some real and effective diplomacy takes place when officials start doing unofficial things themselves (Chataway, 1998). By making meetings in bars rather than in embassies and when an official invites a negotiator over for a drink or a meal on a Sunday afternoon, brief them on what everyone thinks of their country (Chataway, 1998: 273). It is in these informal contexts where diplomatic actors get rid of the constraints and formalities of political protocols; and it is because of this freedom in track II or official diplomacy that relationships get well-lubricated, ideas get well expressed, and negotiators get to know each other better.

The informality of relationships and the people-to-people contacts in informal or unofficial cultural diplomacy leads to the emergence of grassroots engagements. The grassroots level in unofficial cultural diplomacy has the advantage of knowing and being in direct contact and touch with the local communities, and also the capability to influence political behaviour on the ground and in real time (Nohra, 2022:27).

This grassroots strategy can be more productive because relationships in grassroots engagement are more informal and more natural or spontaneous than in official cultural diplomacy, which makes it easier to establish genuine trust and true understanding. Also, and because it is based on personal relationships rather than on political agendas, this approach paves the way for cultural diplomacy to be more accessible and more inclusive and, therefore, it attracts young people, artists, and other cultural influencers who may be less interested in formal diplomatic channels.

4.2. The Power of Volunteering & Community Service

Volunteering is another way that Moroccan study abroad students can go through to be good cultural ambassadors and to create new friends and new allies for their country. Moroccan study abroad students can participate in community service projects and voluntary work activities such as environmental clean-up initiatives, charity fundraisers, or mentoring programs. Through these activities, they can demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility and promote a positive image of their country and its cultural values. To achieve this goal, Moroccan students can collaborate with other student groups and organizations to organize joint events that promote intercultural exchange and learning. By sharing their personal experiences and stories, these students can engage in conversations about their country's history, culture, and customs, thereby breaking down stereotypes and promoting cross-cultural understanding. Volunteering in local communities or schools is a good strategy for these students to share their cultural perspectives, and personal experiences, and to learn more about the culture and customs of the host country (Biltekin, 2020).

Additionally, participating in academic and professional exchange programs, such as internships, research projects, or conferences, can enable Moroccan students to build relationships with their international counterparts and promote academic collaboration and innovation. By acting as Morocco's unofficial cultural ambassadors in academic communities, Moroccan study-abroad students can represent their country, promote its values, and establish long-lasting relationships that benefit both themselves and their respective communities.

4.3. The Power of the Virtual Sphere

Since we live in an age dominated by social media and digital technologies, it would be a good idea for Moroccan study abroad students to leverage social media platforms and virtual spheres to showcase Morocco's culture and values and to engage with the worldwide audience. The power of digital technologies and social media is overwhelming to the extent that it has led to the emergence of a specialty in diplomacy studies called "digital diplomacy" (Stein 2011; Seib 2012). And digital diplomacy is nothing but expanding the outreach of "old school" diplomacy using digital and social media (Aronczyk, 2013). The use of social media has been considered a game changer in the field of diplomacy studies and diplomacy practice (Stein 2011; Seib 2012). One big advantage of digitalizing and using social media in diplomacy is that it goes beyond the hierarchical structures and dynamics of traditional diplomacy by injecting new blood into the communication channels of diplomacy, especially by bringing ordinary citizens into the spotlight of diplomacy affairs and making their voice heard and their views understood. In this way digitalizing cultural diplomacy can provide diplomats with multi-directional communication media to reach foreign publics and, thus, boosting traditional one-way information flows to more dialogue and engagement (Melissen 2005).

In a world dominated by information technologies, communication strategies are crucial, and the outcome of a policy is not determined by how much material resources are behind it but also by whose story wins (Nye, 2011: 18). So, in the case of Morocco's cultural diplomacy, official cultural diplomacy should be accompanied by unofficial cultural diplomacy, especially by Moroccan students who have stories to tell. Stories help "win over the hearts and minds (shape the preferences) of the majority of the population" (Nye, 18). There is nothing better than social media and information technologies for creating networks and friendships. They enable people to work together and achieve common goals. Moroccan study abroad students can act their cultural diplomacy mission and enhance their country's image by sharing photos, videos, and stories that highlight their country's traditions, landmarks, and achievements. Also, they can use hashtags and online forums to connect with other students and organizations interested in cross-cultural exchange. However, these media cannot achieve their potential goals without injecting the contents we put in them with 'integrative power' that is the contents should combine "empathy and social intelligence" and

these two elements, “are vastly more important to acquiring and exercising power than are force, deception, or terror” (Keltner 2007).

Another way to use social media and new technologies to exercise their unofficial cultural diplomacy is by working with influencers. Social media influencers have thousands, even millions, of followers and Moroccan study-abroad students can cooperate with them to showcase their country’s unique culture to a global audience and highlight the beauty and richness of their country’s heritage. Influencers are known for their ability to connect with their followers on a personal level, and as a result, they have a significant impact on people’s views and attitudes (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Through the use of social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, influencers can share their experiences of Morocco, promoting its cultural heritage and highlighting the country’s unique landmarks and tourist destinations. This would not only increase the visibility of Morocco’s cultural image but also attract more tourists to the country, thereby boosting its soft power.

Another advantage of Moroccan study-abroad students partnering with international influencers to enhance Morocco’s cultural image is that this partnership is a cheaper and more effective way to reach a global audience. Traditional methods of advertising and marketing can be expensive and may not necessarily reach the target audience. However, with the help of international influencers, Moroccan study-abroad students can make use of international networks of followers who are interested in travel and cultural experiences; therefore, creating a buzz around the country and its heritage. Overall, using social media international influencers is a great way for Moroccan study abroad students to promote their country’s cultural image and showcase its unique traditions and customs to a worldwide audience.

4.4. The Power of Faith

Religion has been a powerful factor in shaping cultural diplomacy and soft power for many countries around the globe (Ali, 2022). It can be used as a vehicle for transmitting a country’s cultural heritage, values, beliefs, polishing its image, promoting its soft power, and even boosting its economic interests. For example, Chinese Muslims, especially those who are merchants or students, played the role of a middleman minority between China and the Islamic World (Wang, 2018); they used their double identity, as Chinese and Muslims at the same time, to play the role of cultural ambassadors, “cultural brokers,” and trusted mediators between China’s economic interests and Arab-Muslim countries (Wang, 2018: 131). Because they are Muslims, Chinese Muslims have exploited their religious capital to gain the trust and the warm welcome of their brothers in the Islamic faith. And because they speak Chinese, Arabic, and understand Chinese culture, they have exploited this cultural capital to play the role of mediators, translators, interpreters, negotiators, problem solvers, cultural ambassadors, and cultural brokers (Wang, 2018, 133-134). Thus, the religious, linguistic, and cultural capital of Chinese Muslims is putting them in an advantageous position to promote Sino-Arab relations better than any other third party. Now, they are serving both China and Arab-Islamic countries.

In the case of Morocco, spirituality is an important asset of Moroccan cultural diplomacy, and it includes a specific domain that is religion, tolerance, and intercultural dialogue. This is to say, religious diplomacy is part of cultural diplomacy for the reason that tolerant Islamic practice is well integrated into Moroccan culture, which describes itself as diverse and multi-ethnic. In the Moroccan Kingdom, one can easily notice that the country has a rich Islamic history, with many historic mosques, madrasas, ancient libraries, and other Islamic landmarks that are significant to the religion. So, Moroccan study abroad students can use Islam to promote their country’s soft power by adopting many strategies. Firstly, they can highlight Morocco’s rich Islamic heritage and promote the country as a destination for Islamic tourism. So, by sharing their knowledge and experiences of Morocco’s Islamic heritage, Moroccan international students can promote their country’s soft power and attract more tourists interested in Islamic history and culture. Secondly, Moroccan students can use Islam’s values to promote their country’s values and beliefs. Islam is well-known for moral values such as hospitality, generosity, and compassion, which are also deeply ingrained in Moroccan culture. And by promoting these values and sharing their experiences of practicing Islam in Morocco, Moroccan students can exhibit Morocco’s soft power and positive image to the global audience.

Thirdly, Morocco has a long history of religious tolerance and coexistence, with Jews, Christians, and Muslims living together in harmony for centuries. And this is another reason why Moroccan study abroad students should use this long history and rich tradition of tolerance and co-existence to promote interfaith dialogue and build bridges between different cultures and religions. By sharing their stories of living in a country that holds in high esteem religious diversity and promoting interfaith dialogue, Moroccan students can showcase their country as a land of tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect.

Fourthly, as Islam appreciates charity and benevolence and because Morocco has a long history of helping the poor and the needy, Moroccan study abroad students can use Islam to give a push to their country’s humanitarian efforts. By advancing Morocco’s charitable works and humanitarian efforts, such as catering for refugees needs and supporting international development projects, Moroccan students can make a significant contribution in building their country’s image as a compassionate and caring country.

If Islam is well-known for being a religion which highly esteems values such as charity and philanthropy, then this is a good opportunity for Moroccan students to be engaged in humanitarian aids and charitable works. By being engaged in humanitarian aids and charitable works, these students can build a good image of their country and enhance its reputation among nations. Many countries use humanitarian aids to promote their reputations and soft powers. For example, Saudi Arabia has been using Islam to enhance its humanitarian efforts by providing aid to refugees in Yemen and Syria (Konopka & Strykhotzkyi, 2021).

Moroccan students can use Islam in building their country's soft power by showcasing its Islamic heritage, sharing their experiences and knowledge of Islam's values and beliefs, promoting interfaith dialogue, exhibiting their country's humanitarian efforts, and attracting investment and business opportunities. By adopting such cultural diplomacy in its religious dimension and leveraging their country's symbolic capital, Moroccan students can promote Morocco's soft power and enhance its image on the global stage. In more concrete terms, Moroccan students can enlighten their classmates about Islam and deconstruct any misconceptions or stereotypes about it. While being abroad, Moroccan students should not miss any opportunity to participate in interfaith events, whether these events take place on campus or in their communities. They can share their experiences as Muslims by offering insights into the Islamic faith and how it may contribute to human civilization. This Islamic unofficial cultural diplomacy can help in enriching interfaith dialogue, fostering greater understanding between different cultures, and building bridges between nations for the easy flow of outlooks and ideas. Also, Moroccan students can take advantage of Islamic holidays and events such Ramadan and Hajj to promote the values of Morocco's moderate Islam and its civilization. By focusing on the values of these events, which it shares with many other Arab and Islamic countries, Morocco can establish, through its students, strong relationships with other nations.

Another advantage of this religious unofficial cultural diplomacy is that by promoting the religious heritage of their country, Moroccan students can give their country more chances to attract more tourists interested in exploring Morocco's history and cultural traditions. Saudi Arabia, for example, has recently been promoting its Islamic heritage to attract more tourists and increase its soft power in the Middle East (Alkatheeri & Khan, 2019). In the United Arab Emirates, Dubai is being engaged in the same religious diplomacy and has been promoting its Islamic identity to attract Muslim tourists and investors (Haq & Yin Wong, 2010) (Sabeti, Paris, & Marochi, 2018). Many countries use religious diplomacy as a means to brand their soft power, attract investments, hunt business opportunities, and, thus, boost their economies. If other countries give much care to this diplomacy, then Morocco should have no excuse to be an exception. This type of diplomacy can help in enhancing Morocco's soft power and strengthening its influence in many regions in the world. Iran, for example, has been promoting its Shia Muslim identity as a tool for building cultural ties with other Shia-majority countries in the Middle East and elsewhere (Jödicke, 2017).

Using Islamic identity and values will not only enhance the image of Morocco as a nation of co-existence and tolerance, but it will bring with it some economic benefits, too. Morocco is an emergent economy, and by promoting the country's Islamic identity and values, Moroccan study abroad students can attract more investments in tourism, agriculture, manufacturing industries, and business opportunities to their country.

To sum up, religion can be a very efficient strategy for helping a country improving its cultural diplomacy and enhancing its soft power. By exploiting Islam's heritage, values, and teachings, Moroccan study abroad students can captivate tourists' attention, construct cultural bridges between Morocco and other countries, enhance understanding, build cooperation ties, and create a positive image for Morocco among the members of the international community.

5. Conclusion

Morocco's official cultural diplomacy has traditionally been politically oriented and institutionally based, with a heavy reliance on the monarchy and the ministry of foreign affairs. While this approach has been successful, its limitations cannot be ignored. Alternative approaches that work in parallel with traditional policies should be explored to promote Morocco's soft power more effectively. One of these approaches is unofficial cultural diplomacy. This type of diplomacy, also known as Track II diplomacy, alludes to non-governmental or non-official efforts use to enhance cultural exchange and understanding between nations, usually done by civil society associations, higher institutes, or individuals. Unlike official cultural diplomacy, which is designed and carried out by governments or official institutions, parallel or unofficial cultural diplomacy is typically more decentralized, more autonomous, low cost, and can include a variety of actors and initiatives.

This unofficial diplomacy, especially if conducted by students, has the potential of being a very effective tool in building bridges between people from different cultures and promoting greater understanding and cooperation between countries. Its emphasis on grassroots engagement, informality, mutual benefit, people-to-people encounters, and non-political dialogue can help to foster deeper and more meaningful relationships between people and contribute to a more peaceful and connected world.

One party that can really carried out this parallel cultural diplomacy for the benefit of Morocco is Moroccan study-abroad students. Moroccan students studying overseas could be very productive as cultural ambassadors of Morocco if the government provides

them with the right training and tools. Students as cultural ambassadors can be closer, more personal, more authentic, and more relatable. Thus, they have the potential to contribute to enhancing Morocco's cultural diplomacy and soft power by breaking down stereotypes and cultural barriers and building cultural bridges between Morocco and other nations.

Although Moroccan students have great potential and many capabilities for carrying out effective cultural diplomacy, these students cannot push this diplomacy to its full limits without some help from the Moroccan state or government. For this reason, this paper concludes with practical recommendations for the Moroccan government, and its ministry of education, if it wants to keep up with the pace of what other nations are doing with their cultural diplomacies. The practical recommendations proposed by this paper provide a starting point for the Moroccan government and the Ministry of Education to integrate Moroccan international students' cultural diplomacy into their policies and practices. Firstly, the Moroccan government should consider alternative approaches to cultural diplomacy that work in parallel with official policies. Secondly, the Ministry of Education should get involved in Morocco's cultural diplomacy by integrating it into school curricula and creating formal training programs in cultural diplomacy for Moroccan study-abroad students. Thirdly, the government should channel the large number of Moroccan students overseas towards promoting Morocco's cultural diplomacy. Fourthly, the government should create educational exchange programs like Fulbright where Moroccan students can be fully engaged to promote their country's cultural diplomacy. These programs should involve a combination of cultural immersion activities, language exchange, and community engagement. Finally, among other activities that study abroad students should get involved in to promote their country's cultural diplomacy is to actively be engaged in research and academic work in the university and institutes of the host country, participate in language classes or language exchange programs, engage with local communities and organizations to learn about their cultures and ways of life, give presentations or workshops about their own culture and experiences, and participate in cultural events and festivals.

To sum up, these programs that recruit students as cultural ambassadors provide valuable opportunities for young people to learn about other cultures, gain new perspectives, and build relationships with people from different backgrounds. The experiences that students go through can help them to foster greater understanding and cooperation between Morocco and other countries and contribute to a more peaceful and interconnected world.

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