

SOFT POWER STRATEGIES IN INDIA AND KAZAKHSTAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Shokhan Kenbayev¹, Margie Parikh²

¹Doctoral student, Department of International Relations, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, India

²Professor of Management, B.K. School of Business Management, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, India

ABSTRACT

This article examines the soft power instruments used by Kazakhstan and India in their foreign policy strategies. Soft power as a concept is the ability of a state to influence international relations through the attractiveness of its culture, values, and political systems without resorting to coercion. Situated in the heart of Eurasia, Kazakhstan uses its soft power through cultural diplomacy, interfaith dialogue, and educational initiatives. Meanwhile, India actively uses cultural diplomacy, Bollywood, exchange programs, and other opportunities under its Global South initiative. A comparative analysis shows how two countries with different cultural and historical backgrounds use soft power to enhance their influence in regional and global contexts. This study emphasizes that the successful application of soft power depends on a consistent strategy, institutional support, and the ability to adapt to changing international challenges.

Keywords: Soft power, cultural diplomacy, Kazakhstan, India, international relations.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary international landscape is witnessing a notable shift from traditional methods of influence, such as economic and military pressure to softer, more flexible forms of diplomacy (Melissen, 2005). The concept of "soft power" as articulated by Joseph Nye is becoming increasingly important in the context of globalization (Nye, 1990). In this context, Kazakhstan, leveraging its strategic geographical position and rich cultural heritage, is actively developing soft power strategies to advance its national interests. (Nair et al., 2020). Likewise, India, with its rich cultural and historical heritage, continues to strengthen its position on the world stage by emphasizing its spiritual and cultural aspects (Chandra & Sinha, 2023). Exploring the soft power instruments of these two countries is an important step in understanding their role in shaping international relations in the 21st century (Sani & Fatima, 2024). Kazakhstan and India serve as examples of how countries with different historical, cultural and political backgrounds use soft power to achieve their goals (Gaur, 2021; Kakimzhanov, et al., 2023).

The objective of this paper is to conduct a comparative analysis of Kazakhstan's and India's soft power instruments and assess their effectiveness in the face of contemporary challenges.

The concept of "soft power" was first introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990 to describe the ability of a nation to attain its objectives through the promotion of culture, values, and diplomatic policies, rather than resorting to coercive measures unlike hard power, which involves economic and military pressure, soft power affects the level of public awareness. (Nye, 1990).

There are several soft power indices around the world, each focused on distinct aspects of a country's "soft power." Among the most well-known are Brand Finance's Global Soft Power Index (Brand Finance, 2024), and the Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index (Lowy Institute, 2025). Governments, corporations, and officials use these indices to measure and comprehend countries' worldwide influence. The exact number of indices varies depending on how soft power indicators are defined, however these are the major players who frequently publish full rankings.

In this article, we will look at aspects such as: enhancing a country's image; increasing trust from other states; increasing investment and tourist inflows; and increasing cultural and educational exchanges. Each of these aspects contributes to strengthening the state's position on the world stage (Mir, 2024; Al Suwaidi, 2021).

Creating a positive image not only fosters trust and respect, but it also increases a state's credibility in the eyes of other nations. This can be accomplished through cultural diplomacy, the promotion of art, literature, and music, involvement in international forums, and the resolution of global challenges. Countries that prioritize human rights, the environment, peace, and stability are frequently seen as leaders in these fields, which improves their worldwide

image. Trust is essential in international relations, particularly when dealing with global issues like climate change, migration, counter-terrorism, and the spread of contagious diseases. Countries that adhere to the ideals of openness, cooperation, and honesty in international relations can establish a solid foundation of trust. As a result, nations with a favorable reputation, stable political and economic conditions, high social security, and a diverse range of cultures attract both tourists and investment. Exchange programs and international educational and cultural initiatives, in turn, give foreign specialists and students the chance to work or study, making the nation a more desirable destination to live, work, and relax.

The most important soft power tools are:

- Culture: national traditions, art, music, and cinema (Umarkulova, 2024).
- Education: International educational programs, academic exchanges, and universities. (Wojciuk, et al., 2015).
- Religion and Spirituality: Promotion of religious values, interfaith dialogue (Ozturk, 2023).
- Sports: International sports events, popularization of national sports (Abdi, et al., 2019)
- Media and Technology: Using digital platforms to influence contemporary international political systems. (Mavrodieva, et al., 2019).

Kazakhstan has a rich cultural heritage, which is actively used to promote the country's image in the international arena. One of the striking examples is the EXPO-2017 World Exhibition Project held in Astana (Wang, 2013), which drew attention to Kazakhstan's achievements in sustainable development and innovative technologies. The country is also actively developing cultural exchanges with other countries and organizing cultural events and festivals representing Kazakh culture, one such event being the recent Nomad Games in Astana. These games, held since 2014, are an international event that brings together athletes and spectators from around the world and promotes the rich cultural heritage of the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. Sport plays an important role in the national development of Kazakhstan therefore huge funds are allocated for holding sporting events of such scale as: Winter Universiade and the Asian Winter Games.

In education Kazakhstan actively participates in international educational projects and exchange programs. One of such projects is the Bolashak program, which aims to educate Kazakhstani students in the best universities of the world (Brand Finance, 2023). The country is also building its own educational institutions, such as Nazarbayev University, which focuses on creating a world-class academic environment (Kuramayeva & Suleimenov, 2019). In addition, the Kazakhstani government provides scholarships for international students (Enic-Kazakhstan, 2024). Every year their number increases, both on a free and paid basis. For example, according to the Indian Embassy, in 2023, 9,500 students are attending universities in Kazakhstan, primarily in medical disciplines (Embassy of India, Astana, 2023).

It is worth noting that Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic country, where more than 150 ethnic groups and 18 confessions live, so it is fundamentally important to preserve peace and harmony in country. It was for this purpose that the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions was first initiated in September 2003. For the first time in modern history, this forum brought together at one table 17 delegations from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and America, representing Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Shintoism. It contributes to strengthening international ties and improving the image of Kazakhstan as a country capable of uniting different religious and cultural groups (Taubayeva & Umirzakova, 2022).

India also uses a wide range of soft power tools to strengthen its position on the global stage. Bollywood movies, Indian cuisine and philosophical teachings have made India an important cultural and spiritual center for millions of people around the world. India also actively promotes traditions such as Yoga and Ayurveda through international cultural centers and exchange programs (Chandra & Sinha, 2023). Indian universities such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) enjoy a strong reputation worldwide (Jayaram, 2011), facilitating student influx and academic exchange (Study in India, 2023).

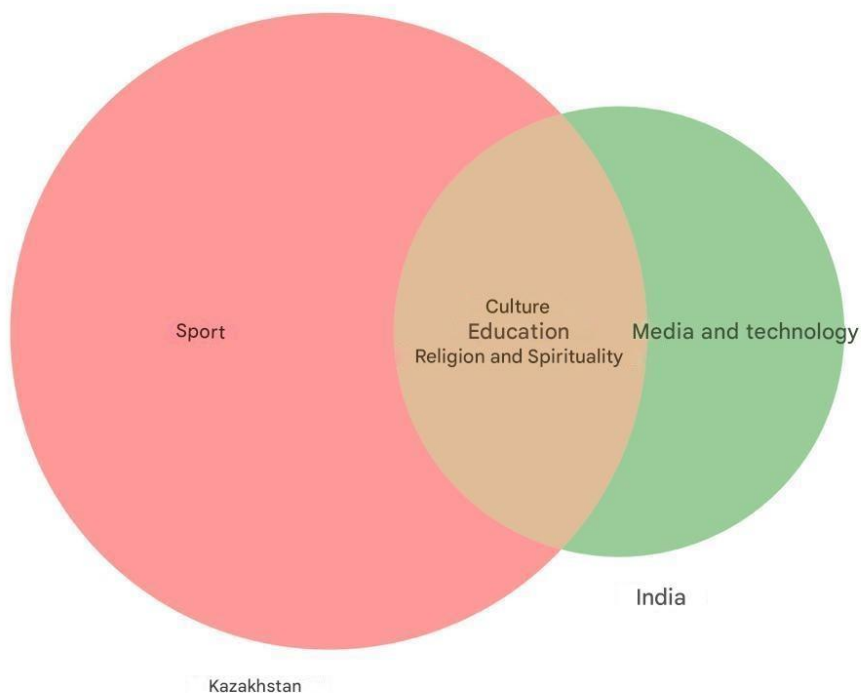
Being the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, India actively uses its religious and spiritual values as a means of soft power. International programs such as Yoga for Peace draw attention to Indian philosophical teachings and promote spiritual practices around the world. The Indian government actively supports international cultural and religious initiatives, strengthening spiritual ties with other countries (Mazumdar, 2018).

Moreover, the cricket and hockey championships also are used to attract attention to the country. For example, in 2023 the Indian Women's Premier Cricket League was launched (Duerden, 2023). Cricket, being the national sport, has a significant impact on developing diplomatic and cultural ties with other countries, especially with former British colonies (Das, 2024). India actively maintains international sports ties, promoting its sporting achievements through various global tournaments (Sen, 2015).

Social media is also an important element, through which the Indian government actively promotes its initiatives and achievements in the fields of science, education and medicine. Indian media companies such as NDTV and Times Group disseminate Indian culture and politics around the world. (Devi, 2019).

So, we've represented our data in the chart (Pic 1) to show what soft power tools Kazakhstan and India have in common.

Venn Diagram: Soft Power Instruments of Kazakhstan and India



Pic.1 Soft power tools of Kazakhstan and India

Here is a Venn diagram that visualizes the common and unique soft power tools of Kazakhstan and India:

- Common tools: Culture, Education, Religion and Spirituality.
- Unique tools of Kazakhstan: Sports.
- Unique tools of India: Media and Technology.

Comparative Analysis of Soft Power Instruments of Kazakhstan and India

Despite different geographical and cultural contexts, Kazakhstan and India use similar approaches to the implementation of soft power. The main points of contact are:

1. Culture and Traditions

Both countries actively promote their culture through international cultural events such as festivals, exhibitions and cultural exchanges.

2. Education

Both Kazakhstan and India pay great attention to educational exchange and international cooperation.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Kazakhstan and India actively promote the idea of interreligious dialogue. Kazakhstan, having a large Muslim community, actively supports dialogue between religions, which helps it strengthen ties with neighboring countries, especially in Central Asia.

Despite their common features, Kazakhstan and India have their own unique features in the use of soft power.

1. Sports

Kazakhstan pays attention to the development of sports as an element of soft power, in particular through hosting international sporting events such as winter sports championships. India actively uses the popularity of cricket to

strengthen diplomatic ties, and also develops sports cooperation through international competitions and programs.

2. Media and technology

India has a more developed media infrastructure for the dissemination of its culture and policies. While Kazakhstan actively uses its media resources and social networks, India is significantly ahead of Kazakhstan in terms of global influence through television, the film industry (Bollywood) and digital platforms.

Soft Power Effectiveness

The assessment of the effectiveness of soft power in Kazakhstan and India may depend on various factors such as regional characteristics, level of international recognition and involvement in global initiatives.

- **Kazakhstan:** Kazakhstan's soft power effectiveness is high in Central Asia, where the country is actively developing cultural and educational ties. However, on the global stage, Kazakhstan has yet to overcome certain barriers to fully utilize soft power.

- **India:** India is significantly more effective on a global scale due to its more developed cultural infrastructure and a strong image created through Bollywood and international cultural programs. Indian soft power has an impact not only in Asia but also in other regions such as Africa and Latin America.

Challenges for Kazakhstan

1. Limited Media Resources

Kazakhstan faces difficulties in creating and distributing media content that would attract the attention of a global audience. The smaller scale of the entertainment and film industry compared to India limits the influence of the country's culture on the global stage.

2. Political Stability

The political situation in Central Asia can create obstacles to the development of international cultural initiatives and educational programs, making it difficult to use soft power in this region.

Challenges for India

1. Internal Challenges

India faces internal conflicts, including religious differences, which may have a negative impact on its international image. These challenges may limit India's ability to use soft power to attract supporters in some parts of the world.

2. Competition with Others

In the context of globalization, India is competing with other major powers such as China, which are also actively using soft power to advance their interests. This poses certain challenges for India, which require it to formulate a more flexible and strategically oriented policy.

CONCLUSIONS

A comparative analysis of soft power instruments in Kazakhstan and India shows that both countries use cultural, educational and religious initiatives to enhance their international influence. However, there are many approaches, reflecting differences in the size of the economy, infrastructure and international ambitions.

For Kazakhstan, an important step towards strengthening its soft power could be the development of media and technology, as well as active participation in international cultural exchanges and educational activities. Strong cultural and historical ties with Central Asia and neighboring countries can become an important basis for further expansion of its influence.

Meanwhile, India has great potential to expand its soft power influence on a global scale. With dynamic economic growth and the growing cultural influence of Bollywood and cricket, India continues to be a leader in the use of soft power. But to maintain and strengthen its global influence, it must be prepared for domestic challenges and competition from other countries, including China.

Thus, the use of soft power by Kazakhstan and India represents a dynamic and evolving area of international politics, in which both countries have successfully promoted their cultural, educational and religious values. Although they differ in scope and strategy, the common feature is that cultural and educational initiatives are actively used to advance interests in different parts of the world. These efforts will help both countries to strengthen their global position and develop flexible foreign policies aimed at peaceful cooperation and the development of international relations.

RECOMMENDATION

1. For Kazakhstan:

Kazakhstan should expand international cooperation around media platforms and online content to enhance its influence in the international community, especially in Europe and North America. It is also important to further strengthen educational relations, for example by expanding scholarship systems and international academic exchanges.

2. For India:

India should continue to develop its cultural and sports initiatives, especially in Africa and Latin America, and improve the effectiveness of its diplomacy through media and information technology. India can also focus on strengthening intercultural and interreligious relations to ease domestic challenges and enhance India's standing in the world.

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