

# STRENGTHENING INDIA'S GLOBAL STANDING AND SOFT POWER: A STUDY ON STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to investigate the various ways India is projecting itself on the international stage and enhancing its soft power through strategic communication and diplomatic initiatives. The paper further indicates how India utilizes its democratic values and rich cultural heritage- notably, its popular cinema-in its soft power strategy. With the turn of the century, India has had greater global engagement in terms of democracy, including participation in the United Nations Democracy Fund in 2005. In addition, India's digital diplomacy engagements have been looked into for reaching out to the diaspora and global audiences via modern communication avenues. It throws light on the role of a robust and independent media landscape that fosters awareness of foreign policy among the public. It has been considered very important by India to communicate effectively in the digital age so that a favorable global image can be created for itself. The paper also discusses leadership dynamics to understand the personality traits and leadership styles of the prime minister of India, which, the authors assert, have been key to navigating the world's power dynamics. The article concludes by advocating a synergistic model for enhancing India's soft power and global presence, with the four key components being democratic engagement, cultural diplomacy, strategic communication, and leadership consolidation, thus providing a platform for India to exert its influence on the world stage.

**Keywords:** India, global stand, soft power, Strategic communication, diplomatic initiatives, cultural diplomacy, popular cinema, digital diplomacy, media landscape, leadership dynamics.

## 1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

India's position in the world is significant with respect to culture, democracy, and economy. Joseph Nye's idea of soft power says that one of the most important ways to entice or attract people towards a specific country or brand is through its culture as opposed to forcefully dominating over them or simply paying them off (Nye, 2004). India has various strategies such as "Curry Diplomacy," Foreign Cinema, Digital Diplomacy, and Global Information Strategy which all form a part of the India Soft Power Strategy (Goswami, 2024).

As of now, the Indian government has focused on formulating policies that target international marketing of Indian culture through exhibition and fest management for cultural diplomacy purposes (Goswami, 2024). Cultural programs, festivals, art exhibitions, and even educational scholarships proactively put forth a positive portrayal of India to the rest of the world. The creation of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has enabled increased cultural tourism through providing educational and heritage India tours. (ICCR) initiated the first cultural exchange programs with foreign countries after independence offering a window to India's diverse heritage for enhanced mutual understanding. It is well-known that Bollywood has single-handedly altered the perception of the world regarding India. It mesmerized them to the extent that now Indian's projected image all over the world is the modern and vibrant youth Bollywood depicts through Indian films and it has broadened the cultural boundary of the country (Sleepy Classes, n.d.). The growing popularity of foreign countries to Indian movies and soaps has improved the country's image all over the globe and increased soft power.

The success of digital diplomacy has been shown through the reach of social media and international broadcasting

to global audiences and to connect with the Indian diaspora, as highlighted by Goswami (2024). The Ministry of External Affairs' "Digital India" initiative has used the power of digital platforms to further India's policies, culture, and achievements. India has, through Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, directly communicated with global audiences and shaped public opinion.

India's strategic communication and diplomacy have also been instrumental in augmenting its international presence. From the time when the "Look East Policy" was launched in the 1990s, India has proactively used its cultural legacy and strategic alliances to strengthen its bonds with regions like Southeast Asia (Goswami, 2024). India's increasing participations in global forums such as G20, BRICS, and United Nations have allowed it to exhibit soft power and further strengthen its influence at the international level (Qureshi, 2024). Other mega-events such as International Yoga Day and the Vibrant Gujarat Summit testify to India's active approach to engaging at the global level. Development aid and humanitarian missions also reflect India's responsible global actor status. Initiatives such as the Pan-African e-Network Project and medical aid during the COVID-19 pandemic reflect India's commitment to global well-being and cooperation (Mehta, 2024).

Public awareness of foreign policy can only be enhanced with the help of a strong and independent media landscape. India has the most diversified media ecosystem of both state-run and private channels. The various domestic and international perceptions have been moulded in these channels. Positive global imagery was created due to media campaigns showcasing India's successes and endeavors. Digital communication is viewed as imperative in the contemporary age for a favorable global image by India. Thus, the fusion of traditional and digital media in direct conjunction with strategic storytelling has allowed India to craft compelling narratives that resonate with global audiences.

This serves to highlight the leadership dynamic, specifically the characteristics and styles of India's prime ministers, thereby underlining an element of how such leaders - charismatic leaders with a view for India's position on the world stage have thereby substantively influenced the country's soft power strategy. Personal diplomacy and international outreach efforts of the likes of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and even Narendra Modi have shaped India's foreign policy and soft power greatly.

India's soft power strategy is multi-layered, consisting of cultural diplomacy, strategic communication, digital engagement, humanitarian initiatives, and effective leadership in establishing its influence globally (Goswami, 2024). By resolving issues related to resource scarcity and geopolitical issues, India will eventually be able to extend its global reach and soft power (Goswami, 2024). This review assesses the effectiveness of these initiatives based on the perspectives of the rest of the world. It emphasizes the significance of cultural diplomacy, strategic communication, and the steps taken in diplomacy as instruments of reinforcing India's global influence by doing an extensive literature review.

## 1.2. *Statement of the problem*

India's potential for soft power is substantial, but a systematic analysis of its strategic communication and diplomatic initiatives is needed. Soft power, as defined by Nye (2004), is the ability to shape preferences through attraction and appeal rather than coercion. While India has leveraged its cultural heritage, democratic values, and economic growth to enhance its global presence, existing research lacks coherent insights into these efforts (Goswami, 2024). India's public diplomacy, which involves activities aimed at creating a positive image and securing long-term ties (Gilboa, 2008), also requires further study. Although India has promoted yoga and Bollywood films, the success of these efforts in changing global perceptions remains unclear (Tharoor, 2012). Additionally, India's economic diplomacy, including trade agreements and international memberships, has boosted its profile, but the strategic communication dimensions need more rigorous examination (Basu, 2020). Digital diplomacy, defined as the use of social media and digital platforms to engage with international audiences and promote interests (Bjola & Holmes, 2015), has gained importance. India's digital efforts, like the Digital India campaign, show promise, but their long-term impact on India's soft power is unknown (Qureshi, 2024).

The lack of comprehensive understanding hinders the development of effective strategies to maximize India's soft power. Conducting a systematic literature review that synthesizes existing research and offers nuanced understanding is essential. This review will help identify strategies, areas for improvement, and address issues to enhance India's global presence and influence, improving approaches to leveraging India's soft power.

This review will assist in determining effective strategies, areas of improvement, and those issues that must be

addressed so that India can enhance its global presence and voice. As a means of enhancing approaches to leveraging India's political, economic, and cultural influence in global affairs, this research hopes to be a way to enhance approaches to the use of India's soft power.

### 1.3. General objectives

To systematically review and synthesize existing literature on India's strategic communication and diplomatic initiatives:

#### 1.3.1. Specific objectives

- To evaluate the effectiveness of India's strategic communication initiatives
- To identify successful strategies and best practices of diplomatic initiatives
- To explore the challenges and areas for improvement in India's strategic communication efforts
- To propose recommendations for enhancing India's strategic communication to bolster its global presence and influence
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### 1.4 Methodologies

To carry out a systematic review of literature on "Enhancing India's Global Presence and Soft Power: Strategic Communication and Diplomatic Initiatives," we used an integrative methodological approach. We began by conducting an extensive search of various databases of scholarly publications, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PubMed, to obtain relevant scholarly articles, books, and reports. We used keywords such as "India soft power," "strategic communication," "diplomatic initiatives," and "global presence" to capture a wide range of the literature. The search was limited to publications over the last two decades to capture the prevailing trend in the topic. We then critically evaluated the sources retrieved, assessing the relevance, validity, and contribution to the topic. This involved assessing the methodologies, sample sizes, and findings of each study. We also used thematic analysis to determine recurring themes and patterns in the literature, which allowed us to have a systematic framework to synthesize the findings. This systematic approach allowed us to critically analyze the existing literature and draw meaningful conclusions on India's strategic communication and diplomatic efforts to boost its global presence and soft power.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND SOFT POWER

Joseph Nye's soft power theory is at the core of explaining the mechanisms through which nations influence other nations through institutional, ideological, and cultural means rather than pressure (Nye, 1990). India's strategic communications in the form of cultural diplomacy, economic engagement, and student exchange programs are aimed at increasing international visibility and soft power. Strategic communication involves conscious efforts aimed at specific ends through public diplomacy, media management, and cultural diplomacy, and influences target audience beliefs and behavior (Hallahan et al., 2007). Effective communication of values, culture, and policy can make a nation build an attractive image and attract others to them with the assistance of media, cultural exchange, and international broadcasting (Nye, 2004). Strategic narratives, that is, carefully crafted narratives forming international images, create an interesting image which facilitates soft power (Roselle et al., 2014). Media and digital diplomacy are pivotal in the digital media era, with social media platforms and digital content promoting a nation's culture, values, and policy, thus enhancing soft power (Cull, 2009). Good examples of effective strategic communications are India's "Incredible India" campaign based on appeal to cultural heritage and tourism (Kumar, 2019), China's Confucius Institutes for Chinese language and culture promotion (Paradise, 2009), and America's public diplomacy efforts such as the Fulbright Program (Nye, 2008).

## 3. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

India's strategic communication has, to a significant extent, enhanced its global presence and soft power. The efforts involve a range of activities, including public diplomacy, media outreach, and cultural diplomacy, whose purpose is to influence international attitudes and advance India's policies and values (Hallahan et al., 2007). Rebutting negative narratives and disinformation propagated by its competitors is one of the primary objectives of India's strategic communication. For instance, India has been confronted by its neighbors, including Pakistan and China,

who have used strategic communication to enter the minds of people and polarize them (Hasnain, 2022). By effectively rebutting such narratives, India aims to maintain its credibility and improve its relations with other nations (Hasnain, 2022).

The second most important area of India's strategic communication is its focus on promoting its cultural heritage as well as its soft power. The "Incredible India" campaign, for instance, has successfully branded India's cultural diversity and invited tourists from the global public (Kumar, 2019). This not only enhanced the economic development of India but also presented India as a dynamic and vibrant nation in the world (Kumar, 2019). Second, India's strategic communication has been extremely important in shaping the global alliances and partnerships. Through its engagement with the global publics and promotion of cross-cultural exchanges, India has been able to establish strong economic and political bonds with countries in the world (Nye, 2008). The alliances have been extremely important in promoting India's strategic interests and enhancing its global reputation.

India's diplomacy has significantly enhanced its global influence and soft power through economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and multilateral diplomacy. Emphasis on trade agreements and foreign direct investment, such as the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan, has enhanced economic ties (Bhatia, 2020). Cultural diplomacy initiatives such as the "Incredible India" campaign have assisted in projecting India's rich heritage, tourism, and enhancing its cultural quotient (Kumar, 2019). Public diplomacy, including social media outreach, has assisted India in shaping global opinion and countering negative propaganda (Tharoor, 2016). Active participation on multilateral platforms such as the UN and G20 has enhanced India's diplomatic credibility (Pant, 2017). All these combined contribute to India's enhanced global influence, but constant evaluation and adaptation are required for long-term success.

Measuring India's strategic communication effectiveness can be assessed through its performance with different stakeholders. India's attempts to counter misinformation and negative propaganda have been fairly successful. Through the use of digital diplomacy and media outreach, India has managed to present a balanced narrative and gain the support of other nations. An example of this is the way India handled the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, where a holistic communications strategy was followed to counter misinformation and emphasize the positive implications of the action (Sharma, 2020). Actively engaging in multilateral forums and strengthening alliances in the UN, BRICS, and G20 can increase India's diplomatic leverage (Pant, 2017). Lastly, creating a strategic communications policy with an integrated mix of public, cultural, and economic diplomacy can provide a seamless and effective policy (Hallahan et al., 2007). Regular monitoring and fine-tuning of these plans are necessary to ensure long-term success and sustainability.

The "Incredible India" campaign and other cultural diplomacy have significantly boosted India's soft power. The campaign has attracted millions of tourists and huge economic benefits. Moreover, the global popularity of Indian movies, yoga, and cuisine has further boosted India's cultural attractiveness (Kumar, 2019). India's strategic communication campaigns have significantly played a role in establishing strong international alliances. The emphasis on mutual cooperation and understanding has witnessed the signing of several bilateral and multilateral agreements. For example, India's arrangements with countries in Africa and Southeast Asia have boosted economic and political ties, which have contributed to India's global reach. India's strategic communication campaigns have significantly played a role in establishing strong international alliances. The emphasis on mutual cooperation and understanding has witnessed the signing of several bilateral and multilateral agreements. For example, India's arrangements with countries in Africa and Southeast Asia have boosted economic and political ties, which have contributed to India's global reach (Singh, 2021).

### *3.2 Conclusion and recommendation*

Overall, India's diplomatic efforts and strategic communication have significantly enhanced its global image and soft power. By countering negative propaganda, promoting its rich cultural heritage, and fostering strong international relations, India has boosted its global presence. These initiatives in economic, cultural, and public diplomacy, as well as active multilateral engagement, have strengthened India's international influence. Regular reviews and adaptations of these strategies are necessary to ensure long-term effectiveness and sustainability.

To further improve its global image, India should focus on digital diplomacy, using social media and digital platforms to showcase its policies, achievements, and cultural richness. Expanding cultural exchange programs, such as student exchanges and cultural festivals, will strengthen people-to-people connections and mutual understanding. Strengthening regional diplomacy is also crucial. India must continue to build relationships with neighboring countries in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region through regional cooperation and addressing common



challenges. Expanding economic partnerships and negotiating new trade agreements will bolster India's economic diplomacy, making it an attractive economic partner globally.

Promoting inclusive development and social progress will enhance India's image as a responsible global actor. Cooperation in health, education, and sustainable development will further boost India's soft power. Engaging the Indian diaspora is another valuable resource, as their networks and influence can enhance India's global presence. Finally, active participation in global multilateral institutions will allow India to shape international policies and norms, solidifying its position as a leading global actor. These recommendations provide a roadmap for India to build on its strengths and further enhance its global presence and soft power through strategic communication, cultural diplomacy, and proactive engagement

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