

# Re-Inventing Brand India: Lessons from Korean Hallyu Wave

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**Keywords:** Smart Power, Public Diplomacy, Indian Foreign Policy.

**Abstract:** Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power' has sparked academic interest in exploring its potential impact on international relations, especially in the context of evolving notions of security. While some critics question its efficacy compared to 'hard power,' the rise of global challenges have underscored the importance of people-centred initiatives within a soft power framework. India has started to embrace its soft power arsenal, leveraging its cultural heritage, spiritualism, and diaspora to promote initiatives like the International Yoga Day. This paper argues that such India's soft power based foreign policy can be further fortified by exploring the possibility of adapting the South Korean Smart Power model to the India in a nation-branding context.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

According to Joseph Frankel, a country's foreign policy consists of "decisions and actions, which involve to some extent, relations between one State and others" (Frankel, 1968). It involves the act of finely aligning a country's own domestic system, consisting of multitudes of interests, opinions and demands with the system that exists beyond the borders. In the current globalised world, with the concept of good governance becoming mainstream national borders themselves have become increasingly permeable and the State's internal matters, largely transparent. Consequently, there has been a growing demand for public participation in governance in India as well with the Indian government receiving 14.21 Lakh Right to Information applications in 2021-22 alone (Common Human Rights Initiative, 2022)

Since the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, also falls within the ambit of the agencies accountable to Indian citizens under the Right to Information Act, 2005, international foreign policy making, which has traditionally been shrouded in secrecy of a State's security interest, has evolved to become increasingly visible and people centric.

## 2 EVOLUTION OF 'POWER'

The Realist perspective of international relations, as put forward by Hans Morgenthau considers a country's foreign policy as being guided by the unchanging human nature, which is self-interested and aggressive. It argues that foreign policy, as a tool to secure a country's national interests is defined by the international "struggle for power". (Morgenthau, 1948) This view of international politics, thus, tends to divorce morality from the State, i.e., "universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of States" (Morgenthau, 1948) Consequently, most States have tended to prioritise their external security via methods based in the concept of 'hard power' and the tools of foreign policy have thus, traditionally been limited to deterrence, arms control, intelligence based covert actions, economic sanctions, etc.

However, post-colonial studies of international relations have challenged this perception of security by drawing attention to the non-Western States, where certain intra-state issues related to human well-being were higher on the States' priorities. Subsequently, the concept of 'Human Security' found its place in mainstream security debates, especially since 1994, when the United Nations Development Programme sought to broaden the conception of security on multiple dimensions of universal human concerns such as, poverty, underdevelopment, health etc. (UNDP, 1994) Consequently, the concept of

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‘power’ as defined by Morgenthau, i.e., “man’s control over the minds and actions of other men” (Morgenthau, 1948) underwent transformation as well. According to Joseph Nye, ‘power’ can achieve one’s desired outcomes in two ways – either by coercion or payment, or by attraction or persuasion. He identified the former as ‘hard power’ and the latter as ‘soft power’ (Nye, 1990).

‘Hard’ Power, which can be understood in the context of realism and the notions of traditional security, includes coercive foreign policy tools such as military strength, economic sanctions, deterrence, strategic alliances, and coercive diplomacy. It seeks to safeguard a State’s national interests and territorial integrity by either offensive or defensive strategies, and broadly aims to shift or maintain the balance of power in that State’s favour (Waltz, 1979)

‘Soft’ power, consists of attractive and often intangible attributes that a State possesses such as its culture, its civil society, and the positive opportunities it offers to its people. Unlike ‘hard’ power, it depends on conceptions of human security and can neither be easily measured nor its influence be immediately or concretely discerned (Buzan, 2009).

It would however be a fallacy to perceive ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power as being diametrically opposite and conflicting in nature. Introducing the concept of ‘Smart’ Power, Joseph Nye argued that a State ought to cultivate the ‘ability to combine hard and soft power into successful strategies’ with the aim of making the two concepts reinforce each other (Nye, 2011) He argued that such ‘smart’ power had the ability of increasing the probability of a ‘hard’ power action being perceived as more palatable by other States, if it was accompanied by a robust soft power framework. (Nye, 2017)

### 3 CASE STUDY – THE SOUTH KOREAN SMART POWER

In 2017, South Korea was in a tense situation because its Northern counterpart had successfully displayed to the world, its expanded nuclear weapons capability by developing the nuclear capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), ‘Hwasong-15’. This was perceived as a matter of urgent concern, not only by South Korea, but also by the USA which not only had significant military interests in South Korea but was itself under threat by the ICBM’s range. Faced with this threat to the existing balance of power in the Korean peninsula, South Korea has, since then, taken

multiple steps to make effective use of both its hard and soft power capabilities.

First, it called upon one of its most important strategic allies, the USA, which has committed itself to help South Korea defend itself since 1953, particularly against any threats presented by North Korea, under the ‘U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty’. In 2023, this alliance was further strengthened through the ‘Washington Declaration’ wherein South Korea sought and achieved the USA’s assurance that it would expand consultations with South Korea on extended deterrence and would ‘enhance the regular visibility of strategic assets’, including nuclear-capable weapons. (Congress Research Service, 2023).

Second, it laid the foundations of building a soft power framework under which it would seek de-escalation, dialogue and cooperation with North Korea based in their shared histories and cultural values. This included steps in cultural diplomacy alongside an aid-based diplomacy. In 2018, despite the nuclear level tensions of a few months prior, a unified Korean team participated in Women’s Ice Hockey competition in the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics, thanks to a series of diplomatic dialogues between the two Koreas along with the International Olympic Committee. Just a few months after this, South Korea sent a cultural diplomatic mission to Pyongyang in form of the hit K-Pop Girl Group, ‘Red Velvet’, which performed a popular Korean song, “Our wish is unification” for the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un alongside hundreds of North Korean citizens.

Lastly, South Korea fortified its smart power capabilities in the long term by harnessing the potential of nation branding. Defined as the ‘commodification of a country through strategic marketing’, nation branding aims to construct a positive image of a country, with the ultimate objective of positively influencing the attitudes of the country’s targeted audiences, i.e., foreign peoples, and making the country attractive to them. (Anholt, 2007) South Korea made effective use of nation branding alongside an institutionalised public diplomacy which includes the Presidential Council on Nation Branding, Ministries dedicated to Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as Culture, Sports, and Tourism, alongside education, Science and Technology – working in tandem with other private as well as public agencies. (Yim, 2010)

This multipronged approach to foreign policy has yielded impressive results. South Korea is no longer identified solely for having a tumultuous relationship with its neighbour (Lee, 2009). It has now gained

global recognition as an entertainment powerhouse attracting the younger demographic through its ‘Hallyu Wave’ – with its biggest boy band, BTS, being appointed as ‘special presidential envoy for future generations and culture’ in 2021 with the aim of spreading their message for ‘loving yourself’, and gaining global recognition as “Next Generation Leaders” and one of the “Most Influential People of 2019” (TIME, 2019)

#### 4 INDIAN SOFT POWER

India has recently taken concrete steps towards developing its soft power. Its efforts which have focused majorly on cultural democracy have yielded concrete results. For instance, the United Nations, in 2014, dedicated 21<sup>st</sup> of June as International Day of Yoga to appreciate the rich heritage of Yoga which is believed to have originated in India. India’s display of its attractive culture has not been limited to Yoga but has also included its most prominent film industry i.e., Bollywood, which has grown to become one of the largest in the world in terms of the number of movies produced, which in 2022 stood at 288, the fifth highest number in the world. Bollywood has even found its following across the world with India’s overseas distribution circuit realizing almost Rs.10.9 billion in 2016, which was a 14% increase since the previous year. (KPMG, 2017)

However, there has also been a certain stagnation in the effects that India’s cultural attractions have had in recent years (Mukherjee, 2014). For instance, Bollywood itself has seen a significant drop in production numbers in 2023 with India now standing at the sixth rank worldwide with only 233 movies to its name (Malone, 2011). This might be attributed to multiple factors including specific ones such as Bollywood often perpetuating stereotypical images, limiting the diversity and depth of India’s soft power representation, to wider political factors, such as India’s status as a ‘flawed democracy’ under EUI’s Democracy Index owing to the perception that the government failed to effectively address the persecution of religious and other minorities in India. (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022) Consequently, there is a growing need for a revamped soft power framework for India, which could, on the one hand, enhance its attractiveness through means which would actively involve its people as cultural diplomats, and on the other hand, improve the global perception of India from a political standpoint.

#### 5 DEVELOPING THE INDIAN SOFT POWER

India has been proactively developing its hard power with strategic alliances, military upgrades, and defence innovation. However, its soft power framework can be fortified keeping the South Korean Smart Power framework in mind in two major areas: First, as the most populous country in the world, with an Indian diaspora that stands at 32 million, the scope for India to utilize public diplomacy in its favour is massive ‘Public Diplomacy’ a term coined in 1965, has been defined by E. Gullion as encompassing “dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; ... and the processes of inter-cultural communications.” (Gullion, 1965) The element of inter-cultural communications can be utilised for India in a systematic manner by drawing inspiration from the South Korean model. Although India already has institutional bodies such as the Ministry for Culture and Indian Council for Cultural Relations in place, their impact can be enhanced through effective public diplomacy development as a tool of soft power, by ‘building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies’ (Nye, 2008). One such means could be social media. If one explores popular social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter there has been a surge in the popularity of videos that showcase a person’s cultural identity and history via means of costumes and artistic expressions such as dancing, singing, and painting. The Indian government can play a coordinating role through its Ministries of Culture and Information Technology to encourage young individuals to showcase their own sub-Indian cultures to the global audience on such platforms through means such as officially appointed social media cultural ambassadors and promoting the content of independent creators.

Second, India could promote peace journalism to counter the mainstream media within and outside India which tend to focus solely on catastrophes and conflicts. Defined as choices that editors and reporters make, ‘of what to report, and how to report it – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict’, peace journalism aims to highlight peace initiatives, no matter their scale to present a balanced view of humanity to its audiences. (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005) In times when growing instances of communal violence in India have come to the attention of the

global audiences, it would be highly beneficial for India's brand image to promote peace journalism. Additionally, the Indian government would need to strengthen its own responsiveness to intra-state conflicts, without which foreign peoples would remain largely unaffected by a fully developed soft power toolbox for fears of their own safety and out of a concern for human rights.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Indian foreign policy makers have started making efforts towards harnessing India's soft power through means such as cultural diplomacy and have achieved moderate success. However, there is an underutilization of the country's vast human resources – especially those persons who are familiar with tools of Information Technology. In July 2023, the number of social media users across the world stood at 4.88 billion, i.e., 60.6% of the total global population. This presents an excellent opportunity for India to influence more than half of the global population through social media based public diplomacy in a way that re-builds its national brand-image as a storehouse of human intellect, rich traditions, medical knowledge, and economic opportunities – supported on a robust framework of Indian smart power.

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