

Indian Diaspora as a Tool for Soft Power

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ABSTRACT

The Indian diaspora is one of the world's largest, oldest, wealthiest, and most vibrant. It has emerged as a key source of India's soft power. The diaspora is a cultural bridge promoting Indian customs, festivals, cuisine, and ideals worldwide. Understanding how these cultural exports boost India's soft power might help formulate effective diplomatic initiatives. The achievements and tales of India's diaspora frequently shape the public view of the country as a growing power. The study aims to determine how diaspora members' success stories promote India's image as a place of opportunity and innovation. In this context, the study seeks to ascertain how the success narratives of diaspora members enhance India's reputation as a hub of opportunity and innovation. It examines the increasing recognition of the diaspora's significance in enhancing India's soft power, emphasizing cultural, economic, and ideological influence rather than coercion or force. In conclusion, the Indian diaspora is a potent instrument for bolstering India's soft power by promoting its artistic legacy and influencing international perceptions. India is portrayed as a center of opportunity and innovation through its success stories and cultural exports, enhancing its worldwide influence. Additionally, the study explores digital diplomacy from a novel perspective, as it facilitates domestic and international connections without reliance on conventional media channels.

KEYWORDS: Indian diaspora, Soft power, Digital diplomacy, International perceptions, Ideological influence

INTRODUCTION

The research examines the role of Indian diaspora communities in enhancing India's soft power and explores how new technologies in diplomacy and digital media amplify the diaspora's global reach.

Joseph Nye defined, "Soft power as getting other people to do what you want, the way you want, through appeal rather than force or cash". Soft power is where culture, ethics, institutions, and religion are used by one state to influence another through diplomacy, aid, education, and media.

"Integration" refers to integrating the minority into the host country's cultural, linguistic, and religious identities. The individual members should feel a part of the host culture and be proud of their national culture. The term "Diaspora," is derived from the Greek word, "to scatter or to sow over."

In the centuries of the 19th and 20th, the cross-ocean migration of indentured and contract laborers, traders, professionals, and students into British, French, Dutch, Danish, and Portuguese colonies around Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Far Eastern countries configured into what is today called the Indian diaspora.

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The Indian migrants also know abject poverty throughout the world, many of them in places where they were originally shipped as indentured laborers many decades back. It has seen amazing transformations over the years. Through thrift, doggedness, hard work, and, most importantly, retreat into their own culture from which they could find food sources.

The Indian Diaspora is a product of the regional social stratification that governs the lives of emigrants and migrants. The specific Indian diaspora communities were formed based on these European regional languages and cultures by various Indian emigrants. They identify with the Indian Diaspora, feeling a sense of elegance glorified by sacred fates and destiny. Common cultural inheritance defines the Indian Diaspora among Indians. With the migration to plantations, colonies began the realization of the globalization of the Indian diaspora.

During the 1980s liberalization phase, India's perspective on its diaspora shifted dramatically.

Policymakers further identified that Indians overseas could link the country with foreign governments and greatly contribute to economic development.

Diaspora communities may also result from voluntary or involuntary migration, mass exile, or emigration by economically burdened people seeking better opportunities abroad. Relations between diasporic populations and their homelands may serve as springboards for their eventual return to the country where they have settled.

MEDIA IMPACT AND THE USE OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY FOR THE INDIAN DIASPORA

The Indian diaspora has gained traction due to the immense power that the world has given to the movement of goods and capital with no boundaries and has established itself as the most influential societal, political, and economic horizon on this planet that the world is distributed. Indian diaspora exceeds 30 million and is mainly distributed in prominent countries including America, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Middle East, and South East Asian countries, as stated by the Ministry of External Affairs. (GoI, 2023) Media has played a key role in the formation of this community and in shaping its identity and experience. Furthermore, the Indian government has been able to use media as soft power, which it attributes to its success in fostering international relations and promoting India's cultural values, with the ultimate goal of advancing its geopolitical interests.

The global society has undoubtedly changed since the advent of digitalization. It has totally transformed the way diplomacy is conducted and has emerged as an undisputed avenue for diplomatic communication. Historically, diplomacy was viewed as being quite opaque. People used to learn about it via news channels or print media, and most decisions were made in private rooms. Even embassies and ambassadors are becoming engaged on social media. Both residents and foreign nationals living abroad have the opportunity to speak with policymakers directly and hear firsthand accounts of policies and their effects. The ICT (Information and Communications Technology) revolution has brought about enormous changes in the practice of diplomacy across the world. Social media has evolved into a forum for individuals worldwide to share unfiltered public information. Long-term digitalization processes that are influencing diplomats' use of digital technology are impacted by events that happen offline. Diplomats began experimenting with virtual diplomacy because of the assertion that virtual settings can help them transcend the confines of traditional diplomacy. The vast majority of academics and international leaders first became aware of social media's significance during the Arab Spring in 2011. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, nations were left to rely on digital communications as one of the sole and most efficient means of maintaining global connectivity and cordial international relations. Video conferencing techniques

enabled global leaders to discuss international relations and diplomatic connections during summits, conferences, and Track II dialogues. The essence of digital diplomacy is the application of technology to conventional diplomatic procedures.

Indian diplomacy today aims for peaceful integration into the global order and ensures that the current power structure is not threatened by India's ascent. Therefore, India's digital narrative is one of digital inclusion and empowerment for digital transformation based on accessible, egalitarian, and inexpensive technology. The Digital India Program is accelerating the expansion of our digital economy, which is predicted to reach a trillion-dollar level by 2025, and laying the foundation for a technologically sophisticated future.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has been in the forefront of using social media and digital technology to interact with the public. Through persistent efforts, it has also established itself as one of the leading government agencies in effectively integrating new technologies into its operations. Establishing connections with the Indian diaspora, talking with interlocutors, forming the narrative, and providing crisis support have all been made possible by these platforms and technology. MEA's social media action began in 2010 with the creation of the @IndianDiplomacy Twitter account. The establishment of @MEAIndia's Official Account came next in 2011.

The Ministry Spokesperson's official Twitter account is @MEAIndia. With the help of images, videos, graphics, and creatives, it provides real-time information on the president, vice president, prime minister, minister of external affairs, minister of state, and senior foreign service officials' bilateral and multilateral official engagements, visits, and meetings. The @IndianDiplomacy handle, on the other hand, is dedicated to developing a favourable cultural narrative for Brand India. Each of the Regional Passport Office (RPO) has a Twitter account and uses it efficiently to respond to complaints and questions about passports and visas.

The Ministry is utilizing its social media presence for a variety of objectives through its own accounts as well as those of its Missions and Posts. These include promoting Indian culture, developing an intriguing tale for Brand India, and intensifying its cultural diplomacy campaign.

The Indian diaspora may promote solidarity and pride and serve as ambassadors for India's positive image when they are exposed to content that instills emotions of nationalism.

By showcasing their soft power through their films, sending their artists overseas to perform, encouraging travel and commerce, and establishing regular avenues for cultural interaction, including partnerships and trade, various nations attempt to positively influence the publics and even leaders of other nations.

During his visit to India, Kenyan President William Samoei Ruto said he had dispatched his country's ICT Minister to India to study digital ID and digitizing government services. In addition, India has inked memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with Finland, Vietnam, Africa, and several other nations in the field of ICT to improve digital infrastructure and communication while fortifying diplomatic ties. In order to share its knowledge of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) like Aadhaar, UPI, Digilocker, Co-Win, JAM (Jan Dhan Yojana, Aadhaar and Mobile Number), e-KYC, and others, India is also interacting with nations in the Global South. The Indian government is now giving its citizens immediate, observable, and measurable advantages as a consequence of these DPI programs.

India had over 462 million active social media accounts as of August 2024. Social media is a crucial tool for digital diplomacy, introducing new foreign policy objectives and actions, and tracking public opinion to get a better grasp of international relations considering so many people use it. Policymakers may now effortlessly approach governments throughout the world with their voice through social media networks.

Social media diplomacy has given diplomats across the world more opportunities than ever before to map crises by tracking social media post trails, conduct surveys, and better prepare responses to both man-made and natural catastrophes. Even specialized applications can be developed by embassies to benefit their foreign-based nationals. More than ever, social media may be utilized to engage broad audiences and give them a voice on issues related to foreign policy and international relations, therefore fostering the genuine spirit of democracy.

Media's impact on the Indian diaspora

Isolated from their roots, media pontificates for the Indian diaspora, howsoever watching and cherishing cinema, TV, and digital entertainment, are all helping them to stay loyal to their cultural base. Bollywood instils in one this awareness and camaraderie of personal cultural identity. With movie productions extending across the globe and exceeding those of Hollywood, Bollywood factors in direct erasure of culture, alongside viewership by the diaspora's self-expression of their cultural belief their loss of nostalgia.” Some iconic films about the global Indian community and a shred of that shared cultural knowledge include films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001).

Thereby, Indian television and digital content are fostering a more accurate reflection of Indian life, enabling diaspora communities to stay in touch with India. Satellite TV channels, one of these components, like Zee TV, Star Plus, and Doordarshan, which are broadcast in countries having sizeable Indian populations have been instrumental in keeping this connection alive. However, the launch of platforms like Netflix, Hotstar, and Amazon Prime has further solidified the tenement by providing a wider selection of Indian content encompassing all genres

Indian media has played a very significant role in fostering political engagement among the diaspora. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram serve as forums for political discourse, activism, and advocacy and yet mobilize the Indian diaspora to rally behind causes related to India. This has led to significant participation in Indian elections, with non-resident Indians increasingly encouraged to vote, campaign, and influence domestic politics in India.

Additionally, the Indian authorities have independently enlisted media in engaging the diaspora communities on political and social issues. The Ministry of External Affairs has implemented efforts such as the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*, wherein dignitaries within the Indian diaspora congregate on an annual basis to deliberate on policies and issues that are of concern to them. These events are frequently aired and streamed, thereby enabling the diaspora to establish direct communication with Indian leadership.

Media has helped the diaspora to strengthen its economic ties with India. Information regarding opportunities in India has reached the diaspora via digital platforms, considerably increasing the inflow of remittances, trade, and investment. Business and financial networks such as CNBC India, ET Now, and NDTV have mostly served as conduits of business and financial news, often catering to overseas Indian investors looking to expand their investments in India. Also, Indian government-owned media platforms such as India Global have further assisted in getting India established as an attractive destination to do business in the global arena by further integrating the diaspora into India's economic build-up.

Media as a Soft Power Tool for the Indian Government

The Indian government uses the media as an effective platform for promulgating otherwise unknown cultural history, democratic principles, and larger-scale economic developments of the nation. In this

effort, the employment of Bollywood, Indian classical and folk, and popular music and television serve as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. Promoting the global character of Bollywood supports the Indian government in presenting its diversity, creativity, and mass appeal throughout the world.

While doing this, the government employed other state-run media like Doordarshan and AIR (All India Radio) to underline its achievements in technology, aviation, and the economy. The India Global television channel boosts India's position in international relations by representing India's foreign policy, soft power initiatives, and relations with the rest of the world.

The Indian government has recognized the role of the diaspora in diplomacy and global influence. The media has established a global narrative that has positioned India as a resurgent global power. This has included the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, which promotes Indian culture and values abroad, and soft-power campaigns during major international events like the United Nations General Assembly. The media thus becomes an important instrument through which the government projects its messages across the world.

India's media strategy has also been leveraged to align its geopolitical interests with diaspora communities, as can be seen in the strategic partnerships between India and countries with considerable Indian populations. Across the media, India has made it easy for the diaspora to participate in programs that combine India's strategic interests with theirs.

India's governments have also been actively using media to an international audience while executing public diplomacy through international broadcasting services, such as Doordarshan International, Prasar Bharati, and DD India. These platforms play a crucial role in transmitting India's views on global issues, including climate change, terrorism, and peacekeeping efforts.

Another initiative highlighting the media as an extension of India's soft power is Bharat Ki Baat (India Speaks). Since 2017, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, has broadcast live sessions with Indian citizens and the diaspora focusing on global affairs. Direct engagement with audiences around the world allows the Indian government to enhance its diplomatic reach and global influence.

In the digital age, influencers have emerged as significant actors in shaping public opinion and cultural narratives. Indian influencers, with their vast global reach, play a critical role in projecting India's cultural heritage, values, and modern identity.

Indian influencers act as cultural ambassadors by showcasing the country's rich heritage. Influencers in domains such as fashion, music, dance, and cuisine introduce global audiences to India's diverse traditions. For instance, yoga influencers like Sadhguru promote India's ancient wellness practices, making yoga a global phenomenon. Food bloggers such as Kunal Kapur and Ranveer Brar popularize Indian cuisine, from street food to gourmet dishes.

Influencers in technology, business, and entrepreneurship position India as a hub of innovation and economic growth. Tech influencer Gaurav Chaudhury highlights India's leadership in technology and innovation. Similarly, figures like Ankur Warikoo inspire global audiences with their insights into India's growing startup ecosystem. Content creators like Lily Singh bridge Indian traditions with Western culture, resonating with the Indian diaspora. Fashion influencers such as Masoom Minawala promote Indian fashion on international platforms, representing both traditional and contemporary styles.

Additionally, Indian influencers propagate values such as mindfulness, sustainability, and spirituality, which are integral to India's global identity. Jay Shetty, for example, shares insights from Indian spirituality, making them accessible to an international audience. Priyanka Chopra, a globally recognized

influencer, collaborates with international brands to integrate Indian culture into mainstream global consciousness, offering a new perspective on India to the world.

Indian influencers play a crucial role in enhancing India's soft power by blending traditional and modern elements to appeal to global audiences. Their contributions as cultural ambassadors, promoters of Indian values, and representatives of a dynamic nation underscore their significance in shaping India's global narrative. Addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities, particularly through digital diplomacy, can further strengthen their impact, positioning India as a leader in soft power in the digital age.

INDIAN ORIGIN CHEFS AS INFORMAL DIPLOMATS OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Food is a powerful medium of cultural expression, and Indian-origin chefs have utilised this to bring the richness and diversity of Indian cuisine to the international stage. Innovating traditional dishes, promoting regional flavours, and creating fusion cuisines are all ways these chefs contribute to the soft power of India while integrating Indian culture into global contexts. Their contributions go beyond gastronomy, touching on economic development, cultural diplomacy, and community cohesion. In the digital age, these efforts are amplified through digital diplomacy, where chefs can reach global audiences much more effectively. Indian-origin chefs like Vikas Khanna, Madhur Jaffrey, and Atul Kochhar have brought Indian cuisine to the world stage. In the United States, Vikas Khanna's Michelin-starred restaurant, Junoon, has introduced American diners to the sophistication of Indian flavours. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Atul Kochhar became the first Indian chef to earn a Michelin star, highlighting Indian cuisine's versatility in fine dining. Madhur Jaffrey's cookbooks and television appearances have popularized Indian home cooking across Europe, reaching millions of people. Their efforts have expanded the accessibility and appreciation of Indian food, creating a lasting cultural impact.

To attract global audiences, chefs tend to modify the traditional Indian recipes and blend them with local cuisine. For instance, In Australia, Jessi Singh's restaurants, such as "Don't Tell Aunty," Serve playful fusion dishes like butter chicken nachos, attracting a diverse clientele. These reinterpretations not only attract a broader demographic but also foster cultural fusion.

While Indian recipes are often mixed with local cuisine, Indian-origin chefs emphasize preserving India's culinary traditions by highlighting regional and ancestral recipes. In Singapore, for example, chef Manjunath Mural's award-winning restaurant, The Song of India, showcases regional dishes from across India, maintaining authenticity while catering to global diners. This Middle East venture in Dubai by celebrated chef Vineet Bhatia presents traditional Indian recipes with a modern twist: the preservation of India's heritage while appealing to a cosmopolitan audience. Such initiatives enhance cultural appreciation and foster goodwill.

Indian-origin chefs also serve as informal diplomats to promote India's soft power through food. Vikas Khanna, for instances, cooked for the United Nations General Assembly using food to focus on India's cultural diversity. Gaggan Anand's Bangkok-base restaurant, which has been voted Asia's best restaurant several times, has drawn global attention to modern Indian cuisine, reinforcing India's cultural influence. Social media and digital platforms have empowered Indian-origin chefs in the digital age to reach global audiences to popularize Indian cuisine and culture. Instagram, YouTube and TikTok, among others, give chefs an opportunity to share their recipes, techniques, and the cultural background behind Indian dishes with millions around the world. Ranveer Brar's posts on Instagram and live cooking shows have attracted audiences across India and worldwide. Vikas Khanna's documentary "The Last Colour" has scaled up his cultural aspect via the unique platform of digital storytelling. The media faces of Indian-Origin chefs in

cookbooks, television shows, and social media help popularize Indian Cuisine in a gigantic way. Chefs like Sanjeev Kapoor and Padma Lakshmi have reached millions, educating audiences about Indian food and its cultural significance. Padma Lakshmi's show "Taste The Nation", highlights the contributions of immigrant communities, including Indians to American Cuisine. Digital platforms further amplify their reach, enabling interactive engagement with global audiences. Indian Diaspora has also been facilitated through Indian Origin chefs. The global promotion of the cuisine and culture of India, preservation of Indian culinary traditions, fostering cross-cultural understanding, economic, and cultural influence through Indian diplomacy in this age of digitization, Indian cuisine is better presented globally to everyone and its relevance in being an integral part of India's soft power is preserved.

CONCLUSION

The Indian diaspora is critical in strengthening India's soft power through cultural influence, economic contributions, and political participation. The rise of digital diplomacy and media has increased this influence by allowing the diaspora to maintain cultural ties, participate in India's political and economic landscape, and act as informal ambassadors of Indian heritage. India has successfully cultivated a positive global image by strategically utilizing digital platforms, social media, and cultural exports such as Bollywood, cuisine, and influencers. By embracing innovation while preserving cultural authenticity, India maintains its image as a forward-thinking, inclusive, and culturally rich country. However, despite all these successes, several challenges persist. Key among these challenges is that not everyone in the diaspora has access to technology, especially in lower-income or rural regions. Furthermore, issues of authenticity and reliability in digital media sometimes arise when there's a risk of misinformation or cultural misrepresentation that can undermine the efforts of soft power. Another challenge comes from the struggle between India's cultural heritage and modern identity since sometimes the juxtaposition of foreign influences and the culture of this nation may generate conflict within the diaspora itself. Moreover, while the Indian government has made significant strides in using digital tools for diplomacy, the constant need for adapting to new platforms, technologies, and shifting political landscapes poses a challenge. The volatile nature of social media, where trends can change rapidly, means that maintaining a consistent and effective digital strategy requires constant innovation and monitoring. In the digital era, the Indian diaspora remains a powerful tool for India's global outreach, ensuring that its heritage and values resonate across borders while strengthening India's strategic interest worldwide.

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