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Arijit Mazumdar

University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

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India's Public Diplomacy in the Twenty-First Century: Components, Objectives and Challenges

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Arijit Mazumdar

Abstract

In recent years, several countries have made sustained efforts to project their 'soft power' abroad. Public diplomacy has been an important tool for this purpose. Public diplomacy involves activities usually undertaken by a national government to inform and influence foreign public opinion and attitudes in order to advance its foreign policy goals. Such activities include 'nation-branding', diaspora outreach, digital engagement, international broadcasting, and international exchange programmes, all of which are designed to promote a positive image and reputation of the country to a global audience. This paper discusses the role of public diplomacy in the service of India's foreign policy goals during the twenty-first century. The practice of public diplomacy helps the country achieve two significant objectives. First, it helps allay any active or dormant fears within the international community about India as a rising power. Second, it helps India compete with other countries as it seeks to boost foreign tourist arrivals, attract foreign investment and secure new markets for its exports in an era of globalisation. This paper also briefly discusses some of the challenges associated with India's use of public diplomacy.

Keywords: India, foreign policy, nation-branding, public diplomacy, rising powers, soft power

Introduction

Foreign policy involves a set of objectives and a plan of action outlining how a country will interact with both states as well as non-state actors. It is designed to protect, preserve and advance national interests in the international arena. In order

Corresponding author:

Arijit Mazumdar.

E-mail: arjit_mazumdar@stthomas.edu

to be effective, a country's foreign policy must be able to influence the decisions and actions of foreign actors and audiences. The utilisation of soft power assets by countries across the world to 'attract' the international community has been extensively discussed (Cull, 2008; Nye, 2008). Soft power projection results in the creation of a particular image of the country in the minds of the international community. There is consensus among scholars that a country's image is likely to influence international audiences when it comes to decisions regarding investment, tourism, trade and economic cooperation (Anholt, 2005; Roll, 2015).

Public diplomacy is an important tool to project a country's soft power towards the international community. Public diplomacy involves activities usually undertaken by a national government to inform and influence foreign public opinion and attitudes in order to advance its foreign policy goals (Cowan & Cull, 2008; Cull, 2008; Nye, 2008; Potter, 2009). Such activities include nation-branding, diaspora outreach, digital engagement, international broadcasting and international exchange programmes, and are designed to promote a positive image and reputation of the country to a global audience. This boosts a country's international influence and allows it to play a more significant role in global politics. In turn, this facilitates international trade, foreign aid, foreign investment, foreign tourist arrivals, and bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation contributing to the country's economic prosperity and political stability. Communicating a favourable image of the country in a digitally connected world involves both governmental and non-governmental actors.

This paper discusses the reasons behind India's engagement in public diplomacy abroad. The practice of public diplomacy helps India achieve two significant objectives. First, it helps allay any active or dormant fears within the international community about India as a rising power. Second, it helps India compete with other countries as it seeks to boost foreign tourist arrivals, attract foreign investment and secure new markets for its exports in an era of globalisation. Public diplomacy plays a vital role in conveying and explaining India's foreign policy actions and position on major international issues. Ultimately, India utilises public diplomacy to create a positive narrative about itself in the minds of the foreign public and the Indian diaspora. This paper discusses India's recent efforts to develop a more integrated approach to public diplomacy and its utilisation in the service of its foreign policy goals. Additionally, it discusses some of the challenges associated with India's use of public diplomacy.

Understanding Indian Public Diplomacy

Culture is at the heart of India's practice of public diplomacy in the twenty-first century. Public diplomacy to a large extent involves packaging, communicating, and promoting India's cultural images, ideas, values, goods and products, and practices overseas to serve political and economic goals, enhance national security, and strengthen national pride. India's image and its idea of itself are best communicated through its culture. Throughout India's history, there has always been a strong cultural dimension (symbolised in its literature, fine arts, classical

music, religion, and theatre) to its relations with the rest of Asia (Thussu, 2013). India's civilisation today combines "... strong Hindu-Buddhist foundations, centuries of Islamic influence, and integration with European institutions and ideas..." (Thussu, 2013, p. 11). This rich and varied culture provides the country with ample resources from which to draw upon as it engages in public diplomacy. Ayurveda, Bollywood, Buddhism, Indian classical dance and music, diaspora and yoga are among several soft power assets that are only just beginning to be tapped in order to project a new and dynamic India to the world at large.

The examination of India's public diplomacy is a relatively recent enterprise although the practice itself has a long history dating back to the time of former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Emphasising norms and values such as non-alignment, decolonisation and development partnerships, Nehru sought to create a unique identity for the country (Mullen, 2015, p. 192). The exercise of soft power by various administrations since independence is well documented (Hymans, 2009; Malhotra, 2015; Mishra, 2016; Thussu, 2013). Development partnership programmes with countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal and several African countries, which involved financial and technical assistance, were a prominent element in this exercise (Mullen, 2015, pp. 193–194). Others have focused on the role played by various administrations in projecting India's soft power abroad through the process of 'public diplomacy' (Blarel, 2012; Hall, 2012; Martin, 2015; Mullen & Ganguly, 2012; Pethiyagoda, 2013; Rana, 2009; Suri, 2011). Some studies have pointed to the challenges of branding a vast and diverse population like India as well as the dangers of representing India as a unitary nation (Edwards & Ramamurthy, 2017; Kaur, 2012; Kerrigan, Shivanandan, & Hede, 2012). Most of these studies accept that the government is the only entity that can bring together the disparate elements of the country's soft power assets in the service of the country's foreign policy goals and hence must be actively involved in the projection of soft power (i.e., in the process of public diplomacy).

More recently, some scholars have discussed how the Narendra Modi administration has projected various aspects of India's soft power (Lakshmi, 2015; Martin, 2015; Mazumdar, 2018; Raja Mohan, 2015; Pant, 2015; Ramachandran, 2015; Tandon, 2016). Modi has attempted to leverage India's soft power resources to project the country as a benign rising power. He has sought to engage with the huge Indian diaspora across the world and attempted to promote the country as an attractive destination for both tourism and foreign investment. Broadcasting, print, and social media have proven to be helpful tools for this purpose. Modi himself is active on various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and even Weibo, China's main micro-blogging service.

India's Public Diplomacy: Components and Objectives

Former Indian diplomat Navtej Suri (2011) outlined the key elements of the approach adopted by India in trying to develop a public diplomacy agenda. These include developing a positive narrative, projection of soft power, hosting visitors, digital diplomacy, image and branding, broadcasting, domestic front, and coordination and strategic communications. An institutional framework associated

with engaging the foreign public has developed in India over time to support these elements. The primary institutions involved in India's public diplomacy abroad are the Overseas Indian Affairs (OIA) Division, External Publicity and Public Diplomacy (XPD) Division, and the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) Division. All of these function under the authority of the Government of India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), which is the nodal agency for the conduct of India's foreign relations.

Two autonomous organisations—the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA)—both of which are more than half a century old, are also involved in public diplomacy activities. The ICCR works together with the MEA in the area of external cultural diplomacy, including promotion of cultural exchange with other countries and people, while the ICWA is a think-tank whose task includes the promotion of India's relations with other countries through study, research, discussion, publication and exchange of ideas and information with organisations outside India.

Recent administrations, including the current Modi administration, have cultivated the diaspora for the purpose of transmitting information about developments in India, and seeking investors, tourists and partners for the economy. Although identified as people who migrated to different parts of the world and generally maintained their Indian identity, the Indian diaspora is not a unitary actor (Varadarajan, 2015, pp. 285–286). Their 'cultural' relationship with India over many decades has been maintained through endogamous social patterns of settlement and their resistance to cultural assimilation (Aiyar, 2015). Until the early-1990s, India did not pursue any meaningful engagement with the Indian diaspora. As such, historically, their contribution to the formulation of Indian foreign policy has been marginal (Varadarajan, 2015, p. 285). India's economic liberalisation changed this pattern, as India looked to the diaspora to boost economic growth, much like the Chinese diaspora has played a part in China's rapid economic growth.

During 2016–2017, the total expenditure of the MEA was about ₹127.5 billion (US\$1.9 billion). Out of this, around ₹204 million (US\$3 million) was spent on Public Diplomacy, around ₹70 million (US\$1 million) was spent on Press and Media Relations, around ₹57.8 billion (US\$860 million) in development assistance to countries, around ₹1.85 billion (US\$27.5 million) was spent on ICCR and around ₹98 million (US\$1.5 million) was spent on ICWA, while the rest was spent on salaries and benefits and various other projects, events, schemes and services (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2018).

The above-mentioned institutions and organisations have been pressed into service by the MEA (i.e., the government) to primarily influence foreign public attitudes and opinions in a manner that they become favourable and/or supportive of India's foreign policy and interests. Public diplomacy allows the government to engage with actors from all over the world in the service of these goals. As mentioned earlier, Indian public diplomacy is designed to achieve two significant objectives. First, it attempts to allay any active or dormant fears within the international community about India's rise. Second, in a globalised era where competition is the norm across many sectors, it helps the country 'market' itself as

an attractive destination for foreign tourists, foreign investment, as well as secure new markets for its exports. The following sections describe these issues in more detail.

Rising India: Partner or Antagonist?

India's rising power has been the subject of much debate and discussion among academic, government and media circles since the end of the Cold War (Cohen, 2001; Ganguly, 2003; Pant, 2009). As the largest country (in terms of both population and area) in the South Asian region, the world's largest democracy, the second-most populous country in the world, a nuclear weapons state with one of the world's largest military force, and the third largest economy in the world in terms of GDP (purchasing power parity), the attention paid to India comes as no surprise. By virtue of its size and population, India is in a position to influence both regional and, to some extent, global affairs. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge India's limitations and challenges evidenced by its poor human development indicators, attacks against religious minorities and women, caste discrimination and violence, allegations of human rights violations against security forces in Kashmir and the northeast region, traditionally weak governance, and high levels of public corruption. The international community's understanding of India straddles these two opposing images.

It is understandable that India's rise generates some apprehension in the minds of the international community. The example of the Netherlands' rise as a world power during the seventeenth century through a series of conflicts with Spain, the established hegemon, is illustrative here. In recent times, both Russia and China have pursued territorial ambitions in Ukraine/Eastern Europe and the South China Sea, undermining peace and stability in both regions. The international community's apprehensiveness results from the belief that as the economies of rising powers grow, they develop stronger military capabilities, which in turn makes them prone to engaging in conflict behaviour.

The existing international order may also be challenged if rising powers disagree with established ones on major global issues such as trade, climate change, non-proliferation and terrorism. Rising powers may seek to block the actions of major international organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO) and UN Security Council, if they feel that they do not have a significant voice within these organisations. For example, India's nuclear tests in May 1998 openly challenged a nuclear proliferation regime that sought to maintain nuclear weapons states as an exclusive club. In doing so, India directly undermined the provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Will India undertake more such actions in the future as it continues to rise? If India continues to rise, will it be a benign power or will it prove a threat to the existing international order?

India's public diplomacy strategy is designed precisely to assuage such concerns among the international community. Through its public diplomacy efforts, India seeks primarily to be *recognised* as a rising power and *accommodated* into

the existing international order (Sinha, 2016). It does not intend to undermine this order. The hope is that the international community can help promote India's status and development by acknowledging South Asia as its sphere of influence and provide it with a greater voice in prominent international organisations. India seeks to assure the international community that it will not pursue irredentist claims or use force against its neighbours and other countries. Its policy of military self-restraint, even in the face of provocative cross-border terrorism, is held up as proof of India's desire to be seen as a peaceful rising power. India's public diplomacy efforts seek to convince the world that the country is unlikely to engage in military or economic conflicts. As the birthplace of Buddhism and Mahatma Gandhi, the essentially non-violent nature of its independence struggle, the declaration of no-first use of its nuclear weapons, and its status as the largest democracy in the world, emphasising pluralism and tolerance, India is hardly a threat to the international community. Despite being a rising power, India does not seek to export its political system (democracy) or economic ideology to other countries (Sinha, 2016). It seeks to be integrated into the global system on the strength of its economic achievements and soft power, rather than military capabilities. It seeks peaceful coexistence and promotes dialogue and discussion to resolve all conflicts.

Indian public diplomacy is designed to convey that while the country may be a rising power, the pace of its rise is gradual compared to China's. It is hoped that this will allow the international community time to adjust to India's rise. India may be incrementally accommodated (through minor adjustments) into the ranks of established powers as its economic and military capabilities gradually expand. India's acceptance of international institutions as platforms for discussion and change, its embrace of democratic norms and its increasing closeness to the West, particularly the United States, make it easier to accommodate its interests (Sinha, 2016). India's belief that it is possible to reform current international organisations, such as the UN Security Council, IMF, World Bank, NPT and WTO, to provide a more significant role not just to it but also to other countries in the developing world, will also prove helpful to others as they seek to address the country's growing aspirations. Public diplomacy is an important vehicle through which to convey India's intentions to the international community. India's case is helped by the perception that it is unlikely to be antagonistic towards the West. India neither displays a strong sense of historical grievance against the West nor is it affected by strong anti-Western currents within its body politic (Paul, 2016). Its public diplomacy efforts focus on highlighting the fact that the country seeks dialogue, engagement, cooperation and accommodation wherever possible. The goal is to ensure that established powers will not adopt obstructionist positions in the face of India's growing aspirations.

India's history of non-alignment is also highlighted to demonstrate that it will not enter into military alliances in the future, thereby disturbing the existing balance of power and endangering international peace and security (Theis & Nieman, 2017). During the Cold War, India sought to create a shared sense of identity for the developing world characterised by anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism and opposition to apartheid. Today's public diplomacy initiatives are designed to convey to international audiences that India's desire to work together with

developing countries remains undiminished despite its growing ambitions and capabilities. In fact, India needs the cooperation of developing countries to tackle global issues such as poverty, climate change, nuclear proliferation, international trade, terrorism and reform existing international organisations (Sullivan, 2015). Public diplomacy is required to secure the developing world's support for India's aspirations and its desire for recognition. In this regard, reiterating India's commitment to South-South solidarity, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and the creation of a more equitable international order is very important (Harris & Vittorini, 2015, p. 96). As such, development partnership initiatives in Africa, including Lines of Credit (LoC), which come without conditionalities and infrastructure development projects that cater to the specific needs of the African countries, are part of a broader strategy designed to convey that India is unlike any other past or present power in the international system. At the same time, public diplomacy may help address any suspicion among these countries that if and when India is integrated into the ranks of established powers, it will behave very much like other great powers in terms of policies and actions (Sullivan, 2015, p. 17).

In actuality, the twin imperatives of seeking recognition from existing powers and the desire to maintain solidarity with developing countries will make it unlikely that India will behave aggressively in international affairs in the future (Sullivan, 2015, p. 15). It may seek to reform the existing international order (as a representative of the developing world), but it will not risk antagonising existing powers beyond a point. Therefore, it will be likely to pursue gradual, incremental changes to the international system. Its military capabilities, while extensive, are still limited compared to the great powers further demonstrating that it is in no position to threaten or unilaterally change the international order. These realities must be conveyed not only to foreign governments but also to foreign publics. This is where public diplomacy comes in. It should be noted that India's public diplomacy increasingly portrays India as a rising economic and cultural power, while downplaying its military capabilities.

In recent times, the Modi administration has declared its support to the liberal international economic order by calling for maintaining an open trading system, in the face of protectionist measures adopted by some countries. Support for global economic integration is demonstrated by India's increasing trade and commercial links with ASEAN countries, its entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and participation in multilateral talks to create a free-trade area across Asia under the proposed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). For India, economic development is paramount. Conflict within the South Asian region or beyond is likely to undermine its ability to trade with other countries and receive foreign investment. India is therefore unlikely to behave aggressively and threaten the international economic system.

In summary, India seeks to present itself as a useful and dependable partner to the international community as it tackles pressing security and non-security challenges. It wants to dispel the notion that as a rising power it will threaten international peace and security. India will not undermine international organisations and pledges to uphold the existing international order, based on the twin pillars of

liberal democracy and free trade. It supports global trade and economic integration. In return, it seeks recognition from other countries and gradual, but tangible, accommodation from the established powers. India's primary focus is on reforming international organisations to provide it (and perhaps other developing countries) with a much more significant voice in the international system. This is demonstrated through its pursuit of permanent veto-wielding status in the UN Security Council. Public diplomacy efforts are designed to minimise apprehension and resistance to India's aspirations by conveying the message that a rising India will not act like other rising powers in the past. To the extent that India's public diplomacy efforts bear fruit and India's pursuit of gradual change is understood, the international community will likely reciprocate and help India fulfil its aspirations.

Destination India

In the post-Cold War era, the competition between countries for tourists, resources, markets and investments is intense. If a country can 'market' itself as an attractive destination for tourism and investment by differentiating itself from others, it stands a good chance of succeeding in this competition. This would boost its economic growth and development. In order to market themselves, countries need to improve their standing and develop a positive image and reputation for themselves. They have to create a 'brand' for themselves. A brand is a name, term, symbol, slogan and design, which attributes certain unique characteristics to an entity or a product and distinguishes it from others (American Marketing Association, 2018). In recent times, countries across the world have begun developing national brand strategies. It is seen as an important tool for economic growth and development (Anholt, 2007; Lee, 2010; Marat, 2009; van Ham, 2008). Countries seek to portray themselves as attractive destinations for tourism and investment purposes, promote their soft power (including culture) and manage how the world sees them. Public diplomacy can play an important role in this process.

Most countries around the world are unhappy with the image and reputation that foreigners have about them. Either the country suffers from a bad image/reputation or the image of a country is outdated (i.e., not in pace with current reality) (Anholt, 2006). The latter is likely to be the case when there have been rapid economic and social changes within countries in recent times. India is among those countries that mostly suffer from the second problem. Through public diplomacy, India is attempting to present an image of a country capable of producing high quality goods and services for export to the rest of the world, thereby challenging the negative perception of an underperforming and uncompetitive economy.

Public diplomacy attempts to change the perception of international audiences by not just simply communicating with international audiences but also *engaging* with them (Anholt, 2010). A dialogue must be established wherein external actors may also be involved in the development of a positive new image of the country

so that public diplomacy does not turn into mere propaganda. In an era in which audiences have access to multiple channels of information and communications, 'one-way messages' are likely to be ignored or treated with derision by the international public. However, if the latter are involved in the process of 'branding', then they are more likely to accept the revised, new image that a country is attempting to project. The role of national public is also important here. Projecting a unified vision of the country to external audiences and an image of a strong, confident, aspirational society require some degree of support from the domestic public (Babla, 2012). Citizens must be made aware of the achievements of ordinary people living in their midst as opposed to the success of government initiatives and programmes. They must feel proud of these accomplishments and 'buy' into the narrative of a changing country destined for greatness, before international audiences accept the new image that is being projected. Finally, governments need to be involved in the promotion of the country's positive qualities and attributes (Anholt, 2010). They are the only entity that can coordinate efforts to change/revise the perception of a country. Working together with citizens, domestic businesses and corporations, and international audiences, a new image/reputation for the country may be gradually developed.

The most effective way to shape the perceptions of external audiences is to communicate recent achievements (to bring the image/reputation of the country in line with current realities) and inform them about the country's vibrant culture (Anholt, 2005). Highlighting the richness, uniqueness and diversity of a country's culture and heritage is certainly helpful in building a better understanding of the country in the minds of foreigners. Tourism promotion initiatives often highlight the cultural elements of a country, in order to make the latter stand out as a destination offering a unique and colourful experience for the visitor. If a country wants to demonstrate its uniqueness, there is no better resource than culture. Culture is the most authentic representation of a country. People may choose to ignore a country's recent achievements, as a 'flash-in-the-pan' event, but it is harder to ignore the richness of its culture. Even if a person has visited many countries, a new country offers the attraction of a unique culture that draws them to it so it is important to highlight this.

In recent times, many countries have engaged in nation-branding initiatives to compete effectively in the global marketplace. These include not just developing countries that may perhaps need an image makeover but also developed countries with strong reputations like Germany and the United Kingdom (Dinnie, 2016). In Asia, countries like Japan (Cool Japan), Malaysia (Malaysia, Truly Asia) and Thailand (Amazing Thailand) have all engaged in nation-branding with varying levels of success (Roll, 2015, pp. 76–82). Japan is interested in promoting its culture to international audiences, so that it was not perceived solely as an economic powerhouse. 'Cool Japan' focuses on aspects of Japanese culture such as anime, manga, cuisine, art, music and traditional crafts. Promoting Japan as an attractive destination for tourists was the primary goal. The run-up to the 2020 Summer Olympics due to be held in Tokyo is providing Japan with many opportunities to market itself as a cultural superpower. 'Amazing Thailand' seeks to brand Thailand as a holiday tourist destination—historical sites, beaches and

exotic food. On the other hand, Malaysia, Truly Asia, has highlighted Malaysia as a multicultural and cosmopolitan place where visitors can sample the diversity of Asia's culture and foods.

India has undertaken a part 'destination-branding' (attracting foreign tourists and foreign investment) and part nation-branding (image makeover) campaign in the post-Cold War era. Some of the early efforts in this regard involved the creation of the India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), a trust established by the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, in 1996. According to its website, 'the IBEF's primary objective is to promote and create international awareness of the Made in India label in markets overseas and to facilitate dissemination of knowledge of Indian products and services' (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2018). It works closely with domestic and international actors to promote what it calls 'Brand India'.

The IBEF's task is to portray India as a place that both welcomes international business and investment and is capable of providing quality services and manufactured products. It attempts to provide updated, accurate and comprehensive information about India to international investors, policymakers and media personnel. In 2006, the IBEF launched the very successful 'India Everywhere' campaign at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The goal was to portray India as a country that had transformed from a relatively closed economy to a place that welcomed international trade, commerce and investment (Thussu, 2013, p. 159). The Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EEPC) India is another organisation established along the lines of the IBEF. It is the premier trade and investment promotion organisation of India, focusing on the Indian engineering sector. Its goal is to promote India's engineering exports to the outside world. It too works under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

Perhaps the country's most significant international promotion campaign is 'Incredible India', which began in 2002. It is primarily designed to attract international tourists to India by promoting the latter as an attractive destination. The initiative was designed to create a distinctive identity for the country. It was conceived and launched by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. The campaign involved highlighting India's historic and religious sites, including Hindu temples, Buddhist stupas, Islamic mosques and mausoleums, Christian churches and convents and Sikh shrines (Thussu, 2013, pp. 161–162). India's rich religious diversity is showcased, presenting it as a mosaic of various faiths. Other attractions highlighted include the country's most recognisable landmark, the Taj Mahal, prominent historic and cultural sites, wildlife sanctuaries, mountains, beaches, pilgrimage sites and so on. The campaign has proved very successful in boosting annual tourism arrivals to the country.

In 2014, the Modi administration launched the 'Make in India' campaign. It was designed to encourage foreign companies to manufacture their products in India and portray it as an attractive destination for investment (Make in India, 2018). The campaign highlighted the fact that 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was permitted in about 25 sectors, the only major exceptions being space, defence and news media. The campaign was accompanied by policies and measures designed to reduce barriers to doing business in India. Both the Make in India

and the EEPC India campaigns have made their presence felt recently at the Hannover *Messe* (Hannover Fair) in Germany, one of the world's largest trade fairs, where India is an official partner country. They have highlighted India's products, services, and innovations in sectors like automotive, Information technology, energy and environmental technology, industrial supply, and production engineering and services (Engineering Exports Promotion Council, 2018). The goal of both campaigns is to convey a positive narrative regarding India. Although many hurdles remain with regard to doing business in India, the Modi administration's efforts to change India's image in the minds of the international community received a boost when it jumped from the rank of 130 in 2016 to 63 in 2020—in the World Bank's 'Ease of Doing Business' Index (The World Bank, 2019).

Leaders and foreign policy mandarins across the world appear to have understood the value of public diplomacy. There is also a better understanding about how the international community's perceptions about the country shape its behaviour towards that country. India's case is no different. At present, the Modi administration is engaged in public diplomacy to both facilitate India's rise as a global power as well brand and market India as an attractive destination for foreign tourists, business visitors, and students. Its aspirations of great power status and increasing competition with other countries are driving India to embrace public diplomacy as an important element of its foreign policy. A clearer picture about the usefulness of public diplomacy will only emerge some years or even decades down the line. However, it is expected that the nature and scope of India's public diplomacy will continue to expand going forward.

Indian Public Diplomacy: Challenges

The success of this initiative is already visible to some extent (improved image/reputation among some circles outside the country). The Pew Research Center's *Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey* indicated that most respondents in the Asia-Pacific region countries held favourable views towards India (Pew Research Center, 2018a). Among Western countries, the perception that India plays a 'more important role' or 'as important a role' in the world today compared to 10 years ago was shared by more than 75 per cent of the respondents (Pew Research Center, 2018b). The numbers were equally high among Asia-Pacific country respondents. These figures appear to support the view that India's public diplomacy efforts may have succeeded in promoting a positive perception about the country among the foreign public. Nevertheless, while public diplomacy has grown to become an important tool for countries to shape the views of others, its practice is associated with several challenges.

With regard to India, the biggest obstacle is that a certain image of India has become entrenched in the minds of outsiders. The country's image has been undermined by its widespread poverty and social inequality, violence against individuals belonging to religious minorities and underprivileged castes, horrific sexual assaults against women, police brutality, allegations of human rights violations by security forces, poor governance, political corruption, and frustrating

levels of bureaucratic inertia and red-tape. Almost every day, disturbing news about India are highlighted by national and international print and broadcast media outlets, which call into question the country's claims of being a rising power with aspirations of great power status. The negative image/reputation India suffers as a result has been reinforced by events over the past several decades. Under these circumstances, it seems fair to question whether India's public diplomacy efforts will succeed in shifting people's perception about India. The millions of dollars spent on these programmes and campaigns may ultimately not bring the desired results.

Second, as China's experience shows, nation-branding exercises may not help alter the perception of the international community about the country. Despite establishing 'Confucius Institutes' across the world to educate people about Chinese culture and language, hosting the Summer Olympic Games in 2008, declarations about the country's 'peaceful rise', providing foreign aid to sub-Saharan African countries, and promoting economic and cultural linkages across Asia through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's rise continues to generate fear and anxiety. Additionally, the 'Made in China' tag does not inspire much confidence among consumers due to questions regarding product origin and quality. The international community has closely followed China's march towards great power status for over two decades during which time its intentions and behaviours have been minutely scrutinised. An authoritarian system of government, a muscular foreign policy and growing political and economic ambitions have generated uneasiness across Asia and beyond. Even though India is very different from China on almost every measure, the question may well be asked whether India's efforts at improving its existing image/reputation will run into similar obstacles.

Finally, the allocation of resources by the Modi administration to India's public diplomacy is quite meagre considering the size of the country and its aspirations. Only a small portion of the budget of the MEA is designated for public diplomacy activities undertaken by the XPD division. The lack of funding and manpower resources needs to be urgently addressed. This is a problem associated not just with the XPD but that affects the MEA as a whole. In addition, the reluctance of some politicians and foreign policy officials and experts to engage with foreign audiences and clearly communicate India's views and positions on major international issues is another barrier to the successful conduct of public diplomacy. Sometimes, politicians fail to understand how their words and actions are perceived by international audiences and the negative impact it may have on the country's image. Although the government and the bureaucracy are important participants in the exercise of successful public diplomacy, they may also be the biggest reasons for its failure.

Conclusion

A country's foreign policy is designed to protect and advance its interests by shaping the views and behaviour of external actors. In addition to hard power, soft power is a significant tool to help achieve these objectives. The projection of soft

power in the service of a country's foreign policy goals is becoming increasingly common. Creating a positive narrative about the country and burnishing its image in the minds of the international community are something most countries actively engage in at present. The image/reputation of a country is important in a world where rising powers are treated with anxiety and fear, and competition for tourism, trade and investment is intense. It is in this context that public diplomacy assumes significance. Public diplomacy is ultimately a means to project the country's soft power to an international audience. Once the positive views about the country have been identified, public diplomacy campaigns strive to reinforce these perceptions while adding other stories that help create a new/revised narrative around the country.

India has utilised the practice of public diplomacy as a means to reduce obstacles to its path to great power status. It has attempted to reassure the international community that it will not act as some rising powers have done in the past. It aspires to integrate with the existing international order, not undermine it. It wants to be recognised and accommodated by the existing great powers. It argues that its aspirations are relatively modest compared to rising powers in the past, and it is willing to accept a gradual, but meaningful, accommodation of its aspirations of playing a strong role in some prominent international organisations, like the UN Security Council. Its public diplomacy efforts are designed to persuade the international community that it is indeed a benign rising power.

Finally, India utilises public diplomacy campaigns to attract international attention and capital in order to promote economic development. Encouraged by the modest successes of other countries, India too has begun utilising public diplomacy to shape the views of the international community. By doing this, it ultimately hopes to change their behaviour towards it. Its programs and campaigns are designed to not just portray India as an attractive destination for tourism and investment like any other emerging economy, but they also highlight the country's uniqueness in order to differentiate it from others. Projecting soft power assets like Bollywood, Buddhism, Indian cuisine, Indian classical dance and music, cricket and yoga are already part of the country's public diplomacy strategy. The process of branding India as a unique country worthy of travel and investment will likely continue into the future. If it can help promote economic growth and development and facilitate India's rise, the country's public diplomacy efforts will have fulfilled its stated objectives.

Arijit Mazumdar, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. He is the author of Indian Foreign Policy in Transition: Relations with South Asia (Routledge/Taylor & Francis). His research interests include Indian foreign policy, India's internal conflicts, and South Asian politics.

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