

# PERFORMING IDENTITY THROUGH CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: AUDIO VISUAL MEDIA, DESIGN, FINE ARTS, HANDICRAFTS, MUSIC, AND INDIA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

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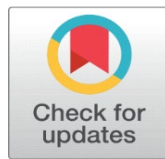
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## ABSTRACT

India performs and negotiates its cultural identity through a wide spectrum of creative industries, including audio visual techniques and media production, fashion, interior and industrial design, fine arts, handicrafts, and music and performing arts. It argues that these diverse cultural forms function as instruments of soft power, enabling India to project narratives of heritage, innovation, and modernity in the international arena. By analyzing state sponsored initiatives, global festivals, exhibitions, and transnational collaborations, the study highlights how India leverages creative expression to foster dialogue, enhance visibility, and strengthen its global standing. Situating these practices within the broader discourse of international relations, the paper demonstrates that cultural diplomacy is not merely symbolic but a strategic dimension of foreign policy. Ultimately, the research underscores the dynamic role of creative industries in shaping India's identity as a cultural actor on the world stage.

**Keywords:** Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, Audio Visual Media, Fashion and Design, Fine Arts and Handicrafts, Music and Performing Arts, Performing Identity, International Relations



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of *performing identity* emphasizes how nations enact and project their cultural essence through creative expression. Identity is not static but continuously negotiated and performed in cultural spaces, festivals, and artistic practices. Scholars argue that cultural identity is enacted through symbolic performances that communicate heritage, modernity, and innovation to global audiences [Chakraborty \(2021\)](#). This perspective situates identity as a dynamic process, where creative industries become the stage upon which nations articulate who they are and how they wish to be perceived internationally.

India's ascent as a cultural actor in international relations is closely tied to its ability to mobilize creative industries as instruments of soft power. With its rich traditions in cinema, music, handicrafts, and design, India has positioned itself as a hub of cultural diplomacy. Scholars highlight that India's cultural diplomacy initiatives, such as the International Film Festival of India and ICCR programs, have enhanced its visibility and strengthened its global standing [Kumar \(2020\)](#). These efforts underscore India's transition from a regional power to a global cultural influence.

Creative industries serve as the medium through which India performs its identity, blending traditional heritage with contemporary innovation. Bollywood films, classical dance, and handicraft exhibitions are not merely cultural products but performances of national identity. Scholars argue that such performances allow India to negotiate its image as both ancient and modern, rooted in tradition yet forward-looking [Banerjee \(2019\)](#). This duality strengthens India's appeal in international relations, as it resonates with diverse audiences across cultural and political contexts.

The central research problem lies in understanding how creative industries function as instruments of cultural diplomacy. While soft power theory has been widely discussed, there is limited scholarship on how specific sectors—such as audio-visual media, design, fine arts, handicrafts, and music—contribute to India's diplomatic strategies. Scholars note that cultural diplomacy often remains symbolic, but India's creative industries demonstrate that it can be strategically embedded in foreign policy [Mehta \(2022\)](#). This research seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the operational mechanisms of cultural diplomacy through creative expression.

The objectives of this study are to analyze India's use of audio-visual media, design, fine arts, handicrafts, and music as tools of cultural diplomacy. Each sector contributes uniquely to India's global image: Bollywood projects narratives of modernity, handicrafts showcase artisanal heritage, and music embodies both classical traditions and contemporary fusion. Scholars emphasize that these diverse forms collectively enhance India's visibility and foster intercultural dialogue [Singh \(2021\)](#). By examining these sectors, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of India's cultural diplomacy.

This research contributes to bridging cultural studies and international relations by situating creative industries within the discourse of soft power and diplomacy. It demonstrates that cultural diplomacy is not merely symbolic but a strategic dimension of foreign policy. Scholars argue that analyzing creative industries through the lens of performing identity enriches both theoretical and practical understandings of international relations [Rao \(2020\)](#). Ultimately, the study underscores the dynamic role of creative industries in shaping India's identity as a cultural actor on the world stage.

## 2. SOFT POWER AND CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

The concept of soft power, as articulated by [Nye \(2004\)](#), provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how nations influence others through attraction rather than coercion. Culture, political values, and foreign policy are central to this framework, positioning creative industries as vital instruments of persuasion. Cultural diplomacy extends this notion by institutionalizing cultural exchange as a deliberate foreign policy strategy. [Ang et al. \(2015\)](#) argue that cultural diplomacy involves the use of cultural resources—such as arts, media, and education—to foster mutual understanding and strengthen international relations, thereby embedding soft power within statecraft.

India's cultural diplomacy has been widely studied in relation to initiatives such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the "Incredible India" campaign. [Thussu \(2013\)](#) highlights how Bollywood cinema, yoga, and traditional crafts have been mobilized as cultural assets to strengthen India's image abroad. These initiatives demonstrate how India performs identity through creative expression, projecting narratives of heritage and modernity

simultaneously. However, [Chandra \(2025a\)](#) cautions that India's soft power politics in South Asia, such as its humanitarian aid to Nepal, reveal pitfalls where cultural diplomacy can be undermined by geopolitical tensions.

Comparative cases illustrate the global trend of institutionalizing creative industries in diplomacy. Japan's *Cool Japan* initiative, Korea's *Hallyu* wave, and France's *Alliance Française* exemplify how nations strategically export culture to build influence. [Otmazgin \(2012\)](#) shows how Korea's Hallyu transformed its global image through K-pop and dramas, while France sustained its reputation through long-standing cultural institutions. [Chandra and Sinha \(2024a\)](#) extend this comparative lens to China, analyzing its reliance on cultural strategies, media, and educational exchanges to project influence. These parallels highlight the competitive environment in which India operates.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the multi-sectoral nature of India's creative industries. [Banerjee \(2019\)](#) argues that performances of identity through cinema, dance, and handicrafts allow India to negotiate its image as both ancient and modern. [Chandra and Sinha \(2024b\)](#) further contend that India's foreign diplomacy must be understood through the broader lens of soft power and international politics, where diverse creative industries—audio-visual media, design, fine arts, handicrafts, and music—collectively shape perceptions. This multi-sectoral approach remains underexplored in existing literature, which often focuses narrowly on Bollywood or yoga.

The strategic role of visual and performing arts has been particularly emphasized. [Chandra and Sinha \(2023\)](#) demonstrate how these art forms function as instruments of India's soft power, projecting narratives of heritage and innovation in international politics. Their findings align with [Singh \(2021\)](#), who underscores the role of creative industries in fostering intercultural dialogue. [Chandra \(2025b\)](#) adds that soft power operates through the "science of influence," where narratives and symbols embedded in creative industries subtly shape global perceptions.

[Chandra \(2025c\)](#) doctoral dissertation provides a comprehensive historical account of India's soft power from 1990 to 2022, tracing its evolution from symbolic gestures to strategic instruments of foreign policy. [Rao \(2020\)](#) similarly argues that analyzing creative industries through the lens of performing identity enriches both theoretical and practical understandings of international relations. Collectively, this body of scholarship underscores the need to analyze India's multi-sectoral creative industries as vehicles of performing identity and cultural diplomacy, bridging cultural studies and international relations.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AS STRATEGIC TOOLS

The concept of creative industries has been defined by international organizations such as UNESCO and the British Council, each offering perspectives that highlight both cultural and economic dimensions. UNESCO emphasizes that creative industries are sectors focused on the production and distribution of cultural, artistic, and innovative content, serving as vehicles of cultural identity and diversity while contributing to inclusive development [UNESCO \(2006\)](#), [UNESCO \(2025\)](#). In contrast, the British Council frames creative industries as originating in individual creativity, skill, and intellectual property, with a strong emphasis on their role in driving sustainable growth, education, and international collaboration [British Council \(2010\)](#), [British Council \(2025\)](#). Taken together, these frameworks establish creative industries as both cultural and economic assets, capable of shaping national identity while fostering global exchange.

A useful lens for analyzing creative industries is the notion of performing identity, which captures how nations narrate themselves through cultural production. Creative industries perform identity in three interrelated ways: heritage, by projecting traditions and cultural practices that anchor historical continuity; innovation, by reimagining culture through technology, design, and new media; and modernity, by positioning nations as cosmopolitan and forward-looking. This triadic lens highlights how creative industries allow states to articulate who they are and who they aspire to be, both domestically and internationally.

This performance of identity directly connects creative industries to nation branding and cultural diplomacy. Nation branding involves shaping external perceptions of a country through symbolic capital, and creative industries serve as powerful vehicles for this process. Cinema, fashion, music, and design become cultural exports that project national narratives and values, thereby enhancing soft power. For instance, Bollywood has become a global cultural brand that not only entertains but also communicates aspects of Indian identity to international audiences. Cultural diplomacy, on the other hand, uses creative industries as instruments of dialogue and mutual understanding. Initiatives such as the British Council's arts and education programs exemplify how creative industries can foster partnerships, build trust, and

strengthen international relations. In this way, creative industries operate at the intersection of culture, economics, and politics, serving as strategic tools for states seeking to expand their influence on the global stage.

The relationship between state, industry, and global audience can be conceptualized as a triangular model of interaction. The state provides policy frameworks, funding, and strategic direction, ensuring that creative industries align with national soft power goals. The industry itself produces cultural goods and narratives, drawing upon heritage, innovation, and modernity to craft compelling representations of identity. The global audience, in turn, receives and interprets these outputs, shaping perceptions of the nation and engaging in cultural exchange. Importantly, this interaction is circular: audience feedback influences industry practices, which in turn inform state strategies. This model highlights the reciprocal nature of cultural diplomacy and nation branding, where creative industries act as mediators between domestic identity and international recognition.

In sum, creative industries serve as strategic tools that bridge domestic identity and international diplomacy. Defined by UNESCO and the British Council as both cultural and economic assets, they perform identity through heritage, innovation, and modernity. Their integration into nation branding and diplomacy allows states to project soft power, engage global audiences, and foster mutual understanding. The triangular model of state, industry, and audience interaction provides a conceptual lens for analyzing this process, emphasizing its reciprocal and dynamic nature. By situating creative industries at the heart of cultural diplomacy, this framework underscores their significance as instruments of influence in the contemporary global order.

## 4. CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN INDIA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

### 4.1. AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA AND GLOBAL NARRATIVES

India's creative industries, particularly in the audio-visual sector, have become central to its cultural diplomacy, shaping global narratives and enhancing soft power. Bollywood films function as cultural exports that project Indian identity across borders. With their vibrant storytelling, music, and dance traditions, Bollywood productions have captivated audiences worldwide, creating a cultural brand that is instantly recognizable. Beyond entertainment, these films often carry themes of family, tradition, modernity, and social change, which resonate with diverse audiences and contribute to India's image as a dynamic and culturally rich nation [Dutta \(2025\)](#), [Šerić \(2025\)](#), [The Indian Writer Team \(2025\)](#).

The rise of OTT platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime has further expanded the reach of Indian content. These platforms showcase Indian films, series, and documentaries to international audiences, democratizing access and diversifying representation. By streaming Indian narratives globally, OTT platforms amplify India's cultural presence and allow for nuanced portrayals that go beyond stereotypical depictions. This digital dissemination strengthens cultural diplomacy by engaging younger, tech-savvy audiences and positioning India as a participant in global media flows [Malviya and Rana \(2025\)](#), [Parikh \(2025\)](#).

India's creative industries also leverage documentaries and short films presented at international festivals. These formats often highlight social issues, heritage, and innovation, offering intimate and thought-provoking perspectives on Indian society. Participation in prestigious festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, or Sundance elevates the visibility of Indian filmmakers and situates India within global conversations on culture, politics, and human rights. Documentaries such as *Period. End of Sentence.* (2018), which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Film, exemplify how Indian narratives can achieve global recognition and foster dialogue [Shunyanant \(2025\)](#).

Another significant dimension of India's audio-visual diplomacy is co-productions with foreign studios. Collaborative projects enable the blending of Indian narratives with global cinematic techniques, creating hybrid cultural products that appeal to international audiences. Co-productions also facilitate knowledge exchange, technological advancement, and cross-cultural partnerships, strengthening India's creative economy while enhancing its global visibility. Recent incentive schemes by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting encourage such collaborations, offering financial support and policy frameworks to attract foreign studios [Ministry of Information and Broadcasting \(2024\)](#), [ANM Global \(2025\)](#).

Taken together, Bollywood films, OTT platforms, documentaries, and co-productions illustrate how India's audio-visual media operates as a strategic pillar of cultural diplomacy. By exporting narratives, engaging global audiences, and

fostering collaborations, India's creative industries contribute to the construction of global imaginaries in which the nation is seen as culturally vibrant, innovative, and globally connected.

## 4.2. FASHION, TEXTILES, AND DESIGN INNOVATION

India's fashion and textile traditions have long been central to its cultural diplomacy, serving as both heritage symbols and contemporary expressions of creativity. Traditional textiles such as Banarasi silk and Khadi cotton embody centuries of craftsmanship and cultural symbolism. Banarasi weaving, rooted in Varanasi, is renowned for its intricate zari work and has historically clothed royalty and brides, making it a global luxury textile that represents India's artistic heritage [Shobitam \(2026\)](#). Khadi, popularized by Mahatma Gandhi, carries political and cultural resonance as a symbol of self-reliance and national identity. When showcased internationally, these textiles act as heritage diplomacy tools, reinforcing India's image as a nation deeply rooted in tradition yet adaptable to modern contexts [Indiehaat \(2026\)](#).

Contemporary platforms such as Lakmé Fashion Week and India Fashion Week have evolved into stages of cultural diplomacy, projecting India's modernity and innovation. Lakmé Fashion Week, celebrating 25 years, is recognized as one of the premier fashion platforms globally, showcasing India's creative talent and positioning the country within international fashion circuits [Elle India \(2025\)](#). Scholars and industry experts increasingly describe fashion weeks as "new embassies," where garments become silent ambassadors of cultural identity, national pride, and political nuance [JD Institute of Fashion Technology \(2025\)](#). These events allow India to project cosmopolitanism while maintaining links to heritage, thereby balancing tradition with innovation in its global image.

India's design innovation also extends beyond fashion into interior and industrial design, showcased at international exhibitions such as INDEXPLUS and IHGF Delhi Fair. These platforms connect Indian designers and artisans with global buyers, highlighting India's strengths in furniture, décor, textiles, and industrial design. Exhibitions abroad serve as economic and cultural bridges, positioning Indian design as both commercially competitive and culturally distinctive. They reinforce India's reputation as a hub of creativity and craftsmanship, while also fostering cross-cultural collaborations [INDEXPLUS \(2025\)](#), [IHGF Delhi Fair \(2026\)](#).

Indian designers themselves act as cultural ambassadors, shaping global luxury fashion and influencing international brands. Designers such as Rahul Mishra, Sabyasachi Mukherjee, and Indian-origin creatives abroad have brought Indian aesthetics to global runways, from Paris Haute Couture Week to collaborations with Dior and Louis Vuitton. Their work integrates traditional motifs, textiles, and techniques into contemporary fashion narratives, ensuring that Indian culture is not merely referenced but structurally embedded in global design. In this way, designers embody the dual role of creative innovators and diplomatic representatives, projecting India's cultural identity through their artistry [Robb Report India \(2026\)](#), [Grazia India \(2025\)](#).

## 4.3. FINE ARTS AND HANDICRAFTS AS HERITAGE DIPLOMACY

India's fine arts and handicrafts have historically served as powerful instruments of cultural diplomacy, projecting the nation's identity through heritage, creativity, and craftsmanship. These artistic traditions embody centuries of cultural memory and continue to function as symbols of resilience and innovation. By showcasing fine arts and handicrafts on global platforms, India positions itself as a nation that values tradition while engaging dynamically with contemporary cultural currents.

One of the most significant avenues for this diplomacy is India's participation in international art biennales, such as the Venice Biennale and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. The Venice Biennale, one of the world's most prestigious art exhibitions, has provided Indian artists with opportunities to present contemporary works that engage with global discourses while rooted in local traditions. Similarly, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, held in Kerala, has become a major South Asian platform for contemporary art, attracting international audiences and fostering cross-cultural dialogue. These biennales highlight India's ability to merge heritage with modernity, situating its fine arts within global conversations on identity, politics, and aesthetics.

Domestically, handicraft fairs and exhibitions such as the Surajkund Mela and Dilli Haat serve as vibrant showcases of India's artisanal traditions. Surajkund Mela, organized annually in Haryana, brings together craftspeople from across India and abroad, celebrating diversity in textiles, pottery, woodwork, and folk art. Dilli Haat, a permanent crafts bazaar in New Delhi, provides artisans with direct access to urban and international consumers, creating a space where heritage

is performed and consumed. These fairs not only sustain livelihoods but also act as cultural diplomacy sites, where crafts are presented as living embodiments of India's identity.

The concept of artisan diplomacy underscores the symbolic role of crafts as carriers of national identity. Handwoven textiles, pottery, jewelry, and folk art are not merely commodities but cultural texts that narrate stories of tradition, community, and innovation. When artisans participate in international exhibitions or collaborate with foreign institutions, they embody India's cultural heritage in tangible form. Crafts thus become diplomatic tools, fostering mutual understanding and respect across borders.

India's creative industries engage in global collaborations with museums and galleries, strengthening cultural diplomacy through institutional partnerships. Exhibitions of Indian art and handicrafts in institutions such as the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Victoria and Albert Museum have introduced global audiences to India's rich artistic traditions. Collaborative projects, including traveling exhibitions and joint curatorial initiatives, reinforce India's image as a nation of cultural depth and artistic excellence. These partnerships highlight the role of fine arts and handicrafts in building bridges between nations, positioning India as a global cultural interlocutor.

#### **4.4. MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS IN TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGE**

India's music and performing arts have long been central to its cultural diplomacy, serving as vehicles of identity, dialogue, and transnational exchange. Rooted in centuries of tradition yet constantly evolving, these art forms project India's cultural richness while engaging with global audiences in innovative ways.

Classical traditions such as Hindustani and Carnatic music have been showcased through global tours by renowned maestros, including Ravi Shankar, Zakir Hussain, L. Subramaniam, and M.S. Subbulakshmi. These performances introduce international audiences to India's intricate ragas, talas, and improvisational techniques, positioning classical music as both heritage and living tradition. Tours across Europe, North America, and Asia have elevated Indian classical music to a global stage, reinforcing India's cultural depth and spiritual resonance [Subramaniam Foundation \(2025\)](#).

Similarly, dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and Odissi function as cultural showcases, embodying narratives of mythology, devotion, and aesthetics. International performances by artists such as Mallika Sarabhai, Sonal Mansingh, and Alarmel Valli have brought these traditions to prestigious venues worldwide. Dance festivals and tours highlight India's ability to communicate identity through movement, costume, and rhythm, making classical dance a powerful instrument of cultural diplomacy [Sangeet Natak Akademi \(2025\)](#).

India's creative industries also embrace fusion and contemporary music collaborations, blending traditional elements with global genres such as jazz, rock, and electronic music. Collaborations between Indian artists and international musicians—such as Ravi Shankar with George Harrison, or A.R. Rahman's global projects—demonstrate how Indian music adapts to transnational contexts while retaining its cultural essence. These hybrid forms appeal to diverse audiences and foster intercultural dialogue, positioning India as both a preserver of tradition and an innovator in global music flows [Rahman Foundation \(2025\)](#).

International festivals and diaspora performances play a crucial role in sustaining India's cultural presence abroad. Events such as the International Festival of India, Edinburgh Festival, and diaspora-led initiatives in the United States, Canada, and the UK showcase Indian music and dance to multicultural audiences. Diaspora communities act as cultural custodians, organizing performances that celebrate heritage while engaging with host societies. These festivals reinforce India's soft power by creating spaces of cultural exchange and mutual appreciation (Indian Council for Cultural Relations [Indian Council for Cultural Relations \(ICCR\) \(2025\)](#)).

Together, classical traditions, dance forms, fusion collaborations, and diaspora performances illustrate how India's music and performing arts operate as dynamic instruments of transnational exchange. They embody heritage, innovation, and cosmopolitanism, positioning India as a nation that communicates identity through sound, rhythm, and performance.

## 5. CASE STUDIES: STATE INITIATIVES AND GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS

India's cultural diplomacy is advanced through a combination of state-led initiatives and global collaborations, integrating institutional programs, tourism branding, international expos, bilateral agreements, and diaspora engagement. These efforts collectively enhance India's soft power and global visibility.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), established in 1950, remains the cornerstone of India's cultural diplomacy. It operates 37 cultural centers worldwide, including the Nehru Centre in London and the Tagore Centre in Berlin, which host exhibitions, language classes, yoga workshops, and performing arts programs. ICCR also deploys teachers of Indian dance, music, and yoga abroad, thereby institutionalizing India's cultural presence [Indian Council for Cultural Relations \(ICCR\) \(2025\)](#).

The "Incredible India" tourism campaign, launched in 2002, has become a flagship branding initiative. With a budget allocation of ₹89 crore in FY 2021–22, the campaign has undergone global revamps to highlight India's diverse heritage and immersive travel experiences. According to the India Tourism Data Compendium 2025, international tourist arrivals reached 10.9 million in 2024, generating billions in foreign exchange earnings [Ministry of Tourism \(2025\)](#). This campaign positions India as a premier cultural and experiential destination.

India's participation in World Expos further demonstrates its commitment to cultural diplomacy. At Expo 2025 Osaka, the India Pavilion ("Bharat Mandap") was ranked among the top five most admired pavilions, alongside the U.S., Italy, France, and Japan. The government allocated ₹400 crore in 2024 for India's participation, showcasing heritage, innovation, and sustainability [Press Information Bureau \(2025\)](#). Similarly, Expo 2020 Dubai attracted millions of visitors to India's pavilion, reinforcing its global cultural and economic presence.

Bilateral cultural diplomacy is institutionalized through Cultural Exchange Programmes (CEPs). India has signed CEPs with 78 countries, covering areas such as music, dance, theatre, museums, literature, and heritage conservation. These agreements facilitate reciprocal festivals, artist exchanges, and collaborative projects, strengthening people-to-people ties [Press Information Bureau \(2024\)](#).

India's diaspora of over 32 million people plays a vital role in cultural diplomacy. Diaspora-led events such as Diwali at Times Square in New York or Ganesh Chaturthi in Sydney project Indian traditions globally. Scholars note that diaspora networks contribute to nation branding and cultural dissemination, acting as informal ambassadors of India's heritage [Singh \(2025\)](#), [The Hindu \(2025\)](#).

Together, these initiatives illustrate how India integrates state institutions, tourism branding, international expos, bilateral agreements, and diaspora engagement into a cohesive cultural diplomacy strategy.

## 6. COMPARATIVE TABLE: INDIA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY INITIATIVES

Initiative	Key Features	Data/Scale	Impact on Diplomacy
ICCR Programs & Cultural Centers	37 centers abroad; yoga, arts, language	37 centers worldwide	Institutionalized cultural presence
Incredible India Campaign	Tourism branding since 2002	₹89 crore budget; 10.9M arrivals 2024	Nation branding & tourism diplomacy
World Expos Participation	India Pavilion showcases heritage & innovation	₹400 crore allocation (Expo 2025)	Global visibility & trade-cultural synergy
Bilateral CEP Agreements	Signed with 78 countries	78 agreements	Reciprocal cultural exchange & partnerships
Diaspora Diplomacy	Festivals abroad (Diwali, Ganesh Chaturthi)	32M diaspora worldwide	Informal ambassadors & cultural dissemination

**Source:** Compiled from [Indian Council for Cultural Relations \(ICCR\) \(2025\)](#), [Ministry of Tourism \(2025\)](#), [Press Information Bureau \(2024\)](#), [Press Information Bureau \(2025\)](#), [Singh \(2025\)](#), and [The Hindu \(2025\)](#).

## 7. DISCUSSION: NEGOTIATING HERITAGE, MODERNITY, AND IDENTITY

India's cultural diplomacy is characterized by the ongoing negotiation between heritage and modernity, where traditional practices are preserved while simultaneously adapted to contemporary contexts. Classical arts such as

Bharatanatyam, Hindustani music, and Khadi textiles are promoted alongside Bollywood films, OTT platforms, and fashion weeks. This dual emphasis allows India to project itself as both a civilizational state with deep cultural roots and a modern nation aligned with global trends. Scholars argue that this negotiation is central to India's soft power, as it enables the country to appeal to diverse audiences while maintaining authenticity [Turkey \(2022\)](#).

A key challenge in this negotiation is the commercialization of culture, which risks reducing heritage to commodified spectacles. Campaigns such as *Incredible India* have successfully boosted tourism and visibility, but they also raise concerns about authenticity when traditions are packaged for global consumption. The tension between cultural resilience and economic imperatives is evident in the way crafts, festivals, and performances are adapted for international audiences, sometimes diluting their original meanings [Tirkey \(2022\)](#).

Another dimension is the political instrumentalization of culture, where heritage is mobilized to serve national narratives. Events such as the Mahakumbh Mela are framed as symbols of India's civilizational heritage and soft power, projecting religious and cultural identity internationally [Eurasia Review \(2025\)](#). Analysts note that under the Modi government, cultural diplomacy has increasingly been used to soften foreign policy's hard edges and reinforce nationalist narratives, raising questions about inclusivity and pluralism [Devi \(2024\)](#).

Despite these challenges, India's cultural diplomacy has been effective in enhancing global visibility. International tourist arrivals reached 10.9 million in 2024, reflecting the success of campaigns like *Incredible India* [Ministry of Tourism \(2025\)](#). Bollywood, yoga, and diaspora-led initiatives have further amplified India's cultural presence. However, scholars caution that India's outreach remains fragmented compared to East Asian nations, which deploy culture as a systematic strategy [Malviya and Rana \(2025\)](#), [Vivek \(2025\)](#).

Comparative insights reveal that South Korea, Japan, and China have leveraged cultural diplomacy more aggressively. South Korea's Hallyu (K-wave), driven by K-pop and dramas, has reshaped global perceptions and generated economic benefits [Boston University \(2025\)](#). Japan emphasizes anime, cuisine, and traditional arts, while China invests heavily in Confucius Institutes and global cultural infrastructure. India's approach, by contrast, emphasizes heritage and diaspora networks but lacks the same level of institutionalized global branding [Springer \(2025\)](#), [Goda and Čiefová \(2019\)](#).

## 8. COMPARATIVE TABLE: NEGOTIATING HERITAGE, MODERNITY, AND IDENTITY

Dimension	India	South Korea (Hallyu)	Japan	China
Heritage Emphasis	Strong (classical arts, yoga, festivals)	Moderate (traditional + pop)	Balanced (tea, anime, cuisine)	Strong (Confucian heritage)
Modernity/Innovation	Bollywood, OTT, fashion, design	K-pop, dramas, gaming	Anime, tech-driven design	Film, Confucius Institutes
Commercialization Challenges	High (tourism packaging, authenticity)	Managed via pop culture	Balanced commodification	State-driven branding
Political Instrumentalization	Increasing (civilizational diplomacy)	Moderate (state support)	Limited, cultural branding	Strong (state-led narratives)
Global Visibility Effectiveness	Moderate-High (diaspora, heritage exports)	Very High (global pop culture)	High (anime, cuisine diplomacy)	High (Confucius Institutes)

**Source:** Compiled from [Turkey \(2022\)](#), [Eurasia Review \(2025\)](#), [Devi \(2024\)](#), [Malviya and Rana \(2025\)](#), [Vivek \(2025\)](#), [Boston University \(2025\)](#), [Springer \(2025\)](#), [Goda and Čiefová \(2019\)](#).

## 9. CONCLUSION: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AS INSTRUMENTS OF FOREIGN POLICY

India's creative industries have emerged as vital instruments of foreign policy, functioning as channels through which the nation negotiates identity, projects soft power, and engages with global audiences. Across domains such as audio-visual media, fashion, textiles, fine arts, handicrafts, music, and performing arts, India has demonstrated the ability to balance heritage with innovation. These industries perform identity by showcasing tradition while embracing modernity, thereby positioning India as both a civilizational state with deep cultural roots and a modern nation aligned with global currents. Case studies of ICCR programs, *Incredible India* campaigns, World Expos, bilateral cultural exchange

agreements, and diaspora-led initiatives illustrate how creative industries enhance India's global visibility and strengthen its diplomatic outreach.

The implications for India's foreign policy are significant. By integrating creative industries into its diplomatic toolkit, India expands its influence beyond conventional political and economic channels. Cultural diplomacy builds trust, fosters people-to-people connections, and enhances India's reputation as a diverse and dynamic society. ICCR centers abroad, bilateral cultural exchange programs, and diaspora networks institutionalize and amplify this outreach, ensuring that India's cultural presence is sustained across continents. However, India's approach remains less systematic compared to nations such as South Korea, Japan, and China, which have aggressively leveraged pop culture, anime, and Confucius Institutes as global branding strategies. For India, embedding creative industries more coherently into foreign policy could yield greater influence in multilateral forums and regional partnerships.

Looking ahead, India's cultural diplomacy must embrace new directions to remain relevant in the 21st century. **Digital diplomacy** is crucial, as social media, OTT platforms, and virtual exhibitions democratize access and allow India to project diverse narratives globally. **Sustainability** should guide future initiatives, with eco-friendly crafts, sustainable fashion, and green tourism becoming part of India's cultural identity. Equally important is **inclusivity**, ensuring that marginalized voices, regional traditions, and diverse communities are represented in India's global cultural narrative. By aligning creative industries with digital innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity, India can strengthen its foreign policy and ensure that cultural diplomacy continues to serve as a powerful instrument of influence in the evolving global order.

In sum, creative industries are not peripheral but central to India's foreign policy. They embody the fusion of heritage and modernity, provide platforms for dialogue and exchange, and enhance India's visibility on the world stage. With strategic investment in digital tools, sustainable practices, and inclusive representation, India's cultural diplomacy can evolve into a more coherent and impactful force, ensuring that the nation's identity resonates globally while contributing to international cooperation and understanding.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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