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India's Public Diplomacy Instruments

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the instruments used in India's public diplomacy. The paper begins with a brief backgrounder on the concept of public diplomacy. It then goes on to review existing literature on India's public diplomacy. The paper then examines the gamut of instruments used in India's public diplomacy. Using Cull's classification of public diplomacy instruments and adapting it to Indian conditions, this study makes a systematic examination of the instruments used in India's public diplomacy. The paper concludes with suggestions to improve the effectiveness of India's public diplomacy by designing an overarching strategy whereby the optimum mix of these instruments can be prescribed and ensured that these instruments do not work at cross purpose.

1. Introduction

The term 'public diplomacy' was first used by U.S. diplomat and scholar Edmund Guillion in the year 1965. Guillion defined it as "dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy, the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries" (quoted in Prabhu and Mohapatra 2014). Navdeep Suri, an Indian diplomat who was in-charge of the Public Diplomacy Division of India's Ministry of External Affairs, defines public diplomacy as, "the framework of activities by which a government seeks to influence public attitudes in a manner that they become supportive of foreign policy and national interests" (Suri 2011). Joseph S. Nye, one of the leading scholars of Public Diplomacy and soft power, defines public diplomacy as an instrument that governments use to mobilize the resources "that produce soft power" to communicate with and attract the people of other countries (Nye 2008).

One thing is clear from the above definitions; Public Diplomacy is aimed at influencing the peoples of foreign countries with a view to secure the foreign policy objectives of the state practicing public diplomacy.

2. Literature Review

Since the beginning of this century, India has been giving increased emphasis on public diplomacy. India has invested a huge amount of resources in public diplomacy. The primary objective of this is to leverage India's soft power as well as increase it. Both traditional approaches and new approaches of public diplomacy are being used to secure this objective (Hall 2012).

The emphasis on using India's soft power resources further increased after the Narendra Modi led government was inaugurated in 2014. Prime Minister Modi is known for his "passionate use of India's soft power assets through both an effective media management strategy and an intelligent use of social media." (Heng 2016)

3. Research Questions

This research paper will seek the answer to the following research questions:

Q1. What are the major instruments of India's public diplomacy?

Q2. Whether each of the instruments is given equal importance in India's public diplomacy?

4. Research Methods

This study is descriptive, analytical and exploratory. It is a qualitative study. The study uses primary resources such as the Annual Reports of the Ministry of External Affairs, Annual Reports of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, website of the Ministry of External Affairs, websites of Indian Missions abroad, and Youtube channel and Facebook Page of India's Ministry of External Affairs. It also uses secondary resources such as Books, journal articles etc. It also uses records of Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs.

5. Instruments of India's Public Diplomacy

For the convenience of analysis, the instruments of India's public diplomacy will be conceptually classified here using Cull's classification of public diplomacy activities.

Cull classifies public diplomacy activities into five "elements": listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting. (Cull 2008)

Table-1

Cull's Classification of Public Diplomacy instruments

Instrument	Typical activities
Listening	Targeted polling
Advocacy	Embassy Press relations
Cultural Diplomacy	State funded international art tour
Exchange Diplomacy	Two-way academic exchange
International Broadcasting	Radio broadcasting

Source: Nicholas J. Cull. Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories. The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. 2008; 616(1): 31-54.

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However in case of India's public diplomacy, these five categories are not exhaustive. In other words, there are some activities which do not fall in any of these five categories of instruments. To accommodate them, one more category needs to be added namely, 'domestic outreach'. Therefore India's public diplomacy instruments will be analysed here under six categories: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, international broadcasting, and domestic outreach.

However, as a matter of caution, it must be added that these six categories are not watertight compartments and many of the public diplomacy activities can be placed in more than one categories. The classification is only for the convenience of analysis.

Incorporating the additional category of "domestic outreach", the above table can be adapted as the following:

Table-2
Classification of India's Public Diplomacy Instruments

Instrument	Typical activities
Listening	Opinion surveys, interaction with audience after lectures/speeches by Government officials in foreign countries, lectures/presentations by foreign visitors/delegations
Advocacy	Press release by Indian missions abroad, Speech by diplomats and other government of India officials abroad, holding seminars in foreign countries by or with support of departments/agencies of government of India
Cultural Diplomacy	Sending of cultural troupes abroad, sending of works of art abroad, holding of festivals of India in foreign countries, propagating India's language and cultural heritage (such as promotion of Sanskrit and Hindi, promotion of Yoga, etc) in foreign countries, propagating the works and thoughts of eminent Indians (such as Mahatma Gandhi, Gurudev Ravindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekanand) in foreign countries.
Exchange Diplomacy	Exchange of students, youth exchange, etc with other countries
International Broadcasting	Although India does not have radio broadcasters like the BBC or Voice of America, there are numerous public diplomacy activities done by India that can be placed under this category, for example: materials posted in the website, YouTube channel and social media pages of the MEA and Indian missions. Also, sometimes films/documentaries commissioned by the MEA are arranged to be telecasted by different TV channels in foreign countries.
Domestic Outreach	One peculiarity of India's public diplomacy is that it places a great emphasis on domestic outreach with a view to inform and convince the domestic population about the foreign policy priorities of the government. Towards this end, seminars, conferences and interaction programmes are held in various universities and think tanks across India where officials from MEA explain to the audiences the foreign policy of the government of India.

Source: This table is adapted and developed by the author from Nicholas J. Cull. Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories. The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. 2008; 616(1): 31-54 after making suitable changes to fit it to the unique features of India's public diplomacy.

These six instruments are examined in detail below:

5.1 Listening

Cull defines Listening as "actor's attempt to manage the international environment by collecting and collating data about publics and their opinions overseas and using that data to redirect its policy or its wider public diplomacy approach accordingly." (Cull 2008)

Most prominent form of 'listening' is conducting or commissioning opinion surveys in foreign countries. However, after going through relevant reports of the MEA, no hint has been found of any such survey conducted or commissioned by the MEA or its agencies.

Interaction with audience after lectures/speeches by Government officials in foreign countries, lectures/presentations by foreign visitors/delegations, monitoring of viewers reactions (likes, comments, etc) on materials posted in social media pages of the MEA and Indian Missions, monitoring foreign media for India related news and analyses can also be considered part of listening.

Listening serves two important purposes.

Firstly, it will give the target audiences of India's public diplomacy a feeling that their voice is being heard by India and thus will increase their goodwill towards India.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, It will not only give a clue to the areas where the public diplomacy should focus but also provide a feedback as to whether, to what extent and which of the activities of India's public diplomacy are being successful in promoting India's positive image and interests among foreign citizens. Such feedbacks can provide valuable guidance for planning future public diplomacy activities. However, to perform this function, the listening activities have to be done more systematically. For example merely having an interactive session at the conclusion of a speech by an Indian diplomat or other Indian government official in foreign countries will not serve this purpose unless the audience's reactions are recorded, transcribed, collated (from all or at least most of such interactions in a year) and analysed and such analysis is used in the planning for future public diplomacy programmes. Similarly, the viewers' reaction on materials posted in social media posts of MEA and Indian Missions should be collated and analysed comprehensively to plan the future social media strategy, in terms of both what kinds of materials should be posted more and which of the social media platforms should be given more emphasis. However, after a thorough examination of relevant reports of MEA, no hint can be found that such systematic monitoring and analysis of opinions of the target

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audience is done. It seems that this area is one of the blind spots of India's public diplomacy.

Finally, it can be said that though 'listening' as an activity is present in a rudimentary form in certain activities of India's public diplomacy, there is no systematic 'listening' activity which can be used in designing effective public diplomacy strategies in the future.

5.2 Advocacy

Cull defines Advocacy as "actor's attempt to manage the international environment by undertaking an international communication activity to actively promote a particular policy, idea, or that actor's general interests in the minds of a foreign public. Today this includes embassy press relations and informational work." (Cull 2008)

Advocacy work represents a major element of India's public diplomacy. In fact not only the MEA but even other ministries of government of India and even state governments of India regularly undertake activities that can be placed under the category of advocacy. One of the remarkable advocacy activities till date is the "Incredible India" campaign which was run by the Ministry of Tourism of India. (Suri 2011)

The following table lists some of the public diplomacy activities of India which can be placed under the category of 'advocacy':

Table-3
Activities of India's public diplomacy which can be placed under the category of advocacy

Activity	Examples	Organizing/sponsoring Actor/institution
Tourism Promotion	'Incredible India' campaign	Ministry of Tourism of Government of India
Conference/seminar	Conference on "India-Iran Relations" held in Iran on May 23-25, 2016	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
Speeches	Remarks by India's Foreign Secretary "A 21st Century India-United States partnership for peace, prosperity and progress" at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C. on February 21, 2013	Ministry of External Affairs

Source: the primary data used in this table is collated from Annual Reports 2016-2017 of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and the website of Indian Embassy, Washington DC.

5.3 Cultural Diplomacy

Cull defines cultural diplomacy as "actor's attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad." (Cull 2008)

Cultural diplomacy is one of the major elements of India's public diplomacy.

Asserting the importance of cultural diplomacy, the Standing Committee on External Affairs of Parliament of India asserts, "cultural diplomacy is a powerful tool for furthering (India's) interests in (the) commercial, political and strategic fields." (SCEA 2004)

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is the leading institution for India's cultural diplomacy. ICCR undertakes a wide range of activities "to promote cultural relations and better understanding of India and its culture in countries abroad" (MEA 2017). These activities include promotion of Indian dance, Indian music, yoga, Sanskrit language, Hindi language, etc. (MEA 2017). For promoting India's culture abroad, the ICCR maintains 36 'Cultural Centres' in foreign countries (MEA 2017).

The following table lists the cultural diplomacy activities conducted by the ICCR during the period 2016-2017:

Table-4
Activities of India's public diplomacy that can be placed under the category of 'cultural diplomacy'

Activity	Examples	Organizing/Sponsoring institution
Yoga promotion	Sending of 35 Yoga teachers to lead International Day for Yoga 2016 celebrations in foreign countries. Empanelment of talented teachers with abilities and expertise in teaching Yoga at Indian Culture Centres and Indian Missions/ Posts abroad.	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
Sanskrit Promotion	Empanelment of multi-talented teachers with abilities and expertise in teaching Sanskrit and Vedas at Indian Culture Centres and Indian Missions/Posts abroad.	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
Holding of Indian cultural festival abroad	"Namaste France 2", held in France from September to November 2016	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
Sending cultural delegations abroad	ICCR sponsored 124 Indian cultural groups to 50 countries in the year 2016-2017	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
Establishing and maintaining "Indian	As of 2017, ICCR maintains 70 chairs of "Indian	Indian Council for Cultural Relations

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studies" chair in foreign universities	studies" in foreign universities	
Promotion of Hindi language	As of 2017, ICCR maintains 22 "Hindi" chairs in foreign universities	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
Art/Cultural Exhibitions abroad	Painting/Calligraphy Exhibition (curated by Kamna Prasad) in Iran in may 2016	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
Sending of statues/busts of great personalities of India	Gifting of Aryabhatta's bust to UNESCO in 2017	Indian Council for Cultural Relations

Source: The primary data used in this table is collated from Annual Report 2016-2017 of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

5.4 Exchange Diplomacy

Cull defines exchange diplomacy as "actor's attempt to manage the international environment by sending its citizens overseas and reciprocally accepting citizens from overseas for a period of study and/or acculturation." (Cull 2008)

Exchange diplomacy is a major element of India's public diplomacy. The two major institutions which spearhead India's exchange diplomacy are the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the External Publicity & Public Diplomacy (XPD) division of MEA.

Major exchange diplomacy activities undertaken during the year 2016-2017 are enumerated in the table below:

Table-5
Activities of India's public diplomacy which can be placed under the category of 'exchange diplomacy'

Activity	Examples	Organizing/sponsoring institution
Exchange visits by journalists	Visits of Journalists from Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Croatia and BRICS countries in 2016	External Publicity & Public Diplomacy (XPD) Division of MEA
Sponsoring foreign Students	ICCR offered 3452 scholarship slots to foreign students for studying in India under its various scholarship schemes in 2016-2017	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
Hosting of foreign cultural delegation	Artists from Zhejiang Kaiming Art Gallery of Eastern China Region were received for artists' residency programme in 2017	Indian Council for Cultural Relations

Source: The primary data used in this table is collated from Annual Report 2016-2017 of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

5.5 International broadcasting

Cull defines international broadcasting as "actor's attempt to manage the international environment by using the technologies of radio, television, and the Internet to engage with foreign publics." (Cull 2008)

Although India does not have radio broadcasters like the BBC or Voice of America, there are numerous public diplomacy activities done by agencies of government of India that can be placed under this category, for example: materials posted in the website, YouTube channel and social media pages of the MEA and Indian missions. Also sometimes films/documentaries commissioned by the MEA are arranged to be telecasted by different TV channels in foreign countries.

The following table enumerates public diplomacy activities organized/sponsored by departments/agencies of government of India which can be placed under the category of international broadcasting:

Table-6
Activities of India's public diplomacy which can be placed under the category of 'international broadcasting'

Activity	Channel	Broadcasting/Sponsoring Institution
Posting of information related to the diplomatic activities of Government of India	MEA Website	MEA
Posting of information related to India	Websites of Indian Missions in various countries	Indian Missions in various countries
Posting of information related to the diplomatic activities of Government of India	Facebook and Twitter Pages of MEA	MEA
Posting of information related to India	Facebook and Twitter Pages of Indian Missions in various countries	Indian Missions in various countries
Posting of videos related to India	YouTube Channel of MEA	MEA
Telecasting of Documentaries (commissioned by the MEA and aimed at positive projection of India's image) in foreign TV Channels	Various foreign TV channels	Indian Missions in various countries

Source: The primary data used in this table is collated from Annual Report 2016-2017 of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

5.6 Domestic Outreach

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One unique feature of India's public diplomacy is that it includes a large number of activities which can be termed as "domestic outreach". The purpose of the domestic outreach activities of India's public diplomacy is to publicise the foreign policy of India, in particular its important diplomatic initiatives, among Indian citizens. The idea is that an informed and convinced citizenry is of critical importance for the success of government's foreign policy. Especially since a thrust area of India's foreign policy is to increase trade, investment and tourism relations with neighbouring countries, the cooperation and indeed participation of people of neighbouring states is a sine qua non for this. For example the enthusiastic cooperation and participation of people of North East India is critical for the success of India's 'Look East' policy. Similarly to improve India's relations with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the cooperation of people of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal is necessary.

The main institution of government of India for such domestic outreach is the External Publicity & Public Diplomacy (XPD) division of MEA. The XPD division organizes "Distinguished Lecture Series", under which foreign policy experts visit universities across India to give lecture on various facets of India's foreign policy. Till 2017, "Distinguished Lecture Series" have been organized in 46 Central Universities besides other leading institutions such as IITs/IIMs (MEA 2017).

With a view to keep the people of India informed about the diplomacy of Government of India, the XPD division also brings out booklets/e-books etc, documenting important events and agreements signed during foreign visits of Indian leaders (MEA 2017).

6. Conclusion

From the above examination of instruments used in India's public diplomacy, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, some of the instruments like domestic outreach and cultural diplomacy get most of the attention and resources of India's public diplomacy. Total resources being limited, this implies that other instruments face shortage of resources.

Secondly, 'listening', which is critical for an accurate assessment and effective planning of public diplomacy activities, is neglected. As a result, the designing and planning of public diplomacy activities are done in an ad-hoc way without a feedback mechanism for proper assessment of the effectiveness of various instruments.

Thirdly, India lacks a dedicated radio broadcaster to reach out to foreign audiences. Interestingly, most other major powers, notably, US, UK, Russia and China, have their dedicated radio broadcasters which give an edge to their public diplomacy. India stands out as perhaps the only major power in the world without a dedicated radio broadcaster to reach out to foreign public. This is a glaring lacuna in India's public diplomacy.

Fourthly and most importantly, the various instruments of India's public diplomacy are used separately and without an overarching strategy. An overarching public diplomacy strategy by laying down the general direction as well as optimal mix of these six instruments may have ensured that these instruments work in tandem towards a common goal. Without such an overarching strategy, there is a danger that different instruments work with different objectives and sometimes at cross-purpose thus cancelling each other's achievements.

The most obvious ways to make India's public diplomacy more effective will be:

Firstly, an overarching public diplomacy strategy should be designed in the form of an official document which lays down the goals of India's public diplomacy as well as the optimal mix of instruments of public diplomacy. Such documents exist in case of most other prominent countries, notably US, UK, South Korea, etc. Such a document will ensure that different instruments of India's public diplomacy work in tandem towards a common goal and do not work at cross-purpose. This will also mitigate the present situation where some instruments get too much resources and some other are neglected.

Secondly, a robust system of rigorous and scientific monitoring of public opinion must be put in place to systematically monitor public opinion in foreign countries (especially in those countries which are important for India) and use the result to better design future public diplomacy strategy.

Thirdly, steps should be taken to establish a dedicated radio broadcaster to reach out to foreign audiences.

India has immense soft power resources to influence foreign citizens. What is needed is a clear and effective public diplomacy strategy that makes optimal use of these resources to serve India's foreign policy goals.

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