

# Enhancing National Image: Lessons from India and South Korea for Global Influence and Bilateral Cooperation

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**Abstract:** *National image is the overall impression and evaluation of a country by people of other countries. It is a concrete opinion formed by the international public's perception of the country's strategic resources and strength. Irrespective of how scholars analyse the image of a nation, it is apparent that national image holds an important role in foreign policy decisions, economy, and national identity. As India and South Korea both prepare themselves to take a more active part in global affairs and enhance their status on the global stage, building a positive national image is becoming more crucial. Positive and negative images can impact a country's international influence, its economic interests and power internationally. Therefore, it becomes imperative that the two countries learn from each other's experiences with national image building and in effect strengthen their bilateral cooperation to new heights.*

**Keywords:** national image, nation branding, national identity, cooperation

## 1. Introduction

There is a growing need for nations to manage and enhance their images to determine how they want to be seen by others. Having a good image is important for good international relations, be it in the economic, political or societal spheres. For a country to project a good image it must be relevant globally, and to be relevant means to participate. Because of the many benefits that having a good national image brings to a nation, governments around the world have developed various ways to enhance their images in the form of national branding. National branding allows countries that have low visibility or that suffer from negative perceptions due to their histories, to enhance or reinvent the way they are recognised by others.

The concept of national image has been extensively discussed in various academic works. Fan (2006) defines national image as the perception formed in one's mind about a foreign country. Highhouse et al. (2009) describe it as a dynamic perception of a specific area of national distinction, influenced by stereotyping, media coverage, and personal experience. The importance of national image is evident in how it affects a country's foreign policy decisions, economic interests, and national identity. Scholars like Dinnie (2008) emphasise that a positive national image is crucial for a country's international influence and power.

### Nation Branding: Concepts and Practices

Nation branding is a strategy used by countries to create a positive image internationally. Anholt (1998) coined the term 'nation-branding' and later referred to it as 'competitive identity.' Nation branding involves using marketing principles to project an image that aligns with a nation's desired perception. Kinsey and Chung (2013) define nation branding as a process by which a nation's image can be created, altered, monitored, evaluated, and proactively managed to enhance its reputation among a target international audience.

'Cool Japan', 'Malaysia Truly Asia', 'Germany-land of ideas', 'Taiwan- the heart of Asia', and 'Britain-you're invited' are among the numerous examples of slogans used to create a nation brand, some having more emphasis on 'place branding' which is also a part of nation branding. Estonia and Costa Rica are two nations that have successfully used branding to enhance their visibility internationally (Papp-Vary, 2018. Arias, 2017) and many such smaller nations with low visibility are taking note. Even countries that have high visibility in the public consciousness like South Africa, Russia, Egypt and Switzerland have made considerable efforts to build a nation brand that is more in tune with their present status as the perceived national image by others is outdated and needs to be reviewed (Dinnie, 2008).

This increasing desire for nations to enhance their image has led to the development of indexes to measure the nation's standing in terms of positive perception. One such index is Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI) using a measurement system developed by Professor Anholt (Ipsos, 2019). The NBI measures the power and quality of each country's 'brand image' across the following dimensions: culture & heritage, investment & immigration, governance, people, exports, tourism. Another widely used measurement for national image is the Futurebrand Country Index which measures the strength of perception of countries around the world by using the World Bank's top 75 countries by GDP and re-ordering them based on how individuals rate dimensions of a country's Purpose and Experience (Futurebrand, 2019). There is also the Brand Finance Nation brands and Global Soft Power Index (Brand Finance, 2022). These indexes are often cited by policymakers, researchers and the media to give a concrete view of how nations are perceived and received by international audiences, demonstrating how national prestige and image is taken seriously by nations around the globe. Therefore, it is imperative to see how this concept of nation branding has been employed by India and South Korea as they prepare themselves to take a more active part in global affairs. This paper highlights the steps taken by the two countries to help

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them gain international recognition, what they could learn from each other and estimate future courses of cooperation.

## 2. Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is to analyse and compare the national branding strategies of India and South Korea. By examining their approaches to building and enhancing their national images, the study aims to identify best practices and areas for improvement. The research also seeks to explore how these two countries can learn from each other's experiences to strengthen their bilateral cooperation and achieve greater international recognition.

### Research Questions

- 1) What are the key components of national image and branding for India and South Korea?
- 2) How have India and South Korea implemented their national branding strategies?
- 3) What are the successes and challenges faced by India and South Korea in their national branding efforts?
- 4) How can India and South Korea learn from each other's experiences to enhance their national images?
- 5) What are the potential areas for future cooperation between India and South Korea in national branding?

### Contextualising nation image

#### Definition and Importance of National Image

National image is a multifaceted concept encompassing various dimensions of a country's perception by the international community. Fan (2006) and Highhouse et al. (2009) highlight that national image is shaped by external perceptions and internal efforts to project a specific identity. This perception plays a crucial role in shaping foreign policy decisions, economic interests, and national identity, making it an essential aspect of international relations.

So, the simplest definition of national image is 'the image formed in one's head about a foreign country'. Any country has a certain image to its international audience, be it strong or weak, current or outdated, clear or vague (Fan 2006, p. 12). A nation's image is a dynamic perception of a specific area of national distinction (Highhouse et al, 2009, p. 1487). A nation's image is defined by the people outside the country; their perceptions are influenced by stereotyping, media coverage as well as personal experience. This means that every country already has some sort of image, whether that image is true or false is not something a nation has control over most of the time as it is up to the subjectivities of the international public's perceptions and judgments. This is where the concept of branding comes in, as a way to project an image that is more in tune with what a nation believes it to be. Using marketing principles of communication, branding makes it possible for nations to create the image they want to influence the perception of the audience, whether that is the nation's citizens or other nations, so national image-making is a part of national branding.

#### Nation Branding Strategies

Anholt (1998) is widely credited as the creator of the term 'nation-branding' although he later deviated from the term using 'competitive identity' instead, and further distanced

himself from the concept. However, the concept has taken on a life of its own, and 'nation-branding' is still the most commonly used term to discuss the way nations make concerted efforts to improve their reputations internationally.

Nation branding is concerned with a country's whole image on the international stage, covering political, economic and cultural dimensions. Kinsey and Chung (2013) re-defined nation branding as "... a process by which a nation's images can be created or altered, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to enhance the country's reputation among a target international audience."

Fan (2006) gave six viewpoints on how nation image can be identified as follows-

- 1) How does Nation A see itself? (*Who are we as a nation?*)
- 2) How does Nation A see Nation B? (*How do we see the outside world?*)
- 3) What does Nation A believe Nation B thinks of it? (*What do we believe our image is in the world?*)
- 4) How is Nation A actually being perceived by Nation B?
- 5) How is Nation A promoting itself to Nation B?
- 6) How does Nation A want to be perceived by Nation B? (Pp. 6 to 8)

There can be a difference in the way nations want to be perceived and how they are actually perceived by others, and nation branding shows how these perceptions can change depending on how a nation markets itself to another nation.

In terms of branding, Fan (2010) gave an outline on the evolution of branding, i.e. the components of national branding and the stages that it goes through, that nation brand-

- a) is treated as a visual symbol
- b) endorses a nation's assets
- c) conceptualise image, reputation and positioning
- d) sustain competitiveness
- e) soft power and public diplomacy,
- f) national identity creation. (P. 99)

### Comparative Analysis of National Branding in India and South Korea

#### National branding in India

India wanted to dismantle negative stereotypes about a backward country accompanied by abject poverty. There was a desire, especially from the business community, to place India as an entrepreneurship haven that is contemporary and modern.

The start of creation of the India brand started in 2002 with the Incredible India Campaign (hereafter IIC) under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture (Kerrigan et. al. 2012. p. 319). IIC sought to produce a unique and unified brand that would effectively "...pervade all forms of communication and stimulate the travel consumer's behaviour and decision-making process to competitively position India in the global marketplace" (Kant 2009, p.7). It was designed to create a distinctive identity for India and establish the country as a high-end destination. Under the 'Incredible India' tagline, a series of images were produced to show various destinations as well as cultural attractions.

In 2006 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, India launched a massive public relations campaign to convey the message that India is on the path to economic competitiveness. (Mehta-Karia 2012, p.8). The launch of brand India this time was a response to the realisation that the perception of India has not improved with the changing economic conditions of the country, and the nation wanted to show itself as a competitive player in the realm of economic activities. Brand India's initiative at Davos was considered a success as it managed to inject India into the consciousness of the attendees and had attracted much media attention as images of India and its achievements were plastered everywhere, from billboards to buses, food and entertainment at the total cost nearly four million dollars (Landler, 2006).

India has also started the initiative of branding itself as a 'Green India' in a bid for public diplomacy in environmentalism. The strategy is to brand itself as a global leader in ecologically sustainable development (Pathak 2021, p.2). In 2015, India founded the International Solar Alliance aimed at reducing fossil fuel dependency with the use of solar energy (International Solar Alliance 2020). India has also made efforts in cleaning up the country's beaches, using plastic waste to build roads, and has taken initiatives to abandon single-use plastic by 2022. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan or Clean India Mission was also launched in 2014 and this aims not only to clean India but also to 'clean up' India's image on the global stage (Jeffrey 2015). In 2018, Narendra Modi was awarded the UN's Champion of the Earth title partly in recognition of his emphasis on reducing plastic pollution (Pathak, 2021, P.4).

India is also taking steps to become a leader in the pharmaceutical industry along with developing healthcare diplomacy. By February 2021, India has provided over 36.1 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine to other countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Bahrain, Oman, Afghanistan, Barbados and Dominica partly as grant assistance and the rest on a commercial basis (Livemint, 2021).

In the political arena, India maintained a moral-political ground by playing an active role as a founding member of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) during the collapse of the colonial system and the independence struggle of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America at the height of the Cold War. The movement of Non-Aligned countries has played a fundamental role in the preservation of world peace and security throughout its history. The primary objectives of NAM were national independence, opposition to apartheid, imperialism, colonialism, democratisation of international relations, restructuring of the international economic system; among others (MEA).

According to the evolution of branding mentioned above, India seems to be following the natural stages of nation branding step by step and has yet to manage efficient public diplomacy and national identity creation.

### National branding in South Korea

National branding in South Korea was driven largely by a desire to reposition the Republic of Korea away from the

negative association with North Korea. In the 2005 National Brands Index by Anholt, it was speculated that "respondents described the South Korean government as 'dangerous,' 'sinister,' 'unstable' and 'unpredictable' because they had trouble distinguishing between North and South Korea" (Aronczyk 2008, p. 46).

In 2002, South Korea co-hosted the FIFA World Cup with Japan and prompted the government to use the publicity to raise South Korea's international recognition which will help boost the export of Korean products. In January 2009, the Presidential Council on Nation Branding (PCNB) was instituted by then-President Lee Myung Bak to build and manage the reputation of the country in a systematic way (Choi and Kim 2014, p. 347). The Presidential Council reported directly to the President on initiatives of nation branding. The administration officially launched public diplomacy efforts in 2010 and took initiatives such as hosting the G20 Summit Meeting in 2010 and the Nuclear Summit in 2012 (Choi and Kim 2014, p. 348).

The PCNB was officially dissolved in 2013 under the new government, however, the nation branding project was not abandoned. More concerted efforts were put into public diplomacy with initiatives such as promotion of Tae Kwon Do, adopting a 'Korean Wave' program, continuing the Global Korea Scholarship, increasing external aid, nurturing the culture and tourism industries, etc.

South Korea also utilised public diplomacy in Covid-19 stemming from its relatively successful mitigation of the pandemic by April 2020. The international media started reporting on the country's response to the pandemic due to the success of its substantive measures such as widespread testing. South Korea was also able to hold elections during the crisis and managed to bend the curve without imposing a strict lockdown on its citizens (Lee & Kim, 2021). South Korea was also able to ship millions of masks and medical supplies such as high-quality Covid-19 test kits and personal protective equipment (p. 338).

South Korea has managed to fare better in terms of public diplomacy and national identity creation but still lacks a coherent national image.

### 3. Comparison and Lessons

While India's branding focuses on place/destination branding i.e. advertisement of tourism and economic prospects, South Korea has focussed more on public diplomacy and cultural assets. These are congruent with the results found in the Brand Finance Nation brands and Global Soft Power index. India ranked 7th in the Nation Brands 2021 ranking while South Korea ranked 10th (Brand Finance Nation Brands 2021). This is probably due to India having maintained a cohesive branding "Incredible India" since the beginning of the launch of brand India while South Korea has gone through multiple changes in their slogans, such as "Korea Sparkling" or "Creative Korea" which corresponded to the changes in South Korea's political leadership. India's focus is on public relations marketing and has made more efforts in advertising, which speaks of commercial ambition.

South Korea on the other hand has maintained a more cohesive strategy for overall image-making and has been using popular culture as the major driving force for public diplomacy. With the success of Korean pop music and television dramas, it is no wonder South Korea ranked higher than India at 11th in the Global Soft Power Index while India ranked 36th (Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index 2021). India has a booming popular culture industry with Bollywood being the largest film producer in the world and the second largest after Hollywood in terms of global reach (The Economic Times, 2008). However, India has mainly depended on its large diaspora as the targeted audience with no public policy initiatives to make advancements in providing means for a larger audience to enjoy its popular culture content (Dwyer, 2017) and in terms of filmed entertainment revenue India ranked 8th after South Korea in 2019 (Statistics, 2019). The cultural policing and continued proposals to amend the Cinematograph Act 1952 which will give the government control over creative liberties are other issues that curb the development of the industry (Ramdas, 2021; Chishty, 2021). Popular culture and trends in society drive and influence strong brands (Jansen, 2008) and visibility in popular culture should not be undermined.

The success of South Korea's COVID procedures also has a hand to play in the reputation of South Korea, as South Korean public diplomacy during the Covid crisis was welcomed by many nations. While India's vaccine diplomacy was also appreciated by many of the neighbouring countries, the situation inside the country was abysmal with thousands of citizens losing their lives in the pandemic and millions yet to receive a vaccine. Indian medical diplomacy did not elevate India's image on the international stage. Being an aid donor, scholarship provider or healthcare provider requires first maintaining sophisticated infrastructure at home for the nation's citizens. Images of countries cannot be manipulated using the techniques of commercial marketing communications. Countries are judged by what they do and not by what they say (Anholt, 2011). Projecting a false image outward does not enforce the image internally, i.e. the image projected needs to be in accordance with the reality of the nation.

South Korea has made it clear that public diplomacy starts with acceptance internally (Schwak 2016, p. 12). The citizens of the nation need to be taken in aid of the nation's ambitions. There is always a danger of marginalising sections of society when trying to project a unified image of the nation. Branding cannot account for the plurality of voices, legacies and competing visions of the nation-state (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 46). South Korean non-governmental organisations and private citizens have actively participated in various campaigns to promote their country to international audiences (Lee, 2021). India's branding has shortcomings in this respect, as the image projected till now has not been inclusive and has not inspired the cooperation of the citizens. National public opinion is beginning to emerge as a formidable new player in the complex equation of international relations and sovereign power (Anholt, 2011, 297).

Based on the above comparisons, it is clear that India can learn much from South Korea's cohesive planning when it comes to developing public diplomacy and soft power

strategy. Popular culture is an important arena that cannot be ignored when it comes to image-making of a nation. South Korea has faced its share of backlash from other countries due to the involvement of the Korean government in the spread of popular culture (Kim, 2012; Ainslie, Lipural & Lim, 2017; Matsushita, 2017) as soft power initiatives in the form of cultural assets also have their shortcomings when there is a big push from the government. Therefore, India can learn from the mistakes of the past to come up with a strategy involving minimum risks. On the other hand, South Korea also needs branding that can properly encapsulate the essence of Korea in a slogan that will be remembered. South Korea required more enhancement of its national image than India as the nation has suffered from low visibility and negative perception until recent years while India has the advantage of being a globally recognised country. These are some of the many instances where bilateral cooperation is imperative. Apart from the focus of economic cooperation which has already taken root and is expected to be a mainstay in the bilateral relationship of the two nations, there needs to be a deeper fostering of connections in other areas and nation branding is one of them. Experts from the two countries can join hands to assist the other in their respective strengths and weaknesses to elevate both countries in the global arena.

#### 4. Conclusion

There are several challenges to the concept of nation branding, much of it related to its commercial nature. Nation branding in its essence can be seen as an engine of neo-liberalism which favours market relations and has the tendency to reduce nations and citizens into commodities that can be marketed, bought and sold. However, other scholars also believe that though this is a problematic nature of national branding, it might be better than nationalistic identities that had fuelled wars and genocide in the past (Jansen, 2008, p. 133).

While South Korean scholars seem to have embraced the concept of nation branding as a way to enhance the national image and bring national prestige, Indian scholars tend to be more sceptical, seeing it as a reproduction of colonial power relations through the ideals of neoliberalism. With the global standard being that of Western ideas of modernity, other nations have to keep playing the 'catch-up' game in a system that produces and perpetuates inequalities. South Korea created its own nation brands index 'SERI-PCNB NBDO' (Samsung Economic Research Institute- Presidential Council on Nation Branding Nation Brand Dual Octagon) which was criticised as unnecessarily complex, however, it was a step in the right direction if the focus is a counter discursive practice. The index was however discontinued in 2013 with the dissolution of the PCNB (Lee, 2021, p.173).

To avoid these pitfalls, it is imperative for India and South Korea to consider the terms of their progress and the conditions with which they play by the existing rules of the world order. Countries in the West like Britain, Germany, Canada, Switzerland also have to resort to nation branding to maintain their positions in the world order, which implies that the playing field has somehow levelled. Therefore, the nations that can successfully maintain a good image can come out winning. This is where the importance of knowing one's

nation's ideals become important- a set of values that is better than what dominates the current international community.

There is a degree of basic consensus in morality that is deemed acceptable in most parts of the world today- human rights, environmentalism, democracy, gender equality... (Anholt, 2011, p. 298) which can act as guiding forces for the future. Nation branding can also be made more transparent and accountable to democratic values to avoid marginalising subaltern voices, and as Anholt (2008) says '... can actually be an agent for global social justice.' It can also be used for the demystification of the Orient, a way for the 'other' to speak for themselves and provide counter-discourses.

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