



# UNVEILING SOFT POWER: AMBITIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF INDIAN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE UK

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

2024

**Swarnali Nag**  
**Student ID: 11416828**

Supervised by Dr. Roaa Ali

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

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# Abstract

The 2017 UK-India Year of Culture is examined critically in this dissertation as an example of Indian soft power and cultural diplomacy. The effort aims to export India's cultural history onto the world arena, involve the Indian diaspora in the UK, and improve bilateral relations. By examining the strategic aims, effectiveness, and reception, the paper investigates how India's cultural influence was both leveraged and restrained by the project. By utilising Nye's theory of soft power and Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, the study pinpoints major obstacles such as the homogenisation of culture, an emphasis on metropolitan areas, and insufficient interaction with intricate historical legacies. The results imply that although cultural diplomacy was shown to have potential during the Year of Culture, its influence was limited by a lack of critical engagement and diversity.

**Keywords:** Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, UK-India Relations, Indian Diaspora, Cultural Exchange, Postcolonial Dynamics.

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# **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Roaa Ali for her invaluable guidance and support throughout my dissertation.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Cultural diplomacy has increasingly become a central pillar of international relations, offering nations a means to project their values, heritage, and identity onto the global stage. This arena, unlike traditional diplomatic channels, focuses on the soft power of cultural exchange to foster understanding, build partnerships, and promote national interests in a more nuanced manner [19]. For a country as culturally rich and diverse as India, cultural diplomacy represents a strategic tool not just for showcasing its heritage but for exerting influence and promoting its geopolitical objectives [43]. In recent years, India has sought to harness its vast cultural capital to establish itself as a global leader, and the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 stands out as a key example of this ambition.

The concept of *soft power*, as introduced by Joseph Nye [56], is integral to understanding these cultural initiatives. Nye describes soft power as the ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction rather than coercion, utilizing culture, values, and policies to co-opt rather than compel. In this context, cultural diplomacy becomes an essential mechanism for countries like India to leverage their cultural heritage, engaging with international audiences in a way that goes beyond traditional diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy, as a subset of soft power, plays a critical role in shaping global perceptions, fostering international goodwill, and building sustainable relationships [56].

In 2017, the UK-India Year of Culture was launched, a landmark effort that sought to celebrate the deep cultural ties between India and the United Kingdom while marking the 70th anniversary of Indian independence. This initiative was not merely a cultural showcase but a strategic endeavor to enhance bilateral relations, promote mutual understanding, and project India's evolving identity on the world stage [10]. A year-long celebration featuring a diverse array of events, exhibitions, performances, and collaborations, the Year of Culture provided a unique opportunity to analyze the ambitions and limitations of Indian cultural diplomacy within the context of its relationship with the UK.

The initiative was endorsed at the highest levels of government, reflecting its significance in both nations' diplomatic agendas. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the then UK

Prime Minister Theresa May announced the Year of Culture during their bilateral visits, underscoring the alignment of cultural diplomacy with broader strategic goals [30]. This high-level endorsement signaled a commitment to using cultural exchange as a means to strengthen the political, economic, and social ties between the two nations. The High Commissioner of India further emphasized that the Year of Culture offered a platform to renew and revitalize the cultural heritage that binds the two countries, aiming to foster a deeper people-to-people connection [30].

Yet, while the initiative sought to celebrate shared heritage and build on historical ties, it also operated within a complex post-colonial framework that brought to the fore questions about representation, power dynamics, and the nuanced relationship between culture and diplomacy. This dissertation aims to critically examine the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 as a manifestation of Indian soft power and to explore the intricate interplay between cultural diplomacy and international relations.

## 1.1 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this dissertation is to offer a critical analysis of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 as an expression of Indian soft power. The study aims to delve into the strategic motivations behind India's cultural diplomacy efforts, the reception of these initiatives among different audiences, and the effectiveness of these efforts in enhancing bilateral relations. Specifically, the research seeks to:

1. **Understand the Strategic Objectives:** Examine the broader strategic goals behind India's cultural diplomacy initiatives in the UK, including how they align with India's foreign policy and soft power strategy.
2. **Analyse Reception:** Investigate how these cultural activities were perceived by both the Indian diaspora in the UK and the wider British public, exploring the initiative's impact on cultural perceptions and identity.
3. **Evaluate Effectiveness:** Assess the overall effectiveness of the Year of Culture in achieving its diplomatic aims, particularly in terms of enhancing UK-India relations and fostering a more nuanced cultural understanding.
4. **Identify Challenges and Limitations:** Explore the challenges and limitations encountered in implementing these cultural diplomacy efforts, including issues related to representation, inclusivity, and the complexities of post-colonial dynamics.

## 1.2 Rationale for the Study

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 is a compelling case for examining the ambitions and limitations of cultural diplomacy. Unlike other cultural initiatives, this effort encompassed a wide array of events—ranging from arts, music, and dance to film and education programs—intended to showcase the depth and diversity of Indian culture [10]. This case is particularly instructive for understanding how India attempts to leverage its cultural heritage as a form of soft power in a country like the UK, where historical connections are intertwined with colonial legacies and contemporary multiculturalism. The extensive media coverage and detailed reports on the Year of Culture provide a rich source of qualitative data, enabling a comprehensive analysis of how cultural diplomacy is enacted and perceived [30].

Moreover, this study addresses a gap in the existing literature on cultural diplomacy by providing an empirical investigation into the mechanisms and outcomes of such initiatives. Scholars like Ang, Isar, and Mar [3] have called for more nuanced analyses of cultural diplomacy, particularly in the context of emerging powers like India, where cultural narratives are deeply complex and multifaceted. By focusing on the UK-India Year of Culture, this dissertation contributes to the broader discourse on how cultural heritage can be strategically employed in international relations and the potential implications of these efforts on diplomatic ties.

## 1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

To provide a thorough exploration of these themes, the dissertation is structured into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 2: Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power Dynamics: Insights from the 2017 UK-India Year of Culture** — This chapter reviews the existing scholarship on soft power and cultural diplomacy, establishing the theoretical framework for the study. It delves into key concepts, such as Nye's soft power and Gramsci's cultural hegemony, to contextualize the UK-India Year of Culture within broader academic debates. The review also explores the specific dynamics of cultural diplomacy in post-colonial contexts, highlighting the complexities of representing culture in international relations.
- **Chapter 3: Methodology** — This chapter outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used in the study. It explains the qualitative approach adopted for this research, including content analysis of media reports, government documents, and event evaluations. This chapter also addresses the study's limitations and ethical considerations, providing a transparent account of the research process.
- **Chapter 4: Case Study Analysis** — This chapter offers an in-depth examination of the events and activities of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017, analyzing them through

the lens of soft power and cultural diplomacy. It explores how different facets of Indian culture were represented, the strategies employed to engage various audiences, and the reception of these efforts. The analysis also considers the initiative's alignment with India's broader diplomatic objectives and its engagement with contemporary issues like migration, diaspora identity, and global cultural exchange.

- **Chapter 5: Discussion** — This chapter synthesizes the findings from the case study with the theoretical insights from the literature review. It critically examines how the UK-India Year of Culture aligns with or challenges existing theories of soft power and cultural diplomacy, exploring its implications for UK-India relations and the practice of cultural diplomacy. It offers recommendations for how cultural diplomacy can be harnessed more effectively to foster equitable and meaningful international relations, considering the evolving landscape of global cultural interactions. The chapter also reflects on the broader lessons that can be drawn from this initiative for future cultural diplomacy efforts.
- **Conclusion** — The final chapter summarizes the research findings and discusses their implications for cultural diplomacy, policy-making, and academic research. The conclusion also identifies areas for future research, emphasizing the need for continued exploration of the dynamic interplay between culture and diplomacy.

In summary, this dissertation aims to provide a nuanced analysis of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017, contributing to a deeper understanding of how India employs its cultural assets to navigate international relations. By critically examining this case, the study seeks to illuminate the potentials and pitfalls of cultural diplomacy as a tool for soft power, offering insights that are relevant not only to India and the UK but to the broader field of international cultural relations.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power Dynamics**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This review of the literature examines the connection between soft power and cultural diplomacy, concentrating on the 2017 UK-India Year of Culture. This program is an essential case study for comprehending how nations use cultural diplomacy to strengthen bilateral ties and increase their soft power internationally. With an emphasis on mutual understanding, shared values, and cultural interaction, cultural diplomacy has emerged as a crucial tactic for states looking to exercise influence without resorting to force [57]. This calculated strategy is demonstrated by the 2017 UK-India Year of Culture, which aims to fortify relations between two countries that have different current histories but a common colonial past [35]. Considering the achievements and difficulties of the project, this literature review examines the degree to which it strengthened bilateral relationships and enhanced cross-cultural understanding.

In order to do this, the analysis delves into important topics including cultural hegemony and soft power, the development of global cultural diplomacy, and India's particular initiatives, especially in relation to the UK. Joseph Nye created the term "soft power," which refers to a nation's capacity to draw in and use cultural influence for political gain rather than imposing force [57, 41]. This analysis assesses India's influence on British attitudes and media, as well as the wider consequences for bilateral ties, by placing the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 within the framework of international cultural diplomacy and examining theoretical and empirical studies [33].

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.2.1 Soft Power Theory

Soft power is essential for influencing opinions around the world without using force, and it provides a strong substitute for physical power. The idea was first presented by Joseph Nye [56], who emphasised how a nation can influence preferences without using force by using attraction and cultural appeal. When a nation's foreign policies, political beliefs, and culture are viewed favourably by others, they can increase their global influence and promote international collaborations. This is known as soft power [57]. In this perspective, India's strategy to improve its international standing and forge foreign alliances is exemplified by its use of soft power during the 2017 UK-India Year of Culture.

India aimed to improve bilateral ties with the UK by exhibiting its rich cultural legacy and creative accomplishments [35]. Promoting India's rich cultural identity was one of the main goals of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017, as demonstrated by events like the opening of a year-long Indian culture festival at Buckingham Palace in London that featured Indian classical dance, music, and cuisine [33]. Soft power, however, is only as powerful when combined with geopolitical context and cultural authenticity; otherwise, it runs the risk of being misconstrued as propaganda. A study by Hall [28] underscores this point, noting that the perceived authenticity of cultural diplomacy efforts significantly impacts their reception abroad.

### 2.2.2 Cultural Hegemony

According to Antonio Gramsci's concept, cultural hegemony describes how one social class dominates others through cultural methods. Grasping how cultural diplomacy may either support or undermine power systems requires a grasp of this idea [27]. The theory of cultural hegemony explains how the ruling classes uphold their authority by influencing societal norms and values via cultural institutions including the media, the educational system, and religion. This dominance is not static but requires continuous reinforcement through cultural production and ideological control.

In cultural diplomacy, hegemony highlights how cultural exchange can perpetuate or challenge existing power dynamics. Cultural diplomacy is a tool used by nations to influence and project soft power by promoting specific cultural narratives and ideals [82]. India uses cultural diplomacy as a tactic to challenge Western cultural hegemony as well as to project its cultural impact. India aims to assert its identity and counter prevailing cultural narratives by promoting its ideals and presenting its rich cultural heritage on a global scale.

## 2.3 Review of Existing Literature

This section examines the dynamics of global cultural diplomacy, illustrating how nations leverage soft power to foster relationships. By analyzing case studies from the U.S., China, and India, we can understand how these countries navigate the complexities of cultural diplomacy, particularly in the context of UK-India relations and historical influences on current strategies.

### 2.3.1 Case Studies

#### American Cultural Diplomacy during the Cold War

The use of cultural exchange for geopolitical ends is best shown by the United States' Cold War-era cultural diplomacy. The United States sought to offset Soviet influence and advance democratic ideas through programs like jazz tours and art exhibitions [31]. The "Jazz Ambassadors" program, for instance, showcased American ideals of freedom and creativity, contrasting with Soviet cultural rigidity [82]. However, these efforts were sometimes seen as cultural propaganda, highlighting the complexity of cultural diplomacy in balancing cultural understanding with political motives.

#### Chinese Confucius Institutes

Confucius Institutes in China are an example of a contemporary strategy for cultural diplomacy that leverages language and cultural instruction to increase China's influence worldwide [?]. These organisations, although fostering intercultural understanding, are criticised for furthering geopolitical objectives and possibly acting as propaganda vehicles. Nonetheless, Confucius Institutes significantly contribute to global cultural diplomacy by challenging Western hegemony and presenting alternative narratives [41].

### 2.3.2 UK-India Cultural Relations

The cultural relationship between India and the UK is deeply connected to their colonial history, marked by both cooperation and opposition. Throughout time, these relationships have developed into a vibrant collaboration that reflects common interests, values, and a dedication to cross-cultural learning [35]. However, a close examination reveals the complexity of this connection, in which past legacies still have an impact on current cultural diplomacy initiatives. In the aftermath of colonialism, India and the UK have endeavoured to reinterpret their cultural ties, transcending their colonial history to form a partnership predicated on reciprocal respect and cooperative efforts.

## 2.4 UK-India Year of Culture 2017

The 2017 UK-India Year of Culture was a historic effort honouring the close historical and cultural ties between India and the UK. Despite the challenges of managing historical legacies and power dynamics in bilateral relations, this effort demonstrated the potential of cultural diplomacy to promote mutual understanding and transcend cultural divisions [35]. Its accomplishment required a great deal of preparation and cooperation from governments, artists, and cultural institutions. The initiative included a noteworthy exhibition at the British Museum, "India and the World: A History in Nine Stories," which highlighted India's cultural legacy and global impact [32]. These performances showcased both countries' artistic traditions, emphasizing cultural diplomacy's potential to foster mutual appreciation and understanding.

## 2.5 Identification of Gaps in Literature

Despite an extensive body of literature on cultural diplomacy and soft power, notable gaps remain, especially regarding the UK-India Year of Culture 2017. While studies have examined specific events, such as major exhibitions, a holistic assessment of the initiative's effectiveness in achieving broader objectives like enhancing cultural diplomacy remains underexplored [33]. Evaluating public and media perceptions could provide insights into the initiative's contribution to cultural diplomacy [3]. For example, the "India and the World: A History in Nine Stories" exhibition received significant attention, but its overall impact on public diplomacy and bilateral relations has not been critically evaluated.

Further analysis is needed to examine the initiative's strategic planning, execution, and reception among Indian and British audiences. The UK-India Year of Culture was designed to promote mutual understanding and shared values, yet its success in meeting these goals and how they were perceived by the public and media is underexplored [3, 33]. Evaluating public and media perceptions could provide insights into the initiative's contribution to cultural diplomacy.

Additionally, there is limited research on how Indian cultural diplomacy initiatives, including the Year of Culture, have influenced India's soft power in the UK [73]. Understanding how these initiatives have shaped perceptions of India in the UK is crucial for assessing their effectiveness. This includes evaluating the influence on public perceptions, media coverage, and diplomatic relations. More empirical research is required to explore these dynamics and assess the success and limitations of Indian cultural diplomacy in the UK context [36].

Another gap concerns the perception of Indian cultural diplomacy among UK audiences. Although some studies have examined the strategic objectives of these initiatives, the public and media responses remain insufficiently explored [16]. Analyzing UK audiences' perceptions would provide insights into the initiatives' effectiveness and impact on mutual cultural understanding. It is also essential to explore how the narratives and stereotypes associated with

Indian culture in the UK have been influenced or reinforced by these initiatives [16].

A detailed study of the specific impacts and outcomes of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 is crucial for assessing its success and limitations. This analysis could offer valuable lessons for future cultural diplomacy initiatives and inform strategies for enhancing bilateral relations through cultural exchange [82]. By exploring the initiative's objectives, execution, and reception, scholars can identify what worked well and areas for improvement. Moreover, understanding the long-term impacts on UK-India relations can illuminate how cultural diplomacy initiatives can facilitate sustained partnerships and promote cultural exchange [41].

Researching the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 provides an opportunity to gain new insights into the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy as a tool for enhancing bilateral relations. This initiative serves as a case study to understand how cultural diplomacy can shape international perceptions and foster long-term partnerships [57]. Furthermore, this research could contribute to the broader understanding of cultural diplomacy's role in shaping narratives, building trust, and promoting intercultural dialogue [73].

In conclusion, addressing these research gaps is crucial for advancing the field of cultural diplomacy and understanding the complex dynamics between India and the UK. By critically examining the impacts of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017, scholars can offer valuable insights for policymakers, cultural practitioners, and academics seeking to leverage cultural diplomacy for diplomatic and cultural objectives.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the theoretical foundations of cultural diplomacy, focusing on India's initiatives, particularly the UK-India Year of Culture 2017. By examining soft power theory and cultural hegemony, it highlights cultural diplomacy as a strategic tool for enhancing global influence and bilateral relations. Future research should focus on the specific impacts of cultural diplomacy to deepen our understanding of its role in international relations.

# Chapter 3

## Methodology

Examining the cultural dynamics and power dynamics that emerged during the 2017 UK-India Year of Culture is the goal of this dissertation's methods section. To examine how cultural diplomacy is used and comprehended in a diplomatic setting, this exploratory study adopts a qualitative approach to do a thematic analysis and draws on the concepts of cultural hegemony [27] and soft power [56]. Nye (2004) [56] emphasises the concept of soft power, which highlights the ability of a nation to embrace rather than enforce, whereas Gramsci (1971) offers a theoretical framework for analysing the procedures involved in establishing and sustaining cultural supremacy. In order to learn more about the complex ways that culture affects international impact and collaboration, this study combines ethnographic interviewing methods, and document analysis. By utilising these approaches, the study intends to offer a thorough grasp of how the event was carried out and its wider effects on international relations, offering important new perspectives on the diplomatic use of culture [72, 3].

This dissertation's theoretical framework makes it especially pertinent for examining how India uses cultural activities to improve its standing and influence in the UK. This is in line with the goal of evaluating how well the Year of Culture used India's soft power [56]. This also relates to the goals of assessing how cultural events are received and looking into the role of media discourse, since both aim to comprehend how Indian cultural presentations are received and whether or not they dominated the cultural narrative in the UK at the time of the event [27, 34].

Utilising these theoretical frameworks, the study seeks to pinpoint crucial components of cultural diplomacy that impacted the results of the UK-India Year of Culture. In the end, the results will guide suggestions for upcoming cultural diplomacy campaigns, making sure they are sensitive to the hegemonic systems in which they function and properly matched with the goals of soft power [81]. To understand it in a better way, sophisticated comprehension of international cultural relations and diplomacy is supported by the analysis's robustness, which is ensured by the integration of several theoretical viewpoints.

The research design of this dissertation adopts an exploratory approach, chosen specifically for its utility in investigating uncharted or complex issues where much remains to be

understood. This approach is particularly suited to the study of cultural relations and power dynamics, where nuanced interactions and subtle influences are often not immediately apparent [8]. Exploratory analysis's main goal is to analyze a dataset without assuming anything about what it might include. Researchers and data analysts can identify patterns and possible causes for observed behaviors by checking assumptions at the door [8].

This methodical process of going over and assessing written and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) documents is known as document analysis. It is particularly appropriate for this case study because it allows for the analysis of cultural diplomacy in the context of the UK-India Year of Culture by documenting government narratives, media reactions, and public participation through a variety of documentation formats [9]. The media reports from the British Council, the Indian High Commission in London, and the Ministry of Culture from the Indian government are among the documents chosen for examination. Rich data sources also include press releases, social media posts, and online interviews with officers, delegates, and musicians. We critically examine these texts to comprehend how cultural exchanges are framed, how cultural identities are portrayed, and the reflection of soft power dynamics. This analysis helps in constructing a coherent narrative of how the event was projected and perceived publicly.

The selection of documents is done with great care, with an emphasis on those that offer comprehensive insights into the implementation and effects of cultural diplomacy projects, and on the basis of their direct connection to the research issues. The interviews have been analysed manually. This approach ensures that significant themes related to the UK-India Year of Culture are identified, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how the event was projected and perceived both officially and publicly.

About the interviews, two cultural officers from the Indian Council of Cultural Relations and two artists who have performed South Asian dance genres in India and the UK are the four main participants in the interviews. Diverse viewpoints on the cultural diplomacy initiatives and the artists' individual experiences are captured through the selection of cultural officers and artists. While artists talk about concerns related to minority representation and cultural expressions, cultural officers offer insights into the strategic use of cultural events for diplomacy and enhancing soft power. Some difficulties were faced during conducting the interview as two participants weren't directly associated with the UK-India Year of Culture project. However, their experience in both the UK and India, along with their role in fostering diplomatic relations between the two nations, provided significant perspectives that greatly contributed to the study.

Zoom is used for interviews, enabling flexible communication across regional boundaries. The discussions are supplied with open-ended questions to promote in-depth answers and story development, and they are semi-structured (See appendix).

### **3.1 Limitations of Research**

There were various restrictions on this investigation. First, it was difficult to get direct interviews with artists and cultural officers who took part in the UK-India Year of Culture. As a result, secondary sources and published interviews were used, which might not accurately reflect their unique perspectives and experiences. The availability of thorough event appraisals and official documentation, which occasionally lacked critical viewpoints, further restricted the analysis. Additionally, the study may have missed grassroots cultural exchanges because it concentrated mostly on well-publicized events in urban settings. Finally, subjectivity is introduced by the interpretive character of qualitative analysis, which could affect how the results are framed. Nevertheless, despite these drawbacks, a thorough analysis has been conducted using the information and records at hand, offering insightful information about the workings of the project.

In conclusion, the methodology intertwines the theoretical constructs of soft power and cultural hegemony with qualitative methods, including document analysis and interviews, aligned to the objectives of exploring the UK-India Year of Culture. It is anticipated that this approach will unveil nuanced insights into the cultural and hegemonic influences shaped during the event.

## **Chapter 4**

# **Case Study Analysis: UK-India Year of Culture**

### **4.1 Context and Implementation**

#### **4.1.1 Introduction to the UK-India Year of Culture 2017**

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 was a pivotal initiative commemorating the 70th anniversary of India's independence and the enduring ties between the UK and India. Announced by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his 2015 visit to the UK, this year-long celebration sought to strengthen cultural understanding and deepen bilateral relationships. The initiative took place against the backdrop of the Brexit referendum, wherein 52% of British voters opted to leave the European Union, prompting the UK to redefine its global partnerships [80]. This initiative provided the UK an opportunity to project its cultural innovation and identity as a global partner, while India showcased its cultural richness and soft power, particularly to the large Indian diaspora in the UK [75]. It highlighted the role of culture as a diplomatic tool capable of bridging gaps and fostering stronger bilateral ties.

#### **4.1.2 Planning and Strategic Vision**

The strategic vision for the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 was shaped by extensive collaboration between key stakeholders, including the British Council, the Indian High Commission in London, and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). These institutions played a crucial role, though their traditional frameworks may have constrained the initiative's capacity for innovation and engagement with less conventional cultural expressions [14]. The initiative aimed to celebrate shared history while fostering a forward-looking relationship through contemporary cultural exchanges. The projection of India's national bird, the peacock, onto Buckingham Palace during the launch event symbolized both nations' historical and contemporary ties [30]. However, this symbolism risked reinforcing colonial narratives, potentially

overshadowing the initiative's modern and progressive intentions [29].

Digital innovation was a significant aspect of the strategic vision, aimed at broadening the initiative's reach, particularly among younger audiences. The British Council's emphasis on digital platforms responded to the changing modes of cultural consumption, especially among millennials [22]. However, this approach also exposed a digital divide, as initiatives like "Mix the City" primarily reached more connected demographics, thereby limiting inclusivity [11]. The initiative also grappled with challenges of cultural representation, striving to present an authentic and diverse portrayal of both nations. Events like the India Season at Edinburgh highlighted Indian dance and theater but were criticized for favoring elite cultural narratives, potentially marginalizing other voices [20].

### 4.1.3 Major Events and Highlights

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 featured a series of high-profile events and artistic collaborations central to its goal of strengthening cultural ties. The opening ceremony at Buckingham Palace on February 27, 2017, set a grand tone for the celebrations. The "India Illuminated" exhibition at the Science Museum in London, for instance, highlighted India's contributions to global science and culture. An artist who participated in this exhibition noted how the event allowed them to explore the intersection of traditional Indian motifs with contemporary digital art, reflecting the continuity between India's rich cultural heritage and modern-day innovations. This experience deepened their engagement with themes central to the UK-India cultural exchange (Artist 1, 2023). However, the focus on historical achievements sometimes risked presenting a static image of Indian culture, rather than emphasizing its dynamic and evolving nature [42].

Artistic collaborations such as the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival at the British Library brought together prominent writers and performers, facilitating rich discussions on literature and culture. One artist who performed at this event described how blending Indian classical music with contemporary British poetry created a unique cultural dialogue, reinforcing the importance of cross-cultural collaborations in their work (Artist 2, 2023). However, while these events were crucial in fostering contemporary cultural dialogues, the selection of participants and topics sometimes skewed towards elite cultural narratives, potentially limiting engagement with more diverse voices [30]. Furthermore, some artists felt that the initiative could have done more to emphasize contemporary issues such as migration and diaspora, which are vital aspects of the modern UK-India relationship but were not fully explored (Artist 2, 2023).

### 4.1.4 Challenges in Implementation

The implementation of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 was marked by significant logistical, cultural, and operational challenges. Coordinating over 200 events across multiple locations required intricate scheduling, resource allocation, and coordination among various stakeholders,

leading to occasional delays and mismatches in expectations [11]. Cultural sensitivities also posed substantial challenges, particularly in ensuring respectful and authentic representations of both nations' cultures. One key challenge was balancing the representation of shared history without reinforcing colonial narratives. This was addressed by involving cultural experts and historians from both nations, ensuring a nuanced portrayal that acknowledged both the complex past and contemporary contributions of the Indian diaspora in the UK (Cultural Officer 1, 2023). Additionally, avoiding cultural appropriation was a critical concern, especially in representing traditional Indian arts and crafts. This was mitigated by close collaboration with Indian artists and cultural practitioners, ensuring that cultural expressions were not only accurate but also resonant with the communities they represented (Cultural Officer 2, 2023).

Digital innovation played a crucial role in broadening the initiative's reach, particularly among younger audiences. However, the emphasis on digital engagement also revealed gaps, such as the exclusion of older or less digitally connected demographics. This highlighted the need for more inclusive digital strategies that combine both digital and traditional media, ensuring broader accessibility and participation (Cultural Officer 1, 2023). Furthermore, while the digital component successfully engaged tech-savvy audiences, it underscored the importance of creating interactive and participatory experiences that resonate across diverse platforms and varying levels of digital literacy (Cultural Officer 2, 2023).

In conclusion, while the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 faced numerous challenges, the proactive and inclusive strategies employed by the organizers, particularly in addressing cultural sensitivities and digital engagement, were largely successful in overcoming these hurdles, ensuring the initiative's overall success.

## **4.2 Cultural Content and Selection**

### **4.2.1 Criteria for Selection of Cultural Content**

The cultural programming for the 2017 UK-India Year of Culture was carefully curated around the themes of modernity, heritage, and diversity, which were key to achieving the initiative's broader objectives of enhancing mutual understanding and strengthening bilateral ties. Diversity was a critical factor in the selection process, reflecting India's vast cultural landscape, which includes numerous languages, faiths, and traditions. The event lineup showcased this diversity, with a variety of modern art exhibitions, film screenings, and traditional Indian dance performances. By incorporating events such as the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival at the British Library, which featured a range of writers and topics, the initiative highlighted the multiculturalism present in both Indian and British societies [30]. The goal was to engage a wide audience while celebrating ethnic diversity.

Heritage played a central role in content selection, focusing on acknowledging the historical ties between India and the UK. Events like the India Illuminated exhibition highlighted

India's contributions to global knowledge over millennia while raising important questions about how to present this shared history within a colonial context [54]. Curators aimed to balance traditional cultural practices with critical engagement on the more challenging aspects of the UK-India relationship. One cultural officer emphasized that ensuring a nuanced portrayal without reinforcing colonial narratives required collaboration with cultural experts to reflect both the complex past and the contributions of the Indian diaspora (Cultural Officer 1, 2023). Equally important was modernity, as the initiative aimed to present India as actively engaged with global contemporary culture while rooted in tradition. Events such as Indian cinema screenings and digital art exhibitions showcased modern achievements [77]. This dual focus was crucial in countering stereotypes of Indian culture as static. One officer observed that emphasizing modernity helped portray India as a dynamic cultural force, demonstrating its evolving contributions globally (Cultural Officer 2, 2023).

A key challenge in selecting the cultural content was finding the right balance between traditional and modern art forms. By blending modern dance and digital art with classical forms like Kathak and Bharatanatyam, the initiative sought to honor India's cultural legacy while showcasing contemporary achievements. However, this approach required careful curation to ensure that neither traditional nor modern elements overshadowed the other [58]. The aim was to provide a comprehensive portrayal of Indian culture to both Indian and British audiences, fostering greater mutual understanding [14]. One officer noted that achieving this balance was difficult, as traditional art forms often attracted more attention, but they worked diligently to ensure contemporary expressions were given equal prominence (Cultural Officer 2, 2023).

In summary, the cultural content selected for the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 reflected a nuanced approach that emphasized diversity, honored heritage, and embraced modernity. This balanced selection was key to advancing the initiative's cultural and diplomatic objectives.

#### **4.2.2 Significance of Selected Cultural Content**

The cultural content of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 played a pivotal role in fostering mutual understanding and bridging diverse audiences in both nations. By showcasing a wide array of cultural expressions, from Bharatanatyam to contemporary art, the initiative highlighted India's dynamic and evolving identity. Events like the India Illuminated exhibition underscored India's historical and modern contributions to global science and technology, challenging static views of Indian culture [30, 75].

Incorporating contemporary elements, such as digital art installations, alongside classical forms, offered a balanced portrayal, breaking stereotypes and emphasizing cultural continuity [25]. This strategy resonated with varied audiences, presenting Indian culture as living and evolving. Cultural officers emphasized the importance of engaging critically with shared histories to avoid romanticizing the past, fostering meaningful cultural exchange (Cultural Officer 1, 2023; Cultural Officer 2, 2023).

Ultimately, the chosen content was significant not only for its artistic value but for its impact on diplomatic ties, facilitating a deeper understanding between India and the UK and aiding in renegotiating complex historical relationships.

### 4.3 Reception, Perception, and Impact Analysis

This section aims to critically examine the reception and perceptions of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017, assessing its impact on cultural perceptions and bilateral relations between the two nations. By exploring how different audiences engaged with the initiative, analyzing media coverage, and evaluating feedback from participants, this section provides a comprehensive understanding of the initiative's effectiveness in achieving its cultural diplomacy objectives. The analysis draws on a range of data, including audience attendance figures, media narratives, and feedback collected through surveys and interviews with two cultural officers and artists who were part of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017. By integrating these diverse sources of information, this section not only assesses the immediate reception of the events but also considers their broader implications for the future of UK-India relations and cultural diplomacy efforts.

#### 4.3.1 Audience Reception and Public Engagement

##### Attendance Figures and Demographic Analysis

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 attracted a significant number of attendees across a variety of events, exhibitions, and digital platforms. According to the India @ UK 2017 Report by the High Commission of India, the initiative engaged over 7.7 million people directly through in-person events, with an additional 75 million reached through digital and social media channels [30]. These figures indicate a broad appeal, transcending traditional cultural engagement and reaching diverse segments of society (See Figure A.1 Appendix).

A closer examination of the demographic breakdown reveals a varied audience profile. Events like the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival at the British Library attracted a predominantly middle-aged, educated demographic, reflecting the literary nature of the event. In contrast, performances of classical Indian dance and music saw higher engagement from the Indian diaspora, particularly those of South Asian descent living in urban areas of the UK [21]. The diversity of attendees, spanning different age groups, ethnicities, and geographic locations, highlights the initiative's success in engaging a wide audience (See Figure A.2 Appendix). However, it also raises questions about accessibility, as rural areas in both countries were less represented, suggesting a potential gap in outreach [11].

### Feedback from Participants

Survey data from the British Council and the High Commission of India revealed largely positive feedback from participants, with 82% expressing satisfaction with the events they attended [30]. This satisfaction was particularly pronounced within the Indian diaspora, where attendees reported a strengthened sense of cultural pride and connection to their heritage. The screening of *Shiraz: A Romance of India*, for example, was described by many as a “powerful reminder” of India’s rich cultural history, resonating deeply with the diaspora’s communal identity [45].

However, there were also critical insights that revealed areas for improvement, particularly in the balance between traditional and contemporary cultural elements. Feedback from younger audiences, for instance, indicated a desire for more modern cultural expressions, such as digital art and contemporary music, which they felt were underrepresented compared to classical forms like Bharatanatyam and Kathak [64]. This highlights the challenge of ensuring a well-rounded cultural offering that appeals to diverse demographics. As one cultural officer noted, “balancing tradition and modernity was a key challenge” in the UK-India Year of Culture, with younger participants feeling that contemporary elements could have received more attention [2]. The officer’s insights emphasize that cultural diplomacy must evolve to better reflect the tastes and preferences of younger, globally connected audiences.

Similarly, the artist’s feedback supports this perspective. One artist noted that while traditional Indian music was well-received by older attendees, younger participants engaged more when contemporary elements were introduced. The artist observed, “there’s a growing demand for pushing beyond tradition,” a sentiment echoed by other participants who desired more modern art forms [1]. This points to the importance of integrating contemporary artistic innovations into future cultural programming to sustain engagement from younger generations. As Thussu [77] notes, cultural diplomacy must evolve by incorporating both heritage and modernity to stay relevant and impactful across diverse demographic groups.

### Public Engagement on Digital Platforms

The digital aspect of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 played a crucial role in expanding the initiative’s reach, particularly among younger audiences. Social media platforms were extensively utilized to promote events, with hashtags like #UKIndia2017 gaining significant traction. The Mix the City project, an interactive digital music platform, exemplified the initiative’s innovative approach to cultural engagement, allowing users to create their own music mixes using sounds from different Indian cities. This project alone attracted over 2 million interactions, highlighting its appeal to tech-savvy youth and demonstrating the potential of digital platforms to foster cultural exchange on a global scale [11, 30].

While the success of these digital initiatives is evident, it also raises questions about the depth of engagement and the sustainability of such interactions in fostering genuine cultural understanding. Digital platforms like Mix the City are undoubtedly effective in reaching wide

audiences quickly, but they often do so in a manner that prioritizes accessibility and entertainment over substantive cultural exchange. As scholars like Morozov [53] have argued, the digital realm can sometimes lead to a superficial engagement with complex cultural issues, where the depth of understanding is sacrificed for the breadth of participation. The interactions generated by these platforms, while impressive in number, may not translate into a meaningful, long-term impact on participants' cultural perceptions.

The success of these digital initiatives not only broadened the scope of participation but also demonstrated the potential of digital platforms in cultural diplomacy, providing a model for future initiatives aiming to engage a global, digitally connected audience. However, future initiatives must consider how to balance the advantages of digital engagement with the need for deep, inclusive, and meaningful cultural exchanges that go beyond superficial interaction [60].

### **Impact Analysis: Cultural Perceptions**

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 had a notable impact on cultural perceptions, with survey data and social media analysis indicating enhanced mutual understanding between the UK and India [61]. This engagement suggests that the initiative contributed to the soft power objectives of both nations, strengthening cultural ties. However, measuring cultural perceptions through short-term successes like attendance and immediate feedback can be limiting. Immediate appreciation of cultural events does not necessarily translate into long-term shifts in perceptions or behaviors [12].

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony highlights that dominant cultural narratives often persist despite efforts to promote diversity [27]. The initiative's focus on high-profile events and digital engagement may have sidelined grassroots cultural expressions and marginalized communities, potentially reinforcing existing power structures [44]. This analysis underscores the need for cultural diplomacy to be evaluated not just by immediate responses but by its long-term influence on cultural narratives and inclusivity. Future initiatives should address these complexities to ensure a more inclusive and sustained impact on cultural perceptions.

## **4.3.2 Media Reviews, Coverage, and Impact on Soft Power**

### **Media Coverage in the UK and India**

**Narratives and Themes:** The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 was covered extensively in the media of both countries, but the narratives and themes that emerged from this coverage were shaped by distinct cultural and political contexts. In the UK, the media largely framed the initiative as a celebration of the enduring cultural ties between the two nations, with a particular focus on how these events could strengthen post-Brexit diplomatic and economic relations [?]. British newspapers and broadcasters often highlighted the grandeur of the events, such as the opening ceremony at Buckingham Palace, emphasizing the UK's continued commitment to

global cultural partnerships.

In contrast, Indian media coverage tended to focus more on the cultural pride associated with the initiative. Publications like *The Hindu* and *Times of India* emphasized how the Year of Culture allowed India to showcase its rich cultural heritage on an international stage, reinforcing India's narrative as a rising global power with a deep cultural legacy [78]. The Indian media also highlighted the participation of Indian artists and the representation of contemporary Indian culture, which was seen as a critical component of India's soft power strategy.

**Differences in Media Perception:** The differences in media perception between the UK and India reflected broader cultural and political attitudes. In the UK, the initiative was sometimes viewed through a lens of nostalgia for the British Empire, with some media outlets subtly framing the events as a continuation of the "special relationship" rooted in colonial history [6]. This perspective occasionally drew criticism for overshadowing the modern, egalitarian partnership that the initiative was meant to promote. On the other hand, Indian media largely portrayed the initiative as a success, focusing on its role in strengthening India's global image and expanding its cultural influence. The contrasting narratives underscore the complex dynamics of post-colonial relations and the differing priorities of the two nations.

### Comparative Media Analysis

**Cultural Representation:** Media coverage in both the UK and India varied in its representation of the cultural diversity and complexity of the events. While many reports were thorough in showcasing the breadth of cultural expressions—from classical Indian dance to contemporary British art—there were instances where the coverage fell into the trap of oversimplification or stereotyping. For example, some UK media outlets predominantly focused on traditional Indian art forms like Bharatanatyam and Kathak, potentially reinforcing stereotypes of India as a land of ancient traditions, while giving less attention to its vibrant contemporary culture [76]. Conversely, Indian media sometimes portrayed the events as primarily a platform for showcasing India's cultural supremacy, which risked marginalizing the UK's contributions to the initiative.

**Impact on Public Opinion:** The way the media represented the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 had a significant impact on public opinion in both countries. In the UK, media coverage that emphasized the historical connections between the two nations sometimes evoked mixed reactions, with some segments of the public viewing the initiative as an attempt to revive colonial nostalgia [7]. In India, the media's portrayal of the initiative as a major soft power success story helped to bolster national pride and reinforced the perception of India as a culturally rich and influential nation [78]. These differing impacts on public opinion reveal the complex interplay between media narratives and national identity in the context of cultural diplomacy.

### Impact Analysis: Soft Power

**Enhancement of India's Soft Power:** The media portrayal of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 played a crucial role in enhancing India's soft power, particularly in the UK. By consistently highlighting India's rich cultural heritage and its modern, dynamic cultural expressions, the media helped to project India as a culturally sophisticated and globally relevant nation [77]. This was particularly evident in the coverage of events like the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival at the British Library, which was widely praised in the UK media for its intellectual rigor and cultural significance [?]. However, the effectiveness of this soft power projection was not without its challenges. The tendency of some British media outlets to frame the initiative within a colonial context limited the extent to which India could fully assert its cultural influence on its own terms. Nonetheless, the overall media narrative contributed positively to India's image in the UK, reinforcing diplomatic ties and laying the groundwork for future cultural collaborations [13]. The initiative demonstrated the power of media in shaping perceptions and influencing the success of cultural diplomacy efforts, ultimately strengthening India's position on the global stage.

## 4.4 Perceptions Among Different Societal Segments and Bilateral Relations

### 4.4.1 Perceptions Among the Indian Diaspora in the UK

**Cultural Identity:** The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 significantly influenced the cultural identity of the Indian diaspora in the UK by deepening their connection to their heritage and reinforcing their sense of belonging within British society. One prominent event that resonated deeply with the diaspora was the India Illuminated exhibition at the Science Museum, which showcased India's contributions to global knowledge, technology, and the arts. This exhibition was impactful as it connected the diaspora's historical legacy with modern achievements, reinforcing a sense of pride in their dual identity [48]. Similarly, the V&A's *Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London* exhibition highlighted the contributions of Indian artisans to British art, further strengthening the cultural bridge between the two nations [75].

Prominent British-Indian figures, such as filmmaker Gurinder Chadha, emphasized in interviews how the Year of Culture allowed the diaspora to celebrate their identity in a way that was both contemporary and respectful of tradition. Chadha noted that the initiative provided a platform for the diaspora to express pride in their heritage while also affirming their place in British society [7]. These events not only reinforced cultural identity but also fostered intergenerational dialogue within the diaspora, allowing younger members to engage with their heritage in a modern context [70].

**Engagement with the Events:** The Indian diaspora actively engaged with the Year of Culture events, with a strong turnout at both traditional and contemporary cultural programs. For example, the UK Welcomes India at the Edinburgh International Festival, which featured a mix of classical and contemporary performances, was particularly well-received. This event allowed the diaspora to see their culture represented in diverse forms, meeting their expectations for both authenticity and modernity [44]. However, some critiques emerged regarding the limited representation of India's regional diversity, with participants expressing a desire for a broader inclusion of regional cultures from across India [30]. This feedback highlights the complexity of representing a diverse culture in a way that resonates with all segments of the diaspora.

#### 4.4.2 Perceptions Among British and Indian Citizens

**British Citizens:** Among British citizens, the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 was generally seen as a successful cultural exchange that both challenged and reinforced existing stereotypes. Events like *Ravi Shankar: Symphony* at the Southbank Centre, which showcased the fusion of Indian classical music with Western orchestration, were particularly influential in shifting perceptions. This event was widely covered in the British media as an example of India's ability to innovate within its cultural traditions, presenting a modern and dynamic image of the country [37]. However, despite these successes, some British audiences and media outlets continued to frame the initiative within a colonial context, emphasizing historical ties over contemporary collaborations. This duality reflects the ongoing challenge of overcoming colonial nostalgia in cultural diplomacy [14].

**Indian Citizens:** In India, the initiative was perceived positively as an effective projection of Indian culture and values on an international stage. The *Indelible India* digital photography exhibition, which received widespread media coverage in India, was celebrated for its ability to showcase India's cultural richness and diversity [78]. However, some critics in India raised concerns about the potential oversimplification of India's cultural narrative for Western audiences, arguing that such initiatives could inadvertently reinforce stereotypes if not carefully managed [50]. This criticism underscores the importance of nuanced cultural representation in international diplomacy.

### 4.5 Criticisms, Controversies, and Broader Implications

#### 4.5.1 Criticisms and Controversies

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017, while largely celebrated, was not without its share of criticisms and controversies. One of the primary critiques revolved around perceived cultural insensitivity, particularly the reinforcement of colonial narratives. Critics argued that certain

aspects of the initiative, such as the grand opening ceremony at Buckingham Palace, inadvertently highlighted the colonial past rather than focusing on contemporary, equal partnerships between the UK and India [71]. This was seen as problematic because it risked overshadowing the modern, progressive elements of the initiative by invoking a nostalgic view of British colonialism, which is a sensitive topic in the context of UK-India relations.

Moreover, there were concerns about the oversimplification of Indian culture. Some events were criticized for presenting a monolithic view of Indian culture, focusing predominantly on classical art forms while neglecting the rich diversity of regional and contemporary expressions. This approach was seen as a missed opportunity to showcase the complexity of India's cultural landscape, potentially reinforcing stereotypes rather than challenging them [61].

In addition to cultural concerns, there were political undertones that sparked controversy. The initiative was criticized in some circles for being used as a diplomatic tool to advance the UK's post-Brexit strategy, rather than as a genuine effort to foster cultural exchange. Critics argued that the framing of certain events and the funding sources behind them were influenced more by political and economic agendas than by a commitment to cultural understanding [38].

#### **4.5.2 Addressing the Criticisms**

In response to these criticisms, organizers and media outlets made several adjustments and clarifications. For instance, following the concerns about colonial undertones, the British Council issued statements emphasizing that the initiative was designed to celebrate contemporary partnerships and mutual respect between the UK and India, rather than to dwell on the past [11]. Additionally, efforts were made to highlight more regional and contemporary Indian cultural expressions in subsequent events, addressing the concerns about cultural oversimplification [55].

The broader implications of these criticisms for future cultural diplomacy initiatives are significant. They underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity and the need to carefully manage the political contexts in which such initiatives are framed. Cultural diplomacy must go beyond superficial celebrations of culture to engage deeply with the complexities and histories of the cultures involved. Future efforts must be mindful of the power dynamics at play and strive to create platforms that are truly representative and inclusive. This requires not only a broader range of cultural expressions but also a more nuanced understanding of the historical and political contexts that shape cultural relations [79].

# Chapter 5

## Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

The goal of this discussion chapter is to combine the insights from the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 case study analysis with the more comprehensive theoretical framework examined in the literature review. This section will critically analyze how the program fits into or defies accepted ideas of cultural diplomacy and soft power, especially in light of Joseph Nye's theory of soft power, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, and the developing field of cultural diplomacy. The discussion also considers the findings' larger ramifications for UK-India ties, particularly in view of the country's growing global importance and the post-Brexit geopolitical environment.

The 2017 UK-India Year of Culture provided important new information about the goals and constraints of Indian cultural diplomacy. The project proved effective in promoting India's abundant cultural legacy, fostering interaction with the Indian diaspora, and fortifying bilateral ties with the United Kingdom. However, participant input brought to light a number of issues, such as perceived disparities between traditional and modern cultural representations and difficulties in connecting with younger and non-diaspora audiences. These results shed light on areas where India's cultural diplomacy could be improved in order to more effectively accomplish its long-term strategic objectives and are important for understanding how cultural diplomacy can be used as an instrument for soft power.

The following sections will explore the synthesis of these findings with the theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review, examine their implications for UK-India relations, and discuss the challenges and limitations encountered during the initiative. Ultimately, this chapter aims to provide a critical interpretation of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 and its broader significance for cultural diplomacy in both nations.

## 5.2 Synthesis with Theoretical Framework

### 5.2.1 Application of Soft Power Theory

The results of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 are in line with Joseph Nye's theory of soft power, which emphasizes a country's capacity to influence others without using force by using attraction and cultural appeal [56]. One of the best examples of using culture as a soft power instrument to increase one's influence globally is India's deliberate exploitation of its cultural legacy during the initiative. Events engaged a variety of audiences and strengthened favourable opinions of India by showcasing the country's rich traditions while simultaneously highlighting its modernity. The initiative's widespread appeal is demonstrated by the participation of nearly 7.7 million participants and 75 million digital viewers [30].

India's emphasis on engaging the Indian diaspora, particularly in the UK, was another strategic soft power move. The diaspora's positive reception of events like *Shiraz: A Romance of India* reflects the success of the initiative in strengthening cultural ties and fostering a sense of identity among this key demographic [45]. However, the challenge of extending this influence to non-diaspora communities, particularly younger and non-urban populations, highlights a gap in India's approach to soft power, suggesting the need for more inclusive outreach efforts.

### 5.2.2 Cultural Hegemony and Representation

Through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 can be examined in terms of how it shaped global perceptions of Indian culture. Gramsci argued that dominant cultural narratives often reinforce existing power structures, with marginalized cultures struggling to assert their identity within these frameworks [27]. The Year of Culture provided India with an opportunity to counter Western-centric narratives by showcasing its contributions to global culture, science, and technology.

However, some events within the initiative inadvertently reinforced colonial narratives. Certain representations of UK-India historical ties were critiqued for failing to fully address the complexities of colonialism, thus perpetuating hegemonic narratives [54]. For instance, exhibitions of Indian textiles, like muslin and chintz, showcased their artistry but overlooked colonial exploitation that decimated India's textile industry. Similarly, classical dance performances celebrated cultural elegance without acknowledging how colonial suppression marginalized these art forms, perpetuating a sanitized narrative that ignored the impact of British colonial policies [75, 74]. Additionally, the heavy emphasis on traditional art forms without an equivalent focus on contemporary culture may have inadvertently reinforced outdated perceptions of Indian culture as static and unchanging. This reflects how selective cultural representation can still be influenced by hegemonic forces, limiting the broader potential of cultural diplomacy to challenge established global power dynamics [14].

### 5.2.3 Relevance to Cultural Diplomacy

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 contributes significantly to our understanding of the evolving practice of cultural diplomacy. India's use of cultural diplomacy aligns with established models that emphasize cultural exchange as a means to foster mutual understanding and strengthen bilateral relations [47]. However, the initiative also highlighted some key divergences from traditional models. As noted by one cultural officer, balancing tradition and modernity proved challenging, particularly in engaging younger audiences who sought more contemporary content [2]. This demonstrates that cultural diplomacy must be adaptable, incorporating modern and digital cultural forms to remain relevant to a wider and more diverse audience.

Moreover, the initiative illuminated the complexities of cultural diplomacy in a post-colonial context. While it aimed to reinforce ties between the UK and India, it also underscored the challenges of representing a shared history that includes colonialism. Future initiatives must address these complexities more directly to better align with India's broader ambitions of re-shaping global narratives and enhancing its soft power [46].

## 5.3 Implications for UK-India Relations

### 5.3.1 Short-term Implications

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 was launched at a critical juncture, particularly for the UK, as it faced the uncertainties of Brexit. In the short term, cultural diplomacy allowed the UK to demonstrate its openness to non-European partnerships, signaling a desire to deepen ties with Commonwealth countries like India [65]. For India, the initiative aligned with its soft power strategy to expand global influence, particularly by showcasing its cultural diversity and modernity [68].

However, the short-term success of the Year of Culture requires critical examination. While the initiative was celebrated for its cultural richness and public engagement, it did not fully confront the complexities of post-colonial UK-India relations. Scholars such as Gopal [25] argue that cultural diplomacy lacking critical engagement with historical injustices risks perpetuating superficial narratives rather than fostering deeper diplomatic understanding. The focus on shared history without acknowledging the colonial legacy may have limited the initiative's effectiveness in addressing the power imbalances that shape contemporary UK-India relations.

One example is the partnership between British and Indian museums that focused on the display of ancient artifacts and treasures, highlighting cultural exchange. However, these exhibitions often sidestepped discussions on how many such artifacts were acquired during colonial rule, avoiding deeper conversations about repatriation and the colonial legacy of cultural extraction [26].

### 5.3.2 Long-term Implications

The long-term implications of the Year of Culture are more difficult to assess, as its success will depend on how both nations sustain the momentum created during the event. Cultural diplomacy can be an entry point for deeper collaboration in areas such as technology, education, and the creative industries, which could strengthen the long-term relationship between the UK and India [59]. However, for this to happen, the cultural engagement initiated in 2017 must be followed by substantive collaborations in these sectors.

India's ambitions to project a unified cultural identity are clear, but the long-term success of its cultural diplomacy will require more than an emphasis on heritage. Scholars such as Singh [69] argue that cultural diplomacy is most effective when it presents a forward-looking, innovative image. The Year of Culture, by focusing predominantly on traditional forms of cultural expression, may have inadvertently reinforced a static perception of Indian culture. To sustain its global influence, India will need to integrate contemporary cultural forms into its future diplomacy efforts to appeal to younger and more globally connected audiences [5].

For the UK, the initiative represents an opportunity to deepen its non-European partnerships, particularly in the post-Brexit context. However, long-term success will require more than symbolic gestures. Continued engagement in areas like trade, education, and technology is essential for the UK to maintain its influence globally [65]. Without sustained efforts, the long-term impact of the Year of Culture could be limited to a temporary display of goodwill, rather than a foundation for deeper collaboration.

## 5.4 Challenges and Limitations

### 5.4.1 Limitations of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017

Despite its successes, the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 faced several limitations that impacted the scope and depth of its outcomes. Key limitations include:

#### Homogenization of Indian Culture

One of the challenges of the Year of Culture was its tendency to present a somewhat homogenized view of Indian culture. While India is a mosaic of diverse languages, regions, religions, and social traditions, the initiative often emphasized more mainstream cultural expressions, such as classical arts and major religious festivals, at the expense of less prominent or regional cultures [40]. For instance, while Bollywood and classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam received significant attention, there was limited representation of India's northeast, indigenous art forms, and lesser-known folk traditions. This not only failed to capture the full spectrum of India's cultural plurality but also risked perpetuating a narrow understanding of what constitutes "Indian culture."

By not adequately showcasing the diversity of India's cultures, including those that exist on the periphery of mainstream narratives, the initiative may have inadvertently reinforced existing cultural hierarchies. As Sharma [66] argues, there is a risk in presenting a monolithic view of a country as diverse as India because it oversimplifies its cultural complexity and marginalizes voices that do not fit within the dominant framework. This lack of representation meant that the initiative fell short of its potential to educate audiences about the rich tapestry of India's cultural landscape, missing an opportunity to foster a deeper and more inclusive understanding of India's varied identities.

### **Elitism and Urban-Centric Focus**

The cultural programming of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 was heavily concentrated in major cities such as London and Delhi, reflecting an elitist and urban-centric focus that left rural and less urbanized regions underrepresented. By prioritizing events in cosmopolitan areas, the initiative inadvertently catered to a more privileged, educated demographic, thereby limiting its inclusivity. This urban bias not only neglected rural populations but also overlooked the socioeconomic diversity within both nations. The reliance on high-profile venues and events primarily accessible to wealthier, urban audiences reinforced existing social inequalities and perpetuated an elitist narrative of cultural engagement [62]. This elitism diluted the potential impact of cultural diplomacy, which should ideally transcend class and geographic boundaries to include all sectors of society [5]. By not integrating rural and marginalized communities, the initiative missed an opportunity to present a fuller, more nuanced portrayal of both Indian and British culture.

### **Limited Two-Way Exchange**

While the initiative sought to promote mutual cultural understanding, the focus was primarily on Indian culture being showcased in the UK. This unidirectional exchange created an asymmetry in the cultural dialogue, with relatively fewer opportunities for British cultural representation in India. This imbalance reduced the initiative's potential to foster genuine two-way cultural exchange, which is central to the goals of cultural diplomacy [51].

### **Logistical Coordination and Scale**

The sheer scale of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017, with over 200 events spread across multiple cities and venues, created a complex logistical landscape. Coordination among various stakeholders, including government bodies, cultural organizations, and local institutions, was a daunting task that required meticulous planning and resource allocation. However, the differing agendas and priorities of these stakeholders often led to bureaucratic hurdles, delays, and resource mismanagement [63]. Furthermore, the lack of a centralized coordinating body

with the authority to oversee all events exacerbated these challenges, resulting in miscommunication and a fragmented execution [2]. This lack of coherence sometimes resulted in events that appeared disconnected, thereby diluting the overall impact of the cultural narrative that the initiative aimed to present. Consequently, these logistical shortcomings not only affected the quality and reach of the cultural exchanges but also exposed the limitations of large-scale cultural diplomacy initiatives that involve multiple actors.

### **Overlooking Socio-Political Contexts**

One of the key limitations of the Year of Culture was its tendency to depoliticize cultural expressions by neglecting the socio-political contexts that shape contemporary UK-India relations. While cultural events celebrated heritage and shared history, they often avoided engaging with pressing contemporary issues such as migration, diaspora experiences, racial tensions, and the impact of globalization on cultural identities [15]. For example, while the initiative hosted events featuring Indian art and music, it rarely addressed the lived realities of the Indian diaspora in the UK, who often navigate complex identities and experiences of marginalization. This avoidance of socio-political themes meant that the initiative presented culture in a vacuum, stripped of the real-world factors that influence cultural dynamics. By not addressing these contemporary contexts, the Year of Culture missed an opportunity to use cultural diplomacy as a platform for dialogue on the current challenges and opportunities in UK-India relations [67]. Engaging with these issues could have facilitated a more holistic understanding of how culture intersects with politics, economics, and social issues in shaping the relationship between the two nations.

## **5.4.2 Limitations of the Research**

### **Reliance on Secondary Data**

The research for this study predominantly used secondary sources such as government reports, which may not have fully captured the complexity of audience experiences. Apart from that, the primary data, including interviews, gave more focus to thematic analysis, to provide a more nuanced view of how the initiative was perceived.

### **Limited Longitudinal Study**

The research is limited by its focus on the immediate aftermath of the initiative. A longitudinal study that tracks the long-term effects of the Year of Culture on UK-India relations, particularly in the cultural and diplomatic spheres, would offer deeper insights into its lasting impact [17].

**Sampling Bias in Feedback**

Feedback gathered from event participants may reflect a positive bias, as those already inclined to attend cultural events tend to provide favorable responses. This limits the ability to critically assess whether the initiative reached and engaged more skeptical or less culturally engaged demographics [4].

**Lack of Focus on Non-Diaspora Engagement**

The research largely focuses on how the initiative engaged the Indian diaspora. There is insufficient analysis of how non-diaspora groups in the UK perceived and interacted with the initiative, which could offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy beyond diaspora communities.

## **5.5 Ambitions and Limitations of Indian Cultural Diplomacy**

### **5.5.1 Ambitions of Indian Cultural Diplomacy**

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 exemplified India's broader ambitions in cultural diplomacy, primarily aimed at projecting a unified cultural identity, enhancing its global influence, and engaging the Indian diaspora. India sought to showcase its rich cultural heritage and modern artistic expressions to reinforce its image as a culturally vibrant and globally relevant nation [68]. By aligning with Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, India aimed to increase its international appeal, utilizing culture as a means to foster goodwill and deepen diplomatic ties with the UK. Another key ambition was to involve the Indian diaspora in the UK, leveraging their cultural connections to serve as ambassadors of Indian culture, thereby strengthening transnational ties [39].

India also intended to demonstrate a harmonious blend of its traditional and contemporary cultural elements, positioning itself as a nation that honors its past while actively engaging with the modern world. This ambition was evident in the programming, which ranged from classical dance performances to contemporary art exhibitions. The aim was not just to project India's cultural richness but also to assert its status as a progressive, forward-looking country. The strategic use of cultural diplomacy was thus geared towards redefining India's global narrative, moving away from the post-colonial imagery and establishing a more nuanced, self-determined identity [75].

### **5.5.2 Balancing Ambition with Realism**

The ambitions of Indian cultural diplomacy, as demonstrated in the Year of Culture, were aspirational, aiming to achieve a comprehensive and multifaceted projection of India on the global

stage. However, these ambitions also reveal a gap between idealism and practical execution. While the initiative set out to blend traditional and modern cultural narratives, its execution often veered towards the familiar and safe territory of heritage promotion, thus falling short of presenting a balanced view of India's cultural diversity. The need to critically address colonial legacies and adopt a more inclusive representation of modern Indian society suggests that future cultural diplomacy efforts must find a more realistic balance between honoring cultural heritage and embracing contemporary realities [4].

Furthermore, the ambition to engage the Indian diaspora, though partially successful, highlighted the challenge of appealing to multiple generations within the diaspora. The emphasis on traditional forms resonated more with older generations, while younger members of the diaspora felt a disconnect due to the lack of contemporary cultural representations [49]. This indicates that for cultural diplomacy to be effective, it must evolve to reflect the diverse and changing identities of both the homeland and the diaspora.

In summary, while the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 embodied India's cultural diplomacy ambitions, the initiative revealed several gaps and limitations. A more balanced approach that embraces both tradition and modernity, critically engages with historical contexts, and inclusively represents diverse cultural narratives is crucial for future initiatives to achieve their ambitious goals effectively.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

### **5.6.1 For India's Cultural Diplomacy**

#### **Integrate Contemporary Cultural Forms**

While traditional art forms are valuable, they often perpetuate a static image of Indian culture. To resonate with global audiences, particularly younger generations, India's cultural diplomacy must incorporate contemporary cultural expressions like digital art, modern music, and technology. Basu [5] argues that the digital age has transformed cultural consumption, making it essential for cultural diplomacy to embrace digital and contemporary mediums. By doing so, India can project a more dynamic and forward-looking image, enhancing its soft power on the global stage.

#### **Engage with Complex Historical Narratives**

Cultural diplomacy that avoids confronting historical complexities risks oversimplifying relationships. Gopal [24] suggests that by critically engaging with colonial legacies, India can foster more meaningful dialogue with other nations, particularly the UK. This approach moves beyond mere cultural celebration, offering a platform for mutual understanding and respect.

Addressing such complexities directly can help dismantle stereotypes and challenge existing power dynamics, promoting a more balanced cultural exchange.

### **Diversify Cultural Outreach**

The concentration of cultural programs in urban centers has created an urban-rural divide, limiting the inclusivity of cultural diplomacy [62]. Rural regions often have unique cultural expressions that differ from urban narratives, contributing to a richer, more diverse portrayal of Indian culture. By extending outreach to rural and less privileged areas, India can engage a broader spectrum of its population, fostering a more holistic cultural narrative that reflects the country's diversity and socio-economic realities.

### **Enhance Diaspora Engagement**

While the Indian diaspora plays a crucial role in projecting India's cultural diplomacy, generational divides within the diaspora require a more nuanced approach. Menon [49] points out that younger members of the diaspora often identify with a hybrid cultural identity that includes both their Indian heritage and their experiences in their host country. By offering a mix of traditional and contemporary cultural programs, India can engage these evolving identities, strengthening ties with the diaspora and using it as a conduit for broader cultural influence.

## **5.6.2 For UK-India Bilateral Relations**

### **Foster Two-Way Cultural Dialogue**

Cultural diplomacy should not be a one-way exchange but rather a reciprocal dialogue that promotes mutual respect and understanding [28]. The UK should actively promote British culture in India, facilitating a more balanced cultural partnership. By engaging in joint cultural initiatives, such as art collaborations and educational exchanges, both countries can challenge post-colonial power dynamics and foster a sense of equality in their relationship, moving beyond symbolic gestures toward genuine cultural dialogue.

### **Link Cultural Exchange with Broader Collaboration**

Cultural diplomacy can serve as a gateway to deeper economic and political partnerships. Rutter [65] argues that by linking cultural exchange with initiatives in education, technology, and creative industries, both nations can address socio-economic disparities while fostering sustainable bilateral relations. For example, integrating digital literacy projects into cultural programs can have a transformative impact on communities, offering opportunities for skill development while enhancing cultural understanding.

### **5.6.3 For Future Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives**

#### **Adopt a Hybrid Engagement Model**

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift toward digital engagement, highlighting the need for cultural diplomacy to adapt to this new landscape [23]. A hybrid model that combines physical and digital experiences can enhance accessibility, particularly for global audiences who may be unable to participate in person. Digital platforms can expand the reach of cultural initiatives, fostering inclusive participation and ensuring that cultural diplomacy remains relevant in the digital age.

#### **Promote Inclusivity and Diversity**

Effective cultural diplomacy should present a nuanced, diverse portrayal of culture that challenges stereotypes and encourages critical thinking [61]. By including marginalized voices and addressing socio-political issues, cultural diplomacy can foster more meaningful exchanges that reflect the complexities of national identities. Inclusivity ensures that cultural narratives are not dominated by elite or urban perspectives, thereby promoting a more comprehensive understanding of culture.

#### **Implement Long-term Impact Evaluation**

Cultural diplomacy initiatives often have long-term effects that are not immediately visible. Cull [18] argues for the importance of regular feedback and longitudinal studies in measuring the true impact of cultural diplomacy. By implementing mechanisms for long-term evaluation, future initiatives can be refined to adapt to changing global contexts, ensuring that cultural diplomacy remains effective and responsive to audience needs.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 serves as a pivotal case study in examining the intricate nature of cultural diplomacy and soft power. Designed to strengthen bilateral ties, enhance India's global influence, and engage the Indian diaspora in the UK, the initiative achieved a degree of success by fostering public engagement and sparking dialogue. However, a deeper analysis reveals several critical shortcomings. While the initiative's emphasis on traditional cultural forms like classical dance, music, and religious festivals did resonate with older and more nostalgic audiences, it often reinforced existing stereotypes of India as an ancient, unchanging civilization. This approach missed the opportunity to showcase India's contemporary vibrancy, technological advancements, and diverse modern art forms, thereby limiting its effectiveness in portraying India as a dynamic and evolving global player [71, 20].

The initiative's urban-centric focus further underscored an elitist narrative. By concentrating events in cosmopolitan centers like London and Delhi, it marginalized rural voices and neglected the socioeconomic diversity that defines both nations. This focus not only diluted the inclusivity of the program but also perpetuated the notion that culture is the domain of the urban elite, thereby missing a broader representation of the cultural fabric [5, 62]. Moreover, the initiative's limited engagement with the colonial legacy left a critical gap. While the events celebrated shared heritage, they often sidestepped the complexities of colonial history and its enduring impact on contemporary UK-India relations. As Mukherjee [54] argues, cultural diplomacy that fails to address historical injustices risks perpetuating superficial narratives rather than fostering a more profound and transformative dialogue.

The discussion synthesized these outcomes within theoretical frameworks, particularly Nye's concept of soft power and Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. The UK-India Year of Culture illustrates how cultural diplomacy requires a delicate balance between honoring heritage and embracing modernity. Nye's soft power emphasizes attraction rather than coercion, yet the Year of Culture's traditional focus often translated into a form of cultural representation that reinforced existing power structures rather than challenging them [56]. Similarly, Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony was evident in the narrative presented, one that often leaned toward a hegemonic portrayal of a harmonious, uncritical cultural exchange, sidelining the voices

that complicate this narrative [27].

The short-term success of the Year of Culture demonstrated the potential of cultural diplomacy as a tool for building goodwill. Yet, its long-term impact and effectiveness hinge on moving beyond symbolic gestures to more reciprocal, inclusive, and critically reflective cultural exchanges. It is this ability to engage in genuine dialogue that holds the key to fostering a more equitable and meaningful cultural relationship between nations.

## 6.1 Broader Implications and Future Directions

Moreover, there is a pressing need to confront and integrate complex historical narratives, including colonial legacies, into cultural programming. By engaging critically with the past, cultural diplomacy can become a space for dialogue that fosters mutual understanding and healing, rather than merely a platform for celebration. This shift toward a more reflective and dialogic form of cultural exchange can pave the way for a more balanced and equitable partnership between countries, moving beyond the power imbalances that have historically characterized international relations [24, 75].

The analysis of the Year of Culture also underscores the importance of evolving cultural diplomacy to reflect the realities of a globalized world. Contemporary cultural diplomacy should encompass not just heritage but also the dynamic, evolving identities of modern societies. For India, this means integrating its technological advancements, contemporary arts, and digital culture into its diplomatic toolkit, thereby presenting a multifaceted image that resonates with global audiences [5]. For the UK, it involves engaging with its multicultural reality and presenting a more inclusive narrative of British culture that acknowledges its colonial past while embracing its diverse present.

## 6.2 Final Reflections

The UK-India Year of Culture 2017 provides a valuable case for reflecting on the broader dynamics of cultural diplomacy and soft power. It demonstrated the potential of cultural exchange as a tool for building bridges between nations, engaging the diaspora, and fostering a sense of shared heritage. However, it also highlighted the complexities and challenges inherent in this process. By emphasizing traditional narratives and avoiding difficult historical conversations, the initiative often fell into the trap of offering a simplified and sanitized version of cultural relations. This underscores the need for future cultural diplomacy efforts to be more inclusive, diverse, and critically engaged [83].

In an increasingly interconnected world, cultural diplomacy must evolve to meet the complexities of global cultural interactions. It should strive not only to celebrate cultural heritage but also to challenge stereotypes, confront historical legacies, and foster meaningful dialogue

that can contribute to more equitable international relations [52]. As policymakers, cultural institutions, and scholars look to the future, the lessons from the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 provide a framework for developing cultural diplomacy initiatives that are not only celebratory but also transformative. By embracing diversity, inclusivity, and critical engagement, cultural diplomacy can move beyond soft power to become a true force for mutual understanding and global cooperation.

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# Appendix A

# Appendix A

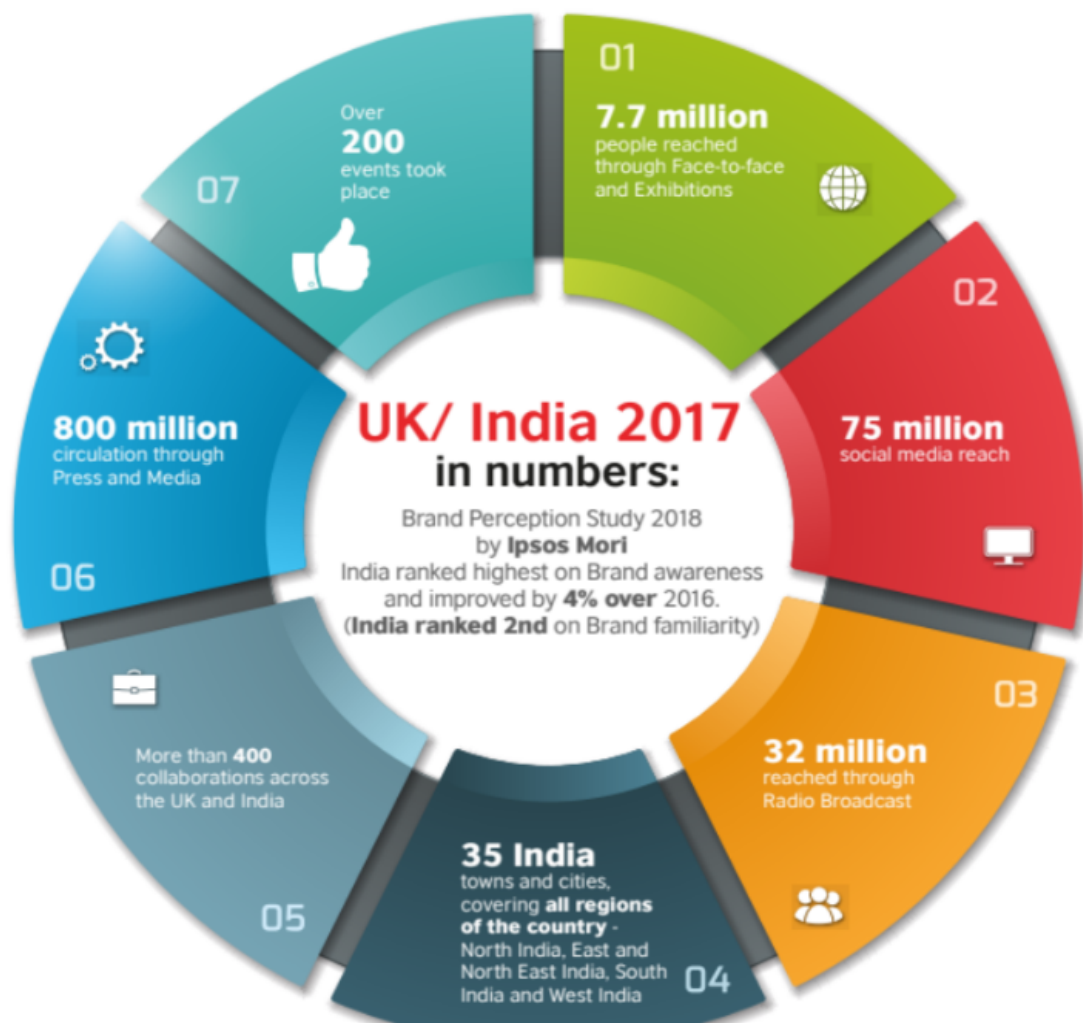


Figure A.1: Demographic Reach of Events [10]

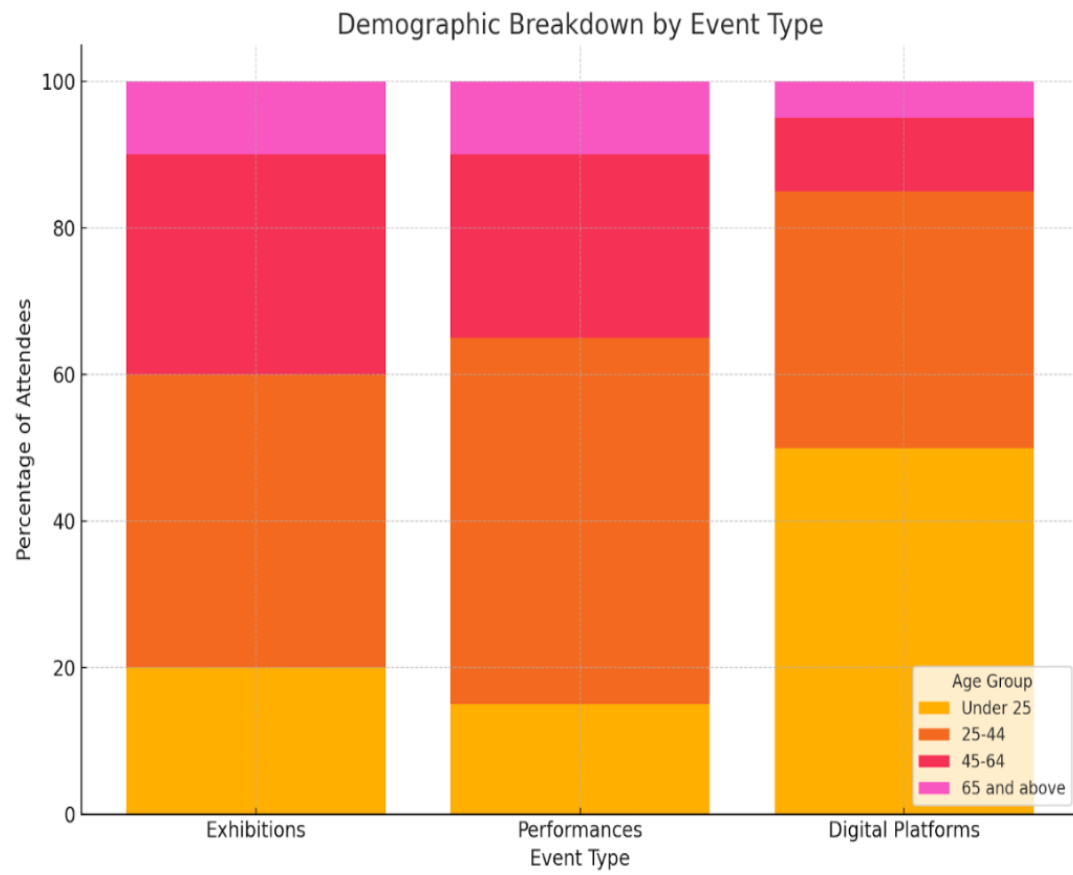


Figure A.2: Demographic Breakdown of Event Type (Author, 2024)

# Appendix B

## Appendix B: Interviews

### Interview 1: Cultural Officer 1

**Question 1:** What were some of the most significant cultural sensitivities you had to navigate during the planning and execution of the events? How did you ensure that the representations of both UK and Indian cultures were respectful and authentic?

**Answer:** One of the most significant cultural sensitivities we faced was ensuring that the historical ties between the UK and India were acknowledged without reinforcing colonial narratives. It was a delicate balance between celebrating shared history and recognizing the complex, often painful, aspects of that history. To navigate this, we involved cultural experts and historians from both nations in the planning stages of each event. This collaborative approach ensured that the representations were nuanced and reflective of both cultures' perspectives. We also made sure to include contemporary voices and narratives, particularly those that highlighted the ongoing contributions of the Indian diaspora in the UK.

**Question 2:** The initiative had a strong digital component aimed at engaging younger audiences. How successful do you think these digital efforts were in reaching diverse audiences, and what lessons did you learn about digital engagement in cultural diplomacy?

**Answer:** The digital component was both a challenge and an opportunity. While we successfully engaged younger, tech-savvy audiences through initiatives like "Mix the City," we realized that digital engagement often excluded older or less digitally connected demographics. One key lesson was the importance of hybrid approaches—combining digital and traditional media to ensure inclusivity. We also learned that cultural diplomacy in the digital age requires more than just accessibility; it demands culturally relevant content that resonates with diverse audiences across different platforms.

**Question 3:** How did the selection of cultural content for the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 reflect the balance between showcasing India's rich heritage and its modern, dynamic culture? What were some challenges you encountered in achieving this balance?

**Answer:** The selection process for the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 was a delicate balancing act. We wanted to ensure that the richness of India's heritage was on full display, but we also needed to highlight its modern achievements and innovations. One of the key challenges we faced was ensuring that traditional art forms, such as Bharatanatyam or Kathak, didn't overshadow more contemporary expressions like digital art and modern cinema. There was a tendency to gravitate towards the classical because it's what audiences are familiar with, but we worked hard to push boundaries by introducing less conventional forms. Personally, I was particularly proud of how we juxtaposed ancient art forms with cutting-edge exhibitions, like *India Illuminated*, which beautifully showcased India's contributions to global science and culture. The challenge was ensuring we didn't romanticize India's past at the expense of acknowledging its vibrant present, and I think we achieved that balance.

**Question 4:** How did you balance traditional and contemporary cultural elements in the UK-India Year of Culture, and how did participant feedback shape your approach?

**Answer:** Balancing traditional and contemporary cultural elements was one of the key challenges during the UK-India Year of Culture. We wanted to honor India's rich cultural legacy, but at the same time, we needed to showcase its modern artistic innovations. Some participants, particularly younger audiences, felt that contemporary art forms like digital art and modern music were underrepresented. Based on this feedback, future initiatives will aim for a more equal representation to engage younger, more globally connected audiences.

**Question** What specific examples can you provide that illustrate the British public's reception of this initiative?

**Answer:** One memorable example was the extensive coverage of the opening event at Buckingham Palace, which received praise for its grandeur and symbolism. However, the public's reception varied; while many appreciated the cultural exchange, some questioned the focus on high-profile events and called for more grassroots engagement.

**Question 6:** What challenges did you encounter during the initiative, and how were they addressed?

**Answer:** One of the challenges was managing the expectations of various stakeholders, from government bodies to artists. Balancing the representation of traditional and contemporary culture was also a challenge. We addressed this by ensuring open dialogue and being adaptive to feedback throughout the initiative.

**Question 7:** Can you discuss any long-term effects of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 on diplomatic relations between India and the UK?

**Answer:** In the long term, the Year of Culture has laid a foundation for sustained cultural collaboration. It has created a framework for continued engagement, allowing both countries to explore new avenues of cultural diplomacy. This initiative has helped in reinforcing the perception of India as a diverse and culturally rich nation.

**Question 8:** What future initiatives are planned that build on the insights gained from the UK-India Year of Culture 2017?

**Answer:** Future initiatives aim to be more inclusive by integrating grassroots and regional cultural expressions. Plans include collaborative projects that involve younger generations, digital platforms, and community-based cultural programs to foster a more holistic cultural dialogue.

**Question 9:** In your opinion, how effective is cultural diplomacy as a tool for enhancing soft power, particularly in the context of bilateral relations between India and the UK?

**Answer:** Cultural diplomacy is highly effective in enhancing soft power, as it allows countries to engage on a human level beyond political discourse. For India and the UK, it opened up conversations that went beyond trade and politics, creating a platform for cultural understanding and mutual respect.

## Interview 2: Cultural Officer 2

**Question 1:** What were some of the most significant cultural sensitivities you had to navigate during the planning and execution of the events? How did you ensure that the representations of both UK and Indian cultures were respectful and authentic?

**Answer:** A major challenge was avoiding cultural appropriation while celebrating the richness of Indian culture. We were very conscious of the potential for misinterpretation, especially in the representation of traditional Indian arts and crafts. To address this, we worked closely with Indian artists and cultural practitioners to ensure that every aspect of the programming was authentic and respectful. For example, during the planning of exhibitions, we made it a point to consult with community leaders from both the UK and India, ensuring that the cultural expressions were not just accurate but also meaningful to the communities they represented.

**Question 2:** The initiative had a strong digital component aimed at engaging younger audiences. How successful do you think these digital efforts were in reaching diverse audiences, and what lessons did you learn about digital engagement in cultural diplomacy?

**Answer:** Our digital efforts had mixed results. While we reached a significant number of young people through social media and interactive online events, we observed a gap in engagement with rural or less affluent audiences, both in the UK and India. One key takeaway was the need for more inclusive digital strategies that consider varying levels of digital literacy and access. Additionally, we learned that effective digital diplomacy is not just about pushing content online but about creating interactive and participatory experiences that allow audiences to feel connected to the cultural exchange.

**Question 3:** How did the selection of cultural content for the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 reflect the balance between showcasing India's rich heritage and its modern, dynamic

culture? What were some challenges you encountered in achieving this balance?

**Answer:** Striking the balance between India's traditional and modern aspects was definitely a challenge, especially when dealing with audiences in the UK who may have had preconceived notions about Indian culture. One of the biggest hurdles we encountered was managing expectations. Many people expect classical dances, colorful textiles, and traditional music when they think of India, but we wanted to show that India is also at the forefront of contemporary arts and technology. The key was to create a narrative that intertwined the two. For me, the most fulfilling part was seeing how events like the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival integrated both historical and contemporary voices, offering a platform for meaningful cross-cultural dialogue. The challenge, though, was avoiding tokenism—making sure modern elements weren't just add-ons, but integral parts of the program.

**Question 4:** How did the selection of cultural content for the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 reflect the balance between showcasing India's rich heritage and its modern, dynamic culture? What were some challenges you encountered in achieving this balance?

**Answer:** The selection process for the UK-India Year of Culture 2017 was a delicate balancing act. We wanted to ensure that the richness of India's heritage was on full display, but we also needed to highlight its modern achievements and innovations. One of the key challenges we faced was ensuring that traditional art forms, such as Bharatanatyam or Kathak, didn't overshadow more contemporary expressions like digital art and modern cinema. There was a tendency to gravitate towards the classical because it's what audiences are familiar with, but we worked hard to push boundaries by introducing less conventional forms. Personally, I was particularly proud of how we juxtaposed ancient art forms with cutting-edge exhibitions, like India Illuminated, which beautifully showcased India's contributions to global science and culture. The challenge was ensuring we didn't romanticize India's past at the expense of acknowledging its vibrant present, and I think we achieved that balance.

**Question 5:** What specific examples can you provide that illustrate the British public's reception of this initiative?

**Answer:** A specific example would be the public's response to the "India Illuminated" exhibition. While many praised it for showcasing India's contributions to science and culture, some audience members felt that certain aspects of India's diverse cultural landscape were underrepresented.

**Question 6:** What challenges did you encounter during the initiative, and how were they addressed?

**Answer:** A key challenge was ensuring that the cultural representation was broad and inclusive. Addressing this requires continuous efforts to incorporate feedback and engage with a wide array of cultural voices, including those that might not typically be in the spotlight.

**Question 7:** Can you discuss any long-term effects of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017

on diplomatic relations between India and the UK?

**Answer:** Although I was not directly involved, the initiative seems to have had a lasting impact on diplomatic relations by laying the groundwork for ongoing cultural exchange. It has encouraged institutions on both sides to continue collaborations, which is vital for sustained cultural diplomacy.

**Question 8:** What future initiatives are planned that build on the insights gained from the UK-India Year of Culture 2017?

**Answer:** Future initiatives are focusing on digital cultural exchanges and incorporating more regional cultural narratives. The insights from the Year of Culture have shown the importance of balancing high-profile events with grassroots engagement.

**Question 9:** In your opinion, how effective is cultural diplomacy as a tool for enhancing soft power, particularly in the context of bilateral relations between India and the UK?

**Answer:** Cultural diplomacy is a powerful tool for enhancing soft power, particularly because it fosters people-to-people connections. In the context of India and the UK, it serves as a bridge that facilitates understanding beyond political narratives, enriching bilateral relations.

### Interview 3: Artist 1

**Question 1:** Artistic Collaboration and Participation: Can you share your experience participating in one of the major events of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017? How did the event reflect or influence your artistic work, particularly in the context of UK-India cultural exchange?

**Answer:** Participating in the "India Illuminated" exhibition at the Science Museum was a profound experience for me. My work, which fuses traditional Indian motifs with contemporary digital art, was showcased alongside historical artifacts and cutting-edge technology. This juxtaposition allowed me to explore and express the continuity between India's rich cultural heritage and its modern-day innovations. The event significantly influenced my artistic practice by encouraging me to delve deeper into the intersections of tradition and modernity, a theme central to the UK-India cultural exchange.

**Question 2:** Representation and Cultural Themes: In your view, how well did the Year of Culture represent the contemporary and historical cultural narratives of India and the UK? Were there any specific themes or stories you felt were particularly well-handled or, conversely, overlooked in the events?

**Answer:** The Year of Culture did a commendable job of representing both contemporary and historical narratives. However, I felt that the focus was often skewed towards elite and well-established art forms, which may have overshadowed the more grassroots and emerging cultural expressions. For instance, while the exhibitions and performances were undeniably rich in content, there was less emphasis on folk traditions and the voices of marginalized communities.

This oversight suggests that while the Year of Culture was successful in many respects, it might have missed an opportunity to fully showcase the diversity of Indian and British cultural landscapes.

**Question 3:** How did you blend traditional and contemporary art forms in your work, and what feedback did you receive from the audience on this mix?

**Answer:** In my performance, I aimed to merge classical Indian dance with contemporary choreography to reflect both tradition and modernity. The audience response was generally positive, with many appreciating the blend of the old and the new. However, some younger participants expressed a desire for more modern elements, suggesting that while tradition is important, there's also a growing demand for contemporary cultural expressions.

**Question 4:** How did audiences in the UK respond to your performances or artworks during the initiative?

**Answer:** The audiences in the UK were incredibly receptive and curious about my performances during the Year of Culture. I noticed a genuine eagerness to learn and understand the nuances of Indian classical dance. After one performance, a young couple approached me and shared how the storytelling aspect of my dance resonated with them, giving them a new perspective on Indian culture. It was moments like these that made the experience so fulfilling.

**Question 5:** Can you share any memorable interactions or feedback that you received from the audience that highlighted the cultural exchange?

**Answer:** One memorable interaction was with an elderly British woman who had spent a few years in India during her youth. After my performance, she spoke to me with tears in her eyes, expressing how the music and dance brought back vivid memories of her time in India. It was a powerful reminder of how art can transcend time and space, creating a shared emotional experience that fosters cultural connection.

**Question 6:** How do you perceive the role of art in cultural diplomacy and the enhancement of soft power?

**Answer:** Art plays a crucial role in cultural diplomacy and enhancing soft power. Through my performances, I felt I was contributing to a larger dialogue, offering a piece of Indian culture that went beyond stereotypes. Art has the power to break down barriers and create a space for mutual respect and understanding, which is essential for soft power.

**Question 7:** From your experience, what are the strengths and limitations of using cultural events for diplomatic purposes?

**Answer:** One of the strengths of cultural events is their ability to humanize diplomatic efforts. However, the limitations lie in the scope and reach. While such events can create a strong impact, they often cater to a limited audience. It's essential to find ways to engage with a broader spectrum of society to ensure a more inclusive cultural exchange.

**Question 8:** What challenges do artists face when participating in international cultural diplomacy initiatives?

**Answer:** One challenge is navigating the cultural expectations and preconceptions of the host country. Sometimes, audiences have preconceived notions about what Indian art should look like, and it can be challenging to present a more nuanced picture. Additionally, logistical issues like funding and support can also pose challenges.

**Question 9:** How do you think these challenges could be addressed to better leverage cultural exchanges in the future?

**Answer:** To better leverage cultural exchanges, there needs to be more support for artists, especially in terms of funding and resources. Creating platforms that encourage dialogue between artists from different cultures can also help in breaking down stereotypes and fostering a more genuine exchange.

**Question 10:** Are there any future projects or collaborations you are looking forward to that build on your experiences from the Year of Culture?

**Answer:** I'm currently in discussions for a collaborative project that involves both Indian and British artists, building on the connections made during the Year of Culture. It's an exciting prospect that aims to continue the cultural dialogue initiated during the 2017 events.

## Interview 4: Artist 2

**Question 1:** Can you share your experience participating in one of the major events of the UK-India Year of Culture 2017? How did the event reflect or influence your artistic work, particularly in the context of UK-India cultural exchange?

**Answer:** One of my artist friends performed at the ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival event held at the British Library. This collaboration was particularly meaningful as it allowed me to blend my music, which is deeply rooted in Indian classical traditions, with contemporary British poetry. The fusion of these two distinct art forms created a unique dialogue between our cultures. The experience reinforced the importance of cross-cultural collaborations in my work, highlighting how different artistic traditions can come together to create something entirely new and reflective of both cultures.

**Question 2:** In your view, how well did the Year of Culture represent the contemporary and historical cultural narratives of India and the UK? Were there any specific themes or stories you felt were particularly well-handled or, conversely, overlooked in the events?

**Answer:** While the Year of Culture did well in highlighting the shared history between the UK and India, I believe it could have further emphasized contemporary issues and narratives, particularly those that resonate with younger generations. For example, themes around migration, identity, and the diaspora were touched upon but not fully explored. These are vital aspects of

the modern UK-India relationship that could have added depth to the cultural exchange. Additionally, there were instances where the portrayal of British culture felt somewhat limited, focusing more on historical ties than on present-day realities.

**Question 3:** How did audiences in the UK respond to your performances or artworks during the initiative?

**Answer:** When I performed in the UK, I found the audiences to be very receptive and curious. They were particularly interested in the stories and traditions behind the art form. It was heartening to see how art could open up conversations about culture and identity in ways that formal dialogues often cannot.

**Question 4:** Can you share any memorable interactions or feedback that you received from the audience that highlighted the cultural exchange?

**Answer:** After one of my performances, a university student came up to me and shared how it gave her a different understanding of Indian culture beyond what she had seen in popular media. Such feedback is always encouraging, as it shows that art can challenge perceptions and create meaningful cultural exchange.

**Question 5:** How do you perceive the role of art in cultural diplomacy and the enhancement of soft power?

**Answer:** Art is a powerful tool in cultural diplomacy because it can evoke emotions and connect people on a personal level. Unlike political dialogue, art speaks directly to the heart, creating an immediate sense of empathy and understanding that can be more impactful in shaping perceptions.

**Question 6:** From your experience, what are the strengths and limitations of using cultural events for diplomatic purposes?

**Answer:** Art is a powerful tool in cultural diplomacy because it can evoke emotions and connect people on a personal level. Unlike political dialogue, art speaks directly to the heart, creating an immediate sense of empathy and understanding that can be more impactful in shaping perceptions.

**Question 7:** What challenges do artists face when participating in international cultural diplomacy initiatives?

**Answer:** A significant challenge is the risk of being pigeonholed into presenting only certain aspects of culture that fit within a specific narrative. There is a tendency for cultural diplomacy to lean towards more traditional forms of art, which can sometimes limit the representation of the diversity within a culture.

**Question 8:** How do you think these challenges could be addressed to better leverage cultural exchanges in the future?

**Answer:** To address these challenges, there needs to be a more inclusive approach that allows

artists to present a fuller range of their work. Additionally, creating more grassroots-level engagement and outreach can help reach diverse audiences who may not typically engage with cultural diplomacy initiatives.

**Question 9:** Are there any future projects or collaborations you are looking forward to that build on your experiences from the Year of Culture?

**Answer:** I'm looking forward to collaborating with some UK-based artists in the future. Although I didn't participate in the Year of Culture, the connections I made during my performances in the UK have opened up new possibilities for cross-cultural projects.

**Question 10:** What advice would you give to other artists considering participating in similar cultural diplomacy initiatives?

**Answer:** For artists considering participating in cultural diplomacy initiatives, my advice would be to use these platforms to not only showcase your art but also to engage in dialogue. It's an opportunity to both share and learn. Be prepared for challenges, but also recognize the unique role art plays in building cultural bridges.