



The Role of Buddhist Philosophy in Traditional and Digital Media for South Asian Public Diplomacy

¹Bimal Prasad Gautam

Affiliation: Lokantar Sanchar Pvt. Ltd.

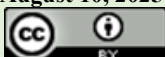
Publishing Process

Received on: July 15, 2025

Finalized to publish: August 10, 2025

Open Access 4.0

Published date: September 10, 2025



Abstract: The Buddhist philosophy has always been directed towards peace and stability in the countries in South Asia, which originated from the land of Nepal. This study discovers that traditional and digital media are the strategic tools for diffusing and communicating knowledge-based Buddhist philosophy. Whereas, public diplomacy can be effective for making broader knowledge for maintaining peace and stability within South Asian Countries.

The knowledge has originated in Nepal, the teachings methodology of Buddhism grounded in compassion, non-violence, mindfulness, and interdependence, which have become instrumental in shaping moral messaging and soft power strategies among the countries in South Asia like Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. Using a qualitative method, the research examines the role of cultural storytelling, tourism campaigns, academic diplomacy, and digital platforms in promoting Buddhist ideals on regional and global stages. The findings reveal that Buddhist-informed public diplomacy contributes to peacebuilding, which enhances the worldwide image and promotes intercultural understanding. However, the instrumentalization of religious narratives for political reasons encounters attitudes. In spite of this, the incorporation of Buddhist beliefs in public diplomacy has exposed potential in making a peaceful narrative for South Asia for promoting international relations.

Keywords: Buddhist Philosophy, Digital Media, Knowledge and Peace, Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Traditional Media

Declaration: There is no conflict of interest and adherence to the research ethics while conducting research.

Introduction

The Buddhist philosophy, which is known as the light of knowledge for keeping peace and inner happiness of the person has originated from the Land of Nepal. It gives the moral values of Buddhism, which depend on kindness (karuṇa), non-violence (ahimsa), mindfulness (sati), and interdependence (Kasih et al., 2024). According to Barreiros & Vainfas (2020), Buddhist philosophy provides ethical and peace-related communication for directing people towards global peace, prosperity, and happiness in the body and the soul of an individual, which always says "May peace prevail on earth" as a strong message through media for communicating positive perspectives. In the context of public diplomacy, these values have been disseminated through modern communication tools to influence public notions. It helps to enhance the national image as well as foster international relationships in bilateral and multilateral ways. In South Asia, a range of traditional and digital media platforms have been deliberately working to communicate Buddhist philosophy as an image to reinforce both cultural heritage and soft power agendas for maintaining peace and prosperity (Saliu, 2020).

In an article written by Alyakhri & Al-Btoos (2025), the researcher asserts that public diplomacy is one of the essential elements that depends on the national strategic communication, which encompasses the



nation's engagement with foreign populations through culture, education, and media. In this context, the symbolic power of Buddhism shows the spiritual tradition that is associated with peace, tolerance, and self-examination. It is becoming a valuable asset for the nations. Governments and civil society actors of South Asia have recognized these combined Buddhist tales for tourism promotion, media broadcasts, educational programs, and international cultural exchange programs for communicating Nepali culture and traditions (Saliu, 2023). It also helps to project a moral image of entire countries, enhancing the power of the peace message with media on the global stage.

Despite its principally positive character, the strategic use of Buddhist philosophy for enhancing public diplomacy has been encountering full of challenges in disseminating soft information to build alliances with global countries for the entire social development. Likewise, Kwachuh (2021) has analyzed that there is a bit of risk seen to instrumentalize religion for political

nationalistic ideology, but for the purpose of balancing power between and among the countries, Buddhist philosophy can be used by the entire world as a strategic tool for public diplomacy as a soft power in the context of Nepal. Additionally, stiffnesses rise when Buddhist rhetoric is chosen by radical groups, as seen in parts of Sri Lanka and Myanmar, confusing the image of Buddhism as consistently peaceful (Lee & Alhabash, n.d.).

Nevertheless, in the context of ethical communication practices, the combination of Buddhist philosophy into public diplomacy can foster deeper understanding for increasing dialogue for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in South Asia and beyond (Jones & Theerawong, 2021). So, this study has explored that Buddhist philosophy pronounced through a variety of communication tools helps as both a moral and strategic resource in determining public diplomacy across South Asia.

Research Problem

Nowadays, the strategic combination of Buddhist philosophy into public diplomacy efforts diagonally in South Asian Countries has increased gestures, mainly in countries like Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Thailand. These nations are using Buddhist values such as non-violence, kindness, and mindfulness as soft power tools to promote peace, improve international relations, and reinforce their national image. Though in spite of this growing importance of Buddhist philosophy, there is a lack of clear sympathy concerning the precise communication strategies employed to distribute these viewpoints effectively at both national and international levels. Furthermore, the challenge lies in interpreting these extremely spiritual and ethical wisdoms into modern communication arrangements such as social media, documentaries, educational programs, and cultural diplomacy, without weakening their spirit the core messages.

Another dimension of the research problem is the potential risk of debating Buddhism for nationalist determinations, which may misrepresent its message of universal peace and tolerance. In some cases, Buddhist rhetoric has been stolen by fundamental groups, confusing its role as a morally peaceful doctrine and creating misperception in global insights. This poses a threat to countries like Nepal, which seek to use Buddhist philosophy as a joining and political force. Therefore, the problem lies not only in the effective communication of Buddhist values but also in safeguarding the legitimacy, consistency, and ethical use of these messages in public diplomacy efforts. A deeper examination is desirable to appreciate how Buddhist values are combined into communication strategies

Research Questions

- a) In what ways do media representations of Buddhist diplomacy improve and use the soft power of South Asian countries to strengthen international relations?



- b) How do specific communication strategies (e.g., documentaries, exhibitions, social media, cultural summits) play for disseminating Buddhist thought as public diplomacy?

Research Objectives

- a) To investigate, from a media perspective, how Buddhist-themed public diplomacy projects have impacted the soft power and worldwide perception of South Asian countries.
- b) To look into the methods and media used by South Asian countries to disseminate Buddhist thought as part of their public diplomacy campaigns.

Method

This study has applied a qualitative research method to discover the role of traditional and digital media in promoting public diplomacy in South Asia. The data in this research were collected from secondary sources such as document analysis of media content, administration tourism movements, academic literature, and digital platforms, including YouTube, podcasts, and official social media pages. In this study, the case studies from Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka were analyzed to understand Buddhist values for the values among the countries that integrate their diplomatic message. The research also studied educational curricula, public diplomacy initiatives, and cultural storytelling practices to evaluate the Buddhist ethics which has been framed within national and international communication strategies. This multi-source, interpretive approach is permissible for a complete understanding of Buddhist philosophy and its functions as a soft power tool across the region.

Buddhist Diplomacy for Promoting Peace Communication in South Asia

In Nepal, the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautam (Gautam Buddha) is in Lumbini, which has highlighted for providing enlightened philosophy on Buddhism with soft diplomacy to have proper development of tourism and culture. It has led regional impact to vitalize Buddhist connections through public diplomacy (Panday, 2025). For this reason, neighboring country India has planned to launch the Buddhist Circuit project to develop regional tourism to restore the ancient monasteries as well as to promote the values of Nalanda University for the preservation of cultural heritage through diplomatic tools (Votey & Pal 2025).

According to Saliu (2020), the developments are frequently publicized over documentaries, social media campaigns, and diplomatic actions with the support of domestic and international media. Similarly, Nepal, as the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautam (the Buddha), has capitalized in promoting Lumbini as a worldwide pilgrimage destination and global peace center, using media platforms to engage Buddhist societies across Asia.

Similarly, there are different ways in diverse communities to flow peace messages in various levels of communication, from Intra-personal communication to mass communication, using various means of communication to accelerate peace in many dimensions (Lee & Alhabash, n.d.). In Nepal, Newar communities, Shakhya Guru used to recite Buddhist philosophy and the message in group communication. Similarly, the Sherpa, Tibetan community is worshipping His Holiness Lama as the peace messenger in the form of Lord Buddha. Likewise, the people of Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, etc., totally believe the Guru from the Buddhist monastery as a fellow of the Lord Buddha. The Buddhist Community always believes that there is the existence of Lord Buddha in the form of an incarnation. All these Gurus have conducted communication for the purpose of increasing discipleship for disseminating the peace voices (Yates & Mackenzie, 2018).

Communication and Buddhism for the National Interest of Bhutan

The Bhutani People worship Mahayana Buddha as their religion, where Buddhist philosophy is deeply rooted in the national identity. Bhutan's National policy is Gross National Happiness (GNH), which



reflects a Buddhist communication approach to National development and maintaining good governance (Hearn & Givel, 2010). Strategically, Bhutan presents Western capitalist models as an alternative way in international forums and media outlets. This philosophical framing has supported Bhutan as a country of spiritual wisdom and ecological balance to communicating its peace messages in the global arena (Cheong et. all, 2015).

Elsewhere, digital media has appeared as a vital platform for Buddhist communication for public diplomacy with the help of Monks, scholars, and influencers. Now it has reached global audiences through YouTube channels, podcasts, online teachings, and deliberation apps. These tools have widely disseminated Buddhist principles for making accessible, interactive, and multi-lingual connections to address generational and cultural gaps properly. The Global Buddhist Network, online Dharma platforms, and digital Buddhist magazines further facilitate the sharing of teachings, festivals, and peace initiatives in Bhutan (Prasartsin & Yanavuddho, 2016).

Traditional Media and Cultural Storytelling

In South Asia, traditional media like newspapers, radio, television, and documentary films remain dominant for disseminating Buddhist philosophy across South Asia. In Sri Lanka, Bhutan state-sponsored television programs regularly feature Buddhist discourses, festivals, recitation, and teachings properly (Sims, 2017). Popular documentaries such as *The Buddha* by David Grubin (PBS, 2010) and India's public broadcasts of Dalai Lama teachings are part of a broader strategy to promote Buddhist standards over storytelling and visual description. Likewise, as per the popular practices in India, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka, Cultural diplomacy is often improved through complete state-backed film festivals, displays, and temple renovation missions that obtain media coverage. These initiatives of these countries have used narrative storytelling to communicate not only Buddhist ideologies but also the supporting country's promise of peace and inheritance preservation (Kishwar, 2023).

Public Diplomacy for Promoting Buddhist Norms

One of the tourism online news portals, BW Hotelier (2025), published an article titled "India and Nepal Join Hands to enhance Cross-Border Tourism," prominence the status of India's Buddhist Circuit strategy in linking Bodh Gaya with Lumbini in Nepal. Nepali and Indian governments have developed tourism campaigns that stress Buddhist pilgrimage circuits for public diplomacy from Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, India, and Lumbini, Nepal, as centers of peace and meditation. Similarly, Mahaseth and Khatoon (2024) had given importance to the main aim of the Buddhist circuit for the development of spirituality with heritage tourism. Nepali media also cannot able to disseminate diplomatic knowledge for the welfare to develop these sites and combine for reaching global audiences via travel shows, brochures, and digital storytelling. These campaigns have used Buddhist rhetoric to emphasize harmony, healing and inner peace, and happiness as part of the philosophical identity in this region.

Digital Media and Multinational Buddhist Networks

Digital platforms are now the most energetic gears in spreading the Buddhist viewpoint. Websites, blogs, podcasts, and YouTube channels host a wide range of Buddhist content from directed deliberations to lectures on the Four Noble Truths. Platforms like the Global Buddhist Network (GBN) and Dharma Seed have created transnational spaces where Buddhist philosophy has been practiced virtually (Newell, 2008). In South Asia, Buddhist foundations practice Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to reach younger audiences, leveraging algorithms to socialize speech marks from the Buddha, vigorous Dharma dialogs, and trilingual content. The Global Buddhist Network has launched MCOT Buddhist Channel in Thailand.



It also broadcast Dharma for reciting to the audience across India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka to disseminate the Buddhist message.

Academic Development for Communicating Public Diplomacy

University Curriculum has to be developed on the Soft Power philosophy to have proper dissemination of academic discourses on Buddhist philosophy. The role of academic institutions (Nepali Universities) is most prominent in making public diplomacy effective with the academic development of Buddhist philosophy in their curriculum, which helps to spread the Buddhist perceptions as a soft power towards peace and development. The teaching curriculum of Buddhist philosophy and public diplomacy will help to maintain peace and stability towards the promotion of tourism. It can also be used as our national foreign policy to protect and promote the Panchasil policy of the Nepali government in its foreign policy. So, promoting the Buddhist philosophy is more essential for the national development of Nepal.

In India, Academic diplomacy has played a vital role in the diffusion of knowledge on Nalanda University as a soft power policy to support its tourism sectors. Nalanda University, India, has launched Buddhist studies programs as an academic diplomacy. Similarly, Sri Lanka and Bhutan have used scholarly research, publications, and lectures to distribute Buddhist concepts globally through many conferences, like India's Samvad, which has initiatives for making films and sharing online effective materials in both educational content and diplomatic signaling (Scott, 2023).

Mindful Journalism and Media Ethics

For the development of soft power perception for launching the Buddhist insights has been recommended "Middle Path Journalism and Communication" model to advocate for value-based communication inspired by Buddhist ethics. This focuses on truthfulness, non-harm, and mindfulness in media exercise. This model has encountered exaggeration and needs to look after respectful dialogue in public discourse. Buddhist-informed journalism initiatives are especially relevant in polarizing countries of South Asia, which have been promoting narratives of peace and tolerance of every individual and the countries (Gunatilleke, 2021).

Findings

The study reveals that Buddhist philosophy is deliberately transferred and concluded in both traditional and digital media across South Asia to improve public diplomacy and soft power. Traditional media, including state-owned television, radio, and print newspaper endure to play a significant role in countries like Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal. Agendas often focus on Buddhist wisdom, festivals, and ancient positions, while tourism drives highlight the key pilgrimage circuits such as Lumbini in Nepal and Bodh Gaya in India. These media-driven narratives stress spiritual and cultural values, a peace strategy that helps these nations represent themselves as the middle of moral wisdom and harmony in the world.

Digital media has arisen as a progressively energetic platform for distributing Buddhist wisdom to both regional and local audiences. Digital Platforms such as YouTube, podcasts, blogs, and social media pages maintained by monks, scholars, and cultural organizations are increasing the reach of Buddhist philosophy. Some of the initiatives, like the Global Buddhist Network, online Dharma platforms, and digital Buddhist magazines, have fostered multilingual and communication assignments that have been enabling global societies to access teachings, meditations, and festivals practically. These tools help connect generational and cultural divisions, making Buddhist values more available and internationally pertinent in modern diplomatic settings.

Additionally, the study highlights that Buddhist-informed public diplomacy is not just about reinforcing cultural identity but also supports national development agendas. Nepal and India are



incorporating Buddhist philosophy into curricula at its university level and also scholarly connections as a form of academic diplomacy. Bhutan has also presented a unique example of embedding Buddhist principles into governance and international discourse through its Gross National Happiness policy. However, the research also identifies challenges, such as the politicization of Buddhist rhetoric by radical groups, which can misrepresent the peaceful image of Buddhism. Despite such a jeopardy-filled situation, the mixing of Buddhist ethics into public diplomacy endures to stand in intercultural dialogue, promote peace stories, and shape promising international insights of South Asian countries.

Conclusion

The diffusion of Buddhist philosophy has involved diverse communication tools from traditional media and tourism storytelling to digital platforms. Similarly, watchdog journalism has become a vital approach for pleasing the eye on public diplomacy in South Asia. These tools not only share Buddhism as a religion but it will insist to promote its universal values to contribute to the protection of national identities and develop inter-cultural understanding in bilateral and multilateral positions in South Asian countries. So, using public diplomacy as a communication strategy with the ethical values of Buddhist philosophy has enhanced spiritual values in modern diplomatic practice.

References

- Alyakhri, M. A. K., & Al-Btoos, H. (2025, April 7). *Soft power in diplomacy: The role of culture and media in international relations*. SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5208216>
- Barreiros, D., & Vainfas, D. R. (2020, May 2). Cognition, Human Evolution and the possibilities for an Ethics of Warfare and Peace. Doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/3dw8s
- BW Hotelier (2025). "India and Nepal Join Hands to enhance Cross-Border Tourism," <https://www.bwhotelier.com/article/india-and-nepal-join-hands-to-boost-cross-border-tourism-557705>
- Cheong, I., Bark, T., & Jeong, H. Y. (2015, September 30). *A framework of trade policy for Bhutan compatible with the Gross National Happiness* (ADB South Asia Working Paper Series No. 39). Asian Development Bank. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2942477>
- Grubin, D. (2010). The Buddha [Documentary film]. PBS.
- Gunatilleke, G. (2021). Buddhists Map a New Paradigm for Development Communication. Eurasia Review. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/14032021-buddhists-map-a-new->
- Hearn, B. A., & Givel, M. (2010). Stock market finance and gross national happiness: An institutional fit? Evidence from Bhutan. *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 22, 1–36. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1624824>
- Jones, W. J., & Theerawong, P. (2021, June 11). *Muay Thai diplomacy: Thailand's soft power through public diplomacy*. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 2021. SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3864868>
- Kasih, Ekawahyu and Benardi, Benardi and Agustina, Selvi, Thudong Practices and Mindfulness A Qualitative Literature Review from the Buddhist Perspective (May 08, 2024)
- Kishwar, S. (2023). The Rising Role of Buddhism in India's Soft Power Strategy.
- Kwachuh, T. P. (2021, November 12). *Qatar's soft power, digital and public diplomacy in the face of a global pandemic walked past MENA neighbours*. SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3962228>
- Lee, H., & Alhabash, S. (n.d.). *The role of social media influencers in public diplomacy and relationship building with foreign publics*. SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4915071>
- Lee, H., & Alhabash, S. (n.d.). *The role of social media influencers in public diplomacy and relationship building with foreign publics*. SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4915071>



- Mahaseth, H., & Khatoon, S. (2024). Enhancing India's Soft Power through the Prism of Buddhism. *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-insight/international-affairs/enhancing-india-s-soft-power-through-the-prism-of-buddhism-101715428573968.html>
- Newell, C. S. (2008). Monks, meditation and missing links: Continuity, "orthodoxy" and the vijjā dhammakāya in Thai Buddhism (Doctoral dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London). <https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00007499>
- Panday, B. (2025). Lumbini: The Birthplace of Buddha, Nepal Social Treks and Expedition Pvt. Ltd. Thamel, Kathmandu,
- Prasartsin, S., & Yanavuddho, P. B. (2016). The happy way of life of retired civil servants according to the integrative Buddhist principles. *PSAKU International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 5(2), [July–December], Article 2.
- Saliu, H. (2020). The Evolution of the Concept of Public Diplomacy from the Perspective of Communication Stakeholders . *Medijska istraživanja*, 26 (1), 69-86. Doi 10.22572/mi.26.1.4
- Saliu, H. (2023). *Narratives of Public Diplomacy in the post-Truth Era: The decline of Soft Power*. *Communication & Society*, 36(2), 209-224. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.36.2.209-224>
- Saliu, Hasan (2020). Public Diplomacy and Related Concepts from the Perspective of Lasswell's Communication Model. *JAHHR*, Vol. 11/2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21860/j.11.2.2>
- Scott, D. (2023). India's Use of Buddhism: Soft Power, Soft Balancing. *E-International Relations*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2023/08/31/indias-use-of-buddhism-soft-power-soft-balancing>
- Sims, M. (2017). What discourses relating to the purpose of early childhood are shaping the work of early childhood practitioners in three different contexts: UK, Bhutan and Fiji? *Journal of Education and Learning*, 7(1), 223–233. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v7n1p223>
- Votey, M., & Pal, P. (2025). Great leaps from unstable ground: A response to “Making a market for ‘The Art of Nepal’: Tracing the flow of Nepali cultural property into the United States.” *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 32(2), 194–203. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S094073912510009X>
- Yates, D., & Mackenzie, S. (2018). Heritage, Crisis, and Community Crime Prevention in Nepal. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 25(2), 203–221. doi:10.1017/S0940739118000140