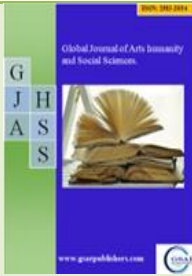
	<b>Global Journal of Arts Humanity and Social Sciences</b>			
	ISSN: 2583-2034			
	Abbreviated key title: Glob.J.Arts.Humanit.Soc.Sci			
	Frequency: Monthly			
	Published By GSAR Publishers			
Journal Homepage Link: <a href="https://gsarpublishers.com/journal-gjahss-home/">https://gsarpublishers.com/journal-gjahss-home/</a>				
Volume - 6	Issue - 6	June 2026	Total pages 598-605	DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20938470

## PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND SOFT POWER IN AFRICA: EVALUATING NIGERIA'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE AND INFLUENCE

By

**Kurotimi Favour Keme<sup>1</sup>, Izu, S. Iroro, Ph.D<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Political Science and International Relations Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja



### Article History

Received: 05- 06- 2026  
Accepted: 20- 06- 2026  
Published: 26- 06- 2026

Corresponding author  
**Kurotimi Favour Keme**

### Abstract

The character of power in international relations has experienced a substantial evolution in recent decades. In the past, people thought of power as military strength and economic dominance. Now, global politics is starting to see the value of attraction, persuasion, and legitimacy. This change has made the idea of soft power, made famous by Joseph Nye (2004), a key part of both academic discussion and policy practice. This research examines public diplomacy and soft power in Africa, focusing on Nigeria's influence and global reputation. Nigeria serves as a significant case study within this changing environment. Nigeria is strategically important on the continent because it is the most populous country in Africa and has one of the largest economies. More importantly, it has become a cultural powerhouse, with its music, movies, books, and digital art gaining worldwide fame. Nigerian musicians are at the top of the charts worldwide, Nollywood movies are popular on all continents, and Nigerian authors are still shaping literary conversations worldwide. The study also examines Nigeria's cultural, political, and digital diplomacy strategies using qualitative research methods and secondary data. This paper proves that Nigeria owns significant soft power resources, particularly in culture, diaspora, and regional leadership; however, its global standing is compromised by governance challenges, insecurity, and cybercrime. There is still a big gap between trust in institutions and cultural visibility. For example, Nollywood and Afrobeats are extremely popular worldwide, and the country's foreign policy is based on four pillars: democracy, development, demography, and diaspora. Ogadigo, S. says that, according to M2025, Nigeria has ample room to improve its credibility and influence in a multipolar Africa. The 2025 National Reputation Perception Index (NRPI), which gave Nigeria a score of 35.2%, says that public diplomacy needs to change from telling stories to delivering services. The study finds that Nigeria's soft power potential is not being fully realized and suggests that institutional changes and better communication could help the country improve its standing in the world.

**Key Words:** Global Influence, International Image, Nigeria, Soft Power, Public Diplomacy

### INTRODUCTION

In the past, the main ways to measure international power were military and economic strength. Hard power is the use of military force, financial incentives, and economic sanctions to achieve your objectives (McClory, 2018). In the 21st century, global politics has shifted away from traditional hard power toward more subtle forms of influence. In a world without a central government, the fight for power and influence between sovereign states is seen as an unavoidable historical force. You can use soft power to get people

to do what you want by setting the agenda, convincing them, and building goodwill. Soft power is not based on traditional methods of reward and punishment. Instead, it uses networking, compelling storytelling, setting international standards, building alliances, and leveraging resources to make a country attractive to others. In short, soft power is pull and hard power is push (Jonathan, 2018).

Joseph Nye made the idea of soft power popular. It means that a state can get what it wants by appealing to others rather than forcing them. Countries around the world are increasingly using



public diplomacy to change people's minds, build international partnerships, and highlight their national identity. Soft power is the ability to get what you want by making people want to do it, rather than forcing them or paying them to do it. (Nye 2004). Soft power and public diplomacy have become important tools in modern international politics. Instead of using force, they focus on drawing people in and convincing them. Public diplomacy is all about how public opinion shapes the making and execution of foreign policy. It includes aspects of international relations that go beyond traditional diplomacy, such as governments shaping public opinion in other countries and private groups and interests interacting across countries (Cull 2006).

Public diplomacy is a strategic approach for governments, organizations, and individuals to shape public opinion, build connections, and advance diplomatic goals worldwide. Public diplomacy looks to engage foreign populations, opinion leaders, and civil society organizations to construct narratives, enhance comprehension, and encourage collaboration, in contrast to traditional diplomacy, which primarily emphasizes government-to-government interactions. Public diplomacy is the process of getting people from other countries to interact with one another through culture, values, policies, and communication styles. It is rare to see African countries as major players in soft power. The rise of soft power was caused by Africa's economic marginalization, internal conflict, and the authoritarian regimes that ruled many of its countries until the end of the Cold War. Nye, on the other hand, says that some African countries have the strongest claims to soft power because of their political ideals, culture, and the legitimacy of their foreign policy (Sidropoulos, 2014).

As African countries try to change their place in the world, soft power is becoming more important. Nigeria, being the most populous country in Africa and one of its biggest economies, plays a key role in shaping the continent's diplomatic and cultural narrative. Nigeria is an interesting case study in this changing world. Nigeria is strategically important on the continent because it is the most populous country in Africa and has one of the largest economies. More importantly, it has become a cultural powerhouse, with its music, movies, books, and digital art gaining worldwide attention. Nigeria, which is sometimes called the Giant of Africa, is at a crossroads. Even though it is the most populous country on the continent and a cultural powerhouse, its reputation outside Africa is often hurt by rumors of corruption and unrest. Nigeria has significant soft power potential and can leverage it to gain legitimacy, acceptance, and recognition as a regional power among other potential challengers. Nigerian artists are at the top of international charts, Nollywood movies are popular worldwide, and Nigerian writers are still shaping global literary conversations.

The nature of this study allows for the use of secondary data. Using historical and documentary methods, information was collected from books, journals, media reports, government documents, and the internet. The study used a method of qualitative research. This paper adds to the larger conversation about soft power by showing that attraction alone is not enough. Soft power could become more of a symbol than a strategy if it does not have credibility,

consistency, and institutional support. Nigeria's experience shows how important it is to connect cultural influence with political legitimacy to have a real effect on the world stage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Soft Power*

Joseph Nye (2004) produced the idea of soft power, which is quite different from traditional realist ideas about power. Joseph Nye defines soft power as the ability to influence individuals through appeals rooted in political ideologies, foreign policy, and cultural aspects. This method has been used a lot to study how states act in international relations. Instead of just looking at coercion or inducement, Nye thinks of power as the ability to change what other people want by making them want it. Culture, political values, and foreign policy are the three main things that draw people to this. Joseph Nye (2004) came up with the term soft power to describe a country's ability to influence others through attraction rather than force or money. Nye says that this kind of power comes from three main places: culture, political beliefs, and foreign policy.

When these factors are seen as acceptable and desirable, they give states the power to affect the choices of others. Over time, this idea has grown to show how important it is to be believable. Nye (2011) says that attraction alone is not enough; for soft power to work, it must be believable. The power of a country that promotes certain values but does not always live up to them weakens. It makes a crucial point: image and trust are both important for soft power. When culture is interesting and connects with people outside of the group, it becomes a source of soft power. Political values are helpful when they are followed consistently and seen as valid. When people think that a country's foreign policy is morally right and follows international norms, it boosts that country's soft power. These parts work together to make a system that lets states affect each other without using force. Nye, on the other hand, later refines this idea by putting more emphasis on credibility.

In his book *The Future of Power* (2011), he says that soft power only works when people trust it. Even if a country has attractive cultural assets, its actions are harmful if they go against what it says it stands for. The goal is to show the significant difference between visibility and legitimacy. Legitimacy gives you power, while visibility gets you noticed. Even though many people agree with the idea of soft power, it has also been criticized. Some academics contend that it is challenging to quantify and may be excessively optimistic about the influence of attraction in international politics. Others argue that soft power cannot work without hard power because material resources often support influence. These criticisms become increasingly pertinent within the framework of developing nations. Soft power works best when it has cultural appeal, but it also needs strong institutions and good governance. This is a big problem for how soft power works in countries like Nigeria, where there are big cultural influences and problems with institutions

### *Public Diplomacy*

Soft power and public diplomacy are closely related. It refers to



how governments talk to people in other countries to change how they think and feel. Nicholas J. Cull (2019) and other scholars build on this idea by connecting soft power to public diplomacy. Cull delineates several sides of public diplomacy, encompassing listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, and exchange initiatives. These mechanisms allow states to use soft power by interacting directly with people from other countries. Melissen (2005) says that public diplomacy is more than just state-to-state interactions. It also includes reaching out to larger groups of people through media, cultural exchanges, and digital platforms. According to scholars such as Nye (2019) and Cull (2019), public diplomacy is the most important way to build soft power. Oluwaseun Tella (2021) says that soft power is often Africanized in Africa through ideas like Nigeria's Omolúwàbí (character/honor).

Studies show that Nigeria's soft power is mostly driven by private citizens, like creatives and digital entrepreneurs, rather than by the government. Akinterinwa (2020) emphasizes that state-led initiatives, exemplified by the Technical Aid Corps (TAC), continue to be vital instruments of deliberate public diplomacy in the Global South. Anholt (2007) also links nation branding to public diplomacy, saying that a country's global reputation is an important part of international relations. States that effectively manage their image are more likely to draw in tourists, investors, and political allies. But scholars also say that for public diplomacy to work, it needs to be consistent and believable. People may be skeptical if you only promote a good image and do not deal with the problems that are causing it. This is especially true for Nigeria, where problems at home have sometimes made it harder to change the country's image

## Empirical review

### *Nigeria's Plan for Public Diplomacy*

Nigeria has often used outside public relations firms for public diplomacy instead of working with its own people to produce strategies. Smith and Faull (2014) say that the government has spent a lot of money on lobbying and media campaigns around the world, especially in big cities. This method is meant to improve Nigeria's reputation, but it has some problems. Historical evidence shows that these kinds of efforts have mostly been reactive, focusing on dealing with crises instead of getting involved for the long term. This paper posits that the solution resides in a deficiency of credibility. Nigeria's cultural assets are appealing, but its political environment, which is marked by problems with governance, inconsistent policies, and security concerns, makes it hard to turn that appeal into influence.

This makes Nigeria both visible and limited at the same time: it is admired on a cultural level but limited on a diplomatic level. For example, during General Sani Abacha's time in power, the government spent a lot of money on PR campaigns to change people's minds about them. But the regime's lack of legitimacy and widespread human rights abuses made these efforts harder. Likewise, during democratic governments, public diplomacy efforts have often had a hard time making a lasting difference. The backlash against PR campaigns during the Boko Haram crisis

shows how image-based strategies can fail when they do not have credibility. Nigeria's experience with public diplomacy shows a big problem: the difference between how things look and how they really are.

The government has tried to make the country look good, but problems at home have often gotten in the way of these efforts. Campaigns meant to fight against negative stereotypes have had a hard time getting off the ground because they are not credible. For instance, Nigeria's ongoing security problems have made it hard to show that the country is safe and stable. Also, Nigeria's public diplomacy has mostly been reactive, focusing on handling crises instead of building long-term relationships. Because of this, it is less effective and gives the impression that it is not consistent. On the other hand, Nigeria's cultural industries have been better at changing how people around the world see things. Nollywood, music, and literature have made the country look better and more likeable. This indicates that non-state actors are instrumental in Nigeria's soft power.

### *The power of culture vs. the power of the state*

Nigeria's cultural industries have been very successful, which is different from what the government has done. Nollywood, Afrobeats, and literature have all helped Nigeria look good around the world. The rise of Afrobeats in Nigeria's music industry has made it one of the most visible and powerful parts of the country's soft power in recent years. What used to be a regional sound has become a global cultural force, making Nigeria an important player in music and entertainment around the world. This change has not only made Nigeria more visible, but it has also had a big impact on how people around the world see the country. One of the main reasons for this global success is that Nigerian artists and musicians from other countries are working together increasingly. These partnerships have helped Nigerian music reach mainstream global markets by acting as cultural bridges. Burna Boy, Wizkid, and Davido have all worked with well-known artists from around the world, like Beyoncé, Drake, Justin Bieber, Ed Sheeran, and Chris Brown. For example, Wizkid and Drake's song "One Dance" became a worldwide hit, topping charts in many countries and bringing Afrobeats to more people. Burna Boy's appearance on Beyoncé's *The Lion King: The Gift* album also helped to make Nigeria a bigger part of global pop culture.

These collaborations are not just artistic partnerships; they also serve as tools of soft power. They make Nigerian sounds, language, and cultural expressions part of global music, which makes them more familiar and accepted by people all over the world. This supports Joseph Nye's point that culture can be a powerful tool for change when it is appealing and widely shared. Nigerian artists have also gained a lot of fame through international awards, especially the Grammy Awards, which are seen as one of the highest honors in the music business. Burna Boy's win for Best Global Music Album in 2021 was a historic moment for both him as an artist and for Nigeria as a whole. It showed that Nigerian music was accepted around the world and made it more legitimate on the world stage. Wizkid's Grammy win for his work on Beyoncé's *Brown Skin Girl* and Tems' recognition for her work on

international hits are other examples of how Nigerian artists are becoming more important. These accomplishments are important because they change Nigeria's cultural influence from just being seen to being recognized and trusted. Not all countries get this kind of official recognition for their popular culture, even though many do.

The Grammys and other awards are examples of global endorsements that show that Nigerian music is not only popular but also has a lot of artistic and cultural value. Another important aspect is how digital platforms help Nigerian music reach more people. Nigerian artists can now reach audiences all over the world without having to go through traditional Western gatekeepers thanks to streaming services like Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube. It has made it easier for people from Nigeria to get into global markets and helped Nigerian artists stay in charge of their work while still being successful around the world. Afrobeats' global success is a big soft power asset for Nigeria, but it also shows a big problem with the country's overall soft power strategy. This success is mostly due to the efforts of private people, not the government. The government has not been a big part of promoting or organizing these cultural exports. As a result, Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomatic strategy do not make full use of this global power.

This gap limits how much Nigeria's cultural soft power can affect other countries. Even though artists have a significant impact on public opinion around the world, these successes don't often lead to strategic advantages or diplomatic power. Nigerian music is popular all over the world, but the country still has problems with its international reputation, foreign investment, and political credibility. Afrobeats is both an opportunity and a limitation in this way. It shows that Nigeria can naturally draw people from all over the world, but it also shows that there is not a coordinated plan in place to make the most of this attraction. Nigeria needs to make a conscious effort to connect cultural success with diplomatic goals in order to fully take advantage of its musical influence. To sum up, the rise of Afrobeats around the world and the success of Nigerian artists around the world show how powerful culture can be as a tool for change. Nigerian music has changed how people around the world see the country and made it a cultural leader through collaborations, awards, and digital growth. But without strategic coordination and institutional support, this influence is not being used to its full potential. This supports the larger point that Nigeria's soft power is strong in attracting people but weak in turning that attraction into real international influence.

The fact that these cultural outputs are real is what makes them work. People see them as real expressions of identity, not as strategic messaging like government campaigns. This makes them more relatable to people all over the world. But the success of cultural soft power also shows a problem with the system: it works mostly without the help of the state. This lack of connection makes it harder to turn cultural influence into diplomatic results. Evidence from the real world shows that Nigeria's soft power is most at risk from a lack of credibility. Corruption, insecurity, and inconsistent policies are some of the things that make people lose trust and

power. People often think that Nigeria's public diplomacy is reactive and inconsistent, and that it does not have a clear long-term plan. This makes it harder for it to build long-lasting relationships and makes bad impressions stronger. Nigeria's position on global corruption lists has always been a big part of how the world sees it, and by extension, how well its soft power works. Nigeria has a lot of cultural assets that draw attention from around the world, but people still think it's corrupt, which makes it hard to trust. This creates a conflict between attraction and trust. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said at a public meeting in Lagos in 2004 that Nigeria's bad reputation abroad has kept it from getting the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) it needs to grow its economy. This makes sense because Nigeria has long been seen as one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Adeniyi, 2012).

### **Religious and Social Impact**

Nigeria's religious and social impact is a unique and often overlooked part of its soft power. Religion is a big part of Nigeria's public diplomacy. It is a way for the country to connect with other countries that is not through formal state institutions. Instead, religious networks work through very personal and community-based connections, which makes them especially good at changing how people see things and how they get along with people from other countries. The global growth of Nigerian Pentecostal churches, especially groups like the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), is one of the most well-known examples. These churches have opened branches in Europe, North America, and parts of Asia, making communities that cross national borders and spreading Nigeria's social and cultural influence far beyond its borders.

They hold religious events, conferences, and outreach programs to teach people values like discipline, faith, resilience, and community that help people in other countries see Nigeria in a good light. The fact that this kind of influence is based on relationships is what makes it so strong. Government-led diplomacy can sometimes seem distant or strategic. Religious engagement, on the other hand, should be based on trust, shared beliefs, and repeated interaction. This supports Joseph Nye's idea that soft power works best when it is based on attraction and legitimacy. People are more likely to be affected by values they see and feel than by things they are told to believe.

Nigeria's broader social influence, especially through diaspora communities, is also very important, in addition to religion. Nigerians living abroad often serve as informal ambassadors, influencing how people see their country through their work, behavior, and accomplishments. The diaspora helps Nigeria's image in small but important ways, from professionals in global industries to students and entrepreneurs. This kind of soft power does have some problems, though. Internal social problems, especially religious and ethnic tensions in Nigeria, can make this influence less credible. For example, fights between different religious groups can make Nigeria look different from what it really is. Even with these problems, religion and social influence are still two of Nigeria's most natural and far-reaching forms of



soft power. It works outside of formal diplomacy to make connections on a personal level and strengthen Nigeria's presence in global cultural and social spaces.

### ***Economic and Development Diplomacy***

Another important part of Nigeria's soft power is its economic power, which is not always as obvious as its cultural or religious power. Nigeria is one of Africa's biggest economies, and it is especially important for trade, investment, and economic integration in the region, especially in West Africa. Nigeria's economic power is most clear in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), where it has historically been a leader. Nigeria has become a key player in West African economic affairs by signing trade agreements, making financial contributions, and taking part in regional projects. This leadership gives Nigeria more power because other countries in the region often look to it for help and direction. Nigerian businesses and entrepreneurs are also growing their businesses in international markets, in addition to their regional influence. Nigerian businesses, from fintech startups to fashion brands, are getting more attention around the world, which is good for the country's economy. These changes fit with the idea that a country's soft power can grow if its economy does well, making it a better place to do business and invest.

But Nigeria's economic soft power is also limited by problems with its structure. Problems like inconsistent economic policies, unstable currency, and lack of infrastructure can make investors less confident and stop the country from fully using its economic potential. This goes back to the bigger issue of credibility: economic strength isn't enough if it is not backed up by stable and open systems. Theoretically, this embodies Liberalist concepts of interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Countries that are economically stable and reliable are more likely to form strong partnerships and have an impact on the global economy. So, for Nigeria to boost its soft power, it needs to make its economic institutions stronger. Nigeria's economic power is both a chance and a problem. It could help Nigeria's reputation around the world, but it will only work if the country's economic situation matches the image it wants to project.

### ***Digital Diplomacy***

Digital platforms have changed how countries interact with each other diplomatically, allowing Nigeria to talk directly to people all over the world. Digital platforms have become one of the most important tools of soft power in the modern world, and Nigeria has used this space to grow its influence around the world. Nigeria interacts with people all over the world in ways that were not possible with traditional diplomacy through social media, online content, and digital communication. Nigerian artists, influencers, and even government agencies can now change stories in real time on sites like Twitter (X), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Online, Nigerian music, comedy skits, fashion, and lifestyle content are very popular and reach millions of people in many different countries. Nigeria's image as a lively, creative, and culturally diverse place is strengthened by this constant digital presence. One of the best things about digital diplomacy is that it is easy to use.

Digital platforms let people help shape a country's image, unlike formal diplomatic channels, which are often only open to state actors. And this has made Nigeria's soft power less centralized.

Most of its global influence now comes from everyday content creators instead of official government campaigns. It fits with the idea that soft power is becoming more network-based and less state-controlled in the 21st century. Joseph Nye (2011) says that power in the digital age depends on being able to connect, talk to, and change people's minds through networks. But there are also risks that come with digital diplomacy. Negative stories can spread just as quickly as good ones. Things like false information, criticism online, and coverage of domestic problems in the global media can change how people think in ways that are hard to control.

This means that Nigeria's digital image is always changing and sometimes being fought over. Also, even though digital influence makes things more visible, it does not always mean that they are trustworthy. A country may become popular around the world for its music or social media, but this does not always make it more trustworthy in politics or in its diplomatic relations. Even with these problems, digital diplomacy is still one of Nigeria's best modern soft power tools. It lets the country talk to people all over the world directly, without going through traditional gatekeepers, and stay in touch with international conversations all the time.

Even after a lot of research, there are still some holes: Insufficient amalgamation of public diplomacy and soft power within a unified analytical framework. Not enough attention paid to Nigeria's international image as a measurable factor. Insufficient thorough assessment correlating soft power resources to tangible global influence results. This study fills in the gaps by looking at Nigeria's place in the world from both a theoretical and an empirical point of view. A lot of the research that is already out there shows that Nigeria has a lot of soft power, especially when it comes to its culture and creative industries. But what isn't clear is why this influence isn't fully turning into real diplomatic power. A lot of research looks at Nigeria's music, movies, and global visibility, but not how well these things affect international relations. There is also very little talk about credibility, even though it is a big part of how people see countries around the world. Another problem is that people often talk about public diplomacy but don't really look at it. There is a lack of thorough examination of the effectiveness of Nigeria's initiatives. This paper addresses that deficiency by concentrating on the absent connection between attraction and influence: credibility.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research is based on three main theoretical frameworks: Soft Power Theory, Constructivism, and Liberalism. Together, these frameworks give us a full picture of how Nigeria is seen and how it affects the world. This study doesn't just look at one theory; it combines these points of view to explain what Nigeria's soft power is and why it doesn't always lead to diplomatic power. The focus of this study is Joseph Nye's Soft Power Theory. Nye (2004) describes soft power as a nation's capacity to sway others through

allure rather than force or monetary inducements. Culture, political values, and foreign policy are the foundations of this kind of power. When a country's culture is attractive, its values are honored, and its policies are regarded as legitimate, it can influence global outcomes without employing coercion. A fundamental premise of this theory is that power is both coercive and persuasive. Attraction is a powerful way to get people to do what you want, and states can reach their goals by being legitimate and appealing. This is especially true in the world we live in today, where how things look can be just as important as how strong they are.

This framework helps explain why Nigeria is so well-known around the world. The country's cultural industries, especially music, film, and digital content, have made it very popular outside of its own borders. But Nye (2004) also says that soft power only works if it is credible. This is also where the idea of a "soft power paradox" comes into play. At the moment, Nigeria's cultural assets are doing better than its institutional assets. Even though its culture is highly valued, corruption, insecurity, and inconsistency hurt its political ideals and policy environment. Because of this, Nigeria is very culturally appealing, but it doesn't get enough diplomatic support. People may like Nigeria, but they don't always trust it, which makes it less powerful overall. Wendt (1999) says that constructivism looks at how identity and perception affect international relations. It says that how other people see a country can affect its power. Nigeria's image, influenced by cultural achievements and governance difficulties, significantly impacts its global influence. To gain a deeper comprehension of this dynamic, this study utilizes Constructivist theory, specifically Wendt (1999). Constructivism stresses how identity, perception, and shared ideas affect how countries get along with each other. It contends that power derives not solely from material capabilities but also from the perceptions of states by others. When you apply this to Nigeria, you can see that its global identity is complicated and sometimes contradictory.

People see Nigeria as creative, lively, and important to culture on the other hand. Conversely, it is frequently linked to governance difficulties and instability. These mixed views affect how other countries deal with Nigeria and how well it can show its power. Constructivism is especially useful for understanding how Nigeria is seen as a leader in the region. Nigeria thinks of itself as a leader in Africa, but other African countries also shape this view of Nigeria. If doubts about credibility or consistency shape those perceptions, Nigeria's leadership role might not be fully recognized or effective.

Along with Constructivism, this study also uses ideas from Liberalism, which Keohane and Nye (1977) developed. International relations are based on liberal theory, which stresses cooperation, institutions, and interdependence. It suggests that countries that are seen as reliable and trustworthy are more likely to make strong alliances. This theory is especially useful for looking at Nigeria, where cultural power is often stronger than political or economic power. Ultimately, this theoretical framework reinforces the study's primary assertion: Nigeria's issue

is not an absence of soft power, but rather the challenge of transforming it into substantial global influence. One of the main reasons this is so hard is that there is a gap between Nigeria's institutions and its cultural appeal. This study goes beyond simple descriptions and gives a more in-depth, critical look at Nigeria's soft power in action by bringing together different theories.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Nigeria's Communication Challenge: Public Diplomacy Beyond Propaganda*

At its heart, public diplomacy is not just about putting on a good face; it is about building trust through regular, honest communication. Nicholas J. Cull (2009) says that public diplomacy is when both state and non-state actors talk to people from other countries through communication, culture, and shared experiences. Public diplomacy is based on honesty and openness, while propaganda is based on manipulation. Nigeria's situation exemplifies a fundamental paradox in international relations: the simultaneous presence of significant cultural allure and limited diplomatic impact. This distinction is especially significant in the context of Nigeria. When it comes to public diplomacy, Nigeria has often focused more on managing its image than building relationships. Governments in the past have relied heavily on public relations campaigns and lobbying in other countries to change how the world sees the country. These efforts may enhance immediate feeling, but they seldom yield enduring influence due to their superficiality and lack of authenticity. Tokunbo Ojo's research shows that Nigeria has always hired outside public relations firms to help it improve its image abroad. These campaigns have been trying to fight stories of corruption, crime, and instability since the time of Abacha and more recent governments. Scholars such as Mustapha (2008) contend that these initiatives often fail because they seek to rectify perception without confronting the fundamental realities. It also shows a bigger problem with Nigeria's public diplomacy: it's more reactive than strategic. It does not shape global stories ahead of time; instead, it reacts to crises, like corruption scandals, security problems, or political instability.

Because of this, its communication is not consistent or clear, which makes it hard to build lasting trust. Nigeria's state-led public diplomacy has had a hard time, but its cultural diplomacy tells a very different story. Nigeria is now a cultural powerhouse thanks to Nollywood, music, literature, and digital content. People do not see these cultural products as strategic messaging like they do with government campaigns. Instead, they see them as real expressions of Nigerian identity. Nollywood, in particular, has a big impact on how people around the world see things. Nigerian films do more than just entertain, as scholars point out; they also tell stories about Nigerian culture, values, and daily life.

These stories speak to people all over Africa and the diaspora, making them feel like they know them and connecting with them emotionally. For example, movies like *Half of a Yellow Sun* brought the world's attention to Nigeria's civil war and helped people understand its history better. Additionally, it corresponds with Baum (2002, 2007), who contends that entertainment media



can profoundly affect public comprehension of political and social matters. Nigerian authors like Chimamanda Adichie and Chinua Achebe have also helped people all over the world learn about Nigerian culture and identity through their writing.

People all over the world study these works, which adds Nigerian points of view to global intellectual discussions. This is very important from a soft power point of view. Joseph Nye (2004) says that culture is one of the best ways to attract people because it works daily. Cultural narratives are often easier to understand and relate to than political messages, which can be talked about. But Nigeria's situation is different because nonstate actors are mostly responsible for this cultural influence. Writers, musicians, filmmakers, and other creative people have become Nigeria's main sources of soft power. This backs up the idea that Nigeria's people have more of an impact on the world than its government does. This is a strength, but it also shows a weakness. Without state coordination, cultural influence stays weak and spread out. The government indirectly receives help from these cultural gains, but it doesn't have a clear plan for how to turn them into diplomatic gains

#### ***Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the Leadership Contradiction***

Nigeria has long been a leader in the region, especially in West Africa, because of its foreign policy. It shows a commitment to stability and cooperation by sending troops to peacekeeping missions and being a part of groups like ECOWAS. Nigeria has sent billions of dollars and troops to many separate places to help with UN peacekeeping missions. These efforts have made it known as an important player in regional security. But the way people see leadership from the outside is often different from how it really is. Nigeria's ability to be a peacemaker is called into question by problems like ethnic conflict, religious violence, and political instability. This contradiction leads to a credibility gap. Nigeria claims to be a leader in peacekeeping, but its problems at home make this story less believable. From a Realist point of view, this shows how power cannot do much without stability within. A state cannot exert external influence if it fails to uphold internal order

#### ***The Soft Power Paradox***

Nigeria's situation can be called a soft power paradox. Strong cultural pull  
 Low trust in institutions  
 Not much power in diplomacy  
 The cultural industries in Nigeria is the strongest and most effective part of its soft power. Cultural expressions come about naturally and connect with people around the world more deeply than state-led initiatives, which often have trouble being credible. This has made Nigeria one of the most important cultural centers in the world and in Africa. Through music, film, fashion, and literature, Nigerian culture has become well-known all over the world.

These cultural works do more than just entertain; they tell stories, show who we are, and make us feel things. This is especially important in soft power, where influence is often built through familiarity and relatability rather than formal diplomatic engagement. One of the best things about Nigeria's cultural soft power is that it is real. People may not believe what the

government says, but they do believe what cultural expressions say about society. This makes them more powerful and convincing. Joseph Nye says that culture can be a powerful source of soft power when it is popular and appealing. But what makes Nigeria's case different is that this cultural influence is mostly caused by people who are not part of the government. Artists, filmmakers, writers, and businesspeople have mostly shaped Nigeria's global image. This spreading out of soft power is both a good thing and a dreadful thing. It lets people be creative and produce innovative ideas without having to deal with red tape. On the other hand, it means that cultural influence and national strategy do not work together very well. Cultural pride and identity are also very important.

A lot of people around the world like Nigerian culture because it is bold, expressive, and confident. This has changed the way people around the world see Africa, especially Nigeria. People are starting to see Nigeria as more than just a place of poverty or conflict. They are starting to see it as a place of creativity and cultural richness. Cultural soft power is not enough to keep influence, even with these strengths. Its effect is still limited because it does not fit with political values or trustworthy institutions. This supports the idea that Nigeria has a lot of cultural soft power, but it is not being used to its full potential in the larger diplomatic picture. People all over the world can see Nigeria, but they don't completely trust it. People like its culture, but they often question its political system. This makes it harder for it to turn soft power into strategic influence. From a Constructivist standpoint, this signifies conflicting identities. People think of Nigeria as both creative and unstable, changing and not always the same. These contradictions lessen its overall power.

#### ***Nigeria's Foreign Policy and Diplomatic Identity***

Nigeria's foreign policy has always been based on an Afrocentric view, which means that Africa is the most important part of its international relations. This perspective has influenced its participation in significant matters, including decolonization, regional integration, and peacekeeping. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) are two groups where Nigeria has been a leader. Its work on peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia shows that it cares about keeping the region stable.

These efforts have helped Nigeria become a regional power. People often think of its diplomatic identity as being about leadership, working with many countries, and standing up for African interests. But this identity is not without its problems. Corruption, insecurity, and political instability at home have hurt its credibility and, by extension, its power around the world. Nigeria's soft power is a paradox of strength and weakness. Good things: Dominance in African cultural businesses big and powerful diaspora, taking the lead in regional politics Weak points: bad views of the world Coordination between institutions is weak Foreign policy messages that don't match up. Nigeria has a lot of cultural power, but it cannot use that power to make political and economic decisions, which makes it less effective overall.



### *Moving Toward a Strategic Soft Power Framework*

Nigeria needs to change its strategy to fully use its soft power. Instead of managing your image, you should focus on building your credibility. This includes: Making governance and openness stronger. Bringing domestic policies in line with international messaging backing cultural industries without being too controlling, making plans for long-term public diplomacy, Nigeria must understand that soft power is not generated by campaigns; it is acquired through consistency.

### CONCLUSION

Nigeria's experience shows both the strengths and weaknesses of soft power. The country has done an amazing job of spreading its culture around the world, but this has not led to the same level of diplomatic power. The most important thing is trust. Soft power cannot reach its full potential if people do not trust it. So, Nigeria's job is not only to improve its image, but also to make sure that image matches reality. Nigeria can improve its credibility and make better use of its soft power by fixing problems with governance and strengthening its institutions. Until then, it will continue to be admired but not fully powerful on the world stage.

Nigeria is still an important player in Africa's soft power scene, with a lot of cultural and diplomatic resources. But its international reputation suffers because of problems at home and inconsistent public diplomacy strategies. The study finds that Nigeria has a lot of soft power potential, but it is not being used enough. To have an impact on the world, Nigeria needs to coordinate its efforts and make changes to its policies. Nigeria has the softest power potential in Africa, but that doesn't mean it has a lot of power. Public diplomacy is still a long-term national project and not just a one-time branding effort. For Nigeria to be the most important country in Africa in 2026 and beyond, it needs to make sure that its brand (Nollywood, Tech, Music) matches reality (stability and security in institutions).10.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Make cultural exports a part of the system: The government should officially support creative industries so they can be "door openers" for trade.
2. Digital Diplomacy: Make the Ministry of Information's digital presence stronger so that it can fight "negative framing" in real time.
3. Domestic Reform as Diplomacy: Make internal

security your top priority; a safe Nigeria is the best way to do public diplomacy.

### REFERENCES

1. Adesina, O. (2023). Exploring Religion as a Tool of Nigeria's Public Diplomacy. *International Journal of Emerging Multidisciplinaries: Social Science*.
2. Akinterinwa, B. (2020). Nigeria's Foreign Policy: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of International Relations*.
3. Chidozie, F. C., & Mogbolu, N. I. (2025). The Politics of Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science*.
4. Cull, N. J. (2006). Public diplomacy before Gullion: the evolution of a phrase.
5. Imam, A. (2024). Nigeria's Foreign Relations and Soft Power Diplomacy Amidst Cybercrime. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*.
6. Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (2025). *National Reputation Perception Index (NRPI) Report*.
7. Nwala, P., & Gesiere, L. (2024). *Tourism Development and Soft Power Diplomacy in Nigeria*.
8. Nye, J. S. (2004). Soft power: The means to success in world politics.
9. Nye, J. S. (2011). *The future of power*.
10. Melissen, J. (2005). *The new public diplomacy*.
11. Anholt, S. (2007). *Competitive identity*.
12. Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Public Affairs.
13. Ogadigo, S. (2025). Nigeria's reputation under global scrutiny: 2025 reputation perception index reveals high potential, low trust paradox. [Nigerian Institute of Public Relations](https://niper.org.ng/news/posts/nigerias-reputation-under-global-scrutiny-2025-reputation).  
<https://niper.org.ng/news/posts/nigerias-reputation-under-global-scrutiny-2025-reputation>
14. Ogele, E. (2025). *Beyond Hard Power: The Role of Soft Power in Shaping Nigeria's Foreign Policy*.
15. Tanko, G. I. (2024). *Digital Diplomacy in Africa*.
16. Tella, O. (2021). *Africa's Soft Power: Philosophies, Currencies, and Prospects*. Routledge.
17. Tella, O. (2022). *Nigeria's Democracy Promotion in Africa*.
18. Yange, E. (2024). *Factors Affecting Nigeria's Soft Power Capability as a Regional Leader in Africa*.