



The Diplomacy of Films and Games

Harnessing Soft Power, Economic Influence, and
Cultural Exchange in the 21st Century

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Executive Summary

In the 21st century, the boundaries of diplomacy are being redrawn. No longer confined to embassies, foreign ministries, and closed-door negotiations, diplomacy has expanded into new arenas of media, technology, and culture. Where traditional diplomacy relies on treaties and formal exchanges, **cultural diplomacy relies on stories, symbols, and shared experiences** that transcend borders. Among the most influential of these instruments are films and games.



Films have historically carried the weight of nations' identities. From the glamour of Hollywood projecting American values of freedom and innovation, to Bollywood's colorful narratives resonating across Africa and the Middle East, cinema has long served as a vehicle for national branding. More recently, South Korea's deliberate strategy of promoting film alongside music and television created the "**Hallyu Wave**," which transformed Korean cultural exports into powerful instruments of influence.

Film festivals, co-production treaties, and government-backed incentives have turned cinematic expression into a recognized form of soft power—a nation's ability to influence without coercion.

Games, meanwhile, represent the new frontier of cultural diplomacy. With over 3.4 billion players worldwide, video games are no longer a pastime limited to entertainment; they have become a shared global language. Unlike films, which are consumed passively, games are interactive and participatory. They build communities across borders, create immersive experiences that shape perceptions, and connect directly with younger generations.

Esports tournaments attract audiences rivaling the Olympics, while gaming franchises such as Pokémon, Final Fantasy, and League of Legends carry cultural narratives as powerful as any blockbuster film. Governments are increasingly recognizing that games are not only a growth industry but also a strategic tool for diplomacy, education, and identity-building.



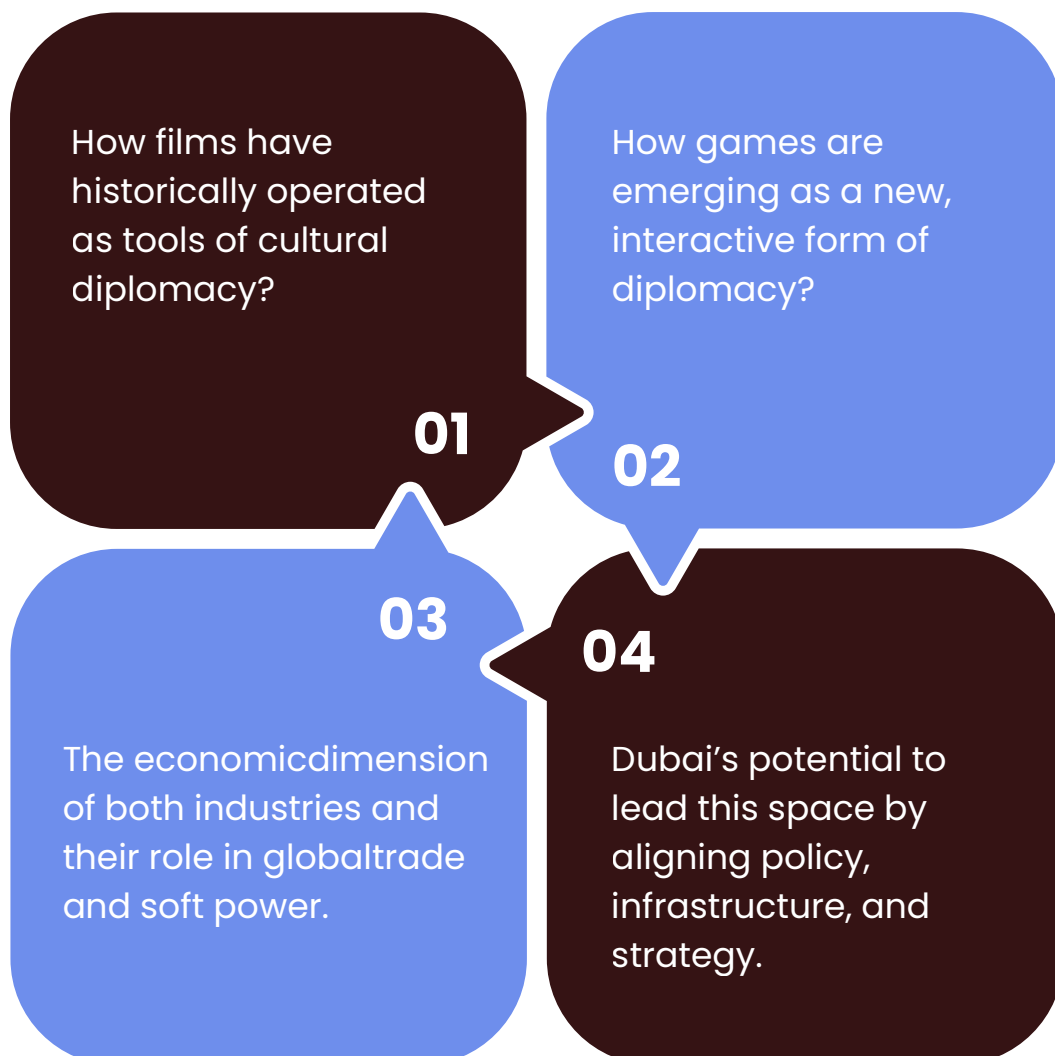
Worldwide Gamers

3.4B



For Dubai, this is more than an opportunity—it is a strategic imperative. As a city positioned at the crossroads of East and West, Dubai is uniquely placed to harness films and games as dual engines of diplomacy. With world-class infrastructure, a track record in hosting global events, and a government committed to diversifying the economy through creative industries, Dubai can position itself as a neutral global convening hub where stories are told, games are played, and cultures connect. This white paper argues that films and games are not simply industries, but diplomatic currencies with profound economic and cultural implications. By investing in production incentives, international festivals, esports hosting, and cross-border collaborations, Dubai can expand its global influence, foster international partnerships, and build a resilient creative economy that enhances both its cultural brand and economic footprint.

The paper explores



The conclusion is clear: in a world where narratives and interactivity shape perception, the city or nation that masters the diplomacy of films and games will command not just cultural attention, but also strategic influence in the global order.

1. Introduction:

Media as Modern Soft Power

The Changing Nature of Diplomacy

Diplomacy has traditionally been understood as the management of international relations through negotiation, communication, and statecraft. However, the rapid globalization of media and the rise of digital platforms have expanded diplomacy into new domains. Today, the most powerful diplomatic messages are often carried not by ambassadors, but by stories on screens. A film watched by millions, or a game played daily by billions, can do more to shape perceptions of a country than any formal communiqué.

The concept of soft power, introduced by Joseph Nye in the late 20th century, highlights a nation's ability to influence others through culture, values, and attraction rather than coercion. In practice, films and games have become some of the most effective tools of soft power in the 21st century. They not only entertain but also project identity, foster empathy, and create shared cultural reference points across borders.



Why Films Matter in Diplomacy

Films are cultural mirrors that reflect and project national identity. Hollywood, perhaps the most famous example, turned American cinema into a global institution that exported not only entertainment but also ideals of freedom, innovation, and resilience. Bollywood became India's cultural ambassador, winning loyal audiences across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. French cinema cultivated an aura of sophistication and artistic excellence, while Japanese anime films carried narratives that inspired new subcultures across continents.

Films also serve as platforms for dialogue. International film festivals—from Cannes and Venice to Toronto—are not only artistic showcases but also diplomatic marketplaces, where governments, financiers, and cultural institutions collaborate. Co-production treaties between nations reinforce political and economic ties, while film incentives are increasingly recognized as tools for both investment and soft power projection.



Why Games Matter in Diplomacy

While films have long been recognized as a diplomatic tool, games are only now being fully understood as instruments of soft power. Unlike films, games are interactive and participatory, creating deeper bonds between players and the cultures embedded within them. Japanese games such as Pokémon and Final Fantasy introduced global audiences to Japanese aesthetics and values. South Korea leveraged broadband infrastructure and esports culture to build a global identity as a leader in digital innovation. American game studios, through franchises like Call of Duty and Fortnite, project cultural narratives of competition, heroism, and resilience.



Esports tournaments are perhaps the clearest demonstration of games as diplomacy. Hosting an international tournament has become the equivalent of hosting a global sporting event, projecting modernity, inclusivity, and youth engagement. Nations from China to Saudi Arabia have invested heavily in esports to reposition their global image. At the same time, “serious games” designed for education and peacebuilding illustrate how interactive media can support cultural understanding and civic engagement.

Why Dubai is Positioned to Lead

Dubai has already demonstrated its ability to use culture and media as instruments of branding and diplomacy. The former Dubai International Film Festival positioned the city as a gateway between Arab cinema and the global industry. The UAE's hosting of Expo 2020 showcased its ability to convene nations through culture and innovation. With the establishment of the Dubai Films & Games Commission, the city is now poised to integrate films and games into a unified diplomatic strategy.

Dubai's strategic advantages are clear:



Geography

A literal and symbolic crossroads between East and West.



Infrastructure

World-class venues, free zones, and logistics.



Policy

Government commitment to creative industries and diversification.



Brand

Dubai as a modern, innovative, and cosmopolitan city.

By investing strategically, Dubai can transform films and games into tools of influence that extend beyond culture into trade, diplomacy, and geopolitics

2. The Diplomatic Role of Film

Films as Cultural Ambassadors

Films have long functioned as cultural emissaries, carrying the values, narratives, and aspirations of nations to audiences far beyond their borders. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is mediated by officials and institutions, cinema operates at a popular level, entering homes and hearts through storytelling. When audiences watch a Hollywood blockbuster, a Bollywood musical, or a French art film, they are not only consuming entertainment—they are absorbing representations of national identity, cultural values, and societal aspirations.



The United States provides perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon. Hollywood became a global industry in the early 20th century, and by the mid-century it had established itself as the dominant force in international cinema. Through genres ranging from Westerns to science fiction, Hollywood consistently projected ideals of freedom, innovation, resilience, and the “American dream.” During the Cold War, Hollywood films served as soft power counterweights to Soviet narratives, presenting America as modern, open, and aspirational.



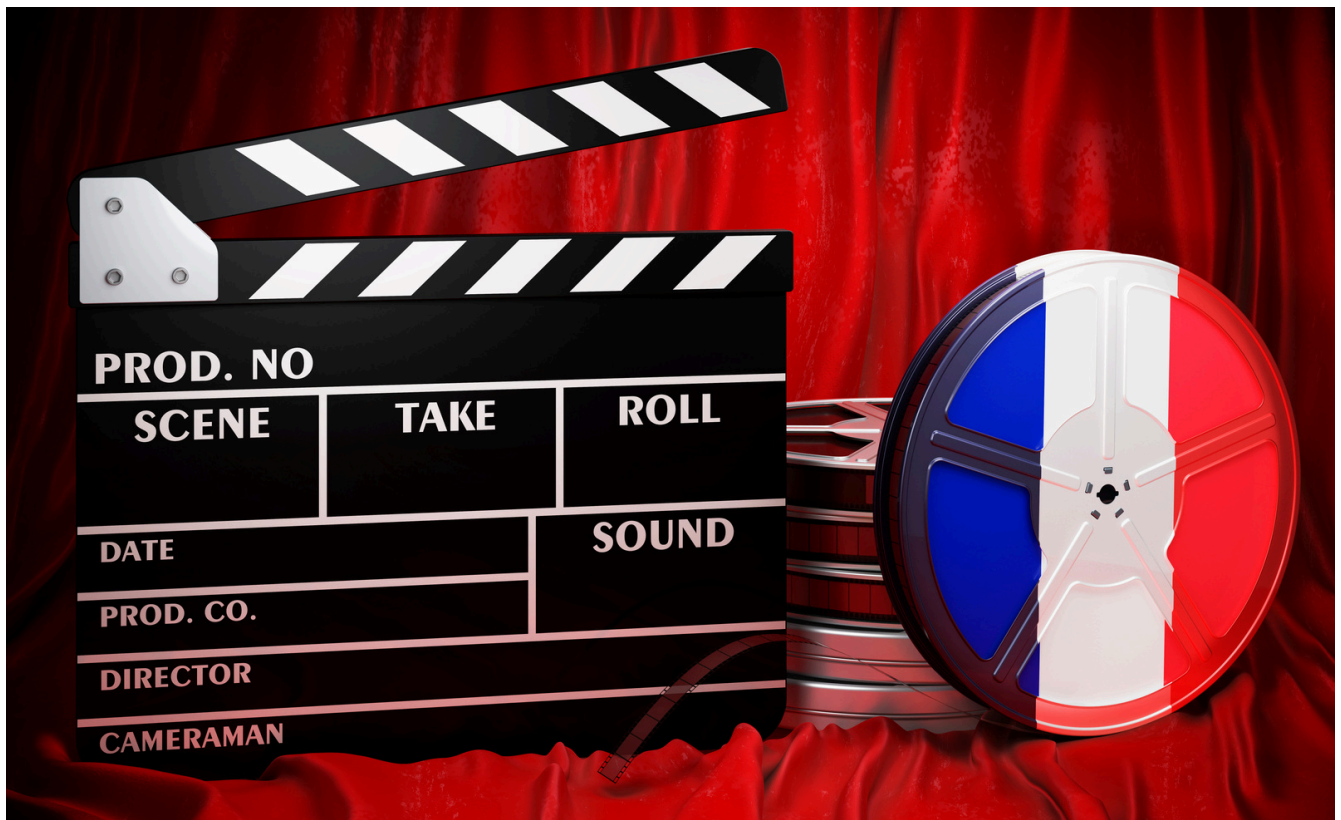


In contrast, India's Bollywood industry demonstrates the ability of cinema to resonate across regions with shared cultural and emotional affinities. Bollywood films, with their distinctive blend of music, dance, and melodrama, became particularly popular in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. In many African nations, Bollywood provided an alternative to Western media, fostering a sense of cultural kinship and shared values of family, honor, and resilience.



Similarly, French cinema cultivated an image of sophistication, intellectualism, and artistic integrity. Through movements such as the French New Wave, France exported not only films but also a cultural philosophy that positioned the country as a global leader in artistic expression. Japanese anime films, from Studio Ghibli to more contemporary productions, also illustrate how distinct cultural forms can achieve global resonance, creating loyal international fan bases that engage deeply with Japanese culture.

Each of these examples underscores the ambassadorial role of cinema. Films do not merely entertain; they negotiate identity, challenge stereotypes, and promote cultural familiarity. As cultural ambassadors, they open doors that traditional diplomacy cannot, fostering empathy and curiosity across borders.



Film Festivals as Diplomatic Platforms

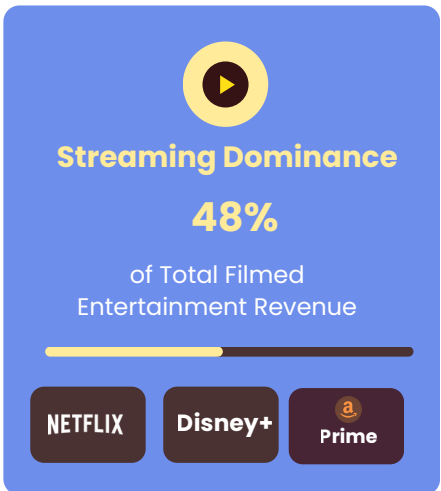
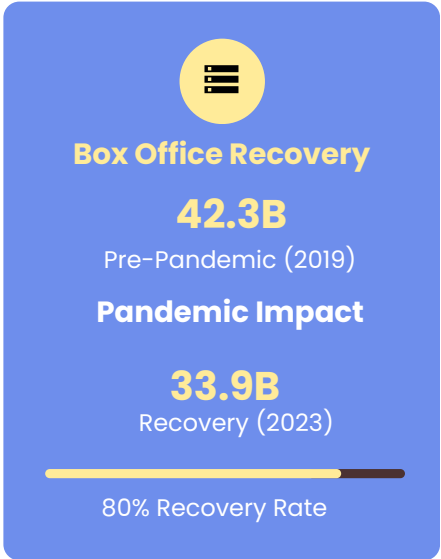
Film festivals are among the most visible and effective instruments of film diplomacy. At first glance, festivals appear to be artistic showcases, celebrating cinematic excellence and creative innovation. In reality, they function as diplomatic marketplaces where culture, commerce, and politics intersect.

The Cannes Film Festival is perhaps the most prominent example. Established in 1946, Cannes quickly evolved into not only a celebration of cinema but also a stage for cultural diplomacy. Governments use Cannes to promote their national cinemas, negotiate co-production agreements, and attract investment into their creative industries. The festival’s Marché du Film (Film Market) is a bustling space where deals worth billions are negotiated annually, often involving cross-border collaborations that serve both economic and diplomatic purposes.

Venice and Berlin have similarly positioned themselves as hubs of cultural diplomacy. Venice, with its long history, emphasizes Europe’s artistic heritage while serving as a showcase for global cinema. Berlin, with its politically charged history, often becomes a platform for films that engage with pressing social and political issues, reinforcing Germany’s role as a promoter of democratic values and critical discourse.

The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) illustrates another model of festival diplomacy. TIFF has become North America’s most influential platform for launching films into the global market. At the same time, it has positioned Canada as a cultural mediator, a bridge between Hollywood and international cinema. Through TIFF, Canada projects itself as open, inclusive, and globally engaged.

For Dubai, film festivals represent a proven avenue for cultural diplomacy. The Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF), which ran from 2004 to 2017, positioned Dubai as a gateway between Arab cinema and the global industry. DIFF provided Arab filmmakers with exposure to international audiences while attracting global talent to the region. Diplomatically, it symbolized Dubai’s openness and ambition to be a cultural bridge.



Reviving or reimagining such a platform under the Dubai Films & Games Commission could restore Dubai's role as a neutral convening hub that unites Hollywood, Bollywood, Asian cinema, and Arab storytelling in one space.

Diplomatically, festivals offer what traditional negotiations often cannot: shared cultural experiences that build goodwill and trust. A handshake at a summit may seal an agreement, but a shared film at a festival can create lasting empathy and mutual recognition.

Co-Productions as International Bridges

Co-productions represent one of the most formalized mechanisms of film diplomacy. When two or more countries collaborate on a film, they are not merely sharing financial risk and creative input—they are engaging in a process of cultural and political partnership.

International co-production treaties formalize this collaboration, granting productions access to funding, tax incentives, and distribution channels in both countries. Such treaties often emerge from broader diplomatic relations, symbolizing trust and mutual recognition. For example:

- Canada and France have one of the world's most active co-production agreements, resulting in hundreds of films and series that circulate widely in both markets.
- The UK and Australia have used co-productions to deepen ties within the Commonwealth, while also gaining access to each other's resources and audiences.
- European Union frameworks such as Eurimages provide funding to cross-border productions, reinforcing Europe's cultural unity.

Co-productions also generate symbolic diplomatic value. A co-produced film that achieves international success is a visible manifestation of cooperation, a cultural artifact that demonstrates the possibility of collaboration beyond politics.

For Dubai, co-production treaties could be an effective diplomatic tool. Positioned between Hollywood, Bollywood, and Asian cinema, Dubai can serve as a neutral and strategic partner. Treaties with India, South Korea, Japan, France, and the United States could establish Dubai as a hub for East–West collaboration, while also embedding Dubai's identity within global storytelling.

Policy and Incentives as Diplomatic Tools

Film incentives—tax credits, rebates, grants—are often framed as economic policies designed to attract production spending. Yet, they also function as instruments of soft power. A blockbuster filmed in a particular location becomes a cultural ambassador for that country, embedding its landscapes and identity into global imagination.

New Zealand is the classic example. Through targeted incentives, New Zealand attracted the production of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Beyond direct economic impact, the films transformed New Zealand's global brand. Tourism surged, the country became synonymous with epic natural beauty, and the government leveraged this new identity in its broader diplomatic strategy.

Abu Dhabi has similarly used incentives to attract high-profile productions such as *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Fast & Furious 7*. These films projected Abu Dhabi's modernity and ambition to global audiences while reinforcing its reputation as a film-friendly destination.

Morocco and Jordan have for decades hosted international productions, offering diverse landscapes and competitive incentives. Their appearances in films such as *Gladiator* and *Game of Thrones* have embedded them in the cultural consciousness, serving as long term branding assets.

In each case, incentives were not only economic levers but also strategic diplomatic investments. For Dubai, a carefully designed incentive program could attract global productions while projecting the city's image as modern, innovative, and culturally open. Incentives are, in effect, policies of influence, shaping both how money flows and how perceptions are formed.



The Emotional Power of Storytelling

Diplomacy ultimately seeks to influence hearts and minds, and films remain one of the most effective mediums for achieving this. Unlike policy documents or official statements, films operate at the emotional level, creating empathy, curiosity, and admiration.

A film that portrays a nation's culture with authenticity can soften stereotypes and create a more nuanced understanding of its people. For example, Iranian cinema has often provided global audiences with intimate portrayals of everyday life, challenging simplistic political narratives. Similarly, African filmmakers have used cinema to counter stereotypes of poverty and conflict, presenting stories of resilience, innovation, and cultural richness. Films also have the capacity to foster admiration. The global success of South Korea's *Parasite* not only showcased Korean filmmaking talent but also positioned the country as a cultural powerhouse. Such admiration can translate into tourism, trade, and political goodwill.

For Dubai, supporting films that authentically reflect its identity—both modern and traditional—can create powerful narratives that resonate globally. Whether through locally produced films, co-productions, or international blockbusters shot in the city, Dubai can use storytelling as a means of cultural negotiation and projection.



3. The Diplomatic Role of Games

Games as Global Cultural Exports

Video games have become one of the most powerful cultural exports of the 21st century. Unlike films, which present fixed narratives, games are interactive cultural experiences that allow players to participate, shape outcomes, and immerse themselves in virtual worlds. This interactivity makes games a uniquely persuasive form of diplomacy, embedding cultural values in a medium that audiences actively engage with rather than passively consume.

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Japan provides the clearest example of games as a diplomatic export. Franchises such as Pokémon, Final Fantasy, and Super Mario are not just commercial successes; they are cultural icons recognized worldwide. Pokémon in particular transcended its origin as a game to become a global franchise spanning anime, films, toys, and merchandise, embedding Japanese aesthetics and values of perseverance, teamwork, and imagination into international youth culture. These franchises created generations of global fans who associate Japan with creativity, innovation, and playfulness—an enduring form of cultural diplomacy.



South Korea has leveraged games as a pillar of its soft power strategy. By investing in broadband infrastructure and legitimizing gaming through PC cafés (known as PC bangs), Korea established itself as the birthplace of modern esports. Korean games such as Lineage and MapleStory attracted global players, while Korean dominance in competitive esports projected the nation as a youthful, innovative, and digitally advanced society. For South Korea, gaming diplomacy complements its broader Hallyu Wave strategy, alongside K-pop and film, forming a coherent cultural export agenda.

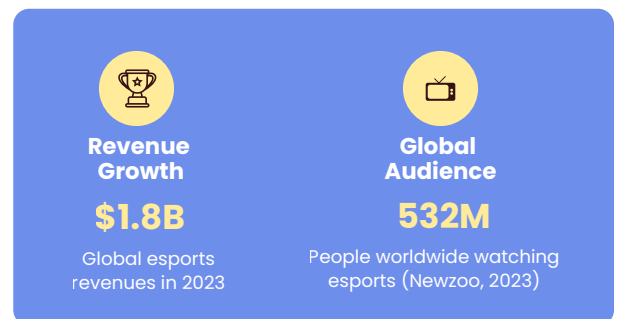


The United States, home to industry giants like Activision Blizzard and Epic Games, has exported cultural narratives through franchises such as Call of Duty, Grand Theft Auto, and Fortnite. These games reflect aspects of American culture, from individualism and competitiveness to urban storytelling. Although often controversial, they have nonetheless reinforced the global dominance of U.S. creative industries. American games, like Hollywood films, shape perceptions of lifestyle, identity, and values.

These cases illustrate how games function as global ambassadors. They generate not only economic revenue but also cultural affinity, projecting nations' values and identities across generations of players.

Esports as Public Diplomacy

Esports has emerged as one of the most visible manifestations of games as diplomacy. With audiences rivaling traditional sports, esports tournaments are not just competitions; they are diplomatic spectacles that signal innovation, inclusivity, and cultural relevance.



China has used esports as a form of public diplomacy by hosting global tournaments such as the League of Legends World Championship. These events project China's technological sophistication and position it as a leader in the digital entertainment economy. At the same time, Chinese game publishers like Tencent and NetEase have expanded their global reach, embedding Chinese culture and commercial influence in global markets.



South Korea institutionalized esports earlier than any other nation, recognizing professional gaming as a legitimate career path and broadcasting tournaments nationally. Korean dominance in games like StarCraft and League of Legends became part of the country's global brand, reinforcing its position as a pioneer in digital innovation. Esports athletes themselves became cultural ambassadors, admired globally and serving as informal representatives of their nation.



Saudi Arabia has recently positioned itself as a regional hub for esports diplomacy. Through mega-events like Gamers8 and the Esports World Cup, Riyadh has attracted global teams, sponsors, and audiences. These events are designed not only to diversify the economy but also to project an image of Saudi Arabia as modern, youth-oriented, and engaged with global digital culture.

Esports is uniquely suited for diplomacy because it connects with younger demographics who are often less engaged with traditional cultural diplomacy such as film or music festivals. Hosting esports events creates opportunities for youth-to-youth diplomacy, shaping perceptions of nations among future leaders and decision-makers.



Games as Cultural Storytelling

Beyond competition, games function as narrative vehicles, embedding cultural values, myths, and histories within interactive experiences. Unlike films, where audiences observe, games require players to make choices, often confronting moral dilemmas and cultural perspectives firsthand.

A striking example is Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed: Origins*, which brought ancient Egyptian history to life. Beyond its entertainment value, the game included an "educational mode" that allowed players to explore Egypt's history without combat, effectively turning the game into a digital museum. This innovation generated global curiosity about Egyptian heritage and boosted tourism interest.

The Witcher, developed by Poland's CD Projekt Red, transformed a local fantasy novel into a global franchise. The game's success projected Polish culture and creativity worldwide, eventually leading to a Netflix series that further amplified Poland's cultural footprint. The franchise became a symbol of Poland's innovation and storytelling capacity, enhancing its reputation far beyond its borders.

Similarly, Riot Games' *League of Legends* built an entire universe blending mythology, modern aesthetics, and diverse cultural influences. The success of the game's spin-off series *Arcane* on Netflix demonstrated how gaming IP can cross into film and television, amplifying cultural impact across multiple platforms.

These examples demonstrate that games are not only entertainment but also cultural artifacts capable of shaping global perceptions. When governments support the creation of culturally grounded games, they invest in a form of digital diplomacy that reaches younger audiences in authentic and immersive ways.

Games as Tools of Peace and Education

Games also hold potential as instruments of peacebuilding, education, and cross-cultural understanding. This form of gaming diplomacy is less commercial but deeply impactful, often supported by governments, NGOs, and educational institutions.

"Serious games" simulate real-world challenges, from diplomacy and conflict resolution to climate change and civic engagement. These games allow players to explore complex issues from multiple perspectives, fostering empathy and critical thinking. For example, games designed to simulate refugee experiences or peace negotiations have been used in classrooms and workshops to build awareness and understanding.

The U.S. State Department has funded educational games to promote civic values and intercultural understanding among youth. NGOs have also used gaming platforms to bridge divides between communities in conflict, using play as a neutral space for dialogue.

Such initiatives illustrate the potential of games to act as diplomatic classrooms, reaching audiences that traditional cultural diplomacy cannot. Unlike films, which present narratives for interpretation, games require active participation, making them powerful tools for shaping values and fostering collaboration.

Policy and Economic Dimensions of Game Diplomacy

The diplomatic potential of games is closely tied to government policies that shape industry growth. Nations that invest in gaming infrastructure, talent, and regulation can leverage games as both economic drivers and diplomatic assets.

South Korea is the clearest example of policy-driven success. By investing in broadband infrastructure in the 1990s and legitimizing gaming as a profession, Korea laid the foundation for its dominance in both game development and esports. The government's proactive approach turned gaming into a source of national pride and international influence. China illustrates how regulation can also be used diplomatically. By controlling what content is allowed in games, the government strategically determines how Chinese values and narratives are projected abroad. At the same time, China uses state-backed investment to support global expansion of its gaming companies, ensuring its cultural influence grows alongside its economic footprint.



Singapore and Finland highlight another model: government funding and incubation of gaming startups. By creating supportive ecosystems with grants, tax incentives, and incubators, both countries positioned themselves as innovation hubs. Finnish companies like Supercell (creator of Clash of Clans) achieved global success, projecting Finland's image as a creative, forward-looking society.

These examples demonstrate that policy is not neutral—it is a diplomatic lever. By designing policies that attract global developers, support local talent, and encourage international collaboration, governments can use gaming as a tool for influence.

The Unique Advantage of Games in Diplomacy

Games hold unique advantages over other cultural forms when it comes to diplomacy:



Interactivity:

Games are not passively consumed; they require engagement. Players invest time, emotions, and decision-making into virtual worlds, creating deeper connections than film or music.



Community:

Gaming communities—online clans, fan groups, and esports audiences—form transnational networks that transcend political borders. These communities are fertile ground for informal diplomacy.



Longevity:

Unlike films, which have limited theatrical runs, successful games can sustain engagement for years or even decades.



Transmedia Potential:

Games often expand into films, series, comics, and merchandise, multiplying their diplomatic impact.



Youth Engagement:

Games are particularly effective in reaching younger generations, who are less likely to be influenced by traditional cultural diplomacy tools. In many countries, games are the primary cultural medium for youth.

Together, these advantages make games not just entertainment products but strategic assets for cultural and economic diplomacy.

4. The Economic Diplomacy Dimension

Films have long functioned as cultural emissaries, carrying the values, narratives, and aspirations of nations to audiences far beyond their borders. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is mediated by officials and institutions, cinema operates at a popular level, entering homes and hearts through storytelling. When audiences watch a Hollywood

blockbuster, a Bollywood musical, or a French art film, they are not only consuming entertainment—they are absorbing representations of national identity, cultural values, and societal aspirations.



Incentives as Dual Tools of Economics and Diplomacy

Film and game incentives—whether in the form of tax credits, rebates, or grants—are usually described as industrial policies to stimulate creative economies. Yet they also serve as tools of diplomatic attraction. When a global production chooses to shoot in a particular country, or when a publisher decides to open a studio in a new hub, the decision is both economic and symbolic. It signals trust in the country's infrastructure, governance, and culture.

The Case of New Zealand

New Zealand's introduction of film incentives in the late 1990s transformed it into a major production destination. The filming of The Lord of the Rings trilogy brought direct economic benefits: billions in local spending, job creation across production and tourism, and the growth of local visual effects companies such as Weta Digital. Yet the diplomatic dividends were equally significant. New Zealand became globally associated with epic landscapes and creativity, reshaping its brand from a peripheral nation to a global cultural landmark. The incentives policy thus functioned as a branding exercise with diplomatic consequences.



New Zealand

\$5.6B GDP impact

+50% tourism boost | 3,000 VFX jobs

The Case of Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi's 30% film rebate, administered by twofour54, has attracted productions ranging from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* to *Fast & Furious 7*. These blockbusters not only generated spending but also projected Abu Dhabi's identity as modern, cosmopolitan, and film-friendly. The appearance of Abu Dhabi in global franchises functions as cinematic diplomacy, embedding the Emirate into the imagination of millions.

Application to Games

The same principle applies to games. Countries that introduce tax incentives for game development—such as Canada's refundable tax credit programs—become magnets for global publishers. Montreal, for example, attracted Ubisoft in the 1990s, which led to the city's transformation into one of the world's largest game development hubs. Each successful franchise developed in Montreal (such as *Assassin's Creed*) is both an economic export and a cultural export, tying Canada to global gaming narratives.

Implications for Dubai

For Dubai, designing incentives for both films and games can serve as a dual-purpose policy: generating immediate economic benefits while positioning the city as a hub of global creativity. Rebates, when linked to criteria such as local hiring, use of Emirati talent, or sustainability, can achieve economic development goals while simultaneously creating cultural ambassadors that extend Dubai's reach.



Abu Dhabi

140+ productions since 2013

Hundreds of millions in local spend
| twofour54 rebate program



Canada

\$9.3B+ annual production

244,000 jobs supported |
Tax credits since 1990s



Montreal (Games)

**40,000 employees |
300+ studios**

Ubisoft 1997 entry | 37.5% tax credit

Intellectual Property (IP) as a Trade Route

The most enduring economic value in films and games comes not from one-off productions but from intellectual property (IP) that can be monetized across platforms and generations. For diplomacy, IP functions as a cultural trade route, carrying narratives across borders in ways that endure for decades.

From Project to Franchise

A single successful film or game can evolve into a transmedia franchise. Pokémon began as a video game but expanded into television series, films, merchandise, and even global tourism circuits. The Witcher began as a Polish fantasy novel, became a successful game, and later transformed into a Netflix series with global acclaim. Each expansion multiplied cultural influence and embedded the originating country deeper into global culture.

IP as a Long-Term Diplomatic Asset

Unlike service-based models (where a country provides crews, locations, or VFX services to international productions), IP ownership ensures long-term returns. The diplomatic impact is also stronger: audiences do not only see a country as a service provider but as a creator of stories and worlds. This positions nations as cultural innovators rather than facilitators.

Dubai's Opportunity

Dubai has historically excelled in infrastructure, facilitation, and services. The next frontier is to build and export original IP. This could involve funding Emirati filmmakers and game developers, incubating transmedia projects that integrate film and gaming from inception, and co-owning IP through public-private investment funds. By retaining ownership stakes in global franchises, Dubai can shift from a service hub to a creator economy leader, ensuring both economic returns and diplomatic capital.



Talent Diplomacy

Talent mobility is one of the most powerful forms of diplomacy. When students, creators, and professionals are trained in one country and later work internationally, they carry with them the identity, values, and networks of their training ground. Films and games, with their heavy reliance on specialized skills, are uniquely suited for this type of diplomacy.

Global Models

- France's La Fémis film school attracts international students, many of whom return to their home countries as cultural ambassadors of French cinema. This has reinforced France's cultural influence far beyond its borders.
- Korea's esports training programs have trained athletes from across the globe, who carry the Korean model of discipline and innovation to their own countries.
- Canada's co-op programs in game design connect international students to major studios, embedding Canadian values of inclusivity and collaboration in future leaders of the gaming industry.



France

~50 Students/Year

Alumni active in 40+ countries



Korea

200+ Bootcamps/Year

Athletes from 15+ countries trained



Canada

20,000+ Students/Year

75% employment in 1 year

Dubai's Potential

Dubai has already launched scholarship funds and leadership development programs in media. Expanding these into film and gaming—with dedicated tracks for directing, game design, production, and esports management—could establish Dubai as a training hub for global creative talent. Graduates of these programs, whether Emirati or international, would form an alumni network that amplifies Dubai's diplomatic influence across borders.

Tourism and Location Diplomacy

Films and games have a well-documented impact on tourism, often referred to as “set-jetting.” When audiences see iconic locations on screen, they are inspired to visit them, creating new tourism flows that reinforce cultural affinity.

- New Zealand leveraged The Lord of the Rings to create entire tourism trails, boosting visitation and extending stays.
- Croatia experienced a surge in tourism after Dubrovnik was featured in Game of Thrones.
- Egypt has seen growing global interest through historical games such as Assassin’s Creed: Origins.



Film Tourism

- Lord of the Rings: 20% of NZ visitors cited films as travel motivation
- Game of Thrones: Tourism in Dubrovnik +12% annually (2014–2019)



Game Tourism

- Japan’s Pokémon: Billions in tourism revenues from events, centers, and festivals
- Poland’s The Witcher: Boosted Kraków visits by 18% in 2020 (pre-pandemic)

For Dubai, films and games can be powerful tourism drivers. A blockbuster filmed in the city, or a game set in Dubai’s futuristic landscapes, can inspire global audiences to visit. By linking film and game productions with tourism marketing, Dubai can create cross-sector diplomatic synergies, positioning itself as both a cultural and tourism destination.



5. Recommendations for Dubai

Building on the analysis above, this paper proposes a multi-layered strategy for Dubai to harness films and games as instruments of economic diplomacy.

Develop a Film and Games Diplomacy Strategy

Dubai should articulate a dedicated strategy that frames films and games as tools of soft power and economic influence. This strategy should:

- Define cultural and economic objectives.
- Establish KPIs for both perception change and GDP contribution.
- Position Dubai as a neutral convening hub for East-West collaboration.

Such a strategy would ensure alignment across government, industry, and international partnerships, embedding diplomacy within every media initiative.

Establish Co-Production and Co-Publishing Frameworks

Dubai should prioritize treaties and partnerships that formalize collaboration in both film and gaming.

- **Film:** Co-production treaties with India, South Korea, Japan, France, and the United States would create pipelines for shared financing, talent, and distribution.
- **Games:** Co-publishing partnerships with global publishers would allow Dubai to act as a bridge between Arab IP creators and international markets.

These frameworks would institutionalize Dubai's role as a trusted partner in global storytelling.



Host Flagship Diplomatic Platforms

Dubai should leverage its convening power to host major international events that combine culture, commerce, and diplomacy.

- Relaunch an International Film Festival in Dubai, positioned explicitly as a platform for cultural diplomacy between East and West.
- Establish an annual Dubai Esports and Games Diplomacy Forum, bringing together governments, industry leaders, and creators to explore how interactive media can foster global cooperation.

These platforms would amplify Dubai’s visibility and create recurring diplomatic opportunities.

Invest in Cultural Exports

Dubai should support the creation of culturally grounded films and games that authentically reflect Arab heritage and modern identity. Funding programs should be designed not only for economic returns but also for diplomatic impact, projecting narratives that challenge stereotypes and highlight diversity.

Additionally, Dubai should launch a Dubai Film and Games Diplomacy Index, an annual benchmark report that measures global contributions, tracks perception changes, and positions Dubai as a thought leader in cultural diplomacy.

Leverage Neutrality and Connectivity

Dubai’s geopolitical positioning as a neutral, globally connected hub is one of its greatest assets. Unlike countries whose cultural exports are tied to political agendas, Dubai can position itself as a neutral convening ground where diverse cultures collaborate. This neutrality, combined with world-class logistics, infrastructure, and policy support, makes Dubai an ideal base for productions that seek to bridge divides and tell global stories.



6. Conclusion

Films and games are not just entertainment industries; they are strategic assets of diplomacy and economic statecraft. They shape perceptions, build bridges, attract investment, and create shared cultural experiences that endure for decades. In an age where narratives are as influential as policies, and where interactivity drives engagement, the power of films and games cannot be ignored by any nation that seeks influence on the global stage.

The evidence is clear. Hollywood shaped America's image as a land of opportunity and freedom. Bollywood forged cultural ties between India and vast regions of the world. South Korea used film, television, and games to create the Hallyu Wave, repositioning itself as a global cultural powerhouse. Japan embedded its values into global consciousness through franchises like Pokémon and Nintendo. Saudi Arabia leveraged esports diplomacy to redefine its brand for younger generations.

For Dubai, the opportunity is profound. The city already possesses world-class infrastructure, geopolitical neutrality, and a visionary leadership committed to building a diversified knowledge economy. With the establishment of the Dubai Films & Games Commission, Dubai has a unique chance to design and implement a strategy that integrates cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and creative industry development into a single, coherent vision.

This white paper has argued that by:

- Developing incentives that attract global productions and studios,
- Owning intellectual property that projects culture across generations,
- Investing in talent pipelines that create global alumni networks,
- Hosting flagship festivals and esports events that position Dubai as a convening hub, and
- Publishing a global diplomacy index that benchmarks progress,

Dubai can transform films and games into a diplomatic currency that amplifies its influence, strengthens its economy, and embeds its identity into global culture. The message is simple but urgent: in the 21st century, the stories a city tells and the worlds it creates are as important as the policies it negotiates. If Dubai chooses to lead in the diplomacy of films and games, it will not only secure its place as a global media hub but also write itself into the imagination of future generations.

7. References

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