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Trump is Baahubali? Certainly the larger than life American president is a big draw in noisy and youthful India

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Sreeram Sundar Chaulia

Sreeram Sundar Chaulia is dean, Jindal School of International Affairs.

Before landing in Ahmedabad for the mega 'Namaste Trump' spectacle, US President Donald Trump tweeted in Hindi that he was eager to arrive and connect with friends in India. His choice of using the Hindi script to directly communicate with the masses of northern India, and earlier memes he shared via Twitter of himself as a mythical warrior from the southern Indian blockbuster movie

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Baahubali, were instant hits and went viral.

These highly unconventional public outreach efforts illustrate why Trump is such a big draw and a showstopper, particularly in a noisy democracy like India where the population is youthful and is hooked on to devices that circulate endless images, videos and sounds.

Like his counterpart Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose followers on Twitter are second only to Trump's 72 million, the American president understands where the pulse of the public lies and taps it straight on instead of filtering his message via traditional media gatekeepers. The rawness and uninhibited form of communication from Trump carry tremendous appeal, not just among diehard Trump loyalists and voters in the US who distrust the so-called 'fake news' mainstream American media, but also in a country like India where VIPs historically maintained a stoic aloofness from the hoi polloi.

According to the latest public opinion survey from the Pew Research Centre, no less than 56% of Indians have confidence in Trump's ability to "do the right thing regarding world affairs". Since the time he was a presidential candidate in 2016, he has steadily climbed the ladder of approval ratings in India. This is despite

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the fact that he slapped trade tariffs and sought to shift the US-India strategic partnership in a narrow transactionalist direction.

Indians do disapprove of Trump's actions that conflict with India's interests, such as his quixotic offers to 'mediate' on Kashmir, but when it comes to Trump the individual, he is widely admired in India much more than in other parts of the world.

Trump's popularity in India owes not just to unorthodox public relations tactics, but also his bluntness and political incorrectness. Somewhere deep in the Indian psyche, there is a rejection of liberal multicultural niceties and genteel elitist politeness. Trump's populist pushing of boundaries and his utter disregard for dignified protocols of high office draw contempt from liberal critics and intellectuals. But it is these very traits which he displays so unabashedly and unpretentiously that endear him to his core base in the US and to vast numbers of people in India.

Trump may be showy, ignorant and crass, the reasoning goes, but at least he is honest and not beating about the bush while hiding some cunning trick behind his sleeve. Even if he is a pompous villain, it is obvious from the outset, rather than a secretive twisted trait. Fascination with



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Trump is also a product of Indians' admiration for muscular strongmen leaders. Many in India believe that Trump is a hardcore American nationalist who will go to any length to smack strategic rivals of the US like China or rogue states like Pakistan in their faces.

Although an objective reading of Trump's foreign policy confirms he has not mustered a robust multilateral coalition of partners and allies to counterbalance China, and nor has Trump decisively come down like a ton of bricks on Pakistan for sponsoring jihadist terrorism, average Indians still think he is a gutsy street fighter in a bad world who revels in humiliating enemies.

India is hosting Trump lavishly with the implicit assumption that he will triumph again in the US presidential election this November. Modi's bet on Trump's longevity is rational, as the incumbent US president's domestic approval is at a high. To boot, Trump is genuinely liked in India and by Indian-Americans, a fact that not only massages his notoriously inflated ego but also redounds to his advantage in the US electoral arena.

The stunning visuals of Trump and Modi hogging global headlines from Houston to Ahmedabad represent the new normal of a loud, personality-centric and perpetual campaigning style of politics-

