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**THE MODERATING ROLE OF LEADERSHIP VISION AND  
STRATEGIC PLANNING ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND EMIRATI SOFT POWER  
PRACTICES**



**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
UNIVERSITY UTARA MALAYSIA  
2025**

**THE MODERATING ROLE OF LEADERSHIP VISION AND  
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DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND EMIRATI SOFT POWER  
PRACTICES**

**ALI MOHAMMED GHDAYER SUWIDAN ALNUAIMI (906780)**



**UUM**  
Universiti Utara Malaysia

**Thesis Submitted to The Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government In  
Fulfilment of The Requirements for The Doctor of Philosophy  
Universiti Utara Malaysia**



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## ABSTRACT

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is rapidly emerging as a regional leader in digital transformation. However, despite significant investments in digital infrastructure, the influence of digital diplomacy on national culture, political values, and foreign policy within the UAE context has not been thoroughly examined. This study aims to examine the impact of digital diplomacy on three key dependent variables: culture, political values, and foreign policy. To address inconsistencies observed in the relationships between digital diplomacy and these outcomes, the study incorporates two moderating variables: leadership vision and strategic planning. Specifically, the moderating role of leadership vision and strategic planning is assessed in the context of the relationships between digital diplomacy and each dependent variable. Data were collected from a sample of 306 employees across the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the UAE, foreign embassies, specialized organizations, and affiliated academic institutions. The dataset was initially subjected to descriptive analysis, tests for missing data, and assessments of normality. Upon confirmation of normality, the measurement instrument was evaluated for reliability and validity through item loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. Discriminant validity was also assessed to ensure the robustness of the constructs. Following these diagnostic tests, the structural model was analysed using SMART PLS to perform structural equation modelling. The findings indicate that digital diplomacy exerts a significant influence on culture, political values, and foreign policy of the country. Moreover, both leadership vision and strategic planning were found to significantly moderate the relationships between digital diplomacy and the dependent variables. The study concludes by offering recommendations for future researchers and policymakers to enhance the practice and study of digital diplomacy.

**Keywords:** Digital Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Culture, Political Values, Leadership Visions, Strategic Planning

## ABSTRAK

Emiriah Arab Bersatu (UAE) sedang berkembang pesat sebagai peneraju serantau dalam transformasi digital. Namun begitu, meskipun pelaburan besar telah dibuat dalam infrastruktur digital, pengaruh diplomasi digital terhadap budaya kebangsaan, nilai politik, dan dasar luar dalam konteks UAE masih belum dikaji secara mendalam. Tujuan kajian bertujuan untuk meneliti kesan diplomasi digital terhadap tiga pemboleh ubah bersandar yang utama, iaitu budaya, nilai politik, dan dasar luar. Bagi menangani hubungan tidak konsisten di antara diplomasi digital dengan pemboleh ubah tersebut, kajian ini telah memasukkan dua pemboleh ubah penyederhana, iaitu visi kepimpinan dan perancangan strategik. Secara khususnya, peranan penyederhana bagi visi kepimpinan dan perancangan strategik telah dianalisis dalam konteks hubungan antara diplomasi digital dengan setiap pemboleh ubah bersandar. Data telah dikumpulkan daripada sampel yang terdiri daripada 306 orang pegawai yang berkhidmat di Kementerian Hal Ehwal Luar Negeri UAE, kedutaan asing, organisasi khas, dan institusi akademik yang berkaitan. Pada peringkat awal, data telah dianalisis secara deskriptif, termasuk ujian untuk data yang hilang dan penilaian normaliti. Setelah pengesahan normaliti, instrumen pengukuran dinilai dari segi kebolehpercayaan dan kesahan melalui bebanan item, pekali alpha Cronbach, kebolehpercayaan komposit, dan varian purata terestruk. Kesahan diskriminan turut dinilai untuk memastikan kekukuhan konstruk kajian. Selepas pengesahan semua ujian diagnostik, model struktur telah dianalisis menggunakan perisian SMART PLS untuk melaksanakan pemodelan persamaan struktur. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa diplomasi digital memberikan pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap budaya, nilai politik, dan dasar luar negara. Selain itu, visi kepimpinan dan perancangan strategik juga didapati menyederhanakan secara signifikan hubungan antara diplomasi digital dengan pemboleh ubah bersandar. Kajian ini diakhiri dengan cadangan untuk penyelidikan masa hadapan dan pembuat dasar bagi memperkukuh amalan dan kajian dalam bidang diplomasi digital.

**Kata Kunci:** Diplomasi Digital, Dasar Luar Negara, Budaya, Nilai Politik, Visi Kepimpinan, Perancangan Strategik

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praises and glory be to Allah (SWT) for granting me life and the strength to complete this program. May His peace and blessing be upon the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my honourable supervisor for his invaluable support, guidance, and thoughtful feedback throughout this research. Working under his supervision has been a true privilege, and his constructive criticism has consistently provided a source of motivation and inspiration. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the external and internal examiners for their insightful suggestions and encouragement during the evaluation of this work.

I am deeply indebted to my beloved parents—may Allah (SWT) bless them with long, healthy lives—for their endless prayers and unwavering support. I am also thankful to my siblings for their love and encouragement; this journey would have been far more difficult without their presence.

Special thanks are extended to my friends and colleagues in the program who have stood by me through the highs and lows. Your companionship, laughter, and shared struggles have made this journey a memorable and fulfilling one. Thank you for your motivation and support.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Study Background

The concept of soft power, in its broadest sense, has long been a matter of interest for global decision-makers, particularly as mechanisms of international influence continue to evolve. It has become evident that traditional reliance on hard power has declined in effectiveness (Akram, Shahzadi & Davvaz, 2023). The modern interpretation of soft power has significantly expanded, challenging the conventional view that a state's military strength is the primary and most dependable means of achieving foreign policy objectives. Instead, soft power has emerged as a dominant tool for advancing national interests (Tang, 2023).

In this context, the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) hosting of global events serves as a strategic demonstration of its commitment to soft power as a response to contemporary global challenges. The UAE places considerable emphasis on understanding the origins, dimensions, and implementation of soft power in alignment with its national vision. While promoting global unity, the UAE also acknowledges the continuing importance of hard power in maintaining national security and sovereignty (Saber, Paris, & Marochi, 2018).

According to Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi (2022), Expo 2020 Dubai provided a valuable opportunity to observe and analyze the characteristics and scope of soft power, especially given its alignment with the timing of the research. The UAE is a growing Arab and regional development model with its soft power rapidly expanding and diversifying within the region. This progression is significant for all stakeholders, as the UAE's soft power framework effectively integrates the goal setting, tool definition, and priority alignment while also fostering innovative ideas for the future. Additionally, the UAE actively promotes a forward-thinking leadership approach, marked by its ability to adapt to global transformations (Krzymowski, 2022).

Guided by an ambitious leadership vision, the UAE is implementing a comprehensive soft power strategy aimed at establishing a robust government system that supports the development of sustainable policies and programs with regional and international relevance. Through modern digital diplomacy, the UAE seeks to enhance its international reputation and promote its heritage, identity, and cultural image (Zaabi & Awamleh, 2019).

In 2017, during the annual meetings of the UAE government, the “Soft Power Strategy for the UAE” was officially introduced (Krzymowski, 2020; Krzyzaniak, 2018). The strategy aims to establish a unified national identity across multiple domains, including humanitarian efforts, economic activities, tourism, media, and scientific development. This initiative is designed to enhance the UAE’s position as a gateway to the Arab region and a guardian of cultural heritage. It also aspires to position the UAE as the leading hub for cultural, artistic, media, tourism, and scientific pursuits within the Arab world. The strategy comprises four objectives that reflect the principles of immersive

soft power, with the overarching goal of advancing national interests and reinforcing the UAE's image as a modern, inclusive, and welcoming nation for people around the globe (Enser & Koshy, 2015).

Rather than relying on conventional indicators of state power such as geography, population, or historical dominance, the UAE advances a vision of global stability rooted in soft power. This vision is championed by Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, who highlights the role of soft power as a central pillar of effective governance (Khan, 2012; Nisbett, 2021).

The strategic deployment of soft power is often premised on a nation's global reputation, moral commitment to human welfare, and widespread international recognition. Such nations tend to influence global affairs not through coercion, but through attraction and credibility. However, states that heavily rely on this image-based influence may demonstrate limited resilience in the face of criticism, often opting not to defend their positions immediately. Over time, it is anticipated that the merit of their stances will be affirmed through global validation and recognition (Alexander & Mazzucco, 2021).

The UAE exemplifies such a soft power approach through a comprehensive strategy grounded in visionary leadership and forward-looking planning. Central to this strategy are humanitarian initiatives, including international aid, hosting diverse communities, fostering peaceful coexistence, and promoting cultural openness. These initiatives reflect the UAE's ambition to shape global opinion and diplomatic

relationships through moral and cultural appeal, rather than traditional power dynamics.

In recent years, the UAE has expanded its international visibility and influence through significant investments in clean energy, particularly its peaceful nuclear energy program, as well as through advancements in space exploration and the hosting of large-scale international forums and festivals. These efforts have enhanced the UAE's image as a progressive, modern, and globally engaged nation.

The effectiveness of this strategy is reflected in the strategic partnerships it has forged with major global powers such as China and the United States, both of which recognize the UAE as a vital actor in their geopolitical agendas (Baycar & Rakipoglu, 2022). At the regional level, other Middle Eastern nations have sought to replicate elements of the UAE's developmental approach, which is now often compared to the highly regarded Singaporean model (Matheson, 2020).

In parallel with its soft power pursuits, the UAE has positioned itself as a regional leader in the adoption and integration of information and communication technologies (ICT). The rapid evolution of ICT has redefined how states engage with global audiences and manage diplomacy, governance, and development. The UAE's early and enthusiastic embrace of digital platforms has enabled it to amplify its soft power reach, significantly impacting its political, social, and economic spheres (Antoy Boateng and Al Mazrouei, 2021).

The diplomatic engagements of the UAE have given rise to a modern form of diplomacy referred to as “digital diplomacy.” It is essential to recognize that traditional diplomacy remains relevant in international relations, particularly in interactions between representatives of sovereign states. In today’s interconnected world, individuals, organizations, and nations all play significant roles in shaping global events (Al Mazrouei, 2019).

Technological advancements have facilitated the emergence of digital diplomacy in the UAE. This approach centers on the strategic use of social media platforms to advance foreign policy objectives and manage international relations effectively (Gilboa, 2016). As a result, digital diplomacy has established two distinct levels of representation: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the network of embassies located worldwide (Ittefaq, 2019).

Given these developments, the UAE is well-positioned to strategically craft its foreign policy communications and safeguard national interests. This process requires a nuanced understanding of societal characteristics, historical and cultural contexts, and the values and traditions inherent to the UAE. By integrating these elements, the UAE seeks to enhance international recognition and acceptance of its diplomatic initiatives while cultivating a favorable global image (Al-Mansouri, Al-Mohannadi, & Feroun, 2021).

Digital diplomacy in the UAE involves the use of social media platforms by diplomats to fulfill diplomatic responsibilities and support foreign policy goals. It also encompasses public engagement, dissemination of targeted messages, and the exertion

of influence over governmental and organizational decisions through digital channels (Pakin-Albayrakoglu, 2022). When aligned with the UAE's leadership vision and strategic planning, digital diplomacy can significantly enhance the effectiveness of embassies and diplomatic missions in promoting national interests.

This approach facilitates information acquisition and improves communication among diplomatic personnel via email and various social media platforms (Cyrill & Pasha, 2019; Alnaqbi, Yatiban & Ramdani, 2020). Contemporary diplomats increasingly utilize digital platforms such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites. The rise of social media has transformed diplomatic communication, marking a pivotal evolution in the practice of diplomacy (Al Mashat, 2008; Albayrakoglu, 2020). The strategic vision and planning of the UAE's leadership have consistently emphasized future-oriented development since the establishment of the Union on December 2, 1971, under the leadership of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (Alshamsi, 2020; Litz & Scott, 2017). Optimism, strategic foresight, and the mobilization of national resources have become central themes in the political discourse surrounding the leadership's vision (Bush, 2017; Jabnoun & Juma, 2005).

The foundational vision of the Emirati leadership, initiated by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and the founding fathers, laid the groundwork for national development. Sheikh Zayed prioritized human capital development, providing citizens with opportunities to contribute to building a prosperous society. According to Ahmed and Al Amiri (2022), Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE, continued this legacy through visionary leadership.

The UAE's soft power has been shaped by its leaders' strategic decisions and recognition of digital diplomacy's potential to enhance foreign policy outcomes (Alseiari, Khalifa & Bhaumick, 2019; Awamleh, Evans & Mahate, 2005). The country has adopted forward-looking strategies that integrate modern diplomatic tools, particularly digital diplomacy, into its foreign policy framework (Al Zaabi, 2019; Almheiri & Omar, 2022).

Strategic planning serves as a vital mechanism through which the UAE articulates its long-term visions and policy trajectories (Elbanna, 2010; Alhammadi & Sulaiman, 2023). This mechanism ensures that strategic directives are translated into actionable plans and initiatives aimed at achieving national objectives over the medium and long term.

The UAE Cabinet oversees the formulation and implementation of government strategies. It evaluates strategic plans submitted by federal agencies to ensure alignment with national priorities (Al-Shaikh, 2001; Ibrahim, Eltarabishi, Abdalla & Abdallah, 2022; El-Aidie, Alseiari & Khalifa, 2021). Emphasis has been placed on enhancing federal capabilities through the development of standardized processes, methodologies, and governance frameworks (Siddique, 2015; Habitat, 2019).

The UAE government has introduced several strategic plans, including the UAE Government Strategy 2008–2010, 2011–2013, and 2014–2016. These plans aim to incorporate international best practices and define medium-term goals (Alseiari, Khalifa & Bhaumick, 2019; Samad & Ahmed, 2021). Federal entities develop strategic and operational plans to implement initiatives and projects effectively.

These plans are budget-aligned and integrated with broader national objectives outlined in the UAE Vision 2021 and subsequent government strategies. Their primary aim is to address societal needs, enhance Emirati soft power, promote sustainable development, and reinforce the UAE's status as a leading global actor (Chaib Lababidi, Lababidi, Colak & Dayan, 2020).

The soft power of a nation is predominantly derived from intangible assets, such as strategic planning and visionary leadership (Gordanić, 2020). This study aims to investigate the impact of digital diplomacy on the soft power strategies of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with particular emphasis on the cultural, political, and foreign policy dimensions. Furthermore, the research seeks to examine how the UAE's visionary leadership and strategic planning may moderate and potentially reshape the influence of digital diplomacy on the nation's soft power practices.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

In recent years, the concept of soft power has gained considerable prominence in both academic and public discourse concerning international relations and the evolving role of nation-states. As a result, soft power remains a central theme in scholarly inquiry (Beydoun & Zahawi, 2016; Akram et al., 2023). Its significance is underscored by its frequent appearance in academic publications, media outlets, and policy discussions, warranting comprehensive and critical examination (Tang, 2023). Soft power is widely recognized as a strategic tool shaped by a nation's cultural identity, political values, and foreign policy orientation (Saber et al., 2018; Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022). Similarly, digital diplomacy has emerged as a vital mechanism for enhancing the soft power of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), reinforcing its cultural narrative, political

ideals, and foreign policy objectives (Lee, 2015; Liu & Turner, 2018). While extensive research has been conducted on the soft power strategies of various developing nations, there remains a notable gap in the literature specifically addressing the UAE's soft power dynamics. This gap highlights the need for focused academic inquiry (Saad, 2020; Al Suwaidi, 2021).

According to the 2020 Global Soft Power Index by Brand Finance, the UAE holds the highest soft power ranking in the Middle East (Krzymowski, 2022). Recent studies have explored the UAE's soft power initiatives, including strategies developed by the UAE Soft Power Council and related institutions. These efforts aim to enhance the country's international image by promoting its cultural heritage, political values, foreign policy, and global contributions. Despite these initiatives, the UAE continues to face significant challenges in fully realizing its soft power potential (Al Mazrouei, 2019; Saad, 2020).

The UAE's effective deployment of soft power depends on key pillars such as culture, political values, and foreign policy. However, there is a lack of empirical research examining public perceptions of the most effective soft power strategies within the UAE context (Krzymowski, 2020). Tsvetkova (2020) notes that digital diplomacy has fundamentally transformed public diplomacy, influencing various dimensions of soft power. Ittefaq (2019) further argues that digital diplomacy has emerged as a powerful, albeit unexpected, force in shaping national soft power.

Nye (2018) and Rashica (2018) suggest that the integration of both hard and soft power tools represents a new paradigm in public diplomacy, with digital diplomacy playing

a central role. Antwi-Boateng and Al Mazrouei (2021) observe that the UAE has incorporated digital diplomacy into its foreign policy to promote its cultural and political values. However, the success of these efforts is contingent upon addressing cybersecurity and information governance challenges.

There is broad scholarly consensus on the importance of a foreign policy framework centered on digital diplomacy, which serves as a non-confrontational tool for international engagement (Berg & Vits, 2018). As Walt (2018) metaphorically suggests, a nation without a coherent foreign policy is akin to a ship adrift without knowledge of prevailing currents. A well-articulated foreign policy enables a country to pursue its national interests and secure a favorable position in the global arena (Le Pere et al., 2020).

Despite the theoretical emphasis on perception and evaluation in Nye's soft power framework (Enser & Koshy, 2015), these aspects remain underexplored in the UAE context. This gap hinders the identification of actionable strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of digital diplomacy.

Another critical issue pertains to the UAE's stringent censorship laws, particularly concerning digital media and social platforms. While these regulations are justified on the grounds of national security and social cohesion, they may limit the country's ability to engage effectively with international audiences. This has drawn criticism from Western observers who view such restrictions as impediments to free expression. Therefore, despite the UAE's substantial investments and international recognition for its soft power initiatives, further development is necessary. It is crucial for the UAE to

acknowledge the strategic role of digital diplomacy in advancing its cultural influence, political values, and foreign policy objectives. This assertion is intended as an academic observation rather than a prescriptive recommendation (Al Suwaidi, 2021). According to Vollero et al. (2020), culture is a foundational component of soft power, enabling comparative analysis across societies and fostering mutual understanding. However, cultural differences can also pose barriers. Dan (2020) emphasizes that intercultural communication involves the transmission of traditions, beliefs, values, and symbols—elements that collectively form a legacy of soft power capable of bridging societal divides.

Ranaivoson (2020) argues that the pursuit of cultural diversity, despite occasional tensions, strengthens soft power and fosters international connectivity. This process is closely linked to strategic planning and visionary leadership, which guide the effective utilization of cultural assets. Connors (2019) highlights the importance of political values in shaping a nation's soft power, noting that these values are dynamic and context-dependent. Technological advancements, particularly in digital diplomacy, further influence the expression and reception of political values, which serve as conduits for public engagement and soft power development.

Although the presence of diverse and sometimes conflicting values may introduce complexity, it ultimately contributes to the resilience and richness of a nation's soft power (Alper, 2020). Kalmoe (2020) adds that political values significantly influence individual identity and behavior, and can serve as predictors of public attitudes toward national political trajectories, especially in promoting a culture of tolerance.

Nations often encounter challenges in defining and conceptualizing foreign policy, which complicates efforts to develop comprehensive interpretations and assess their relationship with contemporary technological advancements such as digital diplomacy. These challenges are further influenced by the quality of strategic planning and the presence of visionary leadership (Schumacher & Bouris, 2017).

Accordingly, analyzing the influence of digital diplomacy on soft power strategies presents a challenge to the existing soft power framework employed by the UAE. This challenge reflects a broader lack of global recognition and, in some cases, scepticism regarding the effectiveness of the Emirati soft power model. This issue forms the core of the present research, which aims to provide deeper insights and understanding (Chan & Fung, 2021).

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the impact of digital diplomacy on the UAE's soft power practices (Khan, 2012) through the development of a conceptual soft power framework and an associated implementation strategy. The research aims to support the UAE's international objectives by conducting a comprehensive survey that evaluates the adoption of effective soft power strategies used by other nations. The goal is to identify the most favorable components of such a framework (Alexander & Mazzucco, 2021).

Based on the preceding discussion, it is evident that the UAE faces limitations in its soft power capabilities, largely due to the limited effectiveness of traditional diplomatic efforts in enhancing the country's global reputation and mobilizing its soft power assets—namely, its political values, cultural heritage, and foreign policy (Al

Suwaidi, 2021; Krzymowski, 2022). The UAE aims to advance its soft power strategy through the integration of digital diplomacy, guided by strategic planning and visionary leadership.

The UAE's policy direction aligns with both current and emerging global trends in soft power development. However, the government's aspirations to excel in areas such as foreign policy, culture, and political values are often undermined by perceptions that portray the UAE as a small state with limited global influence. Although the UAE has made strategic efforts to address its soft power limitations, significant progress remains to be achieved.

Additionally, the UAE faces regional competition in asserting its influence. As emphasized by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has identified the enhancement of Dubai's international role as a strategic priority (Saber et al., 2018). This underscores the importance of strategic planning and leadership vision in shaping digital diplomacy to strengthen soft power.

Thus, the UAE continues to face challenges in effectively leveraging its cultural, political, and foreign policy assets. To address the shortcomings of conventional diplomacy, it is essential to assess the impact of digital diplomacy on these three pillars. Furthermore, to reinforce the theoretical framework of soft power, this study introduces the moderating role of leadership vision and strategic planning. The primary objective is to determine how these two factors influence the relationship between digital diplomacy and its impact on the UAE's culture, political values, and foreign policy.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The central research question guiding this study is:

What is the extent of the impact of digital diplomacy on the soft power practices of the United Arab Emirates (UAE)? To address this overarching question, the following sub-questions are proposed:

- i. To what extent does digital diplomacy influence the cultural dimension of the UAE's soft power practices?
- ii. To what extent does digital diplomacy influence the political values dimension of the UAE's soft power practices?
- iii. To what extent does digital diplomacy influence the foreign policy dimension of the UAE's soft power practices?
- iv. Does leadership vision moderate the relationship between digital diplomacy and the UAE's soft power practices (culture, political values, foreign policy)?
- v. Does strategic planning moderate the relationship between digital diplomacy and the UAE's soft power practices (culture, political values, foreign policy)?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to assess the extent to which digital diplomacy impacts the soft power practices of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The following sub-objectives support this aim:

- i. To explore the influence of digital diplomacy on the cultural dimension of the UAE's soft power practices.
- i. To investigate the influence of digital diplomacy on the political values dimension of the UAE's soft power practices.
- ii. To examine the influence of digital diplomacy on the foreign policy dimension of the UAE's soft power practices.
- iii. To analyze the moderating role of leadership vision in the relationship between digital diplomacy and the UAE's soft power practices (culture, political values, foreign policy).
- iv. To evaluate the moderating role of strategic planning in the relationship between digital diplomacy and the UAE's soft power practices (culture, political values, foreign policy).

### **1.5 Study Significance**

The primary contribution of this study lies in its theoretical advancement of the scholarly literature concerning the impact of digital diplomacy on soft power. It aims to provide deeper insights and clearer explanations regarding the mechanisms through which digital diplomacy influences soft power dynamics. Additionally, the study offers practical value to institutions engaged in Emirati diplomatic efforts, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates, by presenting actionable recommendations and formulating results that can serve as a roadmap for enhancing diplomatic practices in the digital age.

This research distinguishes itself from previous studies on digital diplomacy and Emirati soft power by focusing on developments from the year 2023 onward. It also

introduces a novel analytical perspective by examining the roles of leadership vision and strategic planning within the context of diplomatic institutions, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its overseas missions. The proposed theoretical and analytical framework enriches the understanding of how leadership vision and strategic planning can stimulate and shape the relationship between digital diplomacy and the UAE's soft power. The study offers several benefits to both academic and professional communities, including:

### **1.5.1 Practical Significance**

The findings of this study hold direct relevance for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Emirati embassies and consulates abroad, and political decision-makers within the UAE. By empirically examining how leadership vision and strategic planning moderate the relationship between digital diplomacy and soft power practices, the research offers predictive insights that may inform the strategic use of digital diplomacy to strengthen the UAE's soft power.

This study is expected to yield valuable findings related to the implementation of soft power strategies across cultural, political, and foreign policy domains. The effective application of these strategies is increasingly important for enhancing the UAE's regional and global standing through digital diplomacy. However, it remains essential to assess whether such practices are being optimally implemented within Emirati institutions to improve political performance grounded in soft power principles.

The results will contribute to improving decision-making processes by offering evidence-based insights into the influence of digital diplomacy on the UAE's soft

power. Specifically, the outcomes will benefit the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its global network of diplomatic missions. Institutions operating within the UAE's political and diplomatic spheres—sharing common national traditions and strategic interests—may derive actionable lessons from the study's findings. Furthermore, the empirical results may be of interest to organizations and enterprises operating in the Gulf region, particularly those seeking to leverage soft power strategies in their international engagements.

### **1.5.2 Theoretical Significance**

This paper presents an analysis of the relationship between digital diplomacy and Emirati soft power practices, with a particular focus on the moderating roles of leadership vision and strategic planning. Conducted from an epistemological and academic standpoint, the research offers a theoretical foundation for future comparative studies and scholarly exploration.

The study aims to evaluate the effects of digital diplomacy on the implementation of soft power strategies and to develop a theoretical framework that elucidates the interconnections between cultural identity, political values, and foreign policy within the UAE. This framework considers the influence of leadership vision and strategic planning as key moderating variables. The findings will contribute to the expansion of existing theoretical models and enhance understanding within the domains of soft power and diplomacy.

By clarifying the conceptual underpinnings of soft power and offering a detailed analytical framework, this research advances theoretical discourse and disseminates

knowledge to a broader academic audience. Given the shared national perspectives on soft power and its integration with digital diplomacy, other institutions within the UAE may also benefit from the insights generated by this study. These preliminary findings may offer theoretical value to organizations across the Gulf region.

Moreover, the investigation into the effects of digital diplomacy on soft power implementation represents a significant contribution to the theoretical development of this field. The study provides essential insights for foreign ministries, diplomatic missions, and scholars specializing in soft power and digital diplomacy, both within the UAE and in neighbouring countries.

### **1.6 Study Scope**

The moderating effects of strategic planning and leadership vision on the relationship between digital diplomacy and Emirati soft power tactics will be investigated in this research project. The study creates a structure for the presentation of the study as well as for the research context to improve performance prospects. The study will also be used to assess how relevant its findings are to earlier studies. Using a quantitative survey, the primary source of empirical data for this study will be produced.

The survey will be conducted within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its embassies and consulates around the world - the United Arab Emirates, as they are leading institutions in traditional and digital diplomacy. As for the study population, it amounted to 1,500 employees, and according to the Craigie and Morgan equation, the study sample consisted of 306 employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies and consulates of the United Arab Emirates, who were selected through a random

sample. The unit of analysis in this study is the different offices of the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates. The study will be carried out from 2023-2024. The study will use soft power theory.

Due to the unwillingness to prosecute the management of the supervisors, the researcher had trouble locating or reaching the affected employees. In order to solve these issues, the researcher had to make sure that the participants' tastes were open to the data gathered and were unaffected by the names provided in the final paper. The researcher may have trouble accessing the in-depth research studies done in the field of digital diplomacy and its impact on soft power strategies, as well as the desire of mature employees in the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies and consulates around the world to share knowledge.

### **1.6.1 Period of Study**

The study was conducted from 2022 to 2024, but the review covers the last ten years because since 2010, the UAE government has been focusing on improving its image to attract more foreign tourists and investors. However, the data was collected from August 2023 to January 2024.

## **1.7 Terms Definition**

### **1.7.1 Soft Power**

The concept of *soft power* was introduced by Joseph Nye of Harvard University to describe a nation's ability to attract and persuade others without resorting to force or coercion. More recently, the term has evolved to encompass influence over political and non-political entities, as well as the shaping of public and social opinion through indirect and often subtle channels (Nye, 2021).

For the purposes of this study, soft power is defined procedurally as a state's capacity to project spiritual and moral influence through the values, principles, and ethical standards it upholds. This influence is further reinforced through support for human rights, infrastructure development, cultural and artistic expression, political ideals, and foreign policy initiatives. Such attributes foster admiration and respect from other nations, encouraging alignment with the state's values and objectives (Manor, 2016).

### **1.7.2 Digital Diplomacy**

*Digital diplomacy* is understood as an extension of traditional diplomacy, shaped by innovations in information and communication technologies (ICTs). It involves the strategic use of digital tools to support and enhance diplomatic activities (Adesina, 2017).

Procedurally, digital diplomacy is defined in this study as the application of internet-based platforms and emerging ICTs to facilitate the achievement of diplomatic goals, consistent with the definition provided by Hanson (2012).

### **1.7.3 Strategic Planning**

*Strategic planning* refers to the process by which organizational leaders articulate a future vision and establish goals and objectives to guide institutional development. It involves prioritizing these goals to ensure alignment with the organization's long-term vision (Bryson, 2018).

In procedural terms, strategic planning is defined as a structured approach employed by institutions to make informed decisions, coordinate implementation efforts, and

monitor progress. This process is carried out with an emphasis on the optimal utilization of available resources and capabilities.

#### **1.7.4 Leadership Vision**

*Leadership vision* refers to a comprehensive, integrated, and profound perception held by a leader regarding both personal and public domains. This vision enables the leader to form inspiring and forward-looking perspectives that guide strategic decision-making. It represents a mental image of future possibilities, shaped by imagination and expressed through words and actions (Hernandez et al., 2011).

Procedurally, leadership vision is defined in this study as a holistic and deep-seated understanding of a leader's personal and professional life, which facilitates the development of innovative and motivational perspectives that influence institutional direction and policy.

#### **1.7.5 Culture**

*Culture* is a broad concept encompassing the social behaviors, norms, knowledge systems, beliefs, artistic expressions, legal frameworks, customs, skills, and habits shared within human societies (Quitow & Thielges, 2022).

Procedurally, culture is defined as the collective inheritance of individuals from their social and environmental contexts, which they acquire through education, upbringing, and interaction. It encompasses both tangible and intangible elements, including sciences, beliefs, arts, values, laws, customs, and material artifacts produced by human activity.

### **1.7.6 Political Values**

*Political values* represent a distinct set of ideals that guide political behavior and decision-making. Politics, as a specialized domain of human activity, intersects with ethics, economics, and law, and is characterized by unique principles that distinguish it from other social practices. Values reflect the importance attributed to actions or ideas and serve as a basis for evaluating political conduct.

Procedurally, political values are defined as foundational political ideals that shape the intellectual and ethical framework of individuals as political beings. These values influence the pursuit of power and the equitable interaction with others, serving as guiding principles in political engagement and governance.

### **1.7.7 Foreign Policy**

*Foreign policy* refers to a state's strategic objectives and actions in its interactions with other nations. It is influenced by domestic considerations, the behavior of other countries, and broader geopolitical ambitions (Fisher, 2020; Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018).

Procedurally, foreign policy is defined as the set of intentions and strategic plans that guide a country's behavior in the international arena. It encompasses the principles and actions through which a state seeks to achieve its external goals and maintain its global standing.

## 1.8 Study Structure

The content of this academic study is organized into five chapters in a systematic approach as follows:

- **Chapter 1**

This chapter presents the background of the study, outlines the research problem, and articulates the research questions and objectives. It also includes the significance, scope, and key terminology relevant to the study.

- **Chapter 2**

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing literature, including conceptual definitions, theoretical foundations, and the development of the conceptual framework that guides the study.

- **Chapter 3**

This chapter details the research design, including the target population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, questionnaire design, and the procedures used for data analysis.

- **Chapter 4**

This chapter presents the results derived from statistical analyses, including frequency distributions, descriptive statistics, reliability and validity assessments, and regression analysis using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) model.

- **Chapter 5**

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research objectives and literature. It provides a summary of the study, outlines key conclusions, offers recommendations, and suggests directions for future research.

## **1.9 Summary**

The study was introduced by presenting the general background and the research problem concerning the impact of digital diplomacy on soft power practices in the UAE. It then outlined the research questions, objectives, significance, and scope of the study. Additionally, the chapter defined key concepts and explained the thesis' structure.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND PREVIOUS STUDIES**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with an overview of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the practices of soft power (cultural, political values, foreign policy) and diplomatic work in it, specifically digital diplomacy, and then deals with the theoretical foundations through previous studies of the study variables, soft power, digital diplomacy, leadership vision and strategic planning. The theory supporting the study, which is the theory of soft power, was also dealt with. Then the researcher dealt with the research framework and hypotheses.

#### **2.2 About the United Arab Emirates**

With the withdrawal of British forces from the Middle East, seven sheikhdoms in Arabia's northeast—namely Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah—agreed to form a federation in 1971 that granted each emirate significant autonomy, with the exception of some policy areas designated by its constitution for federal control (Waxin et al., 2018). The UAE economy is one of the most developed in the Middle East, and it is regarded as a high-income country (Shirazi et al., 2009). The oil and gas reserves, which are mostly concentrated in Abu

Dhabi, have spurred the fast construction of infrastructure and public services throughout the country.

This allowed Dubai to continue to grow on its traditional position as a commercial hub by aggressively investing in international ports and airports, while also using these assets to become a vacation destination and an emerging financial service center (Waxin & Bateman, 2016). Strategic human resources management is “a pattern of deployment and planned activities aimed at enabling the organisation to achieve its goals.” Human Capital resources are “organizational capabilities related to groups and individuals,” and strategic human resources management is “a pattern of deployment and planned activities aimed at enabling the organization to achieve its goals.”

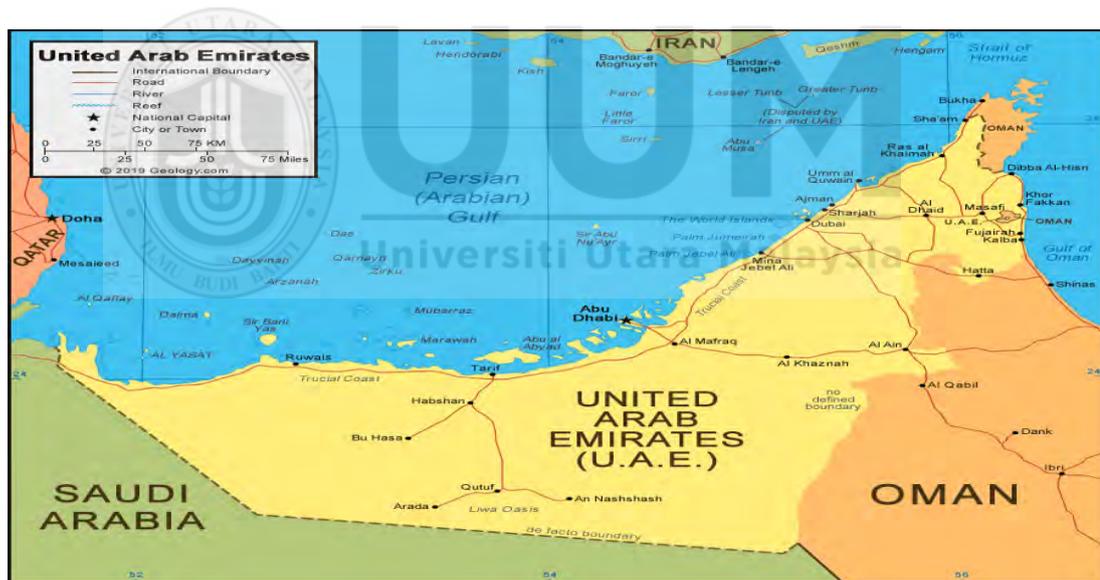


Figure 2. 1 Map of the United Arab Emirates

The national government must “attempt to guarantee employment for citizens and train them so that they are ready” in accordance with the UAE constitution. Given the significance of human resources in “developing strategic capabilities” to achieve strategic goals, “talented human capital” is in fact included as the first of seven

strategic enablers in the UAE Vision: 2021 (Waxin & Bateman, 2016). Effective management of human resources is essential to achieving the UAE's economic and social objectives as well as those of the whole Gulf Cooperation Council (Scott-Jackson & Michie, 2017). However, there are only a few scholarly studies on human resource management in the Arab world. The difficulties in obtaining good data and conducting research in the region might be contributing to the shortfall of studies.

Emirati culture is heavily influenced by Islam and is built on ancient tribal practices. Many features of Gulf culture, which emphasize the significance of religion, family, education, and achievement, are present (Al-Harthi, 2005). One of the strangest aspects of the UAE labor market is its heavy dependence on expats. Another aspect is its dual labor market. The native population's education and skill levels did not correspond to the demands of the quickly expanding economy when the country first started to rapidly expand, creating a considerable need for foreign labor (Ewers & Dicce, 2016). Only with a "no objection" letter from the prior employer may an employee change employment, essentially restricting the movement of foreign workers. It necessitates the UAE's large dependence on expats from across the world, as well as the human resource (HR) function's excellent administrative processes, expatriate management, diversity management, and workforce integration policies and practices (Pinnington et al., 2018). The so-called Emiratization standards are in place to assist more Emiratis to benefit from the economic boom while also reducing the demand for public sector employees (Waxin & Bateman, 2016). Emiratization itself is built on three pillars: boosting education, diversifying the economy away from oil dependency, and controlling the labor market. Banks, on the other hand, also appear

to be an anomaly, as they are compelled to pay people minimum salaries and give other benefits such as insurance, as well as more flexible work hours (Cummings, 2018).

### 2.3 Soft Power

The Arabic dictionaries define strength as the opposite of weakness, which in this context, refers to “soft”. Strength, in terms of energy, is derived from the energies of the rope and encompasses several forces that serve as the origin of activity, development, and movement. These forces may be categorized into natural, vital, mental, as well as emitting and active. The attractive force is the phenomenon that propels an object towards its central point. The centrifugal force is the outward-directed force that acts on an object, pushing it out from the center.

The term “Power” in the English language is derived from the French word “*Pouvoir*,” which may be traced back to its Latin root. Etymologically, “*Pouvoir*” signifies power, ability, and capacity. The term “Power,” sometimes rendered in Arabic as "قوة" (quwwah), encompasses two distinct connotations. The first connotation pertains to the concept of physical or military strength, as shown by phrases such as "قوة عسكرية" (quwwah askariyah) or "أفكار القوة" (afkar al-quwwah), denoting military might and power of ideas, respectively. The second definition pertains to a distinct political or legal connotation, as described by Akram et al. (2021), referred to as political power or individual power.

Hence, the concept of power permeates many social endeavors, including domains such as culture, political ideologies, and foreign policy. Power may be seen as being

intricately connected to all human behaviours that occur within the context of communication and influence (Tang, 2023).

The term “soft power” was introduced by Joseph S. Nye (2004), a renowned American scholar specializing in international affairs. Nye first used this concept in his book titled “Bound to Lead” published in 1990, and then included it in his 2002 publication, “The Paradox of American Power.” The term “soft power” is often associated with its counterpart, “hard power,” which may be described as forceful or coercive (Nye Jr, 2008; Nye Jr, 1990).

According to Nye Jr (2005), soft power is characterized as a potent instrument that aims to accomplish objectives by means of attraction rather than force or financial incentives. In essence, the statement refers to the ability of the state to integrate public policies and ideas from other countries (Quitow & Thielges, 2022). The ability to exert influence is contingent upon the attractiveness of a nation’s social and cultural framework, with its array of institutions and principles, rather than relying on force or intimidation. This influence may be disseminated via several media, including popular culture (both in private and public domains), diplomacy, international non-governmental organizations, civil society institutions, and all functioning and trading corporations (Nye Jr, 2003).

According to Joseph Nye (2007), soft power refers to the ability to shape the behaviour of others to attain desired objectives and goals, without relying on excessive military force or confrontational techniques. One of the central mechanisms through which soft power operates is persuasion. Here, persuasion itself is defined as the ability to achieve

desired outcomes using charm and allure, rather than through forceful methods. It encompasses the compelling force that elicits the desired behaviours and actions, as supported by Saberi et al. (2018) and Cho and Jeong (2008).

The soft power of a country is the capacity to exert influence on the perspectives and beliefs of others, shape their cultural inclinations, and guide their actions. That means one may attain one's objectives without resorting to coercion or inducement by exerting influence on the decision-making processes of external actors. Soft power also refers to the capacity to attract and gain compliance, beyond mere persuasion or the ability to convince others via argumentation. The concept of soft power is enhanced when individuals or entities come to embrace a certain perspective or set of policies (Attatfa, Renaud, & De Paoli, 2020).

According to Nye Jr (2008), culture, political values, and foreign policy are seen as the fundamental variables that comprise the soft power resources of significant nations engaged in global politics. The likelihood of a society achieving desired outcomes is enhanced when its policies align with the values and interests that are commonly held among its members and when it demonstrates a commitment to upholding universal standards. In this context, a culture characterized by limited or constrained ideals is less inclined to cultivate soft power.

Additionally, Nye Jr. (2005) identified that a civilization has a higher likelihood of cultivating soft power when its policies align with the universal principles and interests of other societies. Moreover, the concept of soft power encompasses a range of persuasive and appealing tools that are acquired via factors such as legitimacy, moral

and ethical authority, diplomatic influence, persuasiveness, cultural appeal, and global recognition (Nye, 2021). Hence, the potency of a state's soft power is contingent upon its possession of assets such as its historical legacy and social framework, as asserted by Chan and Fung (2021).

In terms of durability, soft power is contingent upon the passage of time, whereas the establishment of hard power seems to need a comparatively shorter duration due to its tangible and visible resources. Contrarily, the cultivation of soft power requires a significantly longer duration since it relies on intangible assets such as cultural elements, political principles, and foreign policy, all of which need a period of maturation (Lee, 2005).

There is a difference in terms of temporal aspect between the acquisition of hard power and soft power strategies. While military or economic coercion often yields fast but with transitory outcomes, attraction and persuasion tend to engender enduring transformations (Liu & Turner, 2018). The thesis posits that individuals, when subjected to hard power, have a reluctance to deviate from their customary behaviour (Al Suwaidi, 2021).

According to Saad (2020), the concept of soft power influences individuals' attitudes, leading them to intentionally modify their behaviour in a manner that deviates from their usual patterns. Gallarotti (2021) posited that the use of harsh power is associated with coercive measures, whereas the application of soft power is conducive to voluntary actions. Furthermore, the author argues that the implementation of voluntarism leads to the establishment of consent, whereas coercion gives rise to

conflict. This elucidates the reason for the longer-lasting effectiveness of soft power solutions compared to hard power solutions. One example of the consequences of sanctions (as a hard power display) can be seen in the case of Germany during the First World War, which is said to have contributed to the outbreak of World War II. Conversely, the foundation of the European Union has been credited with fostering almost seven decades of peace in Europe (Wagner, 2014).

Several studies have indicated the barriers to using soft power in various settings. For example, Cyrill and Pasha (2019) identified the prospective challenges and advantages of using the internet for developing a soft image of the country through digital diplomacy. Likewise, Antwi-Boateng and Al Mazrouei (2021) identified the challenges associated with the development of UAE soft power and identified the hurdles related to controlling media, reporting issues, and freedom of speech. Additionally, continuing their previous work, Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi (2022) not only identified the challenges but also provided guidance on the strategies needed for the promotion of soft power in the UAE.

It may be argued that the exertion of influence by states on other states and populations is not a novel phenomenon (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022). The subject matter pertains to the domain of political influence, with the involvement of enterprises functioning within the economic and commercial sphere (Krzyszowski, 2022). The media's responsibility in the public sphere often involves documenting the actions and interactions of people inside their personal and social networks. Various entities, such as countries, political parties, corporations, and individuals, strive to achieve their cultural, political, economic, and military objectives (Zaabi, F. A., & Awamleh, 2019).

The influence exerted by a nation's soft power is not predominantly contingent upon its military capabilities. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that a nation's economic prowess, a proficient administrative framework, and a well-structured organizational system that fosters prosperity and societal welfare are indispensable foundations (Krzymowski, 2020). The concept of soft power is challenging to define, and it is arguable that its existence is contingent upon the presence of a political infrastructure, a robust regulatory framework, and substantial economic achievements rooted in political values, culture, and foreign policy (Krzyzaniak, 2018; Nisbett, 2021).

Based on the aforementioned former studies, there is a need for further research because the identified issues are still not properly catered in the context of the UAE—which is crucial to improve the soft image of the country. Furthermore, soft power can be seen in the three dimensions of foreign policy, political values, and culture of the country. Hence, there is a dire need, especially in the context of the UAE, to conduct research and to identify the relationship of digital diplomacy over the three dimensions of soft power.

### **2.3.1 Culture**

Many studies have attempted to define “culture” by comparing societies using different criteria or dimensions to understand it better and to look at it from different perspectives (Vollero et al., 2020). In the field of intercultural communication, different definitions have been found, but there is no agreement upon a standardized definition. For the time being, culture can be defined as a system of acquired meaning, consisting of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, standards, and symbols that are

transmitted from generation to generation. These patterns are therefore shared to varying degrees through interaction with community members (Dan, 2020).

Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of a group or class of people from others. They, in turn, provide another definition of culture, which is used in their Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity (Ranaivoson, 2020). There, culture is considered a set of spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features (characteristics of a society or social group), and is included in systems of values, traditions, and beliefs (Anheier, 2020). Culture includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other abilities and customs that a person acquires as a member of society. Culture is also an aspect of our existence that makes us like some countries, but different from the majority of people in the world.

Culture is the common way of life for a group of people, a set of shared beliefs, attitudes, concepts, and patterns of behavior that allows countries to live together in relative harmony, but sets them apart from the others (Udok, 2020). In addition, these definitions have been used in various basic decisions and declarations, influencing works in resolving intercultural conflicts (Cromwell & Tadevosyan, 2020). When it comes to UAE, culture plays a crucial role in international and cultural communication as well as intercultural conflict resolution that includes communication between the cultures of countries (Meares & Bennett, 2020).

Various declarations and intercultural dialogue are effective tools that can help create peace, protect cultural diversity within societies, and consider cultural diversity within

societies, and accept cultural rights as one of the basic human rights (Repez, 2020). They are part of cultural values and cultural heritage, which in turn are part of the collective identity of indigenous countries, with their cultural heritage having its own rights, such as land rights and access to and control of land and its resources. They are fundamental to indigenous countries around the world, and they depend on these rights and access for their survival, material, and cultural (Neale et al., 2019). In order to survive as distinct nations, indigenous peoples and their communities must be able to own, maintain, and manage their lands, resources, and culture. These elements play an important role in the self-determination and decolonization of indigenous peoples (Domínguez & Luoma, 2020).

### **2.3.2 Political Values**

Political values, as conceptualized by political scientists, refer to overarching and abstract notions of preferred or undesired outcomes in human existence. These values serve as a broad evaluative framework for individuals while navigating the complexities of the world (Connors, 2019). According to Alper (2020), there exists a distinction between political values and political attitudes. Although both are evaluative in nature, values are relatively limited in number and hold a more important position compared to attitudes.

The prevailing consensus among scholars upholds the conceptual definition of political values, which posits that political values are fundamental to one's identity and serve as a compass for political actions. Moreover, empirical evidence has demonstrated that these values can predict individuals' stances on various issues, such

as government expenditure on welfare, evaluations of political candidates, perceptions of racial equality, and assessments of tolerance (Kalmoe, 2020).

Feinberg et al. (2020) assert that political values serve as an influential tool in navigating intricate political landscapes, which was shown by studies advocating their role in filtering political information and providing guidance to individuals. In juxtaposition to the set of findings, alternative evidence suggests that individuals' endorsement of political values may exhibit less consistency than initially presumed. Furthermore, it has been observed that the framing of an issue has the potential to alter the significance attributed to individuals' political values.

Additionally, it has been posited that the endorsement of political values is subject to limitations imposed by the evaluation of the candidate (Connors, 2019). The argument presented challenges the notion that people's political principles are malleable instead of steadfast, with social influence playing a significant role in shaping this malleability (Wachs & Schaff, 2019).

A comparison between macroscopic legal norms and individual-level political values should also be highlighted. Orakhelashvili (2020) underscored the significance of tangible, historical, and societal delineation of political values. His study highlighted the interconnectedness between stated, experienced, promoted, and defended values, as well as the correlation between civilization and certain sorts of civilizations, which are characterized by distinct attitudes, interests, and ideals within a specific culture. It is acknowledged by national entities that, notwithstanding societal, political, and

ideological disparities, contemporary humanity continues to seek fundamental goals (Orakhelashvili, 2020).

In addition to the distinctions observed among contemporary civilizations, as well as the variations in social and political systems and their respective value systems, there exist fundamental interests that are shared by all nations, of which the UAE is no exception. These interests encompass the establishment of a renewed atmosphere of peace and collaboration among countries, the establishment of a novel global political and economic framework, and the addressing of other matters that are deemed to possess global significance. These interests are also aligned with the aim of the UAE to become a symbol of harmony for the entire world. Consequently, the affirmation and reinforcement of values become imperative in addressing these common concerns. The policy in question is widely acknowledged as a public policy, as stated by Kolodko (2020).

### **2.3.3 Foreign Policy**

Scholars widely agree that the formulation of a “**foreign policy**” is important for any nation, since the prospect of full isolation is generally undesirable (Berg & Vits, 2018). A nation without a foreign policy is similar to a vessel navigating the vast expanse of the ocean without a clear understanding of its intended course (Walt, 2018). Foreign policy plays a crucial role in enabling a state to pursue its national objectives and establish a favourable standing among the international community (Le Pere et al., 2020). One of the first challenges encountered while examining foreign policy is the issue of defining the word and the difficulties associated with offering more precise and thorough explanations of foreign policy (Schumacher & Bouris, 2017).

Scholars have offered many definitions of foreign policy. Foreign policy is often described as a deliberate and intentional course of action that arises from the decision-making process of a political entity or a collective of persons (Bojang, 2018). It is often believed that the subject matter primarily pertains to the conduct of a sovereign entity in relation to other sovereign entities.

Foreign policy should prioritize the strategies used by governments to influence and effectively alter the conduct of other states and various political dimensions. The objective of foreign policy is to modify the prevailing conduct of nations, serving as fundamental objectives in accordance with Koga (2018). However, it is important to note that foreign policy encompasses more than just change, as it also encompasses the perpetuation of behaviour and the maintenance of the status quo, provided it aligns with national interests and the severance of diplomatic relations within the realm of international politics, as stated by Rosyidin (2017).

The relationship between international and domestic factors has been extensively debated within the realm of international relations and foreign policy analysis (FPA). While some scholars contend that domestic policy and foreign policy are distinct and separate domains, others argue that they are intricately interconnected and can influence one another (Darwich & Kaarbo, 2020). As per this perspective, it assumes the role of an underlying guiding narrative, representing a distinct foreign policy ideology with historical origins, primarily associated with certain bureaucratic entities, and interconnected with wider inclinations or patterns within a state's domestic politics (Shifrinson, 2020).

Foreign policy, in complement to development policy, has consistently prioritized the pursuit of national autonomy, the politicization of international economic relations, criticisms of the preservation of the existing international global order, and the reinforcement of alliances, particularly with other developing nations. The approach where states mechanically followed policy alignments or ideological blocs was dismissed in favour of technological nationalism (Hill, 2019). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the acknowledgment of middle powers—countries that are not superpowers but still wield significant multilateral influence—has not been consistently defined or universally recognized within the global community. The possible avenues to attain influence and the foreign policy approaches available to middle powers exhibit significant diversity both within and across different geographical areas (Magcamit, 2020).

Even in cases when the notion of self-image as a component of political culture may seem somewhat paradoxical, the concept of self-image within political culture serves as a valuable starting point for examining the local or national elements that impact a foreign state. The topic of international human rights challenges in relation to politics has been discussed by Rein (2017). The significance of domestic and national issues, extending beyond self-perception, has always played a crucial role in shaping foreign policy decisions pertaining to human rights in the UAE. This trend is likely seen in other liberal democracies as well. Public opinion surveys have consistently shown that the general populace is supportive of safeguarding and advancing human rights. According to Neack (2018), the legitimacy and practicality of democracy in foreign countries are evident, since it aligns with significant foreign policy objectives.

## **2.4 Digital Diplomacy**

Over the course of time, the practice of diplomacy has undergone transformations and is now augmented by technological advancements. Consequently, there has been a notable progression in the realm of diplomatic language, leading to contemporary discussions about the concept of “digital diplomacy” (Matheson, 2020). Various definitions of digital diplomacy have been proposed by researchers and practitioners to include a range of governmental contacts within the domain of foreign policy (Asad, Ahmad, Haider, & Salman, 2018). Digital diplomacy has been extensively examined by scholars in the academic discourse, and it is closely associated with the notion of “public diplomacy” (Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei, 2021).

The rapid advancement of technology is exerting a profound influence on several aspects of human existence, including culture, political ideals, and foreign policy. The use of social media and other digital communication platforms has brought about substantial transformations in the management of foreign policy, emerging as an indispensable element of diplomatic endeavours (Al Mazrouei, 2019).

Diplomats extensively use digital technology in several facets of their professional responsibilities, including communication, policy analysis, as well as negotiation and representation (Asad, Haider, & Fatima, 2018). While the conventional approach to diplomacy, including interactions among officials, is crucial, there is a growing recognition of the substantial involvement of individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in global affairs (Gilboa, 2016).

In accordance with the findings of Ittefaq (2019), the concept of digitization in diplomacy encompasses the broad influence of digital tools on diplomatic practices, ranging from the development of smartphone applications to facilitate consular aid and accreditation (referred to as digital diplomacy). Furthermore, it involves the utilization of internet technologies and contemporary information communication methods to assist in the attainment of diplomatic objectives, thereby introducing novel standards and principles, such as a more transparent approach to diplomatic affairs (Adesina, 2017).

The internet, especially social media, has facilitated the participation of many individuals in public discourse (Al-Mansouri et al., 2021). The advent of digital connectivity has significantly reduced the perceived size of the world, enabling unrestricted contact and information exchange among individuals worldwide (Asad, Muhammad, Rasheed, Chethiyar, & Ali, 2020). This is shown by the staggering number of users, over two billion, who actively engage with popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat daily.

The use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter had a significant role in facilitating the organization of large-scale demonstrations during the Arab Spring period in several countries, including Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen (Pakin-Albayrakoğlu, 2021). Furthermore, social media channels were aggressively used to engage in interactions with others to influence public opinion (Israr, Asad, Altaf, & Victor, 2021).

Digital diplomacy has had a substantial impact on public diplomacy. The use of internet communication has become a crucial aspect of contemporary diplomacy (Xie, Qalati, Limón, Sulaiman, & Qureshi, 2023). However, it is important to acknowledge that there are some limitations associated with this kind of communication (Chethiyar, Asad, Kamaluddin, Ali, & Sulaiman, 2019). One such limitation is the increased likelihood of encountering incomplete and erroneous information, which ultimately diminishes its effectiveness (Barston, 2019).

Another relevant discussion pertaining to this topic is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has heightened the significance of digital technologies. Bjola et al. (2020) argue that the widespread plague has posed significant challenges to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in terms of its ability to provide timely and effective consular assistance, uphold their countries' national reputation as the crisis escalates, and counteract the spread of digital disinformation generated by both concerned individuals and strategically adept actors. Furthermore, the pandemic has served as a catalyst for the need for MFAs to acclimate to a novel and evolving environment effectively. This entails enhancing their proficiency in digital literacy and broadening their aptitude for innovative and unconventional digital thinking.

Furthermore, the digitization trend in diplomacy holds considerable importance due to its impact on the utilization of digital tools and the operational norms of diplomats and diplomatic institutions. It is crucial to comprehend the influence of technological advancements on diplomacy, as well as the potential benefits and drawbacks associated with it. For instance, one positive outcome is the dissemination of political values, culture, and foreign policy through digital means (Cyrill & Pasha, 2019).

Another topic to explore is the critical analysis of the potential displacement of traditional diplomacy by digital diplomacy (Barston, 2019). While there exists a limited amount of research in this domain, doing a comprehensive analysis of the existing scholarly works from a contemporary perspective, while considering the potential impact of COVID-19 on diplomatic relations, will provide valuable and captivating perspectives on this issue (Albayrakoglu, 2020). The current state of this particular research scope truly lacks a comprehensive analysis of the benefits and risks associated with digital diplomacy, as highlighted by Alnaqbi et al. (2023).

Nonetheless, diplomats and international leaders are now increasingly using digital technology to enhance foreign policy, political principles, and cultural aspects. According to the latest survey conducted by Twiplomacy, a significant number of ambassadors and embassies, over 3,500 in count, along with over two-thirds (67%) of heads of state, actively maintain Twitter accounts and actively participate in social media platforms. Diplomats establish connections with both their peers and the wider public via the use of modern communication platforms, such as social media (Duncombe, 2019).

Global leaders and diplomats use social media platforms, particularly Twitter, as a direct means of communication with the specific audiences they want to influence. Additionally, they utilize these platforms to express appreciation for their own cultures (Spry & Lockyer, 2022). It is a prevalent phenomenon to see politicians and other notable individuals opting for Twitter as a means of communication, rather than relying on conventional media platforms, when delivering statements or declarations. This practice is often observed while expressing gratitude to the electorate for their

support during election periods or conveying condolences to bereaved families. According to Mawere and van Stam (2020), a significant number of global leaders on the social media platform Twitter engage in reciprocal following, therefore establishing virtual diplomatic networks. These networks enable leaders to engage in informal and private communication via direct messaging.

Leaders use hashtags as a means to promote government initiatives and disseminate information and perspectives during times of crisis, therefore enhancing their country's cultural and political significance. There are several uses of digital diplomacy, and diplomats always strive to discover novel methods for accomplishing their goals (Pohan et al., 2016).

However, it should be noted that defining digital diplomacy only in terms of social media is deemed untenable. As the capabilities pertaining to "digital" continue to progress, the terminology associated with it is already undergoing transformation. Other than that, the scope of the discussion can somehow be expanded and correlated to the development of big data. The increasing popularity of wearable technology items, such as smartwatches and eyeglasses, may be attributed to the improvements of big data in the context of digital diplomacy.

Another significant aspect of digital diplomacy is the increasing involvement of non-state actors, particularly humanitarian organizations, which utilize digital tools to respond more effectively to global crises. Humanitarian organizations use technology such as crisis mapping to enhance their understanding and ability to address both natural and man-made disasters. In this case, crisis mapping involves the collection

and analysis of real-time data from many sources, including social media and emails, during crisis situations (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2018).

Furthermore, the potential applications of data science in conducting informed analytics to forecast public sentiment, constructing predictive models for future responses, and creating customized digital diplomacy tools are vast in the foreseeable future, as diplomats gain access to an increasingly diverse range of digital resources (Tri et al., 2018). In order to successfully comprehend and harness the potential of digital technologies and data-driven techniques for issue resolution, it is imperative for governments to allocate resources towards educating their officials and staff in this domain. The US State Department has emerged as a prominent government entity in the adoption and implementation of digital strategies and technologies, as highlighted by Barston (2019).

As formerly stated, non-state actors, such as individuals, corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and even terrorist groups, have been increasingly using digital technologies to exert more influence and engage more actively in shaping global events via strategic preparation and astute leadership. In contemporary times, the realm of international relations has expanded beyond the exclusive domain of governmental entities and diplomats (Mawere & van Stam, 2020). The advent of new digital technologies is expected to facilitate the emergence of quick, hierarchical, and protocol-free peer-to-peer diplomacy, enabling people to easily connect, communicate, and organize politically and culturally (Adesina, 2017).

While the discourse around digital diplomacy is still in its nascent stage, it is gaining traction within the European context. The Stockholm Digital Diplomacy Initiative, which was initiated in January 2014, facilitates collaboration between diplomats and the technology industry to explore digital remedies for challenges faced by diplomats (Adesina, 2017). Yenidiplomacy, a worldwide research and training centre in digital diplomacy founded by Gökhan Yucel, provides a platform for public policy and technology advisory services. It offers a comprehensive resource for digital technologies, as highlighted by Guéraiche (2022).

Despite its increasing significance, there is a dearth of exact definitions for the concept of digital diplomacy. Despite attempts by some groups to provide a precise definition, the phrase continues to be used in a vague way (Holmes, 2015). Digital diplomacy has been the subject of academic scrutiny due to its ambiguous nature. Scholars have undertaken many approaches to investigate this phenomenon, with a particular focus on areas such as cybersecurity, social media, and internet governance. Under several aliases, according to Hocking and Melissen (2015), scholars use the terms “cyber diplomacy,” “digital diplomacy,” and “twiplomacy” in their academic discourse. The DiploFoundation, an organization dedicated to exploring the convergence of digital technology and diplomacy, provides a concise elucidation of the concept. According to their definition, “digital diplomacy” refers to novel methodologies and strategies employed in diplomatic endeavours through the utilization of the internet and information and communication technologies. Furthermore, it encompasses the examination of the influence of these technologies on modern diplomatic practices (Bjola, 2015).

To aggravate the situation, there is only a limited body of literature addressing the concept of digital diplomacy, with one prominent work being the book titled “Digital Diplomacy - Theory and Practice” authored by a collective group. This publication introduces a novel understanding of the human condition in relation to digital diplomacy, as elucidated by Holmes and Bjola (2015). The phenomenon of governments using social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and similar platforms to interact with global audiences is sometimes referred to as “digital diplomacy.” This approach is frequently characterized by its cost-effective nature.

In her research on digital diplomacy and foreign policy, Adesina (2017) acknowledged the significant influence of the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution in our contemporary period. However, her primary emphasis was on the field of diplomacy. To her rationale, ICTs have significantly transformed the modes of communication and information transmission, as well as the dynamics of politics, society, and the global economy.

Furthermore, various terms have been used to describe the practice of digital diplomacy, with nomenclature often reflecting the specific operations conducted inside the realm of cyberspace. E-Diplomacy, as denoted by Saleh (2015), encompasses the use of websites and associated services. In addition to this, the prevailing phrase often used is also digital diplomacy, denoting the utilization of social media platforms for engaging with the general populace.

According to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, digital diplomacy is considered an extension of traditional public diplomacy that leverages advancements in

information and communication technology (ICT). However, it is important to note that digital diplomacy does not serve as a substitute for conventional public diplomacy (French Foreign Ministry, 2017). The notion aligns with Hanson's (2012) conceptualization of digital diplomacy, whereby it encompasses the use of the internet and information technology as means to promote diplomatic goals. Additionally, according to Kampf et al. (2015), the phenomenon of digital diplomacy can be attributed mostly to governments' heightened use of social media platforms to further their foreign policy goals and bolster their public image. According to the writers, the authors claim that the state department and embassies abroad constitute the two layers of digital diplomacy. By using these two tiers, countries could adapt their national brand and foreign policy communications to align with the distinct history, culture, beliefs, and customs of local populations. This enables them to enhance the attractiveness of their foreign policy and the desired image they want to project.

Hanson (2012) also posited that Dave Lewis has defined digital diplomacy as the use of social media platforms and digital communication tools by diplomats over a span of two years, with the objective of establishing connections among themselves. According to the research conducted by Fergas Hanson, the process mostly entails using the internet and contemporary information and communication technologies to advance diplomatic goals (Adesina, 2017; Al-Muftah, 2019).

In terms of its institutional adoption, digital diplomacy is increasingly being embraced by countries worldwide, mostly influenced by the United States of America (USA). It has been more common for government institutions to have a presence on popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Additionally, embassies and

consulates have also embraced the use of interactive webpages on the internet. In relation to countries, the United Kingdom (UK) has established an official governmental office dedicated to digital diplomacy. Meanwhile, nations such as Poland, Sweden, and France have garnered recognition for their efforts in incorporating digital technology into their practices of statecraft. India seems to be establishing itself as a benchmark in several domains within the Asian region, primarily due to the Ministry of External Affairs' first use of the Twitter platform in 2010. Certain regions, such as Africa, have not made significant progress in the pursuit of this trajectory (Grincheva, 2022).

The discourse around digital diplomacy is intricately intertwined with the ongoing academic dialogue on the subject. This discourse examines the extent to which digital diplomacy utilizes novel technology to engage in public diplomacy in a more current fashion or whether it will fundamentally reshape the process, transitioning from one-way communication to interactive interaction (Intentilia, 2022).

To contextualize digital diplomacy within a broader framework, it is essential to examine the evolution of public diplomacy. Hence, understanding public diplomacy is of utmost importance in this matter. Public diplomacy refers to the strategic approach of engaging with international audiences to advance the goals and interests of a country. The emergence and subsequent growth of public diplomacy may be attributed to the advent and broad use of radio transmission during the early 20th century (Sandre, 2015). Although it has the potential to serve as a valuable diplomatic instrument, the implementation of public diplomacy in the current context may present some difficulties. Diplomats often have challenges in establishing a meaningful

connection with the public, experiencing a sense of isolation and difficulty in engaging with foreign audiences, despite their concerted efforts to foster interaction. The primary reason for this phenomenon is the architectural design of embassies, notably those of the USA, which resemble residential houses and are surrounded by tall barriers that restrict access to only a limited number of individuals.

Ambassadors, despite their desire to dismantle communication barriers, inadvertently establish obstacles between themselves and the public (Adesina, 2017). The use of current technology has enabled diplomats to employ public diplomacy, leading to the observation of a positive relationship between digitization and this kind of diplomacy by several individuals. There is a viewpoint held by some individuals that digital diplomacy differs from public diplomacy and brings about a shift in communication from one-sided discourse to interactive dialogue. This is attributed to the ability of digital diplomacy to directly engage with people, a capability that traditional broadcasting methods lack (Bjola, 2018).

The transition of the UAE's diplomacy to digital diplomacy is a significant aspect of the country's broader strategy to adapt to the evolving global landscape. Digital diplomacy, leveraging technology and social media, has reshaped the way the UAE interacts on the global stage, enabling more direct, immediate, and interactive communication. The UAE, a country that has long been a leader in adopting advanced technologies, has been at the forefront of incorporating digital strategies into its diplomatic practices (Matheson, 2020). The UAE has been using social media to promote its foreign policy objectives, including peace-building efforts, humanitarian initiatives, and interfaith dialogue. The country has increasingly integrated digital tools

into its diplomatic relations with international organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Arab League. Furthermore, the UAE has worked to establish itself as a key player in the global cybersecurity landscape, organizing and participating in international forums like the Global Forum on Cybersecurity and partnering with other nations to enhance global cybersecurity efforts (Charles, 2024).

As digital diplomacy increasingly becomes a central tool of statecraft in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the UAE has embraced this paradigm by integrating advanced technologies and digital platforms into its foreign policy practices. The country has built a sophisticated national brand that is showcased through digital content, promoting itself as a stable, progressive, and business-friendly nation. It has developed several digital platforms to facilitate international collaboration in fields like technology, education, health, and the environment. These platforms allow foreign governments, international institutions, and private sector partners to interact with the UAE remotely. The country's diplomats also start to use AI-driven insights to better understand global political trends and craft more informed diplomatic strategies. Today, the UAE is known for using data to drive policy decisions, and this has extended into the realm of foreign policy, where data analytics helps to shape strategies in real-time.

Nevertheless, the UAE's transition to digital diplomacy is still evolving, and the country is likely to continue leveraging emerging technologies such as AI, blockchain, and 5G to enhance its diplomatic strategies (Al-Mansouri, Al-Mohannadi, & Feroun, 2021). The UAE's approach reflects a broader trend in global diplomacy where technology is used not just as a tool for communication, but as an integral component

of national strategy, enhancing soft power, promoting economic growth, and responding to global challenges.

The digitalization of global communication and the rise of information technologies have profoundly reshaped traditional diplomatic practices, giving rise to what is now widely referred to as digital diplomacy. As a rapidly evolving field that intersects with public diplomacy, global governance, and national branding, digital diplomacy remains conceptually fluid and methodologically underexplored. This is particularly significant in the context of the UAE, a state that has actively integrated digital platforms, data-driven decision-making, and technological innovation into its diplomatic apparatus. The main reason for addressing digital diplomacy is that the UAE has been focusing over the last decade for improving its image, though it has significantly succeeded in attracting the foreign investors as well as tourists, yet there are several shortcomings which need to be addressed which calls for further research over the issue of digital diplomacy.

## **2.5 Leadership Vision**

The new UAE state recognized that, given the late Sheikh Zayed's (1918–2004) practical political acumen, a political structure that combined local autonomy and the federal government to coordinate state affairs and create a coherent foreign policy had the best potential for success in spreading UAE political values and enhance Emirati culture (Al-Suwaidi, 2011). The UAE leaders have a great vision, including Vision 2021, which aspires to make the UAE one of the finest nations in the world in time for the union's golden jubilee, have been offered by the leadership at the federation level

that implement policies and plans throughout numerous sectors in the UAE especially culture and political values field (Al Mazrouei, 2019).

A wide range of strategies and programs have been put in place, including digital diplomacy adopting strategy (Khan, Asad, Khan, Asif, & Aftab, 2021). These include the following: UAE Block chain 2021; The UAE National Cyber Security Strategy; National Strategy for Food Security 2051; National Employment Strategy 2021; National Policy for Senior Citizens, UAE Centennial 2071; UAE National Family Policy; the National Agenda for Advanced Sciences 2031; National Strategy for Advanced Innovation; Emirates Energy Strategy 2050; The UAE National Climate Change Plan 2017-2050; Government Communication Strategy 2017-2021; The National Agenda Water Security Strategy for the UAE 2036; The National Higher Education Strategy 2030 (UAE Vision 2021).

The vision of the leadership of the decision makers and the political values as well as their foreign policy in the UAE was influenced by digital diplomacy and bet on its role in enhancing the soft power of the foreign policy of the UAE; It has drawn the necessary strategies in this regard, and the strategy of the UAE has been developed to adopt artificial intelligence (Asad, Asif, Bakar, & Altaf, 2021) and technology of all kinds, through modern diplomatic tools, especially digital diplomacy, as the UAE has adopted this type of emerging diplomacy in the conduct of its diplomatic work (UAE Government, 2019; Fulton, 2019).

The vision of the leadership is clear and properly communicated as well. However, there is a significant need to identify to what extent the leadership vision supports the

role of digital diplomacy in achieving the soft power of the UAE. Incorporating leadership vision into the current study was based on two main reasons. First, the topic has hardly been addressed, in parallel with the soft power theory, in the context of the UAE. This circumstance shows a clear contextual and theoretical gap. Secondly, the alignment of leadership vision, and to what extent it improved the soft image of the UAE, has hardly been analyzed and needs to be measured.

## **2.6 Strategic Planning**

Considering the evolving and challenging circumstances of the present context, it has become imperative for entities to adopt strategic planning as a modern approach to the planning process (Asad, Altaf, Israr, & Khan, 2020; Asad, Majali, Aledeinat, & Almajali, 2023; Asad, Aledeinat, Majali, Almajali, & Shrafat, 2024). This perspective enables these entities to see the future not just as a potential danger to be avoided, but rather as a trajectory that presents possibilities for growth and development, as well as facilitating the conversion of many factors (Elbanna, 2011).

This study aims to examine the concept of strategic planning, encompassing its definition, elements, significance, objectives, characteristics, advantages, obstacles, levels, stages, and models (Asad, et al., 2021). By exploring these aspects, a comprehensive understanding of strategic planning can be attained, along with its connection to the overarching vision of leadership in shaping a country's foreign policy (Bryson, 2018).

Numerous academics have engaged in discourse on the conceptualization of strategic planning within various domains of application (Alkhuzaie & Asad, 2018). In this

regard, it is important to highlight the most significant definitions and put them forward in the realm of research, as outlined by Muhammad Siddique in 2015. Henri Fayol, an American scholar, provided a definition of strategic planning as “anticipating future circumstances and adequately preparing for potential challenges.” Similarly, Alhammadi and Sulaiman (2023) proposed to define strategic planning as an ongoing and methodical procedure whereby leaders deliberate on the trajectory and advancement of a nation, alongside the requisite measures and approaches needed to actualize such a vision (Sulaiman & Asad, 2023). Strategic planning also encompasses the determination of methods in evaluating the level of achievement to attain the envisioned outcome (Asad, Majali, Aledeinat, & Almajali, 2023). The mentioned process might also be characterized as a systematic procedure including the selection of goals, formulation of policies and strategies, and identification of fundamental procedures and processes to ensure the implementation of policies and plans determined by decision-makers (Habitat, 2019).

According to Friedman (1990), strategic planning may be described as a cognitive process and a structured approach to use the most effective knowledge-based techniques to guide and manage ongoing transformations with the aim of attaining well-defined, explicit, and mutually accepted objectives (Asad, Asif, Bakar, & Sheikh, 2021). However, Streeten (1998) formerly defined strategic framework as a developmental clarification of the state’s strategy at the national level, along with its intervention procedures with market forces, with the aim of advancing and developing the social system. Furthermore, Gilbert (2017), in the context of strategic planning, defines it as a conscious attempt to solve problems. In order to exert influence on the trajectory of forthcoming occurrences, individuals use various cognitive processes

such as insight, prediction, structured thinking, research, and the consideration of higher values (Allam, Asad, Ali, & Ali, 2021). These cognitive faculties are crucial in facilitating decision-making processes when confronted with several possibilities.

According to Habitat (2019), strategic planning is widely recognized as a crucial tool for countries and institutions worldwide to establish realistic plans and feasible projects that facilitate the attainment of their medium- to long-term goals (Asad & Kashif, 2021). By employing strategic planning, these entities can effectively define their future visions and overarching directions, thereby promoting the preservation and celebration of their cultural and political values (Alseiari et al., 2019). Strategic planning in the context of management practice, especially within large institutions, is significantly reliant on the process of determining the most effective means to accomplish organizational objectives (Chaib Lababidi et al., 2020). Consequently, the term seemed to experience substantial expansion until it reached a juncture where it endeavoured to formulate an all-encompassing framework for the field of planning (El-Aidie et al., 2021).

The UAE government formulated the “UAE Government Strategies 2008-2010,” the “UAE Government Strategies 2011-2013,” and the “UAE Government Strategies 2014-2016” in alignment with internationally recognized benchmarks, therefore establishing the government’s medium-term objectives across many sectors (Asad, Asif, Bakar, & Altaf, 2021). The federal authorities engaged in the process of formulating strategic and operational plans, which were designed to facilitate the implementation of initiatives and projects (Asif, Asad, Bhutta, & Khan, 2021). These plans were developed in accordance with specific budgets and were aligned with

broader plans, such as the UAE Vision 2021 and the government's objectives. The goal of these efforts was to address the needs of citizens, enhance government operations, promote sustainable development, and bolster the nation's global reputation (Ibrahim et al., 2022).

Despite the theoretical advancements and rapid growth in many institutions, notably in the USA, strategic planning has encountered several problems, including those posed by its own practitioners (Samad & Ahmed, 2021). Given the multitude of challenges and environmental variables present at the beginning of the 1990s on local, regional, and global scales, it became evident that strategic planning assumed an even greater level of importance. Consequently, there was a notable expansion in written works, scholarly investigations, and empirical studies, indicative of the rapid advancement of this domain within the discipline of management science (Manor & Golan, 2020).

The concept of strategic planning has garnered significant attention from scholars and intellectuals, with several definitions proposed (Almansour, Asad, & Shahzad, 2016; Amir & Asad, 2018; Bilal & Sulaiman, 2021). Notably, one definition emphasizes the process of elucidating the goals that an organization aims to achieve (Allam, Asad, Ali, & Malik, 2022). The administrative process of establishing and sustaining alignment between an organization's objectives and ambitions, and strategically reorganizing operations to effectively drive future development and profitability (Asad, Asif, Sulaiman, Satar, & Alarifi, 2023). The capacity to forecast and align the organization's internal capabilities with the potential opportunities and dangers emerging from the external environment (Asad, Asif, Allam, & Sheikh, 2021).

The nearest concept to strategic planning, i.e., decision-making, is defined as the deliberate process of determining the goals of an organization, allocating resources, and implementing policies to effectively attain these objectives (Qalati, Ostic, Sulaiman, Gopang, & Khan, 2022). A continuous and structured process is used by the leaders of an organization to make choices on the organization's growth and future (Asad, Tabash, Sheikh, Al-Muhanadi, & Ahmad, 2021). This process also involves determining the necessary actions and approaches to achieve the envisioned future (Asif, Asad, Kashif, & Haq, 2021), as well as establishing criteria for measuring success in implementing these actions.

Long-range planning, strategic thinking, and strategic management are key concepts and terminologies that are integral to the process of strategic planning and significantly contribute to the development of a corporate organization's strategy (Hammami, Ahmed, Johny, & Sulaiman, 2021). According to Al-Shaikh (2001), these phrases enable enterprises to establish a competitive edge, so ensuring their long-term existence in the market and mitigating any risks from competitors. Prior to the conclusion of the 1960s, a definitive differentiation between the notions of long-range planning and strategic planning had not been established (Kashif, et al., 2020).

Long-term planning refers to the process of formulating a strategic plan that aims to accomplish a predetermined set of objectives over an extended duration, often spanning several years (Riphah, Ali, Danish, & Sulaiman, 2022). This planning approach operates on the premise that the existing understanding of future circumstances is reliable enough to ensure the viability and effectiveness of the plan throughout its execution (Gilbert, 2017).

Strategic planning is predicated upon the notion that a nation must effectively respond to a fluid and ever-evolving environment, in contrast to the more static environment envisioned in long-term planning (Siddique, 2015). Strategic planning emphasizes the importance of making decisions that support a country's capacity to effectively respond to environmental changes (Alkhuzai, et al., 2024). This includes aligning with the vision and political principles of the country's leaders, as well as its foreign policy (Bryson, 2018).

Furthermore, strategic thinking and planning should be seen as separate entities. According to Alhammadi and Sulaiman (2023), strategic thinking is the practical application of knowledge and understanding, whereas strategic planning is a systematic and analytical procedure. Strategic thinking, as opposed to strategic planning, is an ongoing activity that aims to identify the interplay between an organization's current state and its future trajectory, rather than depending only on an annual plan. According to Friedman (1990), strategic thinking is predicated upon the use of intuition and imagination to envision new possibilities and chart a trajectory for the future of a nation.

Strategic planning is responsible for the execution and reinforcement of the strategies formulated during the phase of strategic thinking. The fundamental prerequisites of strategic planning include a comprehensive examination, a wide-ranging outlook on the circumstances, and the involvement of all stakeholders within the company in the cognitive process (Alseiari et al., 2019). While there exist differences between these two terms, they are interconnected concepts that provide the fundamental basis for

effective strategic management in relation to national visions and strategies (Chaib Lababidi et al., 2020).

This perspective asserts that strategic planning has significance as a constituent element of strategic management, as opposed to being synonymous with strategic management. This is because strategic planning encompasses not only the management of organizational transformation, but also the management of national culture. Strategic planning constitutes a pivotal phase within the broader framework of strategic management, which in turn emerges as a product of the evolution of the strategic planning idea. According to Al-Shaikh (2001), the concurrent management of resources, including political ideals, foreign policy, and culture, is of utmost importance.

Both the present and the future have significant importance in the realm of strategic management. Strategic management may be characterized as an intentional and purposeful process of formulation and implementation, aimed at achieving organizational objectives. In contrast, strategic planning entails the projection and anticipation of future events over an extended timeframe, with subsequent resource allocation guided by the established plan. This approach entails an introspective examination of the external environment and a forward-looking evaluation of the present organization (Ibrahim et al., 2022).

## **2.7 Underpinning Theory**

### **2.7.1 Soft Power Theory**

More than four centuries ago, the Italian philosopher and politician Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) advised, “princes that being feared was more important than

being loved.” But it is better in our contemporary time to be the owner of these two qualities together. Winning people’s hearts and minds has always been important, but it is even more important in the era of modern technological developments and means of communication and social media. It is the era of cultural influence that represents the pinnacle of the effectiveness of soft power, whose influence extends to all homes without permission (Lee, 2009). The concept of soft power, the meaning of force in the Arabic dictionaries, is against weakness and strength (Zamorano, 2016).

Gallarotti (2011) conceptualizes soft power as a form of influence grounded in attraction rather than coercion. He distinguishes between different dimensions of power—such as natural, social, and psychological—and argues that power can manifest as either attractive or repulsive, depending on how it is perceived and projected. Attractive power draws others toward a state’s values, policies, or culture, while repulsive power pushes them away. For Gallarotti, soft power becomes effective when it is rooted in credibility, consistency, and the perceived legitimacy of the actor’s behavior within the international system.

In the English language, the word ‘power’ is taken from the French word *Boudoir*, which is of Latin origin, which linguistically means power, ability, and capacity. The word, which is often translated into Arabic as (power), includes two meanings: the first implies the meaning of power, so it is said: militaristic power or ideological power. The second meaning has a specific political or legal connotation, i.e., political power or individual power (Kroenig et al., 2010). This means that power is every ability that can produce an impact. Power is the ability of an individual or social group to exercise this action to make and implement decisions and, in a broader way, to

define systems and work schedules for decision-making (Nye, 1990). Weber defines force as a form of oppression or coercion by one individual over others. Thus, power from a comprehensive perspective is linked to all human behaviour in one way or another through the process of communication and influence, as the phenomenon of power permeates all social activities (Nye, 2008).

The term soft power dates back to the American professor of international relations, Joseph S. Nye, who conceptualized it in the book “Bound to Lead,” which he published in 1990, and then reused it in his book “The Paradox of American Power” in 2002. Thereafter, the term soft power automatically calls for its opposites: to force, hard, or coarse (Nye, 2004).

Joseph Nye’s definition of soft power is described as “an effective weapon that seeks to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion, or economic sanctions.” In essence, it is the capacity of one country to direct the public choices of other countries through the attractiveness of its social and cultural system, its system of values, and its institutions, rather than through coercion or threat. This attractiveness can be spread in a variety of ways, including popular culture, both official and private diplomacy, international NGOs, all operational businesses, civil society organizations, and commercial entities (Lee, 2011). He further defined soft power as having the capacity to influence other people’s behavior in order to achieve desired results and goals without the need for excessive use of force or other coercive measures, i.e., the attractive force that causes voluntary compliance or aligned behavior. This essentially implies (Ohnesorge, 2020): The ability to shape perceptions and concepts of others, paint their culture, and direct their behaviour

- 1) You get the results you want without physical threats or bribes.
- 2) The ability of soft power to shape the details of others.
- 3) Soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to win over people with an argument, but rather the ability to attract that leads to acquiescence.
- 4) When a certain idea or policy appears legitimate in the eyes of others, soft power expands.
- 5) The ability to attract models, values, and policies, and their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of others.

Joseph Nye (2021) restricted each major active state on the international political stage's soft power resources to three fundamental elements:

- (1) The general culture of a society and whether it appeals to or repels others when that culture comprises universal ideals and when that society's policies support those values and interests. A culture's limited values, on the other hand, are less likely to result in soft power.
- (2) The seriousness with which political principles are upheld, both at home and abroad, in times of peace or conflict (Nye, 2007). The principles that a government upholds through its conduct, whether outside (such as democracy), domestically (by cooperating with others), and internationally (by fostering peace and human rights), have a significant impact on the specifics of others.
- (3) The degree to which the foreign policy is followed and accepted voluntarily by the nations and peoples of the globe in a way that elevates the standing of the state.

A collection of attraction and persuasion tactics known as soft power is also included. They are attained through factors such as international standing, moral and ethical authority, diplomatic heft, persuasiveness, cultural attractiveness, and strategic legitimacy. Therefore, the state's soft power assets, such as its historical heritage and sociocultural structure, affect the strength and, consequently, the efficacy of its soft power (Yukaruç, 2017).

The continuation of soft power depends greatly on the passage of time, but the production of hard power appears to take much less time since its resources are more concrete. In contrast, developing soft power requires a considerable amount of time since its intangible resources need time to mature (Gallarotti, 2011). Both hard power acquisition and soft power tactics have different time horizons: whereas military or economic coercion typically produces an instant but short-term outcome, attraction and persuasion typically result in long-term change (Zamorano, 2016). This is because of a feature of the idea that is inherent: when coercive power causes one to behave differently from how they usually do, they do it unwillingly. Instead, soft power alters one's mindset such that they deliberately act in a different way than they normally would. Gallarotti emphasizes that whereas soft power inspires voluntary action, harsh power generates coercive action. In addition, he contends that compulsion results in conflict, whereas voluntariness results in acquiescence, which explains why soft power solutions outlive hard power ones. For instance, the Second World War was resulted from the harsh measures put by Germany following the First World War, but the creation of the European Union resulted in over 70 years of peace in Europe (Lee, 2009).

In conclusion, we may argue that states exercising influence over other states and peoples in a variety of ways is nothing new. In terms of political influence, businesses engage in it within the economic and commercial sphere, just as the media performs its natural function in the public sphere, and as individuals express it through their personal and social relationships. All nations, parties, businesses, and people pursue their own cultural, political, economic, and military objectives (Rothman, 2011).

The development of a state's soft power may not depend heavily on its military might, but it is undeniable that the state's economic might, along with its possession of an administrative structure and a regulatory system that foster prosperity and societal well-being, are necessary building blocks (Simons, 2017). It is more likely that there is no soft power in the absence of an adequate level of economic success, a political machinery, and an effective regulatory framework that guides society, since the idea of soft power, although its importance, is also a difficult one to define (Gomichon, 2013).

## **2.8 Previous Studies**

**The study of Lee (2015)** saw that across recent years, several education centers have appeared across Asia and the Middle East, with a concentration on cross-border higher education. These centers work to make a nation or city a premier location for training, research, and education through extensive policy planning and significant funding. Given the concentration of both domestic and foreign actors at these centers, there are significant concerns concerning the role of higher education in international relations. By highlighting common cultural identities and values, some education centers are specifically using cultural heritage and colonial legacies as a tool of soft power.

Education centers try to have a say on the global scene by engaging in cultural diplomacy. However, suppositions about common identities and values, as well as the dominant political atmosphere in the community, provide significant obstacles to the implementation of policies. As an alternative, an education hub can cooperate with foreign parties based on a long-standing belief in science's ability to advance the knowledge economy, which is another type of norm that supports soft power. This study contrasts Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong as centers of learning that practice cultural diplomacy and soft power.

**The study of Kourgiotis (2020)** addressed the ideological application of religion in United Arab Emirates' relations with other countries during and after the Arab Spring. This essay seeks to examine the politics of 'moderate Islam' considering (a) the monarchy's nation-building visions for the 21st century; (b) its national rebranding strategies; and (c) its geopolitical empowerment in the Gulf and the Middle East by referring to the theoretical framework of public diplomacy and analyzing UAE regional and domestic attitudes. Although "moderate Islam" has been designed to develop "soft power," it also serves "sharp power," it is contended throughout our examination. It will become clear that this has mostly been the case in terms of keeping Political Islam under control.

**The study of Al Suwaidi (2021)** addressed the capacity of states to influence others without using force or threats, which is referred to as soft power in the modern world. Developed nations have worked very hard to improve their soft power strategies to use this power to sway other countries. Soft power in the UAE is still regarded as a relatively young field of applied academic study. However, the UAE's soft power

strategies continue to be crucial in establishing its standing on the international stage. To create a soft power plan, goals and requirements must be identified. In order to meet these objectives and needs, mixed-method research was carried out to (1) ascertain how the UAE's citizens view the impact of soft-power strategies (humanitarian aid, economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and academic diplomacy) on international relations, and (2) investigate the best soft-power strategies to enhance the UAE's reputation abroad from the perspectives of UAE diplomats and citizens. First, an online quantitative survey utilizing SurveyMonkey was conducted with 300 UAE people stratified across seven Emirates.

Using Spearman's Rho correlation to assess the data analysis for the primary hypothesis, it was found that residents believed media framing raised the degree of soft power and that a higher level of soft power practices would promote the UAE worldwide. However, compared to the other components looked at, the association between cultural diplomacy and foreign relations, as well as the relationship between framing and cultural diplomacy, was stronger. After completing the poll, participants were asked to recommend the best soft power strategies for improving the UAE's reputation abroad. Using ATLAS.ti, the replies were thematically examined. Based on their level of efficacy, the following variables were ranked: A thematic analysis of citizens' points of view was used to examine (1) cultural diplomacy, (2) media mediation impact, (3) foreign diplomacy, (4) country branding, (5) economic diplomacy, (6) educational diplomacy, (7) humanitarian aids, and (8) sports diplomacy.

Second, twenty diplomats were interviewed for qualitative research to assess the causes produced. The Atlas.ti's theme analysis reveals that all diplomats concur that cultural diplomacy is among the most powerful soft power strategies, supporting the opinion of the public. The efficiency of the eight soft power elements gleaned from the poll was also appraised by the diplomats, and the findings indicate that each was seen to be extremely successful. The foreign diplomacy initiatives, on the other hand, were assessed as being the most effective of the eight variables, while the media mediation measures were ranked as being the least effective. In conclusion, the UAE must regularly assess how its citizens perceive it in order to know where to focus its soft-power strategy.

**The study of Rookwood (2019)** emphasized opinions about Qatar's preparedness to organize a successful sporting event and, in doing so, anticipate some of the major organizational issues the country would face prior to the 2022 World Cup. The study was focused on how people perceived country branding and soft power, and it drew on the perspectives of several important groups of people who may provide insightful analysis on Qatar's World Cup.

Interviews with football journalists, knowledgeable tournament employees and volunteers, football fans, and expats residing in the Gulf area were done in a semi-structured manner. Data from seven FIFA and FIFA-affiliated confederation events, including the 2011 Asia Cup in Qatar, the 2011 Gold Cup in the United States, the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, the 2015 Copa America in Chile, the 2016 European Championships in France, the 2017 African Cup of Nations in Gabon, and the 2018 World Cup in Russia, were collected for the longitudinal study, which was published

in June 2018. The report reveals several issues and factors related to Qatar hosting the first Middle Eastern World Cup in 2022. The results highlight some of the major organizational issues that the event is experiencing, including supporter access, security, and the fan experience.

This research examines Qatar's position in the 2022 World Cup and the connections between soft power and nation branding. The tournament was noteworthy, not just because it was the world's most popular sport with the largest number of spectators and participants, but also because it represented a significant change from previous versions of the game. The majority of past World Cups have been or will be held in heavily populated countries with comparatively developed football history and/or infrastructure. This trend was broken by the World Cup in Qatar, which makes for an intriguing case study. This article highlights a number of issues for the World Cup organizers in Qatar to consider as it examines educated opinions on access, security, and diplomacy.

**The study of Baycar & Rakipoglu (2019)** saw that the UAE promotes “peaceful” religious discourse through funding organizations and individuals, including the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, the Emirates Fatwa Council, as well as religious experts like Abdallah bin Bayyah and Hamza Yusuf. To combat political Islam, the UAE has tried to position itself as supporting a moderate type of Islam. Data from religious rulings (fatwas), lectures, and conference records of these experts and institutions are the foundation of this study.

The major goal of the study is to demonstrate how much funding for newly founded religious organizations and young academics is utilized as soft power to advance the UAE's interpretation of Islam and portray the UAE as a moderate and tolerant nation. The study uses critical discourse analysis to reveal the relationship between newly emergent religiopolitical discourse and the UAE-based scholarly (ulam) legal judgments and the organizations they founded. According to this study's additional argument, the UAE has also employed "tolerance" and "moderate Islam" as religious soft power in accordance with expectations for influence and power-seeking based on the small state theory.

**The study of Chong (2010)** indicated that analysis of small state power has untapped potential according to the idea of soft power, also known as symbolic power. According to this article, it is a way to virtually increase the influence and reach of minor governments in international affairs. Examining the foundations of soft power reveals that small nations have the capacity to use their political and economic potential, examples of good governance, and diplomatic mediation as forms of influence that transcend their territorial restrictions. Case studies of Singapore and the Vatican City State show the effectiveness of "small state soft power."

**The study of Guéraiche (2023)** investigated the significance of the 2020 Abraham Accords. The study investigated whether the accords were the conclusion of a development that started in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, or whether they are a turning point for the Emirati diplomacy. The topic has been enticing academicians because significant changes have already happened, more of the former than the latter, since the UAE government has long aspired to become the Switzerland of the Middle

East. The Federation, which places a high priority on economic cooperation and growth, has been working to improve relations with other nations. The main factor in its success is likely its capacity to incorporate effective methods and concepts from cultures other than Western ones. Nevertheless, the UAE has not shied away from implementing Western interpretations of soft power, with a focus on the planning of international events like Expo 2020 or COP 28. Even while the Abraham Accords are congruent with this new tendency in Emirati foreign policy, such international cooperation—which covers areas like humanitarianism, development, foreign aid, and assistance—is arguably not particularly unique.

**The study of Arduino & Shuja (2021)** indicated that the transfer of military equipment and technology is becoming an increasingly important aspect of international relations. This is particularly true when the transfer of military hardware comprises advanced weapon platforms that require specialized training and maintenance, leading to a long-term partnership that enhances the geopolitical links between the contracting parties.

In the Middle East context, the deployment of the S-400 Triumph air defense missile system looks to be quickly becoming a key element of Russia's military diplomacy, driven by the resurgence of great power competition. In addition to Turkey, China, and India, there is a lengthy list of Middle Eastern nations interested in the S-400 export contracts. As it highlights the changing pattern of high-technology arms transfers that will be constant in an increasingly complex multilateral world, the transfer of the S-400 well captures all the facets of Russian defense diplomacy and could be seen as a primary example of scalable soft power.

**The study of Carosella (2022)** investigated the first FIFA World Cup, which was held in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area in November 2022. This essay aims to comprehend how football is used in Qatar, the UAE, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a soft power political instrument. Soft power is influence that is gained via appeal rather than compulsion and is based on culture, values, and policies. More soft power is possessed by a player whose values, culture, and policies are stronger. Traditional fossil fuel-based governments like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates struggle with a lack of appeal. Each country seeks to portray a fresh image and guarantee future significance by investing in football. Qatar utilizes football to elevate its status in the world, ensuring its own safety in the event of regional conflicts. Saudi Arabia invests in football to help portray a progressive image of itself to the world and preserve regime security, while the UAE utilizes football to help transform itself into an international tourist and commercial hub.

**The study of Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi (2022)** investigated the use of the Soft Power 30 Index to evaluate the UAE's soft power status by looking at its components and potential problems it could encounter in the future. In-depth interviews are conducted for this study with Emirati diplomats and academics, as well as international diplomats and academics stationed in the UAE. These statistics are enhanced using primary and secondary information obtained from governmental, international, and media sources. The UAE's example shows that, by putting its domestic affairs in order, any country, regardless of its kind of government, size, geography, or religious or ethnic heritage, can intentionally grow its soft power. Success at home in government, business, culture, education, and digital infrastructure attracts attention abroad, which eventually improves the perception of a nation like the UAE. In the end, it opens

possibilities for additional international collaborations and involvements in multilateralism, charity, peacemaking, conflict resolution, and event hosting. The danger of widely dispersed acts by public and private actors, the financial cost of soft power involvement, and forecasts pose obstacles to these initiatives, Due to its lack of a worldwide media platform to influence global agendas and its growing reliance on physical force in response to geopolitical concerns, the UAE risks having a detrimental impact on its reputation.

**The study of Saberi et al. (2018)** indicated that the systematic and intentional development of a state's international influence may be accomplished by legislation, planning, a properly constructed national brand, and soft power initiatives. To strengthen its position as a rising regional power on the regional and international stage, the UAE has aggressively implemented policies and tactics to build a favorable brand image of the nation. Due to the nation's development and strong global brand, it has drawn major foreign investment, numerous foreign visitors, and a reputation as a fantastic location to live and work. This article's goal is to examine the connections between place branding, diplomacy, and soft power. To do this, it uses descriptions of the UAE's film and tourism sectors.

**The study of Krzymowski (2020)** focused on the UAE's dedication to global aid, the growth of its brand, and its standing in international relations. What is the function and relevance of the UAE's foreign aid for the execution of the Soft Power Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals? This is the research question to which the study is intended to provide a response. The author used the right theories and investigation techniques. Role theory has been used, enabling the blending of several tools. A state's

ability to adapt to changes in its political environment has a direct impact on where it stands and what it does in international relations. Consequently, the adaptation theory has also been added. The author employed a comparative analysis employing empirical research and case studies to validate the theoretical presumptions. The author's ten-year involvement in several UAE international policy initiatives was also helpful. The study demonstrates how a crucial component of promoting branding, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and affecting international relations is the UAE's foreign aid. The UAE foreign assistance developed became a tenet of state foreign policy in the twenty-first century, making it feasible to influence the global environment.

## **2.9 Summary**

The current chapter discussed the theoretical framework for the variables of the study. It dealt in detail with digital diplomacy, soft power, and the various practices of the latter (intellectuals, political values, foreign policy). In addition to the two modified variables, i.e., leadership vision and strategic planning, the chapter presented the supporting theory for the study, which is the theory of soft power. The chapter ended with the definition of the relationship model for the the study and a conceptual framework from which the hypotheses of the study were derived.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the scientific methodology adopted to examine the relationships between the independent variable—digital diplomacy (DD)—and the dimensions of the dependent variable—soft power (SP) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which includes culture (CU), political values (PV), and foreign policy (FP). Additionally, the study investigates the moderating effects of leadership vision (LV) and strategic planning (SP) on these relationships. The chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the research methodology, including the research process, philosophical underpinnings, methodological approach, research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, and data analysis procedures.

#### **3.2 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

##### **3.2.1 Conceptual Framework**

This study proposed a conceptual model that explores the influence of digital diplomacy on the enhancement of soft power in the UAE, focusing on three core dimensions: culture, political values, and foreign policy. The model also incorporates leadership vision and strategic planning as moderating that may affect the strength and direction of these relationships. Figure 3.1 illustrates the conceptual framework.

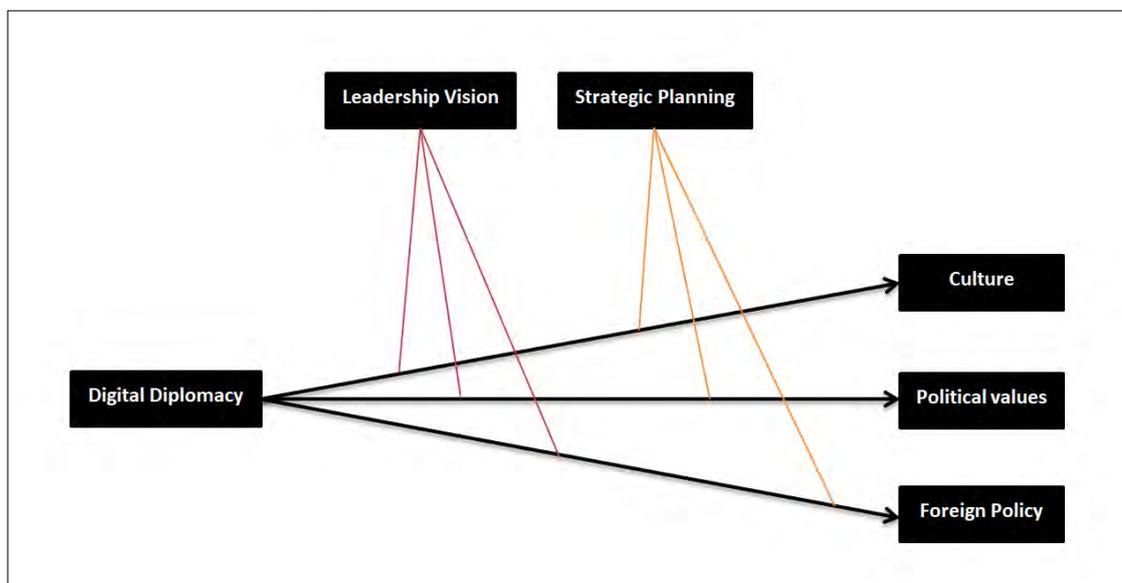


Figure 3. 1 Conceptual Framework.

### 3.2.2 Hypotheses

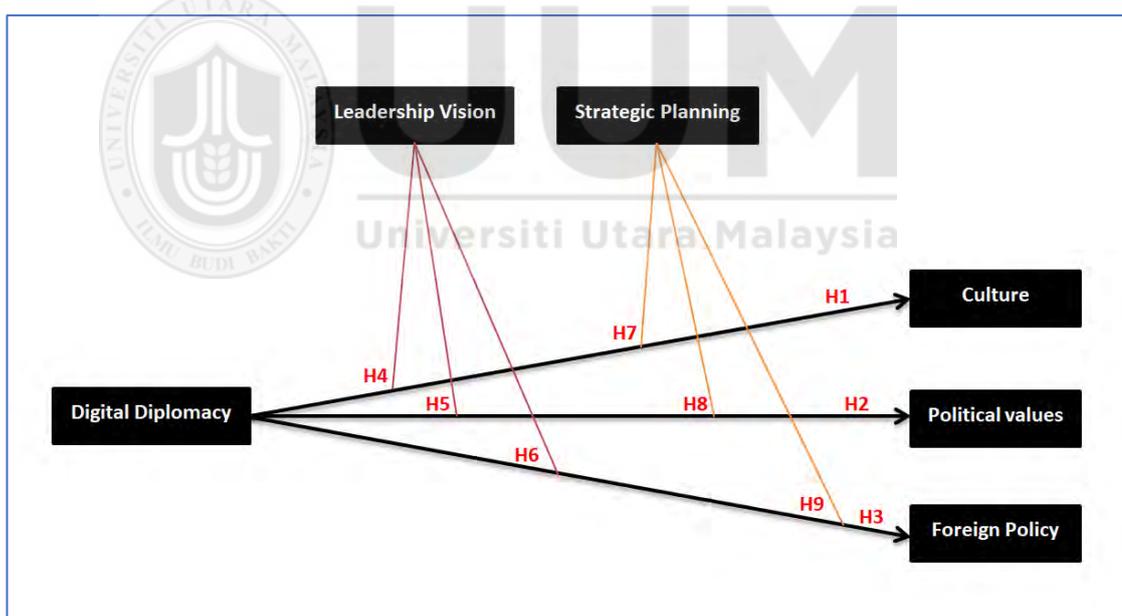


Figure 3. 2 Research hypotheses

#### 3.2.2.1 Digital Diplomacy and Culture

The rapid advancement of digital technologies and the proliferation of successive generations of the Internet have significantly transformed various aspects of life, including behavior, thought processes, communication methods, and cultural

expression. These developments have also reshaped the practice of diplomacy, giving rise to new forms such as digital diplomacy, which reflects the increasing influence of cultural content in international relations (Gilboa, 2016; Rashica, 2018; Pamment, 2016).

In the digital era, public opinion and mass engagement have become critical factors influencing diplomatic relations. Traditional diplomacy, once conducted behind closed doors, has evolved into a more transparent and participatory process. This shift necessitates the effective communication and promotion of national culture to global audiences. The emergence of concepts such as the “digital ambassador” and “digital diplomacy” underscores the growing role of technology in shaping a state's cultural image and international influence (Adesina, 2017; Collins & Bekenova, 2019).

Governments, ministries of foreign affairs, political parties, civil society organizations, and individuals increasingly recognize the strategic importance of digital platforms. These tools are now employed across various domains, including economics, security, culture, health, and education—not only during crises but also in times of peace. In an age characterized by information abundance and digital saturation, the ability to effectively manage and disseminate cultural narratives through digital diplomacy has become essential for achieving national objectives and enhancing global standing (Manor, 2016).

### **3.2.2.2 Digital Diplomacy and Political Values**

Historically, the relationships between societies, peoples, and states have been regarded as one of the most noble endeavors, often led by individuals of wisdom,

experience, and influence. These relationships were intended to foster new societal formations, promote mutual interests, and advance shared values, particularly through the dissemination of prevailing political ideals (Bradshaw, 2015; Park et al., 2019).

However, with the institutionalization of diplomacy under state authority, its original purpose was often redirected to serve the interests of those in power. Diplomacy, in many cases, became a tool for domination, exploitation, and strategic gain. War and peace were employed not as ends in themselves, but as instruments to achieve political objectives. Despite this shift, diplomacy—both in its traditional and modern forms—has continued to reflect and influence the political values of societies. In this context, digital diplomacy has emerged as a contemporary extension of this influence (Wright & Guerrina, 2020).

The limitations of traditional state-centric diplomacy, particularly in the face of global challenges and the failures of unilateralism, have highlighted the renewed importance of societal engagement in international relations. The growing inadequacy of official diplomatic channels in addressing complex global issues has underscored the need for more inclusive and participatory forms of diplomacy (Duncombe, 2019).

In this regard, digital diplomacy has become a powerful tool for promoting democratic values, including coexistence, dialogue, gender inclusion, and peaceful conflict resolution. It supports the vision of a democratic community that prioritizes collaboration over domination and seeks to empower diverse voices in the diplomatic arena. As such, digital diplomacy plays a significant role in shaping and reinforcing the political values of states in the contemporary global landscape (Rashica, 2018).

### **3.2.2.3 Digital Diplomacy and Forging Policy**

With the digital media revolution and the rise of social networking sites and smartphone applications, these platforms have become the primary channels for public diplomacy. They are used to reach the masses through technology utilized by billions worldwide of various ages and backgrounds, as is well known (Adesina, 2017). A new term has emerged in digital diplomacy called “digital diplomacy.” Many countries have established departments within foreign ministries, presidential offices, and other relevant agencies to leverage digital diplomacy in their foreign policy efforts (Dizard & Dizard, 2001).

The year 2007 marked the start of digital diplomacy’s rise. The British Foreign Office officially launched the world's first blog in September 2007, the same year Sweden established its virtual embassy. Over the following decade, the use of digital technology in diplomacy increasingly diversified. Norwegian ambassadors use Skype to connect with university students, while Israelis utilize Facebook to communicate with Arab populations. The Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs utilizes Twitter to provide urgent consular assistance, while United Nations ambassadors employ WhatsApp to coordinate their votes on various resolutions. Overall, digital technology has become a more common tool in diplomacy. Politicians and scholars are paying close attention to this worldwide phenomenon (Aggestam, et al., 2021; Hallams, 2010).

Recent reports highlight a continuous increase in the use of digital platforms by world leaders and governments, accompanied by rising follower counts and engagement

levels. These platforms have become vital tools for disseminating information, shaping global public opinion, and advancing foreign policy agendas (Ross, 2012).

#### **3.2.2.4 Leadership Vision as a Moderator**

Historical evidence demonstrates that leadership vision plays a pivotal role in achieving political stability, particularly when leaders possess a comprehensive understanding of national conditions and challenges. Visionary leadership is essential for guiding political development and fostering long-term reform. Numerous global examples illustrate how transformative leadership has contributed to national progress, with Malaysia serving as a notable case. Several studies have highlighted the contributions of successive Malaysian leaders in establishing political stability and addressing both internal and external challenges (Sosik & Dinger, 2007; Berson et al., 2004).

In the context of this study, leadership vision is considered a moderating factor in the relationship between digital diplomacy and soft power practices. Political leadership that embraces change and is capable of confronting resistance plays a crucial role in shaping soft power strategies rooted in cultural identity, political values, and foreign policy (Kearney, 2008; Jermsittiparsert & Srihirun, 2019).

Effective leadership not only influences the formulation of diplomatic strategies but also prioritizes the resolution of social and cultural issues. Such leadership fosters community engagement, promotes political awareness, and ensures that foreign policy reflects the values and aspirations of the society. Ultimately, leadership vision

catalyzes enhancing the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in advancing soft power objectives (Rowold, 2011; Ayoko & Callan, 2010; Shin & Zhou, 2007).

#### **3.2.2.5 Strategic Planning as a Moderator**

The importance of strategic planning for international relations and foreign policy stems not only from the need for it to be long-term (such as five or ten years or more), but also from the necessity of having a clear, comprehensive, integrated, accurate, and objective understanding of the patterns of interactions between the parties involved in international relations. This approach helps to achieve the goals of the state and protect its strategic interests (Elbanna et al., 2016; Chatterjee et al., 2022).

The concept of strategic planning for international relations involves providing the support and backing needed to achieve a nation's strategic interests on the global stage. It also encompasses enhancing the country's negotiating tools in international dealings, fostering the development of fair international partnerships between the nation and the global community, and promoting international peace and security by balancing national interests with global requirements (Flores et al., 2008; Bachmann et al., 2016).

### **3.3 Study Design**

The research process can be likened to a narrative, with a clear beginning, a series of developmental milestones, and a conclusive end—each stage contributing to a coherent and comprehensive exploration of a specific topic (Levin, 2006). In this study, the central topic is the impact of digital diplomacy on the soft power practices within the foreign policy framework of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). To

systematically investigate this topic, the research follows a structured process comprising several key stages:

- 1) Selection of the research field - The study focuses on the role of digital diplomacy in enhancing the soft power of the UAE, particularly within the context of foreign policy.
- 2) Formulation of research goals, objectives, research questions, and hypotheses: appropriate research goals and objectives or hypotheses usually result from the in-depth research of the literature review from both an academic and a professional point of view.
- 3) Conducting a review of previous studies: comprehensive literature review is conducted to examine existing conceptual and theoretical frameworks related to the study variables. This review informs the development of the research model and supports the formulation of hypotheses.
- 4) Selection of data collection methods: the choice of data collection method is based on a comparative analysis of available techniques. For this study, primary data is collected through a structured survey administered to a representative sample of the target population.
- 5) Primary data collection: the collection of original data is preceded by careful planning and preparation. In this study, empirical data are gathered using a questionnaire designed to capture relevant information on digital diplomacy and soft power dimensions.
- 6) Data analysis: data analysis is a critical phase that facilitates the interpretation of findings in relation to the research hypotheses. Statistical

techniques are employed to examine relationships among variables and to test the proposed model.

- 7) Drawing conclusions: the final stage involves evaluating the extent to which the research goals and objectives have been achieved. Conclusions are supported by empirical evidence and include a discussion of research limitations and recommendations for future studies.

### **3.4 Research Philosophy**

Every study is grounded in philosophical assumptions about how we perceive and understand the world. While there is no universally accepted method for comprehending reality, philosophers have debated this issue for centuries. In the context of contemporary social science, two dominant philosophical paradigms—positivism and post-positivism—serve as foundational approaches to knowledge generation. Other philosophical perspectives include constructivism, interpretivism, feminism, relativism, subjectivism, and deconstruction, each offering unique insights into the nature of reality and inquiry (Adams et al., 2004; Crossan, 2013).

This adopts a positivist research philosophy because the author believes that the research problem can be quantified in numerical terms. Positivism rejects metaphysical speculation and asserts that the purpose of knowledge is to explain observable phenomena. From this perspective, science is viewed as a tool for uncovering truth and acquiring sufficient understanding of the world to predict and manage it effectively (Holden & Lynch, 2004).

Positivism assumes that the world operates according to identifiable laws of cause and effect, which can be discovered through systematic scientific inquiry. It emphasizes measurement, observation, and experimentation as core components of the scientific method. Experimentation, in particular, is used to isolate variables and identify natural laws through controlled modification and direct observation (Mkansi & Acheampong, 2012).

This study is grounded in a positivist and empirical approach, as the researcher believes that the role of digital diplomacy in promoting the UAE's foreign policy can be quantified. Data will be collected from a sample of individuals working within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates abroad. Their responses to a structured questionnaire will provide measurable insights into the impact of digital diplomacy on foreign policy. These participants are considered the most relevant stakeholders, given their direct involvement in and influence on diplomatic practices.

### **3.5 Research Approach**

The two primary research approaches commonly employed in academic inquiry are inductive and deductive reasoning. The inductive approach is used to generate novel concepts and generalizations by observing patterns in empirical data. It allows researchers to explore phenomena and develop theoretical insights while critically examining the validity of underlying assumptions and concepts. In contrast, the deductive approach begins with established theories or general principles and proceeds logically toward specific conclusions. Often referred to as a “top-down” strategy, this method involves formulating hypotheses based on existing theoretical frameworks and then testing these hypotheses through empirical investigation.

In this study, a deductive research approach is adopted. The research commences with a comprehensive review of the existing literature and knowledge related to digital diplomacy and soft power. Based on this foundation, hypotheses are formulated through logical reasoning. Data is then collected and analyzed to test these hypotheses, allowing for the validation or refutation of the initial assumptions (Kothari, 2004; Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014).

### **3.6 Approach Selection**

Systematic selection encompasses the use of either quantitative, qualitative methodologies, or mixed methods. To achieve the goals and objectives of the study, qualitative research utilizes several methods such as interviews, focus groups, and case studies. Data analysis focuses on identifying recurring patterns and themes, followed by critical interpretation (Rihoux, 2006). In contrast, quantitative research emphasizes the systematic collection and statistical analysis of numerical data, aiming to uncover underlying relationships and causal factors (Snell, 2011).

The concept of research strategy relates to the proposed approach for addressing research questions and how the technique will be implemented (Verschuren, 2003). Therefore, the approach used in this study involves conducting experimental research through a quantitative questionnaire to collect primary data. This study is both exploratory and causal, as it aims to assess the impact of digital diplomacy on enhancing the foreign policy of the UAE. The research draws insights from the practical experiences and perspectives of employees within the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies in different countries, rather than relying solely

on theoretical frameworks or subjective beliefs. Thus, the study first analyzed the quantitative data, and then, to confirm the findings, interviews were conducted.

Quantitative approaches use a specific methodology based on precise measurements and statistical, mathematical, and numerical analysis of data collected through surveys, questionnaires, opinion polls, or computational techniques applied to existing statistical information. Quantitative research emphasizes collecting and analyzing numerical data related to various populations or the study of events. This study is classified as quantitative because it uses a numerical coding scale from 1 to 5 for initial data collection, which was then analyzed using SPSS (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015).

### **3.7 Research Strategy**

The study employs a descriptive analytical methodology, enabling the inclusion of a substantial participant pool. The formulation of appropriately organized inquiries facilitates the investigation's resolution by assessing participants' perspectives using a subject-specific questionnaire. Data collection was conducted through a survey administered to a defined sample of the study population. In some cases, such surveys may be extended to the entire population (a census) or limited to a specific subgroup, such as employees within a particular organization. To enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, interviews were also conducted following the survey phase. These interviews yielded responses consistent with the survey results, thereby supporting the study's conclusions through the use of multiple methods to examine the same phenomenon.

### **3.8 Study Population**

To obtain data that accurately represents the research population, it is essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of key components, including the study population, sample size, sampling technique, and data collection methods. In academic research, the term study population refers to a well-defined group of individuals or entities that are the primary focus of investigation. Consequently, researchers often employ sampling techniques to select representative subsets from this population. According to Cardis (2007), a research population is characterized by shared attributes that make it suitable for systematic inquiry. The process of selecting a representative sample from a larger population is commonly referred to as sampling from a population (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

The target population for this study includes government personnel employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomats representing the United Arab Emirates in private embassies. These individuals possess specialized expertise in international relations, with a particular emphasis on digital diplomacy and its influence on the UAE's foreign policy. Members of this population are typically engaged in professional roles within diplomatic services, governmental agencies, or academic institutions. The estimated size of this population is approximately 10,000 individuals, distributed across various entities including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, foreign embassies, specialized organizations, and affiliated academic institutions.

### **3.9 Sample Size**

The term "sample size" is often used in academic research to refer to the number of individuals included in the study sample. In the current research, the term "group of

individuals” refers to a sample drawn from the public that is representative of the larger population, contingent upon the sample size (Whitley & Ball, 2002). The necessity of determining an appropriate sample size arises from the need to ensure statistical representativeness in empirical research.

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) developed a table to expedite the determination of the appropriate sample size for a given population, aiming to address the existing knowledge gap. The required sample size ranges from 350 to 400 participants, depending on the specific statistical parameters applied. In practice, after the data cleaning process, the researcher proceeds to distribute additional questionnaires to ensure an appropriate sample size. This approach aims to optimize resource allocation by reducing the financial and logistical burden associated with surveying the entire population. Focusing on a subset of the issue rather than the entire population allows researchers to conduct their investigations more efficiently while maintaining the validity and reliability of their findings. Sampling also facilitates hypothesis testing by enabling the researcher to manage multiple research variables within a feasible scope.

*Formula for determining sample size*

$$s = X^2 NP(1 - P) + d^2(N - 1) + X^2 P(1 - P)$$

$s$  = required sample size.

$X^2$  = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841).

$N$  = the population size.

$P$  = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size).

$d$  = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05).

*Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970*

Table 3. 1  
*Sample Size of Known Population*

Table 3.1									
<i>Table for Determining Sample Size of a Known Population</i>									
N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	100	80	280	162	800	260	2800	338
15	14	110	86	290	165	850	265	3000	341
20	19	120	92	300	169	900	269	3500	346
25	24	130	97	320	175	950	274	4000	351
30	28	140	103	340	181	1000	278	4500	354
35	32	150	108	360	186	1100	285	5000	357
40	36	160	113	380	191	1200	291	6000	361
45	40	170	118	400	196	1300	297	7000	364
50	44	180	123	420	201	1400	302	8000	367
55	48	190	127	440	205	1500	306	9000	368
60	52	200	132	460	210	1600	310	10000	370
65	56	210	136	480	214	1700	313	15000	375
70	59	220	140	500	217	1800	317	20000	377
75	63	230	144	550	226	1900	320	30000	379
80	66	240	148	600	234	2000	322	40000	380
85	70	250	152	650	242	2200	327	50000	381
90	73	260	155	700	248	2400	331	75000	382
95	76	270	159	750	254	2600	335	100000	384

*Note: N is Population Size; S is Sample Size* *Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970*

*Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970*

### 3.10 Selection Technique

The sample population for this study consists of 370 respondents, including personnel from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and various embassies, as well as professors, subject-matter experts, and professionals specializing in international political affairs. The selection procedure employed is considered optimal for achieving a comprehensive representation of all relevant participants. Regardless of the sampling methodology used, it is essential that the selected individuals accurately reflect the broader population. This may involve intentionally targeting hard-to-reach communities (Creswell, 2017).

There are two main categories of sampling techniques: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling begins with the identification of individuals eligible for inclusion, forming a complete sampling frame. This approach enhances the generalizability of the study's findings and ensures that all eligible individuals have an equal chance of being selected (Coolican, 2018). However, probability sampling methods typically require more time and resources than non-probability methods.

Non-probability sampling is characterized by its non-random process and the lack of a comprehensive sample frame, limiting the autonomy of individuals in the selection process. This increases the risk of sampling error, potentially resulting in a non-representative sample and findings that lack generalizability. Nevertheless, non-probability sampling is often more cost-effective, suitable for hypothesis generation, and practical for exploratory research (Coolican, 2018).

Due to concerns over security and confidentiality, obtaining a complete and accurate list of the study population is often challenging. Consequently, researchers opt for the use of a convenient non-probability sampling method that involves selecting participants based on their availability and willingness to participate. A variant of this approach, quota sampling, involves selecting individuals from distinct subgroups, each with a predetermined quota (Coolican, 2017).

Data collection for this study was conducted throughout 2023. The researcher aimed to gather responses from a diverse sample of individuals affiliated with various departments within the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies worldwide.

Selection was based on participants' qualifications and their relevance to the study population. Data collection was facilitated through multiple communication channels, including telephone, email, WhatsApp, and other accessible methods. The distribution of the respondents is detailed in Table 3.2.

Table 3. 2  
Distribution of the respondents

<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	110
Subject Experts, including PhDs in International relations	67
Employees in the Embassies of the UAE	147
International Relations Practitioners	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>

Participants were grouped according to their professional affiliations. The rationale for selecting personnel from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies is their direct involvement in the subject matter. Similarly, university-affiliated professionals, such as legal practitioners, were included due to their in-depth knowledge of the topic.

### 3.11 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through direct distribution of questionnaires at various locations within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or available embassies, or by sending the questionnaire to employees of those embassies via e-mail, WhatsApp, or any available means. Direct collection is preferred due to its higher response rate and greater accuracy. Although the target sample size is 370, the researcher plans to collect a larger number of responses to ensure a sufficient sample size after data cleaning. The data collection process is scheduled to take place throughout the year 2023.

The primary data collection instrument is a printed questionnaire in Arabic. To ensure that all responses are relevant to the study's focus on digital diplomacy, validation

questions will be incorporated into the demographic section of the survey. Responses that fall outside the predefined criteria will be excluded prior to the analysis phase.

For data analysis, the study will utilize the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 25. SPSS is a widely used statistical software in academic research, offering a range of analytical and data transformation capabilities. Selecting appropriate statistical tests within SPSS is essential to generate meaningful and valid results. Each research study follows a specific design and poses unique research questions, which influence the choice of statistical techniques.

For this study, various data analysis techniques were employed: (i) frequency and descriptive statistics for analyzing demographic data and the opinions of participants, (ii) reliability analysis to ensure internal consistency of survey items using Cronbach's Alpha test, and (iii) multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between variables and to test the proposed hypotheses.

### **3.12 Questionnaire Design**

A survey is a method of data collection used to gather, evaluate, and interpret the opinions of a sample that is representative of a broader population. In survey research, a questionnaire is the primary instrument, comprising a set of standardized questions presented to respondents (Hair Jr et al, 2014).

In this study, the questionnaire was designed to capture the perspectives of employees from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies abroad regarding the role of digital diplomacy in enhancing the foreign policy of the United Arab Emirates. The

questionnaire was developed in Arabic to ensure clarity and accessibility for all participants. Respondents were asked to evaluate their experiences and perceptions by responding to a series of structured questions, which were categorized as follows:

1. Questions related to gender, education level, income, nationality, age, and other relevant background characteristics.
2. The section focused on participants' opinions regarding the core variables of the study, including digital diplomacy, leadership vision, strategic planning, and soft power.

The study employed a five-point Likert scale to facilitate quantitative analysis. This scale is widely used in contemporary research to measure attitudes and perceptions (Joshi et al., 2015). In this study, the Likert scale ranged from 1 = lowest agreement/cognition to 5 = highest agreement/cognition. The Likert scale was particularly suitable for this research as it provides a bipolar measurement of respondents' attitudes, capturing both positive and negative reactions to the statements presented (Likert, 1932).

A well-structured questionnaire, adapted from validated instruments in previous studies, was used to collect primary data from the selected sample. The survey items were modified to align with the specific context of this research. A bilingual version of the questionnaire (Arabic and English) was included in the annexes of this thesis. Table 3.3 shows the sources of the questionnaire items corresponding to each variable.

Table 3. 3  
*Questionnaire sources*

Variable	Items	Source
Digital Diplomacy	8	(Intentilia et al., 2022 ; Cyrill & Pasha, 2019)
Culture	5	(Krzymowski, 2022 ; Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022)
Political Values	5	(Saad, 2020 ; Al Suwaidi, 2021)
Foreign Policy	5	(Saber et al., 2018 ; Tang, 2023)
Leadership Vision	6	(Al Zaabi, 2019 ; Alseiari et al., 2019)
Strategic Planning	6	(Elbanna, 2010 ; Alhammadi & Sulaiman, 2023)

### 3.12.1 Questionnaire Structure

The survey instruments consisted of two main sections. The first section gathered demographic information about the respondents and their affiliated organizations. The second section focused on the key variables of this study. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. This measurement approach was selected due to its simplicity in design, ease of administration, and efficiency in data recording and analysis.

After collecting the data, each item was analyzed either individually or as part of a composite score derived from the average of related items, using a statistical program. The Likert scale was particularly advantageous for this study, as it allowed for the quantification of subjective opinions and facilitated the statistical treatment of both dependent and independent variables. This enabled the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions aligned with the study's objectives.

### **3.12.2 Measurement of Research Variables**

This study employed a questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. All items included in the questionnaire were adapted and developed based on a review of relevant literature and previously published studies. A detailed discussion of each item and its source is provided in the following subsections. A comprehensive list of components, along with their respective sources and justification for adaptation, is presented in the appendices. The list of questions is as follows:

#### **3.12.2.1 Measurement Items for Culture**

The items used to measure the variable culture, as a component of soft power, were developed based on the reviewed literature and the previously published studies. The sources that have been used to develop the questionnaire include Wu (2023), Krzymowski (2022), and Dousti, Saboonchi & Sabzi (2023). The following statements were included in the questionnaire to assess perceptions of culture in the context of Emirati soft power:

- The UAE prioritizes culture as a key instrument for enhancing its soft power.
- Emirati culture reflects strategic efforts by the state to influence the behavior of other nations successfully.
- Cultural initiatives aimed at behavioral change are recognized by the UAE as central objectives of its foreign policy.
- The UAE’s cultural strategy is not merely reactive but represents a forward-looking approach to strengthening soft power.
- Emirati culture supports the continuation of existing behaviors and norms in a manner that aligns with national interests through digital diplomacy.
- Cultural policy contributes to the achievement of national objectives.

- The cultural identity of the UAE positions the country to attain recognition and influence within the international community.

### **3.12.2.2 Measurement Items for Political Values**

The items used to measure the variable political values, as a component of soft power, were developed based on a review of relevant literature and previously published studies. The sources that informed the development of these items include Köse, Özcan, & Karakoç (2016), and Kyriakidis, AlDulaimi, & Molaeb (2024).

The following statements were included in the questionnaire to assess perceptions of political values in the context of Emirati soft power:

- The UAE prioritizes political values as a primary tool for enhancing its soft power.
- The political values of the UAE reflected strategic efforts to influence the behavior of other nations successfully.
- The UAE identifies political values aspects that aim to change current behavior as the primary objectives of its foreign policy.
- The UAE's political values are not just a change, but rather a purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power.
- The UAE's political values are a continuation of the current behavior and norms in a manner that aligns with national interests through digital diplomacy.
- Political values lead the state to achieve its national interests.
- The political values of the UAE positioned the country to attain recognition and influence within the international community.

### **3.12.2.3 Measurement Items for Foreign Policy**

The items used to measure the variable foreign policy, as a component of soft power, were developed based on insights from the reviewed literature and prior empirical studies. The sources that informed the development of these items include Chong (2007), Rahman (2019), and Krzymowski (2022). The following statements were included in the questionnaire to assess perceptions of foreign policy in the context of Emirati soft power:

- The UAE is interested in foreign policy as a primary tool to enhance its soft power.
- The UAE’s foreign policy reflected strategic efforts to influence and successfully change the behavior of other nations.
- The UAE sets policy aspects that aim to change current behavior as primary foreign policy objectives.
- The UAE’s foreign policy is not just a change, but rather a purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power.
- The UAE’s foreign policy is a continuation of the current behavioral norms in a manner that aligns with national interests through digital diplomacy.
- Foreign policy leads the state to achieve its national interests.
- The foreign policy of the UAE positioned the country to attain recognition and influence within the international community.

### **3.12.2.4 Items Measure Digital Diplomacy**

The items used to measure the variable digital diplomacy, as a component of soft power, were developed based on the reviewed literature and previously published studies. The sources that informed the development of these items include Antwi-

Boateng & Al Mazrouei (2021) and Kyriakidis, AlDulaimi, & Molaeb (2024). The following statements were included in the questionnaire to assess perceptions of digital diplomacy in the context of Emirati soft power:

- The UAE is interested in digital diplomacy as a primary tool to enhance its soft power.
- The digital diplomacy of the UAE reflected strategic efforts to influence the behavior of other nations successfully.
- The UAE identifies digital diplomacy that aims to change current behavior as a primary objective of foreign policy.
- The UAE’s digital diplomacy is not just a change, but rather a purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power.
- The UAE’s digital diplomacy is a continuation of the current behavior and norms in a manner that aligns with national interests.

#### **3.12.2.5 Items Measure Leadership Vision**

The items used to measure the variable leadership vision, as a component of soft power, were adapted from the reviewed literature and previously published studies. The sources that informed the finalization of these items include Sosik & Dinger (2007) and Rafiq & Khan (2023). The following statements were included in the questionnaire to assess perceptions of leadership vision in the context of Emirati soft power:

- The UAE is interested in leadership vision as a primary tool to enhance its soft power.
- The leadership vision of the UAE reflected strategic efforts to influence the behavior of other nations successfully.

- The UAE identifies leadership vision that aims to change current behavior as a primary objective of foreign policy.
- The UAE’s leadership vision is not just a change, but rather a purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power.
- The UAE’s leadership vision is a continuation of the current behavior and norms in a manner that aligns with national interests through digital diplomacy.
- Leadership vision leads the state to achieve its national interests.
- The leadership vision of the UAE positioned the country to attain recognition and influence within the international community.

#### **3.12.2.6 Items Measure Strategic Planning**

The items used to measure the variable strategic planning, as a component of soft power, were adapted from the reviewed literature and previously published studies. The sources that informed the development of these items include Chong (2010) and Ali, AlZgool, Alzoraiki, Milhem, & Al-Absy (2023). The following statements were included in the questionnaire to assess perceptions of strategic planning in the context of Emirati soft power:

- The UAE is interested in strategic planning as a primary tool to enhance its soft power.
- The strategic planning of the UAE reflected strategic efforts to influence the behavior of other nations successfully.
- The UAE identifies strategic planning that aims to change current behavior as a primary objective of foreign policy.
- The UAE’s strategic planning is not just a change, but rather a purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power.

- The UAE’s strategic planning is a continuation of the current behavior and norms in a manner that aligns with national interests through digital diplomacy.
- Strategic planning leads the state to achieve its national interests.
- The strategic planning of the UAE positioned the country to attain recognition and influence within the international community.

### 3.13 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

Validity and reliability refer to the extent to which a questionnaire yields the same results when administered repeatedly. Reliability indicates the degree of internal consistency, while validity reflects the instrument’s ability to measure what it is intended to measure (Heale & Twycross, 2015). To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 25 employees.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient. The results demonstrated high reliability across all variables, indicating strong internal consistency and statistical significance. Based on these findings, the finalized version of the questionnaire was distributed, and a copy is included in the appendix. Table 3.4 presents the results of the pilot study’s reliability analysis. These values confirm that the questionnaire was both valid and reliable for evaluating the study’s variables, answering the research questions, and testing the proposed hypotheses.

Table 3. 4  
**Results of Pilot Study Reliability Tests (Cronbach’s Alpha)**

Variable	Cronbach’s alpha
Digital Diplomacy	0.726
Culture	0.821
Political Values	0.720

Variable	Cronbach's alpha
Foreign Policy	0.873
Leadership Vision	0.892
Strategic Planning	0.711

### 3.14 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using SPSS Version 25 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). This software was employed to assess reliability, test assumptions, and analyze the relationships among variables. The following analytical methods were used:

- Descriptive analysis
- Experience and reliability
- Natural test
- Correction analysis
- Qualitative analysis



Prior to conducting inferential analyses such as correlation and regression, descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequencies, means, and standard deviations. According to Hale and Napier (2013), descriptive analysis is essential for establishing a balanced understanding of the data and identifying patterns that inform further statistical testing. This step also helped differentiate between high and low levels of variable responses, serving as a foundation for subsequent analysis.

#### 3.14.1 Reliability Test

The reliability test indicates the stability of the test and its reliability in measuring both variables based on samples. The alpha Cronbach analysis will be used to measure the reliability of the tool. The researcher will use a reliability test in this study for the

experimental test and the actual test. If the authority is not valid in this study, this means that there is no discussion point about the reliability test. Both tests are important to ensure the quality of the result.

#### **3.14.2 Pearson's Correlation Test**

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the linear relationships between the study variables prior to performing multiple regression analysis. This test is essential for identifying potential multicollinearity and understanding the strength and direction of associations between variables. According to Hair et al. (2015), the use of multiple linear regression is appropriate when the objective is to explain or predict relationships among constructs. Sekaran & Bougie (2016) emphasized that Pearson's correlation should be performed before applying regression techniques to ensure the validity of the model. Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) ranges from -1.0, indicating a perfect negative correlation, 0.0 (no correlation), to +1.0, which is an ideal positive correlation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This section presents all the results derived from the collected data through the application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SPSS Version 25 and SmartPLS 3.0. The initial section discusses data screening and early diagnostics. The analysis is based on responses from employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Chapter One explores early detection and data screening. The research presented in this chapter draws on data collected from employees working in the UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies and consulates. To begin, the data underwent a response rate analysis and a non-response bias test. The study's participants were then subjected to descriptive statistics to identify demographic factors, including gender, age, qualifications, job title, and work experience, with the aim of pinpointing situations that require analysis.

Additionally, the current research examined the common method bias test and conducted a descriptive analysis of key variables, including analysis of missing data, normality, and multicollinearity. The study also evaluated the results of PLS-SEM. As

part of this assessment, we examined measurement model factors, including Outer Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted, and Discriminant Validity, using the Fornell and HTMT criteria. Lastly, we analyzed the structural model to identify direct relationships, moderator effects, mediating effects, and the coefficient of determination.

#### 4.2 Response Rate

In this research, the data have been collected from employees affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates of the UAE. Questionnaires were distributed in person, along with pens as a symbol of gratitude. Free consultations were also offered to encourage participation and facilitate completion. Following the approach recommended by Sekaran and Bougie (2016), reminders were issued via phone calls, SMS, and in-person follow-ups to improve the response rate. As a result of these efforts, 384 questionnaires were returned out of 849 distributed, yielding an initial response rate of 45.2% (Table 4.1).

However, only 306 questionnaires were deemed valid and used for further analysis, resulting in a usable response rate of 36% (Baruch, 1999). A total of 81 questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete responses or errors in completion. This response rate is consistent with prior studies in similar contexts (Narver & Slater, 1990; Baruch, 1999).

Table 4. 1  
*Response Rate*

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Number of questionnaires distributed	849	100%
Number of questionnaires not responded to	81	9.5%
Returned questionnaires	384	45.2%

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Excluded questionnaires	78	9.1%
Useable questionnaires	306	36%

### **4.3 Non-Response Bias**

In survey research, non-response bias occurs when the responses of participants differ systematically from those who did not respond. This bias can arise from respondents' unwillingness to disclose information or refusal to participate, which may affect the representativeness of the sample. According to Armstrong & Overton (1977), non-response bias is particularly problematic when the characteristics or opinions of non-respondents differ significantly from those of respondents.

If non-response bias is present, it may compromise the generalizability of the study's findings to the broader population. To mitigate this issue, follow-up efforts were made using WhatsApp, phone calls, SMS, and in-person consultations, as recommended by Rogelberg & Stanton (2007), to encourage participation and reduce bias.

To assess non-response bias, the study compared early respondents (those who completed the questionnaire within 15 days of distribution) with late respondents (those who responded after 15 days). This comparison was conducted using Levene's Test for Equality of Variances and a two-tailed independent samples t-test to determine whether significant differences existed between the two groups.

The analysis focused on responses to key variables, including culture, digital diplomacy, foreign policy, leadership vision, political values, and strategic planning. Among the 306 valid responses, 248 were early respondents and 58 were late respondents.

The results of Levene's test and the t-test are presented in Table 4.2, which evaluates whether significant variance exists between early and late respondents across the study variables.

Table 4. 2  
*Test for non-response bias*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Culture	Early	248	3.35	0.89
	Late	58	3.42	0.92
Digital	Early	248	3.65	0.77
	Late	58	3.55	0.81
Foreign Policy	Early	248	3.88	0.95
	Late	58	3.95	0.88
Leadership Vision	Early	248	3.76	0.86
	Late	58	3.87	0.91
Political Values	Early	248	3.67	0.88
	Late	58	3.77	0.77
Strategic Planning	Early	248	3.59	0.69
	Late	58	3.65	0.81

Table 4.2 shows the calculated values of the non-response bias test, gathered after verifying that the data were bias-free and conducting the structural analysis. The independent samples test revealed that the t-test indicated no significant differences in variances, as the P-values for the six main study variables were above the 0.05 significance level assumed by Levene's test for equality of variance. This confirmed that the study's assumptions of equal variances between early and late responders were met precisely.

#### 4.4 Demographics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The analysis includes variables such as gender, age, educational qualification, job designation, and years of experience of employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates of the UAE.

##### 4.4.1 Gender of Respondents

In this section, the gender of the respondents has been examined to determine which gender group was more responsive. The findings of the respondents' gender are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4. 3  
*Gender of Respondents*

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Male	203	66.33	66.33
Female	103	33.66	100
Total	306	100	

Table 4.3 shows that the majority of respondents were male (203 respondents), representing 66.33% of the total sample. In contrast, female respondents accounted for 103, or 33.66% of the sample. For better visualization, the gender distribution is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

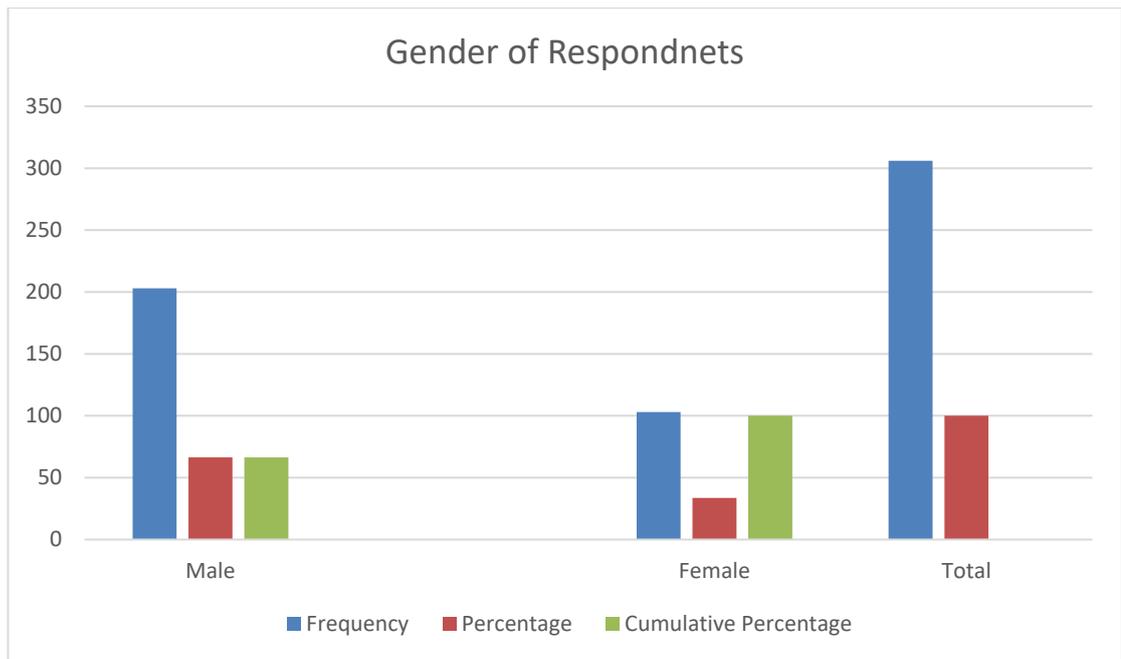


Figure 4. 1 Gender of Respondents

#### 4.4.2 Age of Respondents

To identify which age groups were most responsive, the study analyzed the age distribution of employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates of the UAE. The results are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4. 4  
*Age of Respondents*

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
18-25	32	10.45	10.45
26-35	48	15.69	26.14
36-45	66	21.57	47.71
46-55	83	27.12	74.83
up to 55	77	25.16	100
Total	306	100	

Table 4.4 shows that the majority of respondents belonged to the 46–55 age group, with 83 individuals, representing 27.12% of the total sample. This age group had the

highest participation rate compared to other age categories. For a clearer understanding, the age distribution is illustrated in Figure 4.2.

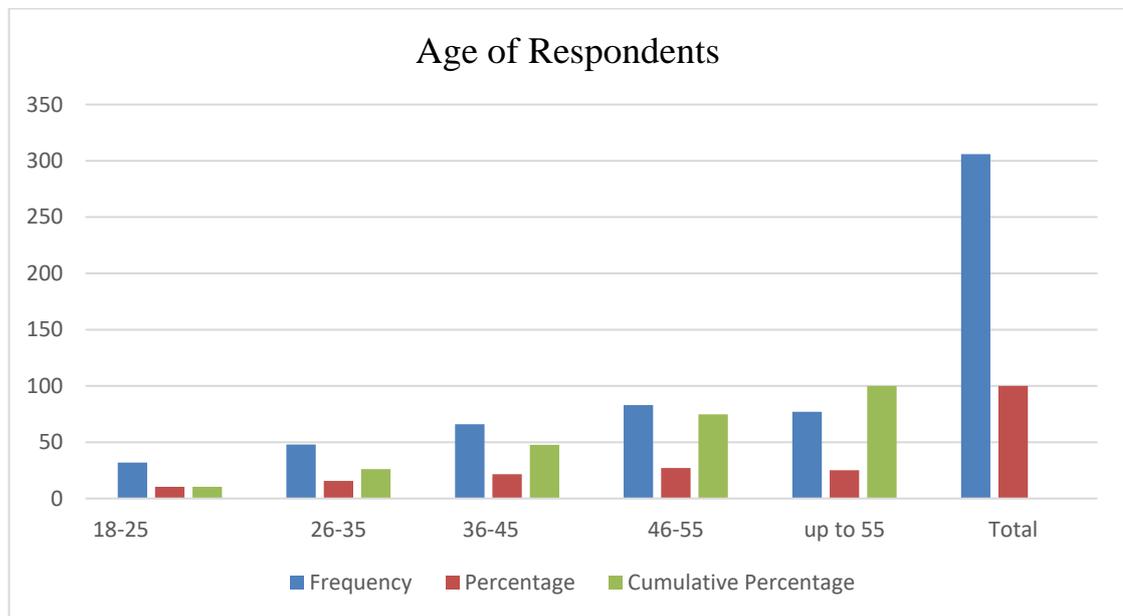


Figure 4. 2 Age of Respondents

#### 4.4.3 Qualification of Respondents

The educational qualifications of the respondents were analyzed to better understand the demographic profile of employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates of the UAE. The results are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4. 5  
*Qualification of Respondents*

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Diploma	81	26.47	26.47
Bachelor	96	31.37	57.84
Postgraduate	129	42.15	100
Total	306	100	

As shown in Table 4.5, the majority of respondents held postgraduate degrees (129 respondents), accounting for 42.15% of the total sample. This indicates a high level of

educational attainment among the participants. For a clearer understanding, the qualification distribution is illustrated in Figure 4.3.

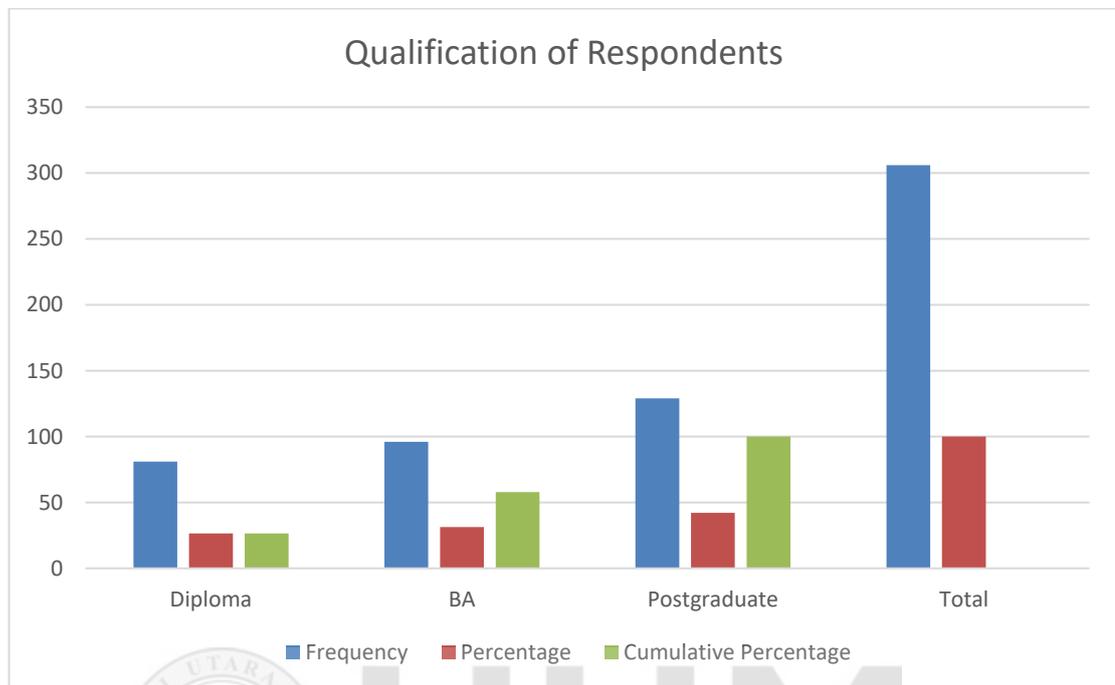


Figure 4. 3 Qualification of Respondents

#### 4.4.4 Designation of Respondents

The job designations of respondents working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates of the UAE were analyzed to better understand their professional roles. The results are presented in Table 4.6. As shown in Table 4.6, respondents in high administrative positions constituted the largest proportion of the sample, indicating a strong representation from senior-level professionals.

Table 4. 6  
*Designation of Respondents*

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Administrative Supervisor	57	18.63	18.63
Exclusive Management	81	26.47	45.10
Middle Administration	75	24.51	69.61
High Administration	93	30.39	100
Total	306	100	

To enhance clarity, the designation distribution is illustrated in Figure 4.4.

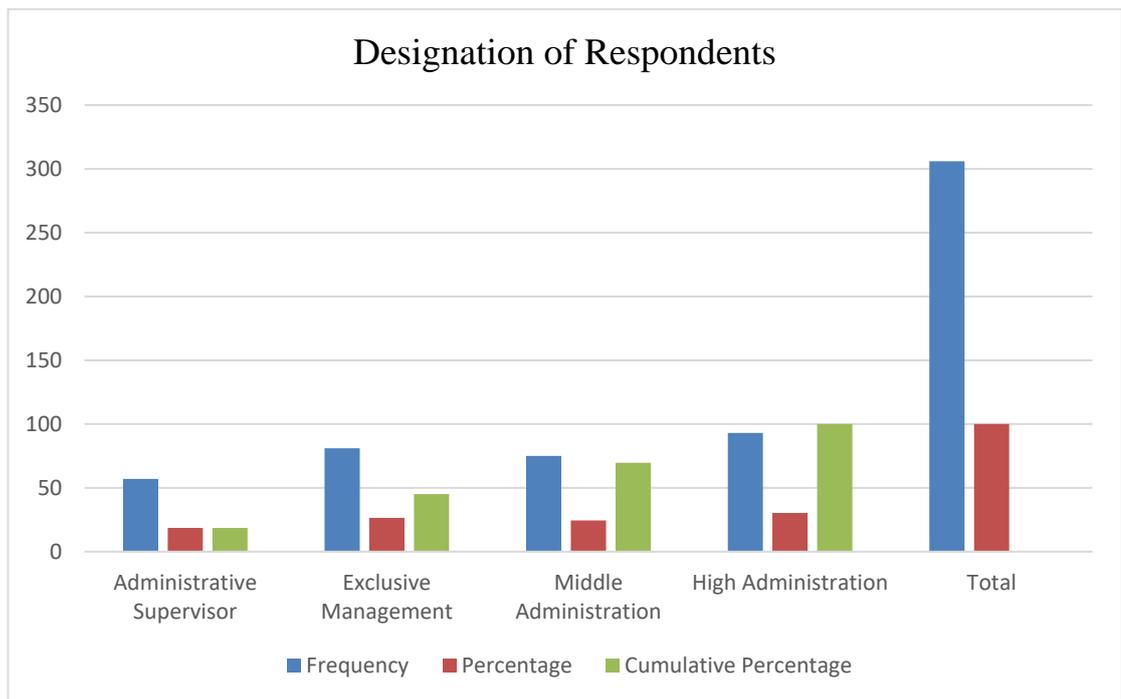


Figure 4. 4 Designation of Respondents

#### 4.4.5 Experience of Respondents

The professional experience of respondents working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and consulates of the UAE was analyzed to understand the distribution across different experience levels. The results are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4. 7  
*Experience of Respondents*

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1-3 Years	97	31.70	31.70
4-7 Years	83	27.12	58.82
8-12 Years	65	21.24	80.06
more than 12	61	19.93	100
Total	306	100	

As shown in Table 4.7, the highest proportion of respondents had 1–3 years of experience, with 97 individuals, accounting for 31.70% of the sample. This indicates

a strong representation from early-career professionals. For a clearer understanding, the experience distribution is illustrated in Figure 4.5.

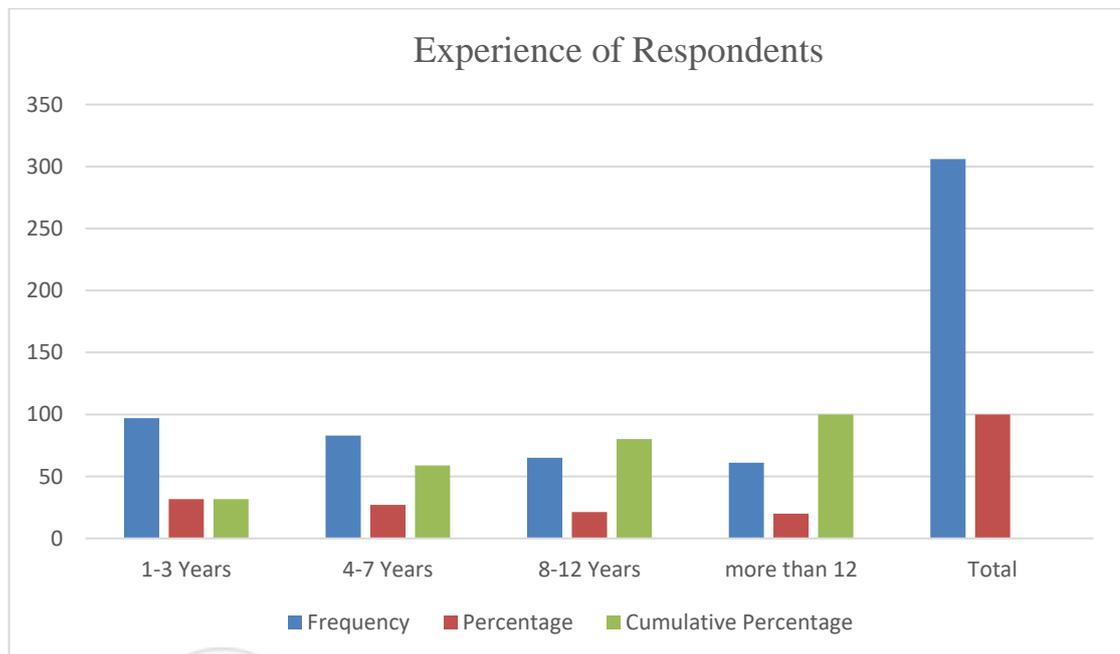


Figure 4. 5 Experience of Respondents

#### 4.5 Common Method Bias Test

Since data on both exogenous and endogenous variables were collected simultaneously using the same instrument, there was a potential risk of common method bias (CMB). To address this concern, the study employed appropriate diagnostic tests to ensure that the observed relationships among variables were not significantly affected by inflated correlations resulting from the measurement method. As defined by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012), CMB refers to the variance attributable to the measurement approach rather than the constructs being measured, which can distort variable relationships and undermine the validity of research findings.

To mitigate this risk, several procedural and statistical remedies were implemented. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to reduce evaluation apprehension. Survey items were neutrally worded, and scale enhancement techniques were applied to minimize ambiguity. Participants were encouraged to respond honestly and were informed that there were no right or wrong answers. Additionally, the items were carefully structured to avoid priming effects and to reduce the likelihood of patterned or biased responses.

#### 4.6 Descriptive Analysis of Major Variables

This section presents the descriptive statistics for the key variables examined in the study. The analysis focused on calculating the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for each construct to provide a comprehensive overview of respondent perceptions. The study employed a 5-point Likert scale, where (1) represents Strongly Disagree, (2) represents Disagree, (3) represents Neutral, (4) represents Agree, and (5) represents Strongly Agree. The variables analyzed include culture, digital diplomacy, foreign policy, leadership vision, political values, and strategic planning. These descriptive statistics offer valuable insights into how participants evaluated each construct, and the results are summarized in Table 4.8.

Table 4. 8  
*Descriptive Analysis of Major Variables*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Culture	3.89	0.97	1	5
Digital Diplomacy	3.75	0.85	1	5
Foreign Policy	3.40	0.91	1	5
Leadership Vision	3.90	0.95	1	5
Political Values	3.78	0.87	1	5
Strategic Planning	3.65	0.55	1	5

#### **4.7 Analysis of Missing Data**

Following the extraction of responses from the completed questionnaires, the initial step in the data cleaning process involves addressing any missing data values. Missing data refers to instances where values for one or more variables in the questionnaire are incomplete, thereby rendering them unsuitable for analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). In other words, missing values typically occur when respondents fail—either intentionally or unintentionally—to provide answers to certain questions.

Sekaran and Bougie (2016) noted that missing data may result from a respondent's inability to comprehend the questions, a lack of willingness to respond, or various difficulties encountered during the response process. When missing data is identified within a dataset, researchers must take appropriate corrective measures, as failure to do so may lead to inaccurate or biased analytical outcomes (Hair et al., 2010). According to Hair et al. (2010), any case with more than 50% missing data should be excluded from the analysis to ensure the adequacy of the dataset.

Although there is no universally accepted threshold for missing data that guarantees valid statistical inference, a commonly accepted guideline suggests that a missing data rate of 5% or less is considered negligible (Schafer, 1999; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) further emphasized that this tolerance level should not be exceeded. For this study, the mean substitution method—recommended by previous researchers for datasets with missing values less than or equal to 5%—was employed to replace missing entries (Little & Rubin, 1989; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Moreover, Bennett (2001) asserted that if more than 10% of the data in a statistical analysis is missing, the results may be significantly biased and unreliable. Accordingly, in the present study, IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 was utilized to implement statistical procedures for handling missing data.

#### **4.8 Analysis of Normality**

Following the treatment of missing data, the normality of the dataset was assessed. Normal distribution is a fundamental concept in statistical analysis and is particularly relevant in the context of structural equation modeling (SEM) (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). Although Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is a variance-based technique that does not assume normal data distribution (Henseler & Fassott, 2009; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013), evaluating the degree of normality remains important. This is because extreme deviations from normality can affect the accuracy of parameter estimates and may lead to inflated standard errors during bootstrapping procedures.

Normality refers to the shape of the distribution of a metric variable and its alignment with the standard normal distribution (Hair et al., 2010). In this study, the statistical measures of skewness and kurtosis were employed to assess deviations from normality and to evaluate the distributional characteristics of the data (Hair et al., 2010). According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), when the sample size exceeds 200, moderate deviations in skewness and kurtosis typically do not have a substantial impact on the results.

Acceptable thresholds for normality suggest that skewness values should be less than 2, and kurtosis values should be less than 7. Joanes and Gill (1998) further argued that absolute skewness values greater than 3 and kurtosis values exceeding 10 may indicate potential issues, while values above 20 suggest severe non-normality. Based on these guidelines, the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis for all items in this study were found to be within the acceptable limits of  $<2$  and  $<7$ , respectively, indicating that the data distribution is sufficiently normal for further analysis.

#### **4.9 Assessment of Multicollinearity**

Multicollinearity refers to a condition in which two or more exogenous latent constructs (i.e., independent variables) are highly correlated, thereby compromising the reliability of statistical estimates (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). This issue arises when independent variables share substantial variance, leading to redundancy in the information they provide (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). When variables are excessively correlated, they contribute overlapping information, which may distort the estimation of regression coefficients and inflate error terms. Consequently, not all variables may be necessary in the same analytical model.

Severe multicollinearity increases the standard errors of regression coefficients, thereby reducing the statistical significance and interpretability of the model. The most widely accepted diagnostic measures for detecting multicollinearity are Tolerance and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). According to Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013), acceptable thresholds are tolerance values greater than 0.10 and VIF values less than 10.

In this study, multicollinearity was initially assessed using the correlation matrix, followed by an evaluation of tolerance and VIF values for each independent variable. These diagnostics were derived from the collinearity statistics provided by IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.

As shown in Table 4.9, tolerance values ranged from 0.55 to 0.90, which are well above the critical threshold of 0.10. Similarly, VIF values ranged from 1.34 to 1.99, which are significantly below the upper limit of 10. According to Hair et al. (2010), tolerance values below 0.10 and VIF values above 10 indicate problematic multicollinearity. Therefore, the results presented in Table 4.9 confirm that multicollinearity is not a concern in this study.

Table 4. 9  
*Multicollinearity Analysis*

	<b>Tolerance</b>	<b>VIF</b>
Culture	0.55	1.08
Political Values	0.87	1.21
Foreign Policy	0.68	1.34
Digital Diplomacy	0.71	1.99
Leadership Vision	0.90	1.54
Foreign Policy	0.75	1.33

#### **4.10 Evaluation of PLS-SEM**

The evaluation of the PLS-SEM was conducted to assess the measurement and structural models of the study. This section presents the results of the factor analysis and evaluates the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments. Based on item analysis, the outer model indicates that the constructs used in the study are unidimensional.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the variable measurements, the structural model was also analyzed, focusing on the correlations among latent constructs. Following data validation, both the outer (measurement) and inner (structural) models were examined using PLS-SEM (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010). Additionally, the direct and moderating effects were assessed through PLS-SEM. Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, and Hair Jr. (2014) emphasized that SmartPLS 4.0 is an effective tool for evaluating causal relationships among variables in theoretical models.

Prior to conducting the PLS-SEM analysis, the model was configured to enhance interpretability. It was necessary to distinguish between formative and reflective indicators, as the analytical approach differs depending on the type of measurement model (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013; Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). Accordingly, all latent construct indicators were carefully considered in this study.

Reflective indicators are observed variables that reflect the underlying latent construct, whereas formative indicators contribute to the formation of the construct. In this study, only first-order constructs were analyzed; second-order structures, which involve hierarchical layers of constructs, were not included. Thus, all variables in the inner model were treated as first-order constructs.

Based on the theoretical framework and the relationships among constructs, the study includes six latent variables: one independent variable (digital diplomacy), two moderating variables (leadership vision and strategic planning), and three endogenous variables (culture, political values, and foreign policy).

#### **4.10.1 Assessment of Measurement Model**

The measurement model, also referred to as the outer model, defines the relationships between latent constructs and their observed indicators (Chin, 1998; Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, & Hair Jr., 2014). In this study, the measurement model was evaluated to determine both reliability and validity, which are the primary criteria for assessing the quality of variable measurement (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

According to Cook and Beckman (2006), *reliability* refers to the consistency or stability of an assessment across multiple administrations. Reliability can be assessed at both the item and construct levels (Chin, 2009). To evaluate the measurement model, this study employed PLS-SEM. The assessment included the following metrics: Outer Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Discriminant Validity, assessed using both the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Henseler & Fassott, 2009; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013).

##### **4.10.1.1 Outer Loadings**

The first step in evaluating the measurement model involved analyzing the outer loadings of individual indicators to identify any problematic items and to confirm convergent validity. Table 4.10 presents the outer loadings for all indicators used in the study. The results show that all indicator loadings fall within an acceptable range, with values ranging from a lower bound of 0.708 to an upper bound of 0.961, indicating strong item reliability and satisfactory convergent validity.

Table 4. 10  
*Outer Loadings*

	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Digital Diplomacy</b>	<b>Foreign Policy</b>	<b>Leadership Vision</b>	<b>Political Values</b>	<b>Strategic Planning</b>
Q13			0.850			
Q14			0.834			
Q15			0.847			
Q17			0.867			
Q18			0.715			
Q19			0.814			
Q20			0.815			
Q29					0.874	
Q30					0.752	
Q31					0.741	
Q32					0.792	
Q34					0.821	
Q35					0.818	
Q36					0.772	
Q41	0.767					
Q42	0.768					
Q43	0.795					
Q44	0.844					
Q45	0.893					
Q46	0.853					
Q47	0.829					
Q51		0.943				
Q52		0.750				
Q53		0.919				
Q54		0.878				
Q56		0.912				
Q59		0.882				
Q60		0.915				
Q61				0.863		
Q62				0.791		
Q63				0.708		
Q64				0.859		
Q65				0.811		

	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Digital Diplomacy</b>	<b>Foreign Policy</b>	<b>Leadership Vision</b>	<b>Political Values</b>	<b>Strategic Planning</b>
Q66				0.868		
Q67				0.729		
Q68						0.742
Q69						0.951
Q70						0.881
Q71						0.961
Q72						0.912
Q73						0.897
Q74						0.898

As indicated in the above analysis of outer loading values presented in Table 4.10, all retained items in the model exhibited outer loadings above the threshold of 0.70. This confirms that a substantial number of indicators were preserved after excluding those with loadings below 0.70. According to established guidelines, the removal of less than 10% of items does not significantly impact the reliability of the measurement scale. Therefore, in this study, fewer than 10% of the items were excluded from the instrument used to measure the latent variables, ensuring the integrity and reliability of the model.

#### **4.10.1.2 Cronbach's Alpha**

In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was employed to assess the internal consistency reliability of the measurement scales used for the constructs: culture, digital diplomacy, foreign policy, leadership vision, political values, and strategic planning. As presented in Table 4.11, the Cronbach's Alpha values for these constructs were 0.897 for culture, 0.954 for digital diplomacy, 0.919 for foreign policy, 0.910 for leadership vision, 0.834 for political values, and 0.957 for strategic planning. These values indicate excellent internal consistency, as each exceeds the commonly accepted

threshold of 0.70. According to Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015), Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 are considered acceptable, while values above 0.90 reflect exceptional reliability. Therefore, the results confirm that the measurement instruments used in this study are highly reliable and suitable for evaluating the latent constructs.

Table 4. 11  
*Cronbach's Alpha*

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
Culture	0.897
Digital Diplomacy	0.954
Foreign Policy	0.919
Leadership Vision	0.910
Political Values	0.834
Strategic Planning	0.957

#### **4.10.1.3 Composite Reliability**

Composite reliability was employed in this study to assess the internal consistency of the measurement model, specifically evaluating the reliability of the items used to measure each construct. Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013) emphasized that internal consistency ensures that items measuring the same construct produce consistent results when applied under similar conditions. Composite reliability values range from 0 to 1, and values above 0.60 are considered acceptable (Henseler & Fassott, 2009). However, values exceeding 0.70 are regarded as optimal and indicative of strong reliability (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010).

As shown in Table 4.12, all constructs in this study—culture, digital diplomacy, foreign policy, leadership vision, political values, and strategic planning—exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. The lowest composite reliability value was 0.877 for political values, while the highest was 0.965 for strategic planning. The remaining

constructs also demonstrated high reliability, with values of 0.918 for culture, 0.963 for digital diplomacy, 0.935 for foreign policy, and 0.928 for leadership vision. These results confirm that the measurement model exhibits strong internal consistency across all constructs.

Table 4. 12  
*Composite Reliability of Constructs*

	<b>Composite Reliability</b>
Culture	0.918
Digital Diplomacy	0.963
Foreign Policy	0.935
Leadership Vision	0.928
Political Values	0.877
Strategic Planning	0.965

#### **4.10.1.4 Average Variance Extracted**

In this study, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was examined to assess the convergent validity of the measurement model. Convergent validity refers to the extent to which indicators of a specific construct share a high proportion of variance in common (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). According to Henseler and Fassott (2009), convergent validity is achieved when the AVE value for a construct is at least 0.50, indicating that more than 50% of the variance is captured by the construct rather than by measurement error.

The AVE values were calculated for all constructs—culture, digital diplomacy, foreign policy, leadership vision, political values, and strategic planning—to determine whether the indicators adequately represent their respective latent variables. As shown

in Table 4.13, all AVE values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50, confirming the presence of convergent validity. Specifically, the AVE values were 0.603 for culture, 0.788 for digital diplomacy, 0.675 for foreign policy, 0.650 for leadership vision, 0.508 for political values, and 0.800 for strategic planning.

These results demonstrate that each construct in the model explains a substantial portion of the variance in its indicators. Therefore, based on the criteria established by Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013), all constructs exhibit sufficient convergent validity and are retained in the model.

Table 4. 13  
*Average Variance Extracted (AVE)*

	<b>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</b>
Culture	0.623
Digital Diplomacy	0.788
Foreign Policy	0.675
Leadership Vision	0.650
Political Values	0.508
Strategic Planning	0.800

#### **4.10.1.5 Discriminant Validity by Fornell**

Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which the indicators of a specific construct are empirically distinct from those of other constructs. One of the most widely used methods for assessing discriminant validity in PLS-SEM is the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Chin, 1998; Henseler & Fassott, 2009). Alongside the cross-loading approach, the Fornell-Larcker method is frequently applied in research and is utilized in the present study.

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion (1981) evaluates discriminant validity by comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each latent construct with its correlations with other constructs in the model. According to Claes and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is established when the square root of a construct's AVE is greater than its correlation with any other construct. This implies that a construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with indicators of other constructs. Additionally, Roldán and Sánchez-Franco (2012) emphasized that the diagonal elements in the Fornell-Larcker matrix (representing the square roots of AVEs) must be significantly higher than the off-diagonal elements (representing inter-construct correlations) to confirm discriminant validity.

Table 4. 14  
*Discriminant Validity by Fornell*

	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Digital Diplomacy</b>	<b>Foreign Policy</b>	<b>Leadership Vision</b>	<b>Political Values</b>	<b>Strategic Planning</b>
Culture	0.790					
Digital	0.766	0.888				
Diplomacy						
Foreign Policy	0.647	0.637	0.821			
Leadership	0.614	0.675	0.590	0.806		
Vision						
Political	0.618	0.616	0.608	0.572	0.713	
Values						
Strategic	0.622	0.548	0.666	0.622	0.502	0.894
Planning						

As shown in Table 4.14, the results of the Fornell-Larcker analysis confirm that all constructs—digital diplomacy, foreign policy, leadership vision, political values, and strategic planning—exhibit adequate discriminant validity. These findings support the reliability and validity of the measurement model, as all constructs are empirically

distinct and appropriately measured. Following this confirmation, the next step involves assessing discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) for further validation.

#### 4.10.1.6 Discriminant Validity by Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations

Discriminant validity ensures that each construct in a model is empirically distinct from other constructs. One of the more rigorous methods for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling is the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT). HTMT evaluates the degree of similarity between latent constructs, and values significantly below 1.0 indicate that discriminant validity is established. Ab Hamid, Sami, and Sidek (2017) emphasized that HTMT is a robust criterion capable of detecting even subtle issues of discriminant validity.

Previous research has suggested a conservative threshold of 0.85, beyond which discriminant validity may be compromised (Ab Hamid et al., 2017; Hair Jr., Howard, & Nitzl, 2020). While the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading analysis are commonly used, Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015) demonstrated through simulation studies that these methods may not always detect the absence of discriminant validity in complex models. Therefore, HTMT is increasingly recommended as a complementary and more sensitive approach.

Table 4.15  
*Discriminant Validity by HTMT*

	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Digital Diplomacy</b>	<b>Foreign Policy</b>	<b>Leadership Vision</b>	<b>Political Values</b>	<b>Strategic Planning</b>
Culture						
Digital	0.800					
Diplomacy						

	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Digital Diplomacy</b>	<b>Foreign Policy</b>	<b>Leadership Vision</b>	<b>Political Values</b>	<b>Strategic Planning</b>
Foreign Policy	0.703	0.676				
Leadership Vision	0.653	0.713	0.624			
Political Values	0.833	0.682	0.804	0.635		
Strategic Planning	0.672	0.568	0.701	0.619	0.557	

As shown in Table 4.15, the HTMT values for all construct pairs—culture, digital diplomacy, foreign policy, leadership vision, political values, and strategic planning—are below the 0.85 threshold. This confirms that each construct is empirically distinct from the others, thereby supporting the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

#### 4.10.2 Evaluation of Structural Model

The evaluation of the structural model (also referred to as the inner model) involves analyzing the relationships between exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) latent variables within the theoretical framework of the study. The structural model is used to assess the predictive capabilities of the model and to determine the strength and significance of the relationships among constructs (Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, & Hair Jr., 2014). Key criteria for evaluating the structural model in PLS-SEM include the significance of path coefficients, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect size ( $f^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ).

#### **4.10.2.1 Assessment of Direct Relationships**

In this study, the structural model was applied to test Hypotheses 1 to 3, which examine the direct relationships between one independent variable and multiple dependent variables. The model provides a systematic framework for evaluating these relationships. The PLS-SEM algorithm was used to estimate path coefficients, while the bootstrapping method in SmartPLS 4.0 was employed to assess the statistical significance of these coefficients. A total of 5,000 bootstrap samples were generated to ensure robust estimation based on the original sample size (Henseler & Fassott, 2009; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013).

The initial structural model focused on analyzing the direct relationships between the independent variable (digital diplomacy) and the dependent variables (culture, political values, and foreign policy) corresponding to Hypotheses H1 to H3. Subsequently, the model was extended to include two moderating variables—leadership vision and strategic planning—to examine their interaction effects, which are addressed in Hypotheses H4 and H5.

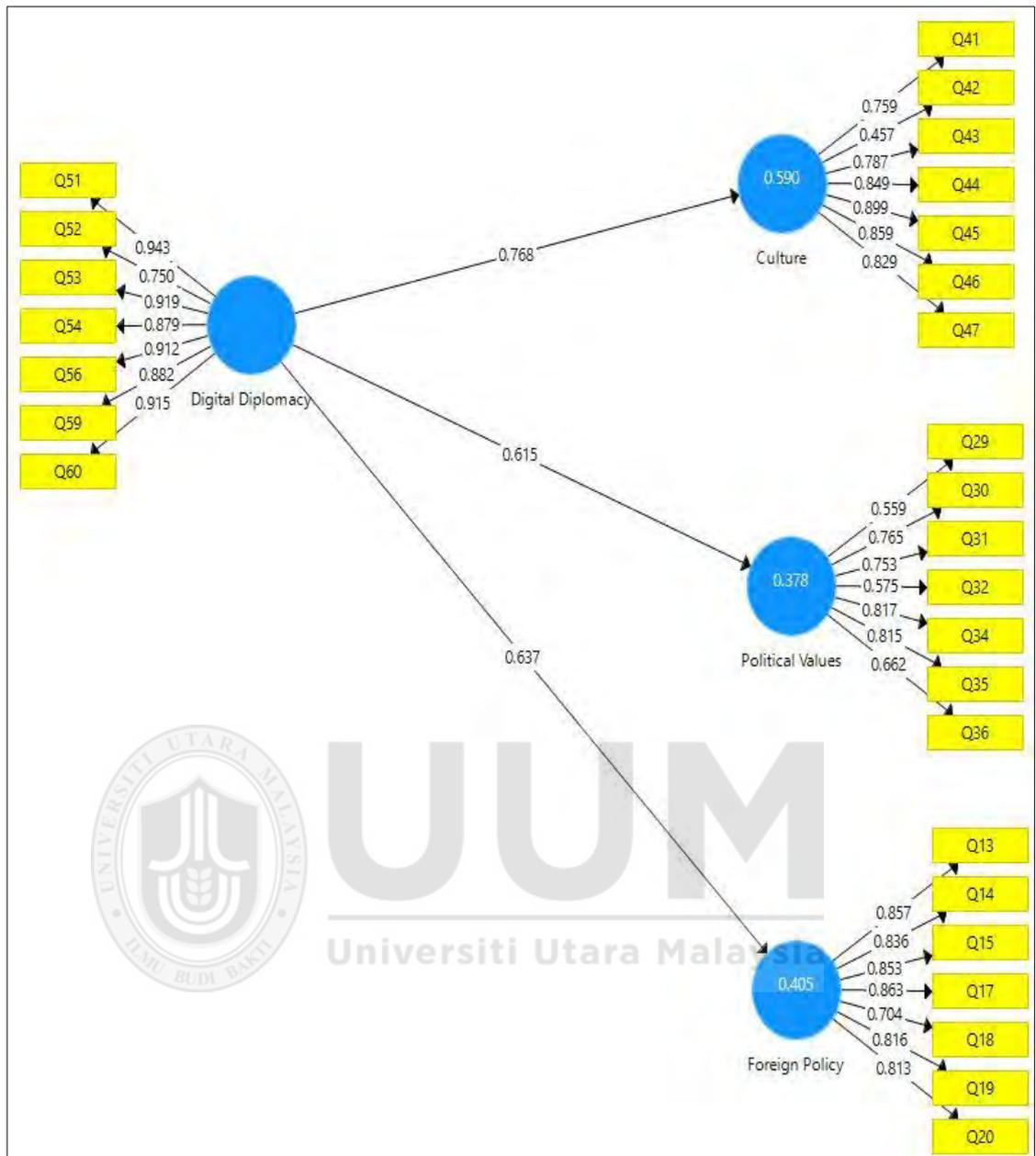


Figure 4. 6 Direct Effects of Algorithms

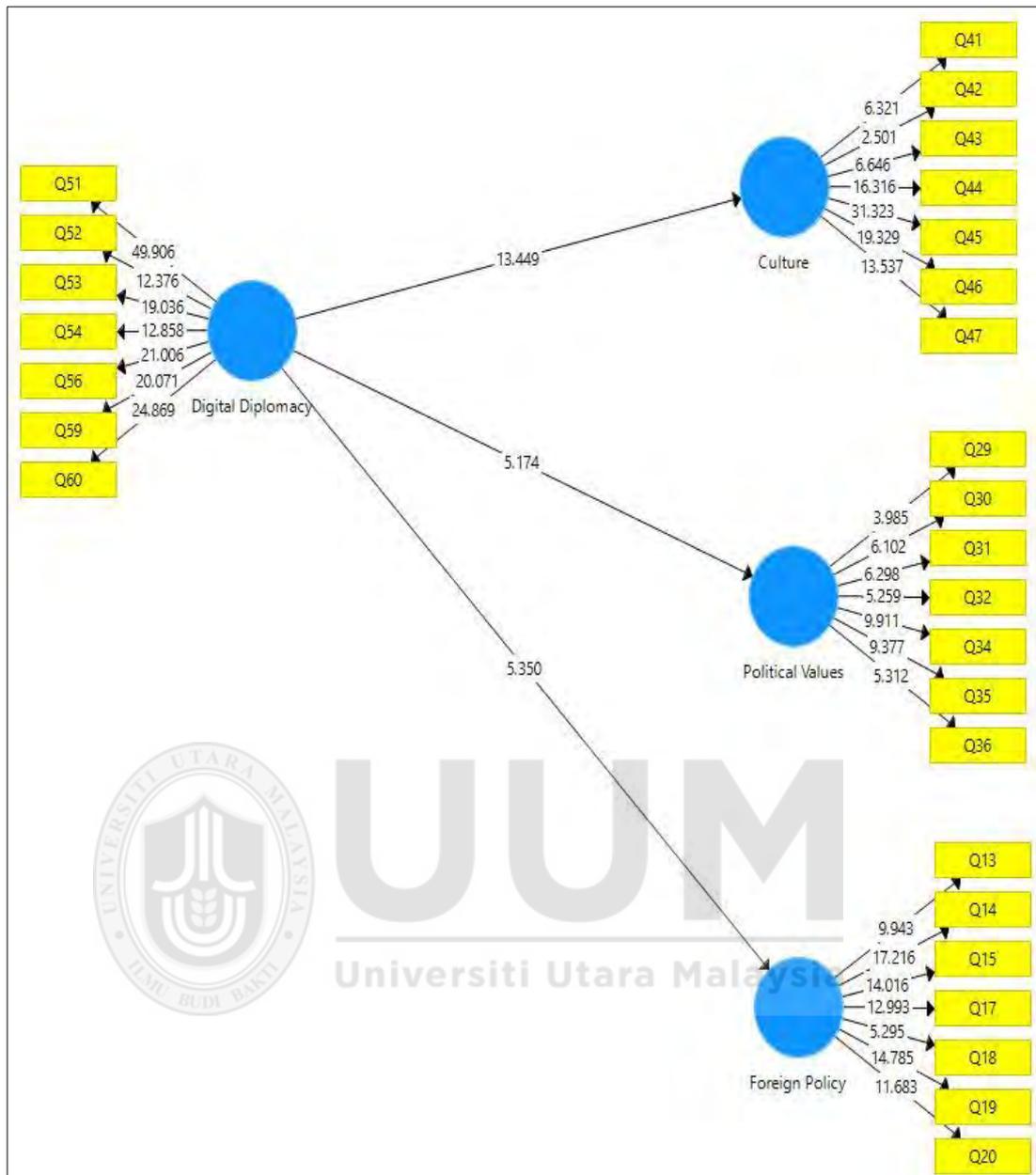


Figure 4. 7 Direct Effects of Bootstrapping

The direct path coefficients derived from the PLS-SEM algorithm are illustrated in Figure 4.6, while Table 4.16 presents the detailed path coefficients between the independent and dependent variables. The results indicate a statistically significant relationship between the exogenous variable (digital diplomacy) and the endogenous variables (culture, foreign policy, and political values). Furthermore, the bootstrapping

results shown in Figure 4.7, based on 5,000 subsamples, confirm the significance of these relationships at the level of  $p < 0.005$ .

As detailed in Table 4.16, the path coefficients,  $t$ -statistics, and  $p$ -values support the hypotheses tested. Specifically, the results for Hypothesis 1 (H1) reveal a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and culture ( $\beta = 0.768$ ,  $t = 13.449$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). For Hypothesis 2 (H2), the findings show a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy ( $\beta = 0.637$ ,  $t = 13.449$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Lastly, Hypothesis 3 (H3) indicates a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and political values ( $\beta = 0.615$ ,  $t = 5.174$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). These results confirm the strength and significance of the direct relationships, as summarized in Table 4.16.

Table 4.16  
*Direct Effects*

<b>Path Coefficients</b>	<b>Original Sample (O)</b>	<b>Sample Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T Statistics (O/STDEV)</b>	<b>P Values</b>
Digital Diplomacy-> Culture	0.768	0.773	0.057	13.449	0.000
Digital Diplomacy-> Foreign Policy	0.637	0.641	0.119	5.350	0.000
Digital Diplomacy-> Political Values	0.615	0.618	0.119	5.174	0.000

The analysis of the direct effects of digital diplomacy on culture, foreign policy, and political values has been determined in the model, which signifies that those direct effects have a significant relationship, whereas the moderating variable has also been introduced in the model. Subsequently, the evaluation of interaction terms over the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. Lastly, the moderating effect also has a significant relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

### 4.10.3 Moderator Effects

According to Henseler and Fassott (2009), assessing moderator effects is essential for verifying whether the interaction between variables significantly alters the strength or direction of the primary relationships. Initially, the direct effects of the moderating variables on the dependent variables were examined. Subsequently, interaction terms were introduced to assess the moderating influence on the relationship between the independent variable. The results of the moderator analysis using the PLS-SEM algorithm are illustrated in Figure 4.8, while the outcomes of the bootstrapping procedure for moderator effects are presented in Figure 4.9. These figures provide visual confirmation of the interaction effects and support the statistical significance of the moderating relationships.

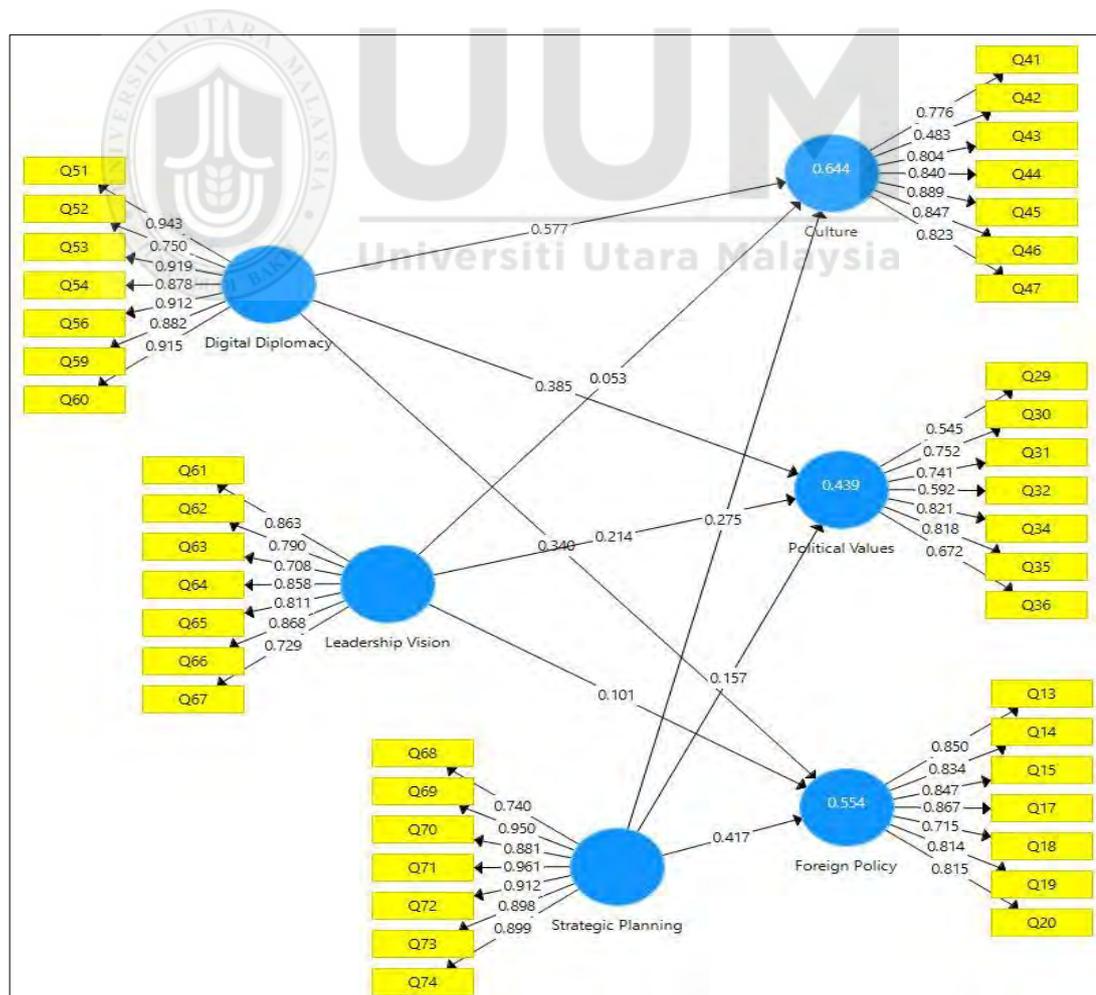


Figure 4. 8 Moderator PLS Algorithms

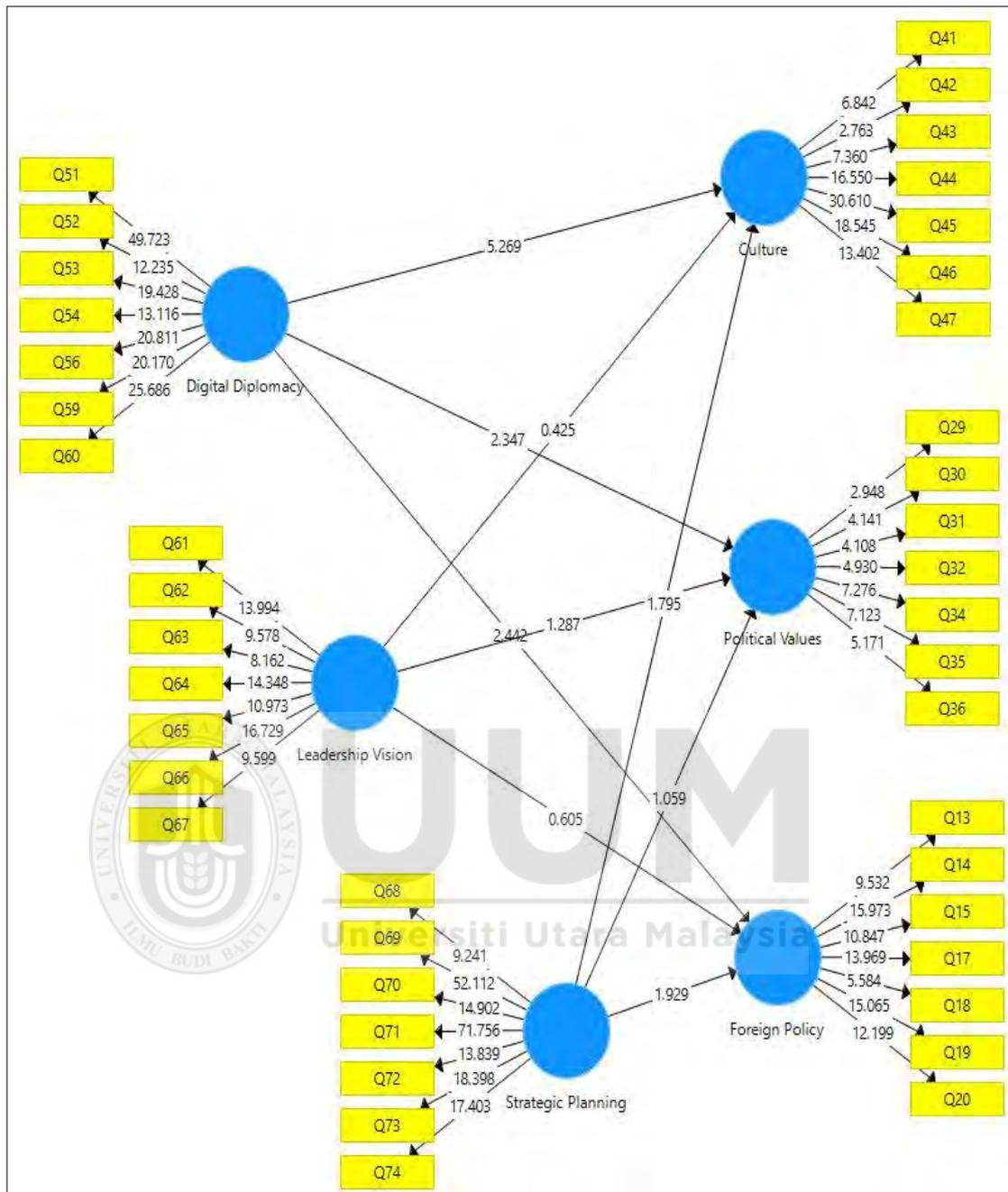


Figure 4. 9 PLS Moderator Bootstrapping

As shown in Table 4.17, the results of the moderator analysis reveal several significant relationships. Hypothesis 4 (H4) indicates a significant moderating effect of digital diplomacy on culture ( $\beta = 0.353, t = 2.425, p = 0.004$ ), which is supported. Hypothesis 5 (H5) shows a significant relationship between leadership vision and foreign policy ( $\beta = 0.301, t = 2.605, p = 0.001$ ), confirming the moderating role of leadership vision.

Similarly, Hypothesis 6 (H6) demonstrates a significant relationship between leadership vision and political values ( $\beta = 0.414, t = 3.287, p = 0.000$ ), which is also confirmed.

In addition, Hypothesis 7 (H7) reveals a significant relationship between strategic planning and culture ( $\beta = 0.475, t = 3.795, p = 0.000$ ), while Hypothesis 8 (H8) shows a significant relationship between strategic planning and foreign policy ( $\beta = 0.517, t = 2.929, p = 0.011$ ). Lastly, Hypothesis 9 (H9) confirms a significant relationship between strategic planning and political values ( $\beta = 0.357, t = 2.059, p = 0.014$ ). These findings collectively support the moderating effects of both leadership vision and strategic planning on the relationships between digital diplomacy and the respective dependent variables.

Table 4. 15  
*Moderator Effects*

<b>Path Coefficients</b>	<b>Original</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>T Statistics</b>	<b>P</b>
	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Deviation</b>	<b>(O/STDEV)</b>	<b>Values</b>
	<b>(O)</b>	<b>(M)</b>	<b>(STDEV)</b>		
Leadership Vision-> Culture	0.353	0.065	0.146	2.425	0.004
Leadership Vision-> Foreign Policy	0.301	0.104	0.116	2.605	0.001
Leadership Vision-> Political Values	0.414	0.215	0.126	3.287	0.000
Strategic Planning-> Culture	0.475	0.265	0.125	3.795	0.000
Strategic Planning-> Foreign Policy	0.517	0.385	0.177	2.929	0.011
Strategic Planning-> Political Values	0.357	0.138	0.173	2.059	0.014

#### 4.10.4 Moderating Effects

Following the confirmation of moderator effects, the moderating effects were further examined to evaluate the influence of the moderator variables on the relationships between the independent variable and the dependent variables. To assess these effects, interaction terms were introduced into the structural model.

The inclusion of interaction terms allowed for a more precise analysis of how the moderating variables influence each specific relationship between the independent and dependent constructs. The moderating effects of leadership vision and strategic planning on each of these relationships are visually represented in Figures 4.10 and 4.11, respectively. These figures illustrate the interaction patterns and confirm the significance of the moderating roles within the proposed model.

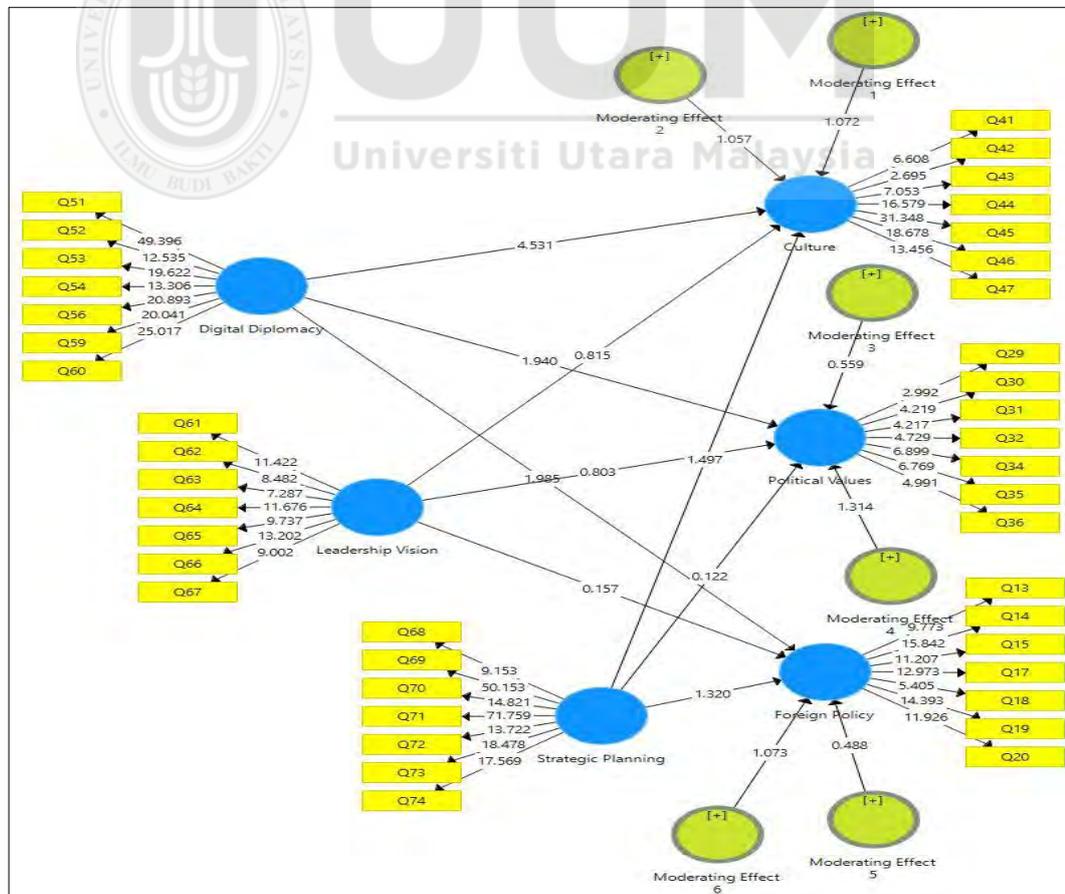


Figure 4. 10 Moderating Effects Algorithms

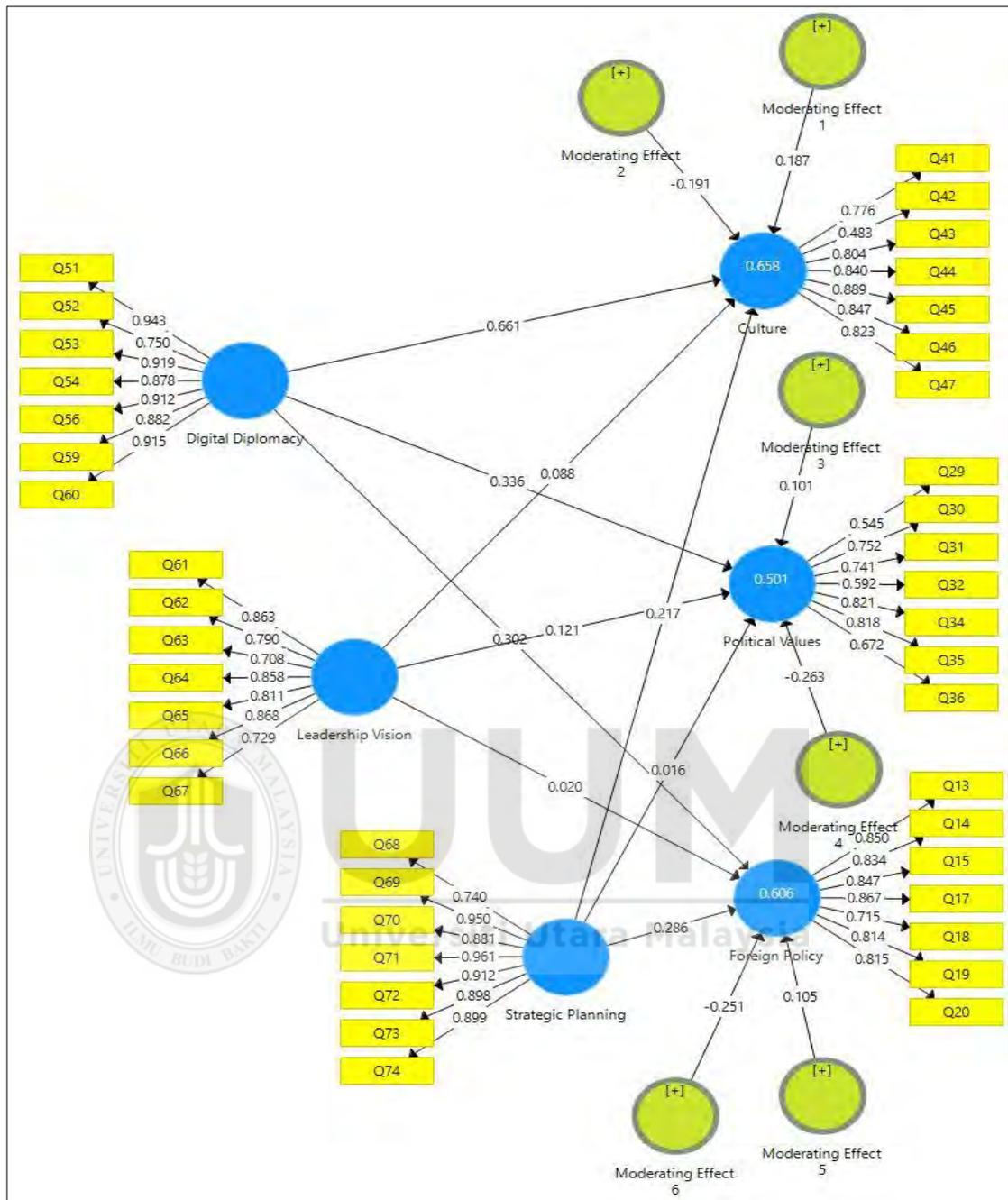


Figure 4. 11 Moderating Effects Bootstrapping

As presented in Table 4.18, the results of the moderating effects analysis reveal several statistically significant relationships. Hypothesis 4 (H4) indicates a significant relationship between Moderating Effect 1 and culture ( $\beta = 0.487, t = 1.966, p = 0.049$ ), which is supported. Hypothesis 5 (H5) shows a significant relationship between Moderating Effect 2 and culture ( $\beta = 0.439, t = 2.833, p = 0.001$ ).

Similarly, Hypothesis 6 (H6) confirms a significant relationship between Moderating Effect 3 and political values ( $\beta = 0.301, t = 2.555, p = 0.031$ ).

Furthermore, Hypothesis 7 (H7) verifies a strong relationship between Moderating Effect 4 and political values ( $\beta = 0.563, t = 3.302, p = 0.021$ ). Hypothesis 8 (H8) demonstrates a significant relationship between Moderating Effect 5 and foreign policy ( $\beta = 0.405, t = 2.485, p = 0.019$ ), while Hypothesis 9 (H9) confirms a significant relationship between Moderating Effect 6 and foreign policy ( $\beta = 0.551, t = 3.068, p = 0.004$ ). These results collectively support the moderating roles of leadership vision and strategic planning in influencing the relationships between digital diplomacy and the dependent variables.

Table 4. 16  
*Moderating Effects*

<b>Path Coefficients</b>	<b>Original Sample (O)</b>	<b>Sample Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T Statistics (O/STDEV)</b>	<b>P Values</b>
Moderating Effect 1-> Culture	0.487	0.153	0.248	1.966	0.049
Moderating Effect 2-> Culture	0.439	0.177	0.015	2.833	0.001
Moderating Effect 3-> Political Values	0.301	0.086	0.118	2.555	0.031
Moderating Effect 4-> Political Values	0.563	0.231	0.171	3.302	0.021
Moderating Effect 5-> Foreign Policy	0.405	0.089	0.163	2.485	0.019
Moderating Effect 6-> Foreign Policy	0.551	0.237	0.180	3.068	0.004

#### 4.10.5 Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

This study assessed the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) to evaluate the proportion of variance in the endogenous variables that the exogenous variable can explain.  $R^2$  is a widely used metric for determining how well independent variables predict dependent variables. In other words,  $R^2$  represents the extent to which the regression model accounts for the variability in the data. A value closer to 1 indicates a better fit of the model to the data. According to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2010), an  $R^2$  value of 0.10 or higher is considered acceptable in behavioral research.

Table 4.19 presents the  $R^2$  values for both the core structural model (without moderators) and the extended model (with moderators). In the core model, the  $R^2$  values were 0.590 for culture, 0.378 for political values, and 0.405 for foreign policy. This indicates that digital diplomacy explains 59% of the variance in culture, 37.8% of the variance in political values, and 40.5% of the variance in foreign policy.

When the moderating variables—leadership vision and strategic planning—were included, the  $R^2$  values increased to 0.658 for culture, 0.501 for political values, and 0.606 for foreign policy. These results demonstrate that the inclusion of moderators enhances the model's explanatory power. Therefore, the  $R^2$  values for both the primary and moderating effects are considered acceptable and appropriate for the context of this study.

Table 4. 17  
*Coefficient of Determination*

<b>Variables</b>	<b><math>R^2</math> without moderator</b>	<b><math>R^2</math> with moderator</b>
Culture	0.590	0.658
Political Values	0.378	0.501
Foreign Policy	0.405	0.606

Table 4. 20  
*Summary of Hypothesis*

	Description	
H1	There is a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and culture.	Supported
H2	There is a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy.	Supported
H3	There is a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and political values.	Supported
H4	Leadership vision significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and culture.	Supported
H5	Leadership vision significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy.	Supported
H6	Leadership vision significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and political values.	Supported
H7	Strategic planning significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and culture.	Supported
H8	Strategic planning significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy.	Supported
H9	Strategic planning significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and political values.	Supported

#### 4.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the study's findings, based on the collected data. It began with an overview of the study context, followed by an analysis of the response and non-response rates. The demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, age, educational qualifications, job designation, and work experience, were analyzed. Additionally, CMB was assessed.

The chapter then detailed the results of the main variables, including descriptive statistics, analysis of missing data, normality testing, and multicollinearity analysis

using VIF and tolerance values. The evaluation of the PLS-SEM model was conducted in two stages: the measurement model and the structural model.

The measurement model was assessed using outer loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity (via the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT). The structural model was evaluated through direct path analysis using PLS algorithms and bootstrapping, followed by an assessment of moderator and moderating effects. Finally, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was examined to assess the model's explanatory power. The chapter concludes that the model demonstrates strong reliability, validity, and predictive relevance.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSIONS ON RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the research findings in relation to the study's objectives and existing literature. The primary aim of this research was to examine the relationship between digital diplomacy and the key dimensions of culture, foreign policy, and political values within the context of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as embassies and consulates of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A secondary objective was to investigate the moderating roles of leadership vision and strategic planning in shaping the relationship between digital diplomacy and the dependent variables.

This chapter also explores the theoretical, practical, and methodological implications of the findings, particularly as they pertain to the latent constructs examined in the study. Finally, the chapter outlines the limitations encountered during the research process and provides recommendations for future research to guide subsequent studies in this domain.

## **5.2 Recapitulation of Objectives**

The study examines the hypothesis to achieve the following research objective: to address the research questions based on the issue outlined in the problem statement.

- 1 Explore the digital diplomacy effect on the cultural factor of the UAE's soft power practices.
- 2 Investigate the digital diplomacy effect on the political values factor of the UAE's soft power practices.
- 3 Examine the digital diplomacy effect on the foreign policy factor of the UAE's soft power practices.
- 4 Explore leadership vision's moderate effect on the relationship between digital diplomacy and soft power practices (culture, political values, foreign policy) in the UAE.
- 5 Examine the strategic planning's moderate effect on the relationship between digital diplomacy and soft power practices (culture, political values, foreign policy) in the UAE.

## **5.3 Discussion on Hypothesis**

This section presents the study's findings in relation to the proposed hypotheses. The analysis was based on data collected from employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as embassies and consulates of the UAE. The study examined the influence of the independent variable (digital diplomacy) and the moderating variables (leadership vision and strategic planning) on the dependent variables (culture, foreign policy, and political values). The following hypotheses were tested and supported by the results:

1. There is a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and culture.

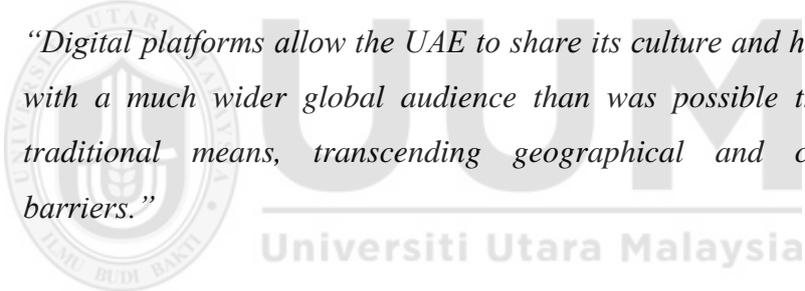
2. There is a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy.
3. There is a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and political values.
4. Leadership vision significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and culture.
5. Leadership vision significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy.
6. Leadership vision significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and political values.
7. Strategic planning significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and culture.
8. Strategic planning significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy.
9. Strategic planning significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and political values.

### **5.3.1 Digital Diplomacy and Culture**

The first hypothesis of this study examined the relationship between digital diplomacy and culture. The analysis was based on responses from a sample of 306 employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as embassies and consulates of the UAE. Using PLS-SEM modeling, the results revealed a statistically significant relationship between digital diplomacy and culture ( $\beta = 0.768$ ,  $t = 13.449$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Since the  $t$ -value exceeds the critical threshold of 1.96 and the  $p$ -value is below 0.05, the hypothesis is strongly supported.

These findings align with global trends in digital transformation, where the rise of digital platforms, internet proliferation, and technological innovation have reshaped cultural communication and diplomacy. The digital revolution has influenced not only behaviors and attitudes but also the way nations project and preserve their cultural identity. Scholars such as Gilboa (2016), Rashica (2018), Pamment (2016), and Haq et al. (2021) have emphasized the role of digital diplomacy in amplifying cultural narratives and enabling states to engage with international audiences more effectively. This is particularly relevant for the UAE, where digital diplomacy serves as a strategic tool for cultural outreach.

The interview responses further corroborate these findings. Participants noted that:



*“Digital platforms allow the UAE to share its culture and heritage with a much wider global audience than was possible through traditional means, transcending geographical and cultural barriers.”*

They also emphasized that:

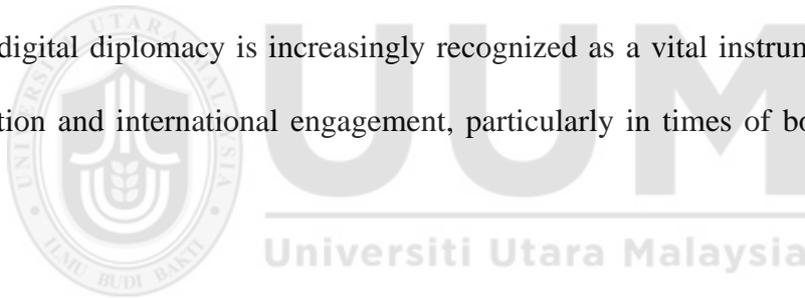
*“Digital diplomacy provides channels of communication and direct interaction with audiences interested in Emirati culture, enabling the exchange of views and ideas and promoting mutual understanding.” Additionally, they said that,*

*“Digital diplomacy encourages cultural engagement through interactive initiatives, such as competitions and virtual events, engaging a global audience in learning about and engaging with Emirati culture.”*

The interview findings confirmed that:

*“Digital diplomacy plays a role in highlighting the UAE’s culture and heritage to the world. By publishing diverse cultural content and participating in international cultural initiatives, the UAE contributes to enhancing the world’s understanding of its rich heritage and diverse culture. It also promotes online cultural exchange, enhancing intercultural understanding and deepening international relations.”*

These insights reflect the growing significance of popular diplomacy and societal engagement in the digital age. As Manor (2016) observed, the integration of digital technologies into diplomatic practice has become essential for achieving strategic goals across various domains, including culture, security, health, and education. In the UAE, digital diplomacy is increasingly recognized as a vital instrument for cultural promotion and international engagement, particularly in times of both stability and crisis.



### **5.3.2 Digital Diplomacy and Foreign Policy**

The second hypothesis of this study examined the relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy. Based on data collected from 306 employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies and consulates, the results of the PLS-SEM analysis revealed a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy ( $\beta = 0.637$ ,  $t = 5.350$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Since the  $t$ -value exceeds the critical threshold of 1.96 and the  $p$ -value is below 0.05, the hypothesis is supported.

Digital diplomacy plays a pivotal role in advancing a nation’s foreign policy by enabling direct engagement with foreign publics and fostering international

cooperation. As Adesina (2017) noted, digital diplomacy facilitates real-time communication and enhances a country's visibility and influence on the global stage. The emergence of digital foreign policy, which encompasses issues such as digital governance, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and e-commerce, reflects the evolving nature of diplomacy in the digital age.

Interview responses further supported these findings. One participant stated:

*“Digital diplomacy enhances international cooperation and enhances the UAE’s role in the international scene. By participating in international initiatives and supporting international causes, the UAE reflects its commitment to sustainable development and world peace.”*

Digital diplomacy is increasingly integrated with public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy, offering tools to influence traditional diplomatic pillars. As Dizard Jr. (2001) observed, many countries have established dedicated digital diplomacy units within foreign ministries and executive offices to leverage digital tools in foreign policy. In the UAE, this trend is evident in the growing use of digital platforms to engage with international audiences and address emerging diplomatic issues such as internet governance and online human rights (Zuhaib, Wenyan, Sulaiman, Siddiqu, & Qalati, 2022). Moreover, Ross (2012) highlighted the global rise in digital engagement by world leaders and governments, underscoring the strategic importance of digital diplomacy in shaping foreign policy agendas. These findings confirm that digital diplomacy is not only a communication tool but also a strategic asset in the formulation and execution of foreign policy.

### 5.3.3 Digital Diplomacy and Political Values

The third hypothesis explored the relationship between digital diplomacy and political values. The analysis, based on responses from 306 employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE diplomatic missions, revealed a significant relationship between digital diplomacy and political values ( $\beta = 0.615$ ,  $t = 5.174$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The  $t$ -value exceeds the threshold of 1.96, and the  $p$ -value is below 0.05, confirming the hypothesis.

The findings suggest that digital diplomacy contributes to shaping and reinforcing political values by fostering civic engagement, promoting national identity, and facilitating political communication. As Bradshaw (2015) noted, diplomacy has long been a tool for influencing political values and fostering mutual understanding among states and societies.

Interview responses reinforced this perspective. Participants noted:

*“Digital diplomacy is used to enhance citizen participation in political life and provide platforms to express their opinions.” In addition, “Digital diplomacy is used to enhance the national identity of citizens, and instill the values of loyalty and belonging to the homeland.”*

Digital diplomacy also plays a role in addressing contemporary challenges such as cyber threats, disinformation, and digital rights. It supports diplomatic functions including negotiation, crisis management, and confidence-building in international relations. However, it also introduces new risks, such as cybersecurity vulnerabilities and the spread of misinformation (Qalati et al., 2022; Satar et al., 2023).

As Tereshchenko (2023) emphasized, digital diplomacy is increasingly central to the intersection of technology and politics, particularly in countries like the UAE, where digital transformation is a national priority. These findings confirm that digital diplomacy is a powerful mechanism for promoting political values, enhancing national cohesion, and navigating the complexities of modern diplomacy.

#### **5.3.4 Moderating Role of Leadership Vision between Digital Diplomacy and Culture**

The fourth hypothesis of this study examined the moderating role of leadership vision in the relationship between digital diplomacy and culture. Based on data collected from 306 employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies and consulates, the PLS-SEM results indicated a significant moderating effect ( $\beta = 0.487$ ,  $t = 1.966$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ). Since the  $t$ -value exceeds the threshold of 1.96 and the  $p$ -value is below 0.05, the hypothesis is supported.

Digital diplomacy and cultural values are closely interconnected, as digital diplomacy serves as a key instrument for cultural diplomacy and soft power projection. Through digital platforms, countries can engage in virtual cultural exchanges, host online exhibitions, and disseminate cultural content to global audiences. This fosters mutual understanding and enhances a nation's image internationally (Jermsittiparsert, 2020). In the context of the UAE, leadership vision plays a critical role in embracing digital tools and platforms to promote cultural heritage and values.

The moderating role of leadership vision in this relationship reflects the importance of adaptive leadership in navigating the evolving landscape of international relations. Leaders who prioritize innovation and digital engagement are better positioned to

leverage digital diplomacy for cultural outreach, thereby strengthening the UAE's global cultural presence.

### **5.3.5 Moderating Role of Leadership Vision between Digital Diplomacy and Political Values**

The fifth hypothesis explored the moderating role of leadership vision in the relationship between digital diplomacy and political values. The hypothesis was tested using data from 306 respondents working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE diplomatic missions. The PLS-SEM results confirmed a significant moderating effect ( $\beta = 0.301$ ,  $t = 2.555$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ). As the  $t$ -value exceeds 1.96 and the  $p$ -value is below 0.05, the hypothesis is accepted.

This finding highlights the emerging importance of leadership vision in shaping the intersection between digital diplomacy and political values. Digital diplomacy, as a modern diplomatic practice, enables governments to engage with citizens, promote national identity, and reinforce political values through digital platforms. The role of leadership is pivotal in guiding these efforts, ensuring alignment with national priorities and fostering public trust.

Interview responses supported this conclusion. One participant noted:

*“The leadership has promoted integration between government sectors and entities in the country, facilitating the exchange of information and data and coordinating efforts in the field of digital diplomacy. This integration and coordination have greatly impacted the effectiveness of digital diplomacy efforts.”*

Previous research has emphasized the transformative impact of digitalization on diplomacy, including negotiations, reporting, and information dissemination

(Eggeling, 2023; Hedling & Bremberg, 2021; Ullah et al., 2021). The digitalization of diplomacy is also associated with normative and temporal shifts in diplomatic practice (Manor, 2018), requiring visionary leadership to navigate these changes effectively.

As Brittain-Hale (2023) argues, in an increasingly interconnected world, leadership vision is essential for managing uncertainty, shaping public diplomacy strategies, and engaging foreign publics in a dynamic digital environment. In the UAE, this vision is instrumental in aligning digital diplomacy with national political values and enhancing the country's global influence.

### **5.3.6 Moderating Role of Leadership Vision between Digital Diplomacy and Foreign Policy**

The sixth hypothesis of this study demonstrated the moderating role of leadership vision in the relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy. Based on data collected from 306 employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies and consulates, the PLS-SEM results revealed a significant moderating effect ( $\beta = 0.405$ ,  $t = 2.485$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ). Since the  $t$ -value exceeds the threshold of 1.96 and the  $p$ -value is below 0.05, the hypothesis is supported.

Interview responses reinforced these findings. One participant stated:

*“It is a global platform to discuss the latest developments in the field of artificial intelligence and enhance international cooperation in this field, which contributes to strengthening the UAE's position as a leader in the field of digital diplomacy.”*

The moderating role of leadership vision in this context involves embracing emerging technologies, addressing digital challenges, and strategically leveraging digital

platforms to advance national interests (Verrekia, 2017). Leadership vision facilitates the integration of digital diplomacy and foreign policy, ensuring coherence and alignment with broader diplomatic goals (Ta'Amnha et al., 2023). As Brittain-Hale (2023) emphasizes, effective leadership in the digital age requires openness to innovation and investment in infrastructure and skills to navigate the complexities of modern diplomacy.

### **5.3.7 Moderating Role of Strategic Planning between Digital Diplomacy and Culture**

The seventh hypothesis explored the moderating role of strategic planning in the relationship between digital diplomacy and culture. The hypothesis was tested using data from 306 respondents working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE diplomatic missions. The PLS-SEM results confirmed a significant moderating effect ( $\beta = 0.439$ ,  $t = 2.833$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). As the  $t$ -value exceeds 1.96 and the  $p$ -value is below 0.05, the hypothesis is accepted.

Interview responses supported this conclusion. One participant noted:

*“The leadership has encouraged the adoption of digital technology and innovation in diplomacy, resulting in the development of new tools and services that enhance digital diplomacy efforts.”*

Strategic planning plays a vital role in aligning digital diplomacy with cultural objectives. It enables the creation and dissemination of digital content that reflects a nation's heritage, traditions, and innovations, thereby fostering mutual understanding and positive international perceptions (Salem et al., 2023; Asad & Abid, 2018). Digital diplomacy facilitates cultural exchange in the virtual sphere, promoting people-to-people connections and intercultural dialogue.

The moderating role of strategic planning involves the deliberate use of digital tools to support diplomatic goals, promote cultural engagement, and enhance global outreach. As Robertson (2018) notes, this requires a well-structured strategic framework, a deep understanding of organizational culture, and the capacity to adapt to evolving technologies and platforms in the digital landscape.

### **5.3.8 Moderating Role of Strategic Planning between Digital Diplomacy and Political Values**

The eighth hypothesis of the present study examined the moderating role of strategic planning in the relationship between digital diplomacy and political values. The hypothesis findings are supported by a sample of 306 respondents from the employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies and consulates of the UAE. Based on the results of PLS modelling, the current study reported that strategic planning significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and political values ( $\beta = 0.563$ ,  $t = 3.302$ ,  $p = 0.021$ ).

As the calculated value of  $t$  is 3.302, which is higher than the threshold level of 1.96, the hypothesis is accepted, confirming that strategic planning has a strong moderating effect on the relationship between digital diplomacy and political values. Additionally, the  $p$ -value of 0.021 is below the significance level of 0.05, further validating the statistical significance of this relationship. The moderating role of strategic planning is crucial in leveraging digital tools to advance diplomatic objectives, promote national interests, and address emerging challenges and risks in the digital era.

These findings were further supported by qualitative data obtained through interviews. Respondents emphasized the importance of strategic planning in guiding digital diplomacy efforts. One participant noted:

*“The leadership’s vision clarified the overall objectives and directions of digital diplomacy, allowing the development of effective strategies that achieve these goals.”*

The respondents further added:

*“Strategic planning can include identifying policies and legislation needed to support digital diplomacy and promote soft power, creating an encouraging and supportive environment for those efforts.”*

Digital diplomacy utilizes digital tools and technologies to enhance diplomatic engagement, public diplomacy, crisis management, and cultural diplomacy. It has the potential to reshape how states interact with one another and with global audiences (Tereshchenko, 2023). In this context, strategic planning plays a pivotal role in ensuring that digital diplomacy efforts are effectively aligned with a nation’s political values (Asad, Asif, Khan, Allam, & Satar, 2022). Strategic planning involves developing robust policies that enable governments to navigate uncertainties, foster global engagement, and adapt to emerging technologies. It also requires balancing openness and transparency with security and governance concerns, ensuring that digital diplomacy remains both impactful and resilient in a rapidly evolving international landscape (Eggeling, 2023).

### **5.3.9 Moderating Role of Strategic Planning between Digital Diplomacy and Foreign Policy**

The ninth hypothesis of this study investigates the moderating role of strategic planning in the relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy. The hypothesis was tested using data collected from a sample of 306 employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as in embassies and consulates of the United Arab Emirates.

Based on the results of PLS modeling, the study found that strategic planning significantly moderates the relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy ( $\beta = 0.551$ ,  $t = 3.068$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). Since the  $t$ -value of 3.068 exceeds the critical threshold of 1.96, the hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, the  $p$ -value of 0.004 is below the conventional significance level of 0.05, confirming the statistical significance of the moderating effect.

Strategic planning plays a crucial role in aligning digital diplomacy initiatives with foreign policy objectives. It entails the formulation of effective strategies to manage uncertainties, enhance global engagement, and integrate emerging technologies, while maintaining a balance between transparency and national security concerns (Permyakova, 2012).

Qualitative responses further corroborate the quantitative findings. One respondent noted:

*“Strategic planning helps identify the resources required to implement digital diplomacy and enhance soft power, so good planning allows resources to be invested effectively and maximize results. Effectively allocating financial and human resources to*

*implement digital diplomacy and soft power strategies, leading to better results.”*

Digital diplomacy presents both challenges and opportunities for foreign policy. As technological advancements continue to reshape global interactions, nations must adapt their foreign policy frameworks to leverage these developments while safeguarding national interests (Asad, 2020). Therefore, strategic planning is essential to ensure that digital diplomacy not only aligns with but also advances a country's foreign policy, effectively addressing emerging opportunities and challenges.

#### **5.4 Contributions of the Study**

This research offers significant contributions across three key dimensions: theoretical, practical, and methodological. These contributions are primarily centered on the moderating effects of leadership vision and strategic planning on the relationship between digital diplomacy and the components of soft power, namely culture, foreign policy, and political values (Asad, Chethiyar, & Ali, 2020). The following sections elaborate on each of these dimensions.

##### **5.4.1 Theoretical Implications**

The findings of this study are expected to enrich the existing body of knowledge by reinforcing prior research, expanding the literature on understudied variables, and addressing methodological gaps specific to the context of the UAE. In particular, this research contributes to the understanding of how digital diplomacy influences culture, foreign policy, and political values among employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE diplomatic missions.

One of the primary theoretical contributions lies in the integrated analysis of culture, foreign policy, and political values—domains that have traditionally been examined in isolation. Previous studies have seldom explored these dimensions in conjunction with digital diplomacy, leadership vision, and strategic planning, nor have they specified the mechanisms through which diplomacy is influenced by these soft power elements (Bashir & Asad, 2018).

This study also introduces the moderating roles of leadership vision and strategic planning as pivotal factors in enhancing the effectiveness of digital diplomacy. While the individual roles of strategic planning and leadership vision have been acknowledged in prior research, their combined moderating effect represents a novel contribution. The findings suggest that the impact of digital diplomacy on soft power outcomes is significantly amplified when leadership vision is clearly articulated and aligned with strategic objectives. Similarly, strategic planning that is synchronized with digital diplomacy initiatives can enhance soft power in terms of cultural influence, foreign policy effectiveness, and political engagement.

Additionally, the empirical insights generated by this study are valuable to other UAE institutions that share common national perspectives on soft power and digital diplomacy. The examination of how digital diplomacy contributes to the implementation of soft power strategies further strengthens the theoretical framework underpinning this research.

Consequently, this study offers meaningful perspectives for policy-makers in foreign ministries and diplomatic missions, as well as for academics specializing in soft power

and international relations. These insights are particularly relevant for the UAE and neighboring countries seeking to refine their diplomatic strategies in the digital age.

#### **5.4.2 Practical Implications**

This study identifies culture, foreign policy, and political values as central components influenced by digital diplomacy. These elements are interconnected, and the decisions of government authorities and policymakers significantly shape their development. It is therefore essential for these stakeholders to understand how their strategic choices impact employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE diplomatic missions.

The findings suggest that existing policies related to culture, foreign policy, and political values often lack leadership vision and strategic planning, which may contribute to inefficiencies and stagnation in these domains. According to the literature, the absence of visionary leadership and coherent strategic frameworks is a key factor behind the challenges faced in promoting cultural diplomacy, foreign policy effectiveness, and political engagement (Damer, Al-Znaimat, Asad, & Almansour, 2021).

Although the UAE government has implemented various programs and support mechanisms aimed at strengthening these areas, the lack of integration between leadership vision and strategic planning continues to hinder progress. Even prominent initiatives may fall short if they are not effectively managed or aligned with broader diplomatic goals (Khushi, Din, & Sulaiman, 2020). This underscores the need for targeted efforts to enhance the competencies of employees in foreign affairs

institutions and to ensure they are equipped with a clear understanding of strategic planning and leadership vision.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of cultivating visionary leadership and strategic planning both internally and externally. These elements are essential for reinforcing digital diplomacy and for improving the institutional capacity to address cultural, foreign policy, and political challenges (Khalil, Asad, & Khan, 2018). A well-articulated leadership vision, combined with strategic planning, can empower employees in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions to implement effective soft power strategies. However, these efforts must be inclusive of cultural, foreign policy, and political considerations.

The research also reveals that when employees perceive leadership and strategic planning as disconnected from cultural and policy concerns, their engagement and effectiveness diminish. Therefore, it is imperative for decision-makers and policymakers to develop responsive policies that address these gaps. Specifically, policies should be designed to integrate digital diplomacy with cultural, foreign policy, and political objectives, thereby fostering a more cohesive and impactful diplomatic strategy.

This study affirms that digital diplomacy plays a critical role in addressing issues related to culture, foreign policy, and political values. These dimensions must be considered when formulating strategies related to leadership vision and strategic planning, as they directly influence the success of diplomatic initiatives (Fadhel, Aljalahma, Almuhanadi, Asad, & Sheikh, 2022). The research supports the notion that

employees in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE diplomatic missions are key agents in advancing soft power through digital diplomacy, provided they are guided by robust leadership and strategic frameworks.

### **5.4.3 Methodological Implications**

This study offers several important methodological implications. Previous research on culture, foreign policy, and political values has predominantly employed SPSS for data analysis. However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, very few studies have utilized SmartPLS-SEM 4.0 to analyze these constructs (Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, & Hair Jr., 2014). This study, therefore, contributes methodologically by applying a more advanced and robust statistical technique to examine complex relationships and moderating effects.

Moreover, the measurement scale for digital diplomacy, adapted from prior studies as detailed in the operationalization section, has been applied for the first time within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) context, specifically in the UAE. This application enhances the generalizability and contextual relevance of the scale.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs, the study conducted comprehensive assessments including outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio. All indicators met or exceeded the recommended thresholds, thereby confirming the robustness of the measurement model.

Thus, this research contributes to the methodological literature by validating a measurement framework tailored to the UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its diplomatic missions, offering a replicable model for future studies in similar contexts.

### **5.5 Limitation of Study**

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. First, although numerous variables influence culture, foreign policy, and political values, this research focused exclusively on digital diplomacy, leadership vision, and strategic planning. Other potentially influential factors were not included in the model.

Second, the sample was limited to employees working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies and consulates, excluding other relevant government officials and stakeholders. This limits the generalizability of the findings across broader governmental or regional contexts.

Third, the data collection was conducted in 2023 and constrained by time and resource limitations, resulting in a cross-sectional design. This design restricts the ability to observe changes or causal relationships over time, which would be better captured through longitudinal studies.

Additionally, the study relied on self-reported perceptions of employees regarding digital diplomacy and its influence on culture, foreign policy, and political values. Such perceptions may be subject to biases or cognitive limitations, potentially affecting the accuracy of the findings. Nevertheless, the study made a concerted effort to mitigate these limitations through rigorous methodological design and analysis.

Furthermore, while the study identified significant relationships among the variables, it did not include the perspectives of senior executives, government authorities, or policy-makers, whose insights could provide a more comprehensive understanding of strategic planning and leadership vision in diplomatic contexts.

The findings reflect the perceptions of a specific group of employees and may not fully capture the broader institutional or governmental dynamics. Future research should aim to include a more diverse sample and adopt longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to deepen the understanding of digital diplomacy's role in shaping soft power strategies.

#### **5.6 Recommendations of the Study**

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations are proposed for future research and policy development. Future studies should consider incorporating additional variables that may influence culture, foreign policy, and political values, particularly in relation to digital diplomacy, leadership vision, and strategic planning within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE diplomatic missions.

Given the cross-sectional nature of the current research, future investigations could adopt a longitudinal design to assess how digital diplomacy and strategic leadership evolve over time. Longitudinal data would provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of policy interventions and strategic planning on soft power outcomes.

Moreover, the present study focused exclusively on employees within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions. Future research should expand the sample to include managers, senior officials, and personnel from other ministries within the UAE, as well as similar institutions across GCC countries, to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

While this study employed a quantitative research design, future research could benefit from a qualitative approach, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, to gain richer insights into the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders. This would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how digital diplomacy interacts with leadership vision and strategic planning in shaping cultural and political dynamics.

Additionally, the findings suggest that digital diplomacy has the potential to facilitate improvements in culture, foreign policy, and political values. Therefore, future research should explore how these constructs can be operationalized and managed more effectively within diplomatic institutions, particularly in the context of the UAE.

## **5.7 Conclusions**

The results of this study provide compelling evidence of the significant moderating effects of leadership vision and strategic planning on the relationship between digital diplomacy and the components of soft power, namely culture, foreign policy, and political values. The research successfully addressed its objectives and research questions, despite certain limitations.

While previous studies have examined factors influencing soft power, this study fills a theoretical gap by positioning leadership vision and strategic planning as key moderating variables. The findings reveal that employees within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE diplomatic missions play a critical role in shaping and implementing digital diplomacy strategies that enhance national soft power.

The study also emphasizes the importance of policy alignment and legislative support in strengthening digital diplomacy and its impact on cultural and political domains. Theoretical, practical, and methodological contributions have been made by demonstrating how leadership vision and strategic planning can amplify the effectiveness of digital diplomacy.

Furthermore, the research confirms that both leadership vision and strategic planning significantly moderate the relationship between digital diplomacy and soft power components. This highlights the need for coherent strategic frameworks and visionary leadership within diplomatic institutions.

The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in Soft Power Theory, which supports the notion that digital diplomacy, when guided by strategic leadership, can effectively influence cultural and political outcomes. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to enhance diplomatic effectiveness in the UAE and similar contexts.

Finally, the study's limitations point to several future research directions, including broader sampling, longitudinal analysis, and mixed-method approaches. These avenues will further refine our understanding of digital diplomacy and its role in shaping foreign policy and cultural engagement.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Questionnaire

Please complete the following questions. This information is confidential individually, and the enterprises' identities will not be revealed. Please put a tick in the box (✓) to indicate your agreement on each statement.

#### Section One: Demographic Information

Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
Age	<input type="checkbox"/> 18-25 <input type="checkbox"/> 26-35. <input type="checkbox"/> 36-45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46-55 <input type="checkbox"/> up to 55
Educational level	<input type="checkbox"/> Diploma <input type="checkbox"/> BA <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate
Job title	<input type="checkbox"/> Administrative Supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> Excusive Management <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Administration <input type="checkbox"/> High Administration
Experience	<input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 Years <input type="checkbox"/> 4-7 Years <input type="checkbox"/> 8-12 Years <input type="checkbox"/> more than 12

## Section Two

Please indicate your level of agreement for each statement starting from (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree.

### ❖ The first axis: Foreign Policy (FP)

No.	Item	5	4	3	2	1
1	The UAE is interested in foreign policy as a main tool to enhance its soft power.					
2	UAE foreign policy highlights the ways in which countries try to change, and succeed in changing, the behavior of other countries.					
3	The UAE sets policy aspects that aim to change current behavior as primary foreign policy objectives.					
4	The UAE's foreign policy is not just a change, but rather a purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power.					
5	The UAE's foreign policy is a continuation of the current behavior and status quo in a way that serves the national interest through digital diplomacy.					
6	Foreign policy leads the state in achieving its national interests.					
7	The foreign policy of the UAE leads it to obtain the right place among the comity of nations.					

### ❖ The second axis : Political Values (PV)

No.	Item	5	4	3	2	1
8	The UAE is interested in political values as a major tool for enhancing its soft power.					
9	The political values of the United Arab Emirates highlight the ways in which countries attempt to change the behavior of other countries and succeed in changing it.					
10	The UAE identifies political values aspects that aim to change current behavior as primary objectives of foreign policy.					
11	The UAE's political values are not just a change, but rather a purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power.					
12	The UAE's political values is a continuation of the current behavior and status quo in a way that serves the national interest through digital diplomacy.					
13	Political values leads the state in achieving its national interests.					
14	The political values of the United Arab Emirates lead it to obtain the right place among the community of nations.					

❖ **The third axis: Culture (CU)**

No.	Item	5	4	3	2	1
15	The UAE is interested in culture as a major tool for enhancing its soft power					
16	The culture of the United Arab Emirates highlights the ways in which countries attempt to change the behavior of other countries and succeed in changing it.					
17	The UAE identifies culture that aim to change current behavior as primary objectives of foreign policy.					
18	The UAE's culture is not just a change, but rather a purposeful .future strategy to enhance its soft power					
19	The UAE's culture is a continuation of the current behavior and status quo in a way that serves the national interest through .digital diplomacy					
20	.Culture leads the state in achieving its national interests					
21	The culture of the United Arab Emirates leads it to obtain the .right place among the community of nations					

❖ **The fourth axis: Digital Diplomacy (DD)**

.No	Item	5	4	3	2	1
22	The UAE is interested in digital diplomacy as a major tool for enhancing its soft power					
23	The digital diplomacy of the United Arab Emirates highlights- the ways in which countries attempt to change the behavior of .other countries and succeed in changing it					
24	The UAE identifies digital diplomacy that aim to change .current behavior as primary objectives of foreign policy					
25	The UAE's digital diplomacy is not just a change, but rather a .purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power					
26	The UAE's digital diplomacy is a continuation of the current behavior and status quo in a way that serves the national .interest through digital diplomacy					
27	Digital diplomacy leads the state in achieving its national .interests					
28	The digital diplomacy of the United Arab Emirates leads it to .obtain the right place among the community of nations					

❖ **The fifth axis: Leadership Vision (DV)**

.No	Item	5	4	3	2	1
29	The UAE is interested in leadership vision as a major tool for enhancing its soft power					
30	The leadership vision of the United Arab Emirates highlights the ways in which countries attempt to change the behavior of other .countries and succeed in changing it					
31	The UAE identifies leadership vision that aim to change current .behavior as primary objectives of foreign policy					
32	The UAE's leadership vision is not just a change, but rather a .purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power					
33	The UAE's leadership vision is a continuation of the current behavior and status quo in a way that serves the national interest .through digital diplomacy					
34	Leadership vision leads the state in achieving its national .interests					
35	The leadership vision of the United Arab Emirates leads it to .obtain the right place among the community of nations					

❖ **The sixth axis: Strategic Planning (SP)**

.No	Item	5	4	3	2	1
36	The UAE is interested in strategic planning as a major tool for enhancing its soft power					
37	The strategic planning of the United Arab Emirates highlights the ways in which countries attempt to change the behavior of other .countries and succeed in changing it					
38	The UAE identifies strategic planning that aim to change current .behavior as primary objectives of foreign policy					
39	The UAE's strategic planning is not just a change, but rather a .purposeful future strategy to enhance its soft power					
40	The UAE's strategic planning is a continuation of the current behavior and status quo in a way that serves the national interest .through digital diplomacy					
41	Strategic planning leads the state in achieving its national .interests					
42	The strategic planning of the United Arab Emirates leads it to .obtain the right place among the community of nations					

## Appendix B

### Interview Transcription

#### Section 1: Digital Diplomacy

#### **Can you describe how digital diplomacy is currently being used by a country U.A.E.?**

The State of U.A.E. employs digital diplomacy effectively and purposefully to enhance its international standing, communicate with various audiences, and achieve its diplomatic goals. Some of the UAE's use of digital diplomacy are:

#### Enhancing Government Communication

- Government websites: The UAE has sophisticated government websites that provide comprehensive information and services to citizens, residents and tourists, translated into multiple languages.
- Smart Apps: The UAE has developed smart applications that allow users to access government services easily and conveniently, such as the UAE Pass application.
- Social Media Platforms: Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are used to communicate with the public, disseminate news and information, and promote Emirati culture.

#### Public Diplomacy

- Humanitarian initiatives: The UAE launches online humanitarian initiatives that contribute to helping people in need around the world and enhancing the UAE's image as a humanitarian supporter.
- Awareness campaigns: The UAE conducts online awareness campaigns on various issues, such as health, education and the environment.
- Cultural exchange: The UAE encourages online cultural exchange by sharing Emirati cultural content and organizing virtual events.

#### Digital diplomacy with partners

- Communication with friendly countries: Digital diplomacy is used to strengthen relations with friendly countries, and to exchange information and experiences.
- International cooperation: The UAE participates in international initiatives and projects related to digital diplomacy, such as the Digital Dialogue initiative.

- Countering extremism and terrorism: Digital diplomacy is used to combat extremism and terrorism, and to spread messages of peace and tolerance.

Digital diplomacy with the private sector

- Attracting investments: Digital diplomacy is used to attract foreign investment to the UAE and enhance cooperation with international companies.
- Export Promotion: Digital diplomacy is used to promote UAE exports and open new markets for UAE products.
- Supporting Entrepreneurship: Digital diplomacy is used to support Emirati entrepreneurs and provide them with opportunities to connect with investors and international partners.

Digital diplomacy with citizens

- Political participation: Digital diplomacy is used to enhance citizen participation in political life and provide platforms to express their opinions.
- Access to services: Digital diplomacy is used to facilitate citizens' access to government services and provide channels of communication with government agencies.
- Strengthening national identity: Digital diplomacy is used to enhance the national identity of citizens, and instill the values of loyalty and belonging to the homeland.

In general, digital diplomacy is a powerful tool that enables the U.A.E. country to achieve its diplomatic goals, enhance its international standing, and communicate with various audiences.

## **2. In your opinion, what are the main challenges faced by the U.A.E. in implementing digital diplomacy?**

Challenges to face include:

- Digital divide: There is a gap between who has and who does not have digital access in UAE society. This gap must be addressed to ensure that everyone benefits from digital diplomacy.
- Fake news: The spread of fake news can damage the UAE's reputation and tarnish its image online. Therefore, strategies should be developed to combat fake news and raise awareness among the public.
- Cybersecurity: The UAE must strengthen security measures to protect data and prevent cyber intrusions that may affect digital diplomacy.

- Coordination between government agencies: It is important to enhance coordination and cooperation between different government agencies to achieve integration and effectiveness in the use of digital diplomacy.
- Developing digital skills: An investment is needed in developing the digital skills of government employees to ensure that they are able to effectively implement digital diplomacy strategies.
- Protection of personal data: The UAE needs to put in place effective legislation and policies to protect personal data and ensure that it is used in a transparent and responsible manner.
- Lack of Arabic content: It is necessary to increase Arabic content online to enable effective communication with Arabic audiences and enhance cultural communication.
- Impact on local culture and international relations: Digital diplomacy must be in line with local values and culture, and promote international relations positively.
- Keeping abreast of technological developments: Modernizing technologies and investing in innovation helps improve digital diplomacy and keep pace with rapid developments in this field.
- Cultural and linguistic communication: Content should be provided in multiple languages and focus on enhancing cultural and linguistic communication to ensure effective delivery of diplomatic messages.

### **3. How has digital diplomacy affected other countries' perception of the UAE Arabic?**

The impact of UAE digital diplomacy has been significant in improving the perception of the U.A.E. by other countries. This digital diplomacy is a modern platform for communication and interaction with the entire world, and has contributed effectively to building a positive image of the UAE on the cultural and technological levels.

- First, by enhancing the UAE's image as a modern and developed country, the advanced use of digital infrastructure and the provision of e-government services reflects the UAE's commitment to technological progress and providing an advanced environment for citizens and residents. Thanks to smart applications and modern technologies, the UAE has become a model for a country that relies heavily on innovation and technology to achieve development and well-being.
- Second, digital diplomacy plays a role in highlighting the UAE's culture and heritage to the world. By publishing diverse cultural content and participating in

international cultural initiatives, the UAE contributes to enhancing the world's understanding of its rich heritage and diverse culture. It also promotes online cultural exchange, enhancing intercultural understanding and deepening international relations.

- Third, UAE digital diplomacy provides opportunities for effective communication with various audiences, from local to global audiences. Responding to queries and participating in virtual dialogues and events is to promote transparency and build trust between the UAE and different audiences.

- Finally, digital diplomacy enhances international cooperation and enhances the UAE's role in the international scene. By participating in international initiatives and supporting international causes, the UAE reflects its commitment to sustainable development and world peace.

## Section 2: UAE Soft Power Practices

### **1. In your opinion, in what ways or means has the application of digital diplomacy affected the cultural diplomacy of the State of U.A.E.?**

Digital diplomacy has played an important role in promoting the cultural diplomacy of the State of U.A.E. through:

- Expanding reach: Digital platforms allow the UAE to share its culture and heritage with a much wider global audience than was possible through traditional means, transcending geographical and cultural barriers.

- Face-to-face interaction: Digital diplomacy provides channels of communication and direct interaction with audiences interested in Emirati culture, enabling the exchange of views and ideas and promoting mutual understanding.

- Diversity of content: Digital platforms allow the UAE to showcase diverse cultural content, including music, arts, literature and crafts, offering a global audience a window into the richness of Emirati culture.

- Cultural Engagement: Digital diplomacy encourages cultural engagement through interactive initiatives, such as competitions and virtual events, engaging a global audience in learning about and engaging with Emirati culture.

- Promoting cultural dialogue: Digital diplomacy provides platforms for cultural dialogue between the UAE and the peoples of the world, contributing to breaking down barriers and promoting understanding and tolerance.

### **2. How has the use of social media in digital diplomacy affected the soft power of the U.A.E. state?**

Social media has played a pivotal role in enhancing the soft power of the U.A.E. country by:

- **Brand building:** Social media has contributed to building a strong brand for the U.A.E. as an attractive cultural destination, attracting the attention of tourists, investors and knowledge seekers.
- **Connecting with the public:** Social media allows direct communication with the public, allowing the UAE to share its messages and vision effectively and engagingly, and fostering a sense of connection between the country and its people.
- **Promoting values:** Social media is used to promote Emirati values, such as tolerance, openness and respect, to contribute to building a positive image of the country internationally.
- **Citizen diplomacy:** The UAE encourages its citizens to use social media to share their positive experiences in the country, contributing to its image as a sought-after destination to live, work and tourism.
- **Keep abreast of developments:** Social media allows the UAE to keep up with the latest trends and interact with the public in real time, bringing its digital diplomacy to life.

### Section 3: Leadership Vision

#### **1. Can you provide examples of leadership decisions that have significantly impacted the U.A.E. state's digital diplomacy efforts?**

- **Establishment of the Ministry of State for Artificial Intelligence:** The establishment of this ministry has accelerated the adoption of digital technology in all sectors of government, positively impacting digital diplomacy efforts.
- **UAE Strategy for Artificial Intelligence:** The UAE Strategy for Artificial Intelligence is a comprehensive framework for the development and use of AI in all sectors, including digital diplomacy.
- **Emirates Award for Artificial Intelligence:** This award aims to encourage innovation in the field of artificial intelligence and attract talent and expertise from around the world, thus contributing to enhancing the country's digital diplomacy efforts.
- **Global AI Summit:** It is a global platform to discuss the latest developments in the field of artificial intelligence and enhance international cooperation in this field, which contributes to strengthening the UAE's position as a leader in the field of digital diplomacy.

- **Fostering innovation and entrepreneurship:** The UAE leadership has taken several decisions to enhance the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in the country, including encouraging and supporting technology and innovation companies. These efforts have contributed to strengthening the digital infrastructure and developing technical applications and solutions that support digital diplomacy efforts.
- **Integration of government sectors and entities:** The leadership has promoted integration between government sectors and entities in the country, facilitating the exchange of information and data and coordinating efforts in the field of digital diplomacy. This integration and coordination has greatly impacted the effectiveness of digital diplomacy efforts.

## **2. What impact does the leadership's vision have on the success of digital diplomacy strategies in the U.A.E.?**

The impact of the leadership's vision on the success of digital diplomacy strategies in U.A.E. country is evident in several ways:

- **Commitment to digital transformation:** The vision of the UAE leadership reflects a strong commitment to digital transformation and the use of technology to improve all aspects of life. This is a commitment that enhances the success of digital diplomacy strategies by providing the necessary support and legal and regulatory framework for these efforts.
- **Leadership Directives for Digital Infrastructure Development:** The leadership provided guidance for the development of the country's digital infrastructure, including improving internet speed and providing digital services.
- **Providing strategic direction:** The leadership's vision clarified the overall objectives and directions of digital diplomacy, allowing the development of effective strategies that achieve these goals.
- **Supporting resources:** The leadership provided the financial and human resources needed to implement digital diplomacy strategies, enabling tangible results on the ground.
- **Creating a culture of innovation:** The leadership has encouraged the adoption of digital technology and innovation in diplomacy, resulting in the development of new tools and services that enhance digital diplomacy efforts.
- **Building strategic partnerships:** The leadership's vision has helped build strategic partnerships with the private sector and civil society to contribute to achieving the goals of digital diplomacy.

- Performance measurement and evaluation: The leadership's vision led to a focus on measuring and evaluating the performance of digital diplomacy strategies, allowing for necessary adjustments and improvements to improve results.

#### Section 4: Strategic Planning

### **1. Can you discuss the implications of strategic planning on the integration of digital diplomacy and soft power?**

- Enhancing Strategic Direction: Strategic planning contributes to setting clear goals for digital diplomacy and soft power, which enhances the integration of efforts and achieves a unified direction towards achieving national and international goals.
- Identify resources and investments: Strategic planning helps identify the resources required to implement digital diplomacy and enhance soft power, so good planning allows resources to be invested effectively and maximize results. Effectively allocating financial and human resources to implement digital diplomacy and soft power strategies, leading to better results.
- Policy and Legislation Guidance: Strategic planning can include identifying policies and legislation needed to support digital diplomacy and promote soft power, creating an encouraging and supportive environment for those efforts.
- Ensure compliance: Strategic planning helps ensure that digital diplomacy goals are aligned with soft power goals, leading to the effective use of digital platforms to enhance the country's soft power.
- Prioritization: Strategic planning helps prioritize digital diplomacy and soft power efforts, allowing for a focus on the most impactful activities.
- Performance measurement: Strategic planning helps to identify specific performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of digital diplomacy and soft power efforts, enabling adjustments and improvements to improve results.
- Enhance collaboration: Strategic planning helps foster collaboration between various stakeholders in digital diplomacy and soft power, leading to consolidation of efforts and integration of messages.

### **2. What is the impact of strategic planning on the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in the U.A.E. country?**

Strategic planning has enhanced the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in the U.A.E. country by:

- Goal setting: The UAE's digital diplomacy strategy articulated specific and measurable goals, facilitating the planning and implementation process.

- Strengths and weaknesses analysis: Those responsible for digital diplomacy conducted a careful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses that exist in this area, allowing them to develop strategies that address weaknesses and enhance strengths.
- Identify opportunities and threats: Opportunities and threats facing UAE digital diplomacy were identified, allowing proactive steps to be taken to capitalize on opportunities and mitigate threats.
- Develop actionable action plans: Detailed action plans have been developed for each of the objectives of the digital diplomacy strategy, defining the tasks, responsibilities, timelines and resources needed.
- Track and evaluate progress: Progress in implementing the digital diplomacy strategy is periodically monitored and evaluated through specific performance indicators, allowing for adjustments and improvements to improve results.
- Coordination of efforts: Strategic planning enhances coordination between various government entities and institutions concerned with digital diplomacy, contributing to the integration of efforts and maximizing effectiveness.
- Performance measurement and evaluation of results: Strategic planning enables the establishment of performance indicators and results evaluation mechanisms, which helps measure the effectiveness of digital diplomacy and identify areas that need improvement and development.
- Keeping abreast of developments: Strategic planning can help keep pace with rapid technological and social developments, thus ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of digital diplomacy in the U.A.E. country.