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**THE MODERATING ROLE OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOFT POWER PRACTICES AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN UAE'S MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SELECTED EMBASSIES**



SAIF ALI MOHAMED QUDOOR AL SHEHHI

UUM
Universiti Utara Malaysia

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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2025**

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**A thesis submitted to the Ghazalie Shafie Graduate School of Government in
fulfilment of the requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
Universiti Utara Malaysia**



Kolej Undang-Undang, Kerajaan dan Pengajian Antarabangsa
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ABSTRACT

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as a notable global player through the strategic use of soft power in its international relations. This study investigates the moderating role of public perception in the relationship between soft power practices and international relations within the context of the UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This research aims to assess how key soft power components, namely foreign policy, culture, and political values, influence the UAE's international standing, and the extent to which public perception shapes these interactions. Using a quantitative research methodology, data were collected through structured surveys from 357 Ministry of Foreign Affairs employees, selected using quota sampling from the headquarters in Abu Dhabi and UAE embassies worldwide. Statistical analyses, including Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), were employed to test and validate the hypotheses. The findings reveal that the soft power dimensions, particularly foreign policy and culture, significantly enhance international relations outcomes. Moreover, public perception was found to play a pivotal moderating role by amplifying the effectiveness of soft power strategies. These results highlight the importance of aligning soft power practices with public sentiment to optimize their impact. The study offers valuable insights for policymakers in the UAE and other nations seeking to strengthen their soft power frameworks to foster more effective global engagement. Future research could benefit from exploring longitudinal shifts in public perception and their implications for international diplomacy.

Keywords: International Relations, Soft Power, Foreign Policy, Culture, Political Values



ABSTRAK

Emiriah Arab Bersatu (UAE) telah muncul sebagai pemain global yang terkenal melalui penggunaan strategik kuasa lembut (*soft power*) dalam hubungan antarabangsa. Kajian ini meneliti peranan pemoderasi persepsi awam dalam hubungan antara amalan kuasa lembut dan hubungan antarabangsa dalam konteks Kementerian Hal Ehwal Luar Negeri UAE. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk menilai bagaimana komponen utama kuasa lembut, iaitu dasar luar, budaya, dan nilai politik, mempengaruhi kedudukan antarabangsa UAE serta sejauh mana persepsi awam membentuk interaksi tersebut. Dengan menggunakan metodologi penyelidikan kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui soal selidik berstruktur melibatkan 357 kakitangan Kementerian Hal Ehwal Luar Negeri, yang dipilih melalui kaedah pensampelan kuota di ibu pejabat Abu Dhabi dan kedutaan UAE di seluruh dunia. Analisis statistik, termasuk Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur-Kuasa Dua Terkecil Separa (PLS-SEM), telah digunakan untuk menguji dan mengesahkan hipotesis kajian. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa dimensi kuasa lembut, khususnya dasar luar dan budaya, meningkatkan hasil hubungan antarabangsa secara signifikan. Selain itu, persepsi awam didapati memainkan peranan pemoderasi yang penting dengan mengukuhkan keberkesanan strategi kuasa lembut. Dapatan kajian ini menyerlahkan kepentingan menyelaraskan amalan kuasa lembut dengan sentimen awam bagi mengoptimalkan impaknya. Kajian ini menawarkan pandangan berharga kepada penggubal dasar di UAE dan negara lain yang ingin mengukuhkan rangka kerja kuasa lembut mereka untuk memupuk penglibatan global yang lebih berkesan. Penyelidikan masa depan boleh mendapat manfaat daripada meneroka perubahan persepsi awam secara longitudinal dan implikasinya terhadap diplomasi antarabangsa.

Kata Kunci: Hubungan Antarabangsa, Kuasa Lembut, Dasar Luar, Budaya, Nilai Politik

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ABSTRAK	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Study Background	1
1.2 Problem Statement	6
1.3 Research Questions	10
1.4 Research Objectives	10
1.5 Significance of the Study	11
1.5.1 Theoretical and Academic Significance	11
1.5.2 Policy Significance	13
1.5.3 Practical Significance	14
1.6 Study Scope	15
1.7 Terms Definitions	17
1.8 Study Structure	20
CHAPTER TWO : LITERATURE REVIEW	22
2.1 Introduction	22
2.2 About the United Arab Emirates (UAE)	23
2.4 Soft Power	27
2.5 The Evolution of Soft Power Concept	30
2.6 International Relations	33
2.6.1 Theoretical Perspectives in International Relations	34
2.6.2 Contemporary Issues in International Relations	35
2.6.3 Cooperation and Conflict in Global Politics	36

2.6.4	International Relations and the UAE Context	36
2.7	Soft Power Strategies	37
2.7.1	Top Soft-power Countries	49
2.7.2	Soft Power Strategies of Middle States (Saudi Arabia, India and Brazil)	53
2.7.3	Soft Power Strategies of Small States (Singapore, Qatar)	55
2.8	Soft Power Practices	58
2.8.1	Foreign Policy	58
2.8.1.1	The Impact of Global Economic Transformations on UAE Foreign Policy	61
2.8.1.2	Regional Dynamics and the GCC Context	61
2.8.1.3	Strategic Economic Statecraft in Foreign Policy	62
2.8.1.4	Pivot to Asia and the Global South	64
2.8.1.5	Challenges and Future Directions in UAE Foreign Policy	64
2.8.2	Culture	64
2.8.2.1	Museums as Instruments of Cultural Diplomacy	66
2.8.2.2	Cultural Festivals and National Identity-Building	67
2.8.2.3	Educational and Knowledge Exchange as Cultural Diplomacy	68
2.8.3	Political Values	69
2.8.3.1	Balancing Tradition and Modernity in Political Discourse	71
2.8.3.2	Political Values in Foreign Policy Decision-Making	72
2.9	Comparative Debate Between Variables	72
2.9.1	Interactions between Foreign Policy, Culture, and Political Values	73
2.9.2	The Role of Public Perception	75
2.9.3	Conflicts and Synergies among the Variables	76
2.9.4	Matrix of Variable Influence on International Relations in the UAE Context	78
2.10	Theoretical Perspectives Linked to the Variables	80
2.10.1	Realist Perspectives on Foreign Policy	82
2.10.2	Liberal and Structural Perspectives on Political Values	84

2.10.3	Constructivist Perspectives on Culture	86
2.10.4	Public Perception through Symbolic Interactionism Theory	87
2.11	UAE as a Case Study of Small-State Soft Power	89
2.11.1	UAE's Unique Geopolitical Position	91
2.11.2	Cultural Diplomacy and Nation Branding	93
2.11.3	Humanitarian Diplomacy and Global Engagement	95
2.12	Underpinning Theory	97
2.12.1	Soft Power Theory	97
2.12.2	Realist Perspectives on Foreign Policy	99
2.12.3	Liberal and Structural Perspectives on Political Values	100
2.12.4	Constructivist Perspectives on Culture	102
2.12.5	Symbolic Interactionism and Public Perception	103
2.12.6	Contribution to Theory	104
2.13	Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis	105
2.13.1	Conceptual Framework	105
2.13.2	Hypothesis Development	107
2.13.2.1	Foreign Policy and International Relations	108
2.13.2.2	Culture and International Relations	109
2.13.2.3	Political Values and International Relations	110
2.13.2.4	Public Perception as a Moderator	112
2.14	Development of Constructs and Measurement Items	113
2.14.1	Culture Items	114
2.14.2	Political Values Items	114
2.14.3	Foreign Policy Items	115
2.14.4	Public Perception Items	115
2.14.5	International Relations	116
2.15	Summary	117
 CHAPTER THREE : METHODOLOGY		 118
3.1	Introduction	118
3.2	Research Design	119
3.3	Research Philosophy	120
3.4	Research Approach	121
3.5	Approach Selection	122

3.6	Research Strategy	123
3.7	Study Population and Sampling Methods	124
	3.7.1 Study Population	124
	3.7.2 The Study Sample	126
	3.7.3 Sampling Technique	127
	3.7.4 Unit of Analysis	128
3.8	Data Collection	129
3.9	Study Tool (Questionnaire)	130
	3.9.1 Structure of the Questionnaire	132
	3.9.2 Measuring Research Tools	133
3.10	Pre-Test	137
3.11	Pilot Study	139
3.12	Data Analysis Technique	140
	3.12.1 Normality Test	141
	3.12.2 Multicollinearity Test	141
	3.12.3 Descriptive Analysis	142
	3.12.4 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)	142
	3.12.5 Validity and Reliability Tests	143
	3.12.6 Pearson's Correlation Analysis	143
	3.12.7 Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	144
	3.12.8 Predictive Relevance (Q^2)	144
	3.12.9 Hypotheses Testing	145
3.13	Informed Consent	146
3.14	Summary	147
CHAPTER FOUR : ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS		148
4.1	Introduction	148
4.2	Response Rate	149
4.3	Pilot Study: Cronbach's Alpha Results	150
4.4	Data Preparation and Screening	151
	4.4.1 Analysis of Missing Values	152
	4.4.2 Normality Test	153
	4.4.3 Multicollinearity Test	154
4.5	Descriptive Statistical Analysis	156

4.6	Evaluation of PLS-SEM Result	158
4.7	Assessment of Measurement Model (Outer Model)	160
4.7.1	Indicator Reliability	161
4.7.2	Composite Reliability	164
4.7.3	Average Variance Extracted	166
4.7.4	Convergent Validity	168
4.7.5	Discriminant Validity	170
4.8	Assessment of Structural Model	174
4.8.1	Results of Direct Hypotheses Testing	175
4.8.2	Results of Moderating Hypotheses	178
4.8.3	Assessment of Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	181
4.8.4	Effect Size (f^2)	182
4.8.5	Predictive Relevance (Q^2)	184
4.9	The Entire Model's Goodness of Fit	186
4.10	The Results of the Hypotheses	187
4.11	Summary	188
CHAPTER FIVE	: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	191
5.1	Introduction	191
5.2	Analysis and Interpretation of Results	192
5.2.1	The Impact of Foreign Policies on International Relations	193
5.2.2	The Impact of Culture on International Relations	195
5.2.3	The Impact of Political Values on International Relations	197
5.2.4	Public Perception Moderates the Relationship Between Foreign Policy and International Relations	198
5.2.5	Public Perception Moderates the Relationship Between Political Values and the International Relations	200
5.2.6	Public Perception Moderates the Relationship Between Culture and International Relations	202
5.2.7	Overall Reflection on Hypotheses	204
5.2.8	Public Perception as a Strategic Indicator	206
5.3	Implications of the Study	207

5.3.1	Theoretical Implications	208
5.3.2	Practical Implications	210
5.3.3	Policy Implications	211
5.3.4	Methodological Contribution	212
5.4	Limitations of the Study	213
5.5	Recommendations for Future Studies	214
5.6	Conclusion	216
REFERENCES		218
APPENDICES		241



LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Morgan Sample Table	127
Table 4.1	Response Rate of the Questionnaire	150
Table 4.2	Cronbach's Alpha Values	150
Table 4.3	Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics	154
Table 4.4	Correlation Matrix	155
Table 4.5	Regression Analysis	156
Table 4.6	Demographic Analysis	157
Table 4.7	Indicators Outer Loadings	162
Table 4.8	Composite Reliability	165
Table 4.9	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	167
Table 4.10	Discriminant Variable	171
Table 4.11	Cross Loadings	172
Table 4.12	Path Coefficients	177
Table 4.13	Testing the Moderating Effect of Public Perception	180
Table 4.14	Variance Explained in the Endogenous Latent Constructs	182
Table 4.15	Effect size (f^2) of international relations and Interaction Terms	183
Table 4.16	Construct Cross-Validated Redundancy	185
Table 4.17	Summary of Results	188

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Map of the United Arab Emirates	24
Figure 2.1	Conceptual Framework	107
Figure 2.2	Hypothesis	108
Figure 4.1	The PLS-SEM Path Model	164
Figure 4.2	Direct Effect Model (Bootstrapping)	178



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UAE	United Arab Emirates
IR	International Relations
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
ADNOC	Abu Dhabi National Oil Company
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
GNI	Gross National Income
ODA	Official Development Assistance
MBRGI	Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives
FP	Foreign Policies
PV	Political Values
CU	Cultural
PP	Public Perception
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CR	Composite Reliability

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Background

International Relations (IR) has developed over the past century as one of the most important fields of political science, concerned with analysing and interpreting the behaviour of states and other actors in the global system. Early IR scholarship after the First World War focused heavily on idealism and the promotion of international cooperation, but this view gave way to the realist school after the devastation of the Second World War (Viotti & Kauppi, 2019; Jackson, 2016). Realists argued that the international system is anarchic, and states must rely primarily on power especially military strength to ensure their survival and defend their interests (Baylis, 2020; Lambach, 2022).

The study of IR expanded throughout the Cold War, incorporating theories such as liberalism, constructivism, and critical approaches that challenged realist assumptions about the nature of power. Liberals emphasised cooperation, institutions, and interdependence, while constructivists explored how norms, identities, and shared beliefs shape state behaviour (Wendt, 1999; Marsh, 2021). Over time, the discipline began to recognise that power is not only about material capabilities but also about social legitimacy and the ability to influence others through non-coercive means. This

realisation laid the groundwork for the rise of soft power as a core dimension of international relations.

Historically, states depended on hard power military and economic coercion to achieve their foreign policy objectives. However, the widespread destruction of the Second World War and the limitations of hard power during the Cold War exposed its unsustainability as the sole tool of statecraft (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022). Scholars and policymakers began to recognise the need for approaches that could build trust, cooperation, and legitimacy at lower costs.

Joseph Nye introduced the concept of “soft power” in the late 1980s, defining it as a state’s ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 1990; Nye, 2008). Nye (2014) emphasised that soft power stems from three key resources: a country’s culture (when it is attractive to others), political values (when they are consistently upheld at home and abroad), and foreign policies (when they are perceived as legitimate and morally authoritative).

Soft power has rapidly evolved into a defining feature of contemporary diplomacy, reflecting a global shift from coercive tools of statecraft toward more subtle forms of persuasion and attraction. In recent decades, governments have increasingly relied on instruments such as cultural diplomacy, international broadcasting, academic exchanges, development assistance, and value-driven foreign policy to enhance their reputation and extend their influence across borders (Hill, 2016; Hutchings & Suri, 2015; Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2018). These approaches highlight the recognition that

credibility, trust, and shared values often yield more sustainable outcomes than the use of military or economic pressure alone.

While hard power such as military force or economic sanctions can sometimes compel immediate compliance, its impact is often temporary and can generate resistance or resentment among the targeted populations. By contrast, soft power builds more enduring influence because it appeals to the preferences and aspirations of others, fostering cooperation rather than coercion. This dimension of power relies on the perceived legitimacy and attractiveness of a country's culture, political values, and policies, as well as its willingness to engage in partnerships grounded in mutual respect (Nye, 2004; Trunkos, 2021).

The growing importance of soft power in international relations reflects the realities of an interconnected and globalised world, where information flows rapidly, and public opinion both domestic and international plays a decisive role in shaping foreign policy. In this environment, the ability of states to project a positive image and win the trust of foreign public can be as crucial as their military or economic strength. As a result, soft power strategies have become essential tools not only for great powers but also for emerging and middle powers, including countries such as the UAE, which increasingly invest in cultural diplomacy, humanitarian aid, educational partnerships, and international media to strengthen their diplomatic presence on the world stage..

In recent decades, the Middle East has experienced a noticeable transition from a foreign policy landscape traditionally dominated by hard power such as military strength and coercive diplomacy to strategies that increasingly integrate elements of

soft power. Several Gulf states, notably the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, have invested extensively in cultural initiatives, higher education, international media networks, humanitarian aid, and global development projects as part of their efforts to project a favourable image abroad and enhance diplomatic influence (Krzymowski, 2020; Al-Suwaidi, 2021). These investments reflect a growing recognition that shaping perceptions and winning hearts and minds can be as important as conventional power in achieving national objectives.

Despite these advances, the adoption and institutionalisation of soft power strategies across the Middle East remain uneven. Some countries have moved rapidly to integrate cultural diplomacy, knowledge exchange, and branding into their foreign policies, while others still rely predominantly on security and energy-driven hard power approaches. Moreover, scholarly research on soft power has traditionally concentrated on Western experiences, particularly the United States and European powers, which has left a notable gap in understanding how smaller Gulf states deploy soft power to influence regional and global relations (Saber, Paris & Marochi, 2018). This gap is particularly evident in the limited theoretical and empirical exploration of the UAE's approach, which combines cultural heritage, humanitarian leadership, and economic modernisation to elevate its standing on the global stage.

Many scholars contend that, although hard power remains relevant for ensuring national security and protecting strategic interests, states are increasingly compelled to rely on their international reputation, credibility, and perceived legitimacy to achieve long-term influence in a globalised and highly interconnected world (Karki & Dhungana, 2020). This shift underscores the need to understand how public perception

and soft power interact with foreign policy, especially in smaller and non-Western states whose influence depends less on military strength and more on their ability to shape narratives, foster cooperation, and build trust across borders. Consequently, studying the operation of soft power within the unique socio-political environment of Gulf states particularly the UAE has become an essential area of academic and policy-oriented inquiry, filling a critical gap in both international relations theory and practical diplomatic studies.

Amid these global and regional shifts, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as a noteworthy case of a small state successfully leveraging soft power to achieve disproportionate influence on the world stage. Since its establishment, the UAE under the visionary leadership of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan has pursued a foreign policy grounded in peaceful engagement, cooperation, and friendship with its Arab neighbours, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, and the wider international community (Abu Zaid, 2021; Al Suwaidi, 2021; Guéraiche, 2023).

Over the past four decades, the UAE has accomplished what many larger regional powers have not: winning hearts and minds globally, expanding its diplomatic and economic partnerships, and enhancing its international reputation (Almezaini, 2012; Hellyer, 2001; Salisbury, 2020). The UAE now ranks first in the Middle East and 18th globally on soft power indices (Saber, Paris & Marochi, 2018), reflecting its growing influence in diplomacy, culture, and global media.

Despite these achievements, the mechanisms through which Emirati soft power operates and its interaction with international relations remain insufficiently

understood (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022). Furthermore, little is known about how the UAE's own citizens perceive these efforts and how public perception shapes the effectiveness of soft power. Public perception is a crucial cognitive and social process that influences how individuals interpret and respond to their environment (Mavrodieva, Rachman, Harahap & Shaw, 2019; Burstein, 2003). It can legitimise or constrain government actions and significantly affect how a country's cultural, political, and foreign policy initiatives are received both domestically and internationally (Kim & Kim, 2022).

Understanding how the UAE's public perceives its soft power strategies is therefore essential. It can determine whether the country's diplomatic initiatives resonate with its citizens and the global community, thereby affecting the sustainability and impact of its international relations. This study addresses this gap by examining how public perception moderates the relationship between soft power practices specifically foreign policy, political values, and culture and international relations in the UAE.

1.2 Problem Statement

In international relations, the UAE has increasingly employed soft power tools in foreign policy, cultural diplomacy, and political values (Baycar & Rakipoglu, 2022). These strategies have elevated the UAE's profile as a rising soft power (Khan, 2012). Yet, despite growing recognition, academic attention to the UAE's soft power and its role in shaping international relations remains limited (Matheson, 2020; Al Ketbi, 2017; Saad, 2020). The concept of soft power itself, first developed by Joseph Nye, has become central to debates in international relations, highlighting attraction rather than coercion as a means of influence (Nye, 2004; Hudson, 2022). While global studies

have examined soft power across Western contexts, the UAE's case remains underexplored both theoretically and empirically (McClory, 2019; Yukaruk, 2017).

Although prior research has identified the influence of Emirati soft power tools, the relationship between these practices and international relations requires deeper investigation. For instance, Krzymowski (2020) highlights that culture, politics, and values underpin the UAE's global strategy, while Al-Suwaidi (2021) emphasizes the capacity of soft power to replace military coercion in diplomacy. Ibrahim and Al-Azzawi (2022) note that the UAE's positive international reputation functions as a distinctive source of soft power, and Saberi (2018) similarly stresses its potential to shape global influence. At the same time, questions remain about the effectiveness of these strategies (Krzymowski, 2022).

Public perception plays a crucial role in the success of soft power, yet it has received little systematic attention in relation to the UAE. Public opinion, shaped by cultural values, expectations, and emotions, influences how soft power initiatives are received internationally (Mavrodieva et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2022). Research indicates that audiences often weigh negative information more heavily than positive narratives (Gorodnichenko et al., 2021), suggesting that unfavorable perceptions may hinder the UAE's ability to project influence. The Spiral of Silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) further explains how dominant perceptions gain traction, while minority views are marginalized, reinforcing prevailing narratives in international discourse. In this sense, unfavorable perceptions could amplify criticisms of the UAE, undermining its soft power, while favorable impressions can strengthen its diplomatic standing.

Theoretically, this study enriches the discussion by situating UAE soft power within broader IR debates. Nye's soft power theory provides the foundation, but complementary frameworks offer deeper explanatory potential. Constructivism highlights how identities, norms, and narratives shape international outcomes, shedding light on how Gulf states manage image and reputation. Neo-Gramscian perspectives further illuminate how cultural hegemony and global structures condition the exercise of soft power, an approach often applied to Western powers but rarely to Middle Eastern contexts (Melissen, 2005; Gallarotti, 2011; Hayden, 2012; Snow, 2020; Tharoor, 2012). By contrasting Western-centric applications of these theories with the UAE's distinct socio-political environment, this study seeks to provide a fresh theoretical contribution.

From a practical perspective, the study focuses on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and selected UAE embassies. These institutions are central to the design and implementation of the UAE's foreign policy and represent the primary channels through which soft power is exercised abroad. The Ministry formulates the overarching strategies that project the UAE's culture, values, and diplomacy, while embassies act as key sites of cultural exchange, public diplomacy, and image-building in host countries. Their activities directly connect to the research questions and objectives of this study, which examine how soft power interacts with public perception in shaping international relations. By selecting these institutions, the research grounds its analysis in the very mechanisms through which soft power is operationalized and assessed.

In recent years, the UAE has climbed significantly in global soft power rankings, holding the highest score in the Middle East according to the 2023 Global Soft Power Index (Brand Finance, 2023). Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum has emphasized that such achievements reflect both national aspirations and the perception of Emiratis themselves, highlighting the interdependence between domestic legitimacy and international reputation (Emirates News Agency, 2022). Despite its small size, the UAE aspires to a larger international role, navigating between global hard power structures and its own values and principles (Krzyszowski, 2020; Diwan, 2021).

The UAE has already embedded soft power into its national strategy through initiatives such as the Soft Power Council and foreign policy agendas that emphasize cultural diplomacy, economic diversification, and global reputation-building (UAE Government Portal, 2023). These directions reflect the country's ambition to act as a bridge between regions and to consolidate its position as a model of modern Arab governance. Yet, while such policies are publicly articulated, little is known about how they are actually perceived by international audiences and whether they succeed in strengthening diplomatic relations. This study responds to that gap by examining how public perception interacts with soft power practices, thereby generating insights that can guide policymakers in refining foreign policy strategies so that they resonate more effectively with global publics and reinforce the UAE's international standing.

Accordingly, the problem addressed in this study lies in the limited theoretical and empirical exploration of how Emirati soft power through foreign policy, culture, and political values interacts with public perception to shape international relations. Existing research has yet to fully explain how these dynamics operate in a Middle

Eastern context, where global recognition remains uneven and competition with larger powers constrains influence. This study therefore aims to bridge this gap by integrating theoretical perspectives from soft power, constructivism, and critical IR approaches to critically assess the UAE's ability to enhance its international role through public perception and soft power practices.

1.3 Research Questions

The main question in the study is to what extent do the practices of the Emirati soft power affect its international relations, and the following questions emerge from it:

1. To what extent do foreign policy practices of the UAE influence international relations?
2. To what extent does the culture of the UAE influence international relations?
3. To what extent do the UAE's political values influence international relations?
4. To what extent does public perception moderate the relationship between UAE's soft power practices and international relations?

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objective in the study is to examine extent the influence of Emirati soft power practices on international relations and the following objectives emerges from it:

1. To examine UAE's foreign policy influences on its international relations.
2. To discuss UAE's culture influence on its international relations.
3. To explain UAE's political values, influence on its international relations.
4. To analyse the moderating role of public perception on the relationship between UAE's soft power practices and international relations.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study carries strong significance at the theoretical, policy, and practical levels. While the concept of soft power has become increasingly central in international relations research, most existing studies focus on Western countries, leaving the role of soft power in the UAE under explored. By examining how soft power practices foreign policy, political values, and cultural strategies influence international relations, and how these relationships are shaped by public perception, this study addresses an evident gap in the existing literature. It offers valuable insights that can strengthen both the scholarly understanding and the institutional practice of soft power in the UAE context.

1.5.1 Theoretical and Academic Significance

This research makes a meaningful contribution to the existing body of knowledge by broadening the theoretical landscape of soft power studies and situating them more firmly within the Gulf context. Much of the current literature on soft power has focused predominantly on Western states, examining the role of culture, political values, and foreign policy as instruments of attraction. However, there remains a clear gap in empirical studies that assess how soft power functions in non-Western environments, particularly within rapidly transforming states such as the UAE. By addressing this gap, the study enriches both international relations theory and the discourse on Gulf studies, offering an alternative lens to understand how small but ambitious states can utilize soft power in distinctive ways.

A central theoretical contribution of this research lies in its explicit integration of public perception as a moderating variable between soft power practices and

international relations. Traditional applications of Nye's (1990, 2004) soft power theory often consider perception as an indirect or secondary outcome of soft power resources, but this study positions perception as a critical mechanism that directly shapes diplomatic influence. This re-conceptualization demonstrates that soft power does not operate in a vacuum; rather, its effectiveness is filtered, amplified, or constrained through the lens of how domestic and international public interpret cultural initiatives, political values, and foreign policy practices.

By adopting this approach, the study extends the explanatory power of soft power theory. It highlights that attraction alone is insufficient if it does not resonate positively with target audiences. Public perception therefore becomes the bridge linking symbolic practices to tangible diplomatic outcomes. This framework not only provides a more nuanced understanding of soft power dynamics but also creates space for comparative analysis between Western-centric models and those emerging from the Gulf and other developing regions.

Furthermore, the UAE serves as a unique case study that demonstrates how small states can strategically leverage soft power to amplify their presence on the global stage. Through its economic diversification, cultural diplomacy, and humanitarian initiatives, the UAE has sought to craft an international image that goes beyond material capabilities. By situating public perception at the core of this analysis, the study shows how the UAE's model can refine and extend soft power theory, making it more adaptable to diverse geopolitical settings. This theoretical innovation offers valuable insights for both scholars and policymakers, advancing the academic debate and bridging the gap between theory and practice in international relations.

1.5.2 Policy Significance

This study also carries important implications for policy, particularly in strengthening the UAE's international relations strategy. The analysis demonstrates that the effectiveness of foreign policy initiatives, the promotion of political values, and the projection of cultural outreach are not determined solely by the design of these strategies but, critically, by how they are perceived by both domestic and international audiences. This recognition highlights that policy success in the modern diplomatic arena is shaped as much by perception management as by policy content itself. For a small yet ambitious state such as the UAE, where reputation and credibility form central pillars of soft power, this dimension becomes particularly vital.

The findings point to a clear need for the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and related institutions to embed perception analysis and feedback mechanisms into their policy design, monitoring, and evaluation processes. By systematically tracking how publics respond to cultural diplomacy, humanitarian initiatives, or political messaging, policymakers can identify gaps between intended outcomes and actual reception. Such an approach ensures that the UAE's international outreach is not only well-structured but also adaptable to changing sentiments at home and abroad.

Moreover, the study provides evidence-based recommendations that can be translated into practical tools for governance. These include the establishment of real-time public perception monitoring systems, the integration of strategic communication frameworks across diplomatic missions, and the development of performance benchmarks that align diplomatic effectiveness with measurable public sentiment. These mechanisms would allow policymakers to adjust and recalibrate initiatives more

responsively, enhancing both the credibility and legitimacy of the UAE's soft power efforts.

By institutionalizing perception-oriented strategies within foreign policy planning, the UAE can reinforce its ability to project stability, tolerance, and progressiveness on the global stage. This, in turn, supports the broader national agenda of consolidating the UAE's role as a regional leader and global partner. Ultimately, this research contributes to policy innovation by offering a framework through which foreign policy becomes not only more perception-aware but also more resilient, adaptive, and effective in advancing the UAE's long-term diplomatic and international objectives.

1.5.3 Practical Significance

On a practical level, this study holds direct relevance for UAE embassies, consulates, and other institutions actively engaged in diplomacy, cultural promotion, and public relations. The conceptual model developed in this research provides not only a theoretical lens but also a practical framework that can be applied to evaluate and refine the design and execution of soft power programmes. By illustrating how public perception mediates the effectiveness of foreign policy, political values, and cultural initiatives, the model offers a roadmap for aligning diplomatic activities more closely with both national priorities and international expectations.

In practice, this means that embassy officials, cultural attachés, and communication teams can adopt the findings of this study to design initiatives that are more audience-sensitive and strategically targeted. For instance, cultural exchange programmes, public diplomacy campaigns, and bilateral partnership projects can be assessed not

only for their immediate outputs but also for the extent to which they shape positive perceptions of the UAE. This focus on perception management ensures that resources invested in soft power initiatives translate into tangible improvements in international trust and cooperation.

Additionally, the insights from this research can contribute to capacity-building within the UAE's diplomatic apparatus. Embassies and foreign missions may incorporate these findings into staff training modules, appraisal frameworks, and performance benchmarks that prioritize perception-oriented strategies. Emphasising communication coherence, responsiveness to feedback, and cultural sensitivity in training programmes will help staff develop the skills required to manage complex international relationships more effectively.

Beyond embassies, the practical significance of this study extends to other organizations such as cultural councils, humanitarian agencies, and international business representatives that contribute to projecting the UAE's image abroad. By applying the model presented here, these actors can strengthen the UAE's reputation as a reliable, progressive, and forward-looking partner. Ultimately, embedding perception-aware practices in day-to-day operations enhances the UAE's ability to achieve its broader international relations objectives, ensuring that soft power initiatives resonate meaningfully with both domestic and foreign audiences.

1.6 Study Scope

This study examines the impact of soft power practices specifically foreign policy, political values, and culture on the international relations of the UAE, with a particular

focus on the moderating role of public perception. The study seeks to provide an evidence-based understanding of how these soft power dimensions influence the UAE's diplomatic effectiveness and global positioning. It also aims to establish a structured framework that links these constructs, contributing to both theoretical advancement and practical policy improvement in the field of international relations.

The empirical scope of the study is confined to Emirati employees engaged in diplomatic, political, or public relations roles within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) headquarters in Abu Dhabi and selected UAE embassies worldwide. This group was selected because they are directly involved in formulating and executing the UAE's soft power strategies and international relations activities. To ensure balanced perspectives, the sample includes employees across different hierarchical levels junior officers, mid-level staff, and senior officials rather than only high-ranking diplomats. Administrative and technical staff who are not involved in international relations or public diplomacy are excluded from the study, as their roles fall outside its conceptual focus.

The study employs a quantitative research design, using a structured questionnaire to collect primary data from respondents between 2023 and 2024. The study is theoretically grounded in Soft Power Theory (Nye) and supported by Constructivist Theory, which emphasises the role of norms, identity, and perception in shaping international outcomes. The unit of analysis is the organisational level, represented by various offices of the MoFA and UAE embassies abroad.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic and the sovereign nature of diplomatic work, access to respondents required formal approvals from the Universiti Utara Malaysia and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Participation was voluntary and anonymous to encourage honest responses and reduce positional bias. The researcher ensured that all data collected remained confidential, and individual names or identifiers were not included in the final reporting. While there were challenges in accessing prior comprehensive studies linking soft power and international relations within the UAE context, this study contributes original empirical evidence to fill this gap, particularly by integrating public perception as a key moderating factor.

1.7 Terms Definitions

❖ International Relations

International relations involve the study of such things as foreign policy, international conflict and negotiation, war, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, international trade and economics, and international development, among other subjects (Lake, 2011).

The researcher defines international relations procedurally as those interactions and behaviors outside the national borders, which are issued by states in the form of foreign policies, in addition to other actors (international organizations, liberation movements, international non-governmental organizations, multinational companies, networks, as well as individuals).

❖ **Public Perception**

The term "public perception" is difficult to define. At one level, an instrumental or pragmatic definition is possible: public perception is simply the type of information obtained from a public opinion survey. That is, "public opinion" is merely the aggregate views of a group of people (usually a randomly selected sample) who are asked directly what they think about issues or events. Answers to structured questions can be recorded and analyzed in simple, quantitative terms as a sort of "snapshot" of opinion at a given moment in time (Dowler, Green, Bauer & Gasperoni, 2006).

The researcher defines general perception procedurally by the mental and intellectual activities that a person practices in different life situations, such as thinking, paying attention, and realizing national community issues.

❖ **Soft Power**

Unlike Nye (2008) defined soft power or co-optive as the capacity to persuade others to do what one wants, without linking the definition to behavioral outcomes. Nye (2019), on the other hand, built his concept as a behavior outcome or as he calls it "relational power concept" on the multiple faces of power.

The researcher defines soft power procedurally as the state having spiritual and moral strength through the ideas, principles and morals it embodies and through support in the areas of human rights, infrastructure, culture and art, which leads others to respect and admire this method and then follow its sources and be influenced by it so that it becomes what you want.

❖ **Culture**

Culture can be defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs and institutions of a population that is passed down from generation to generation. Culture has been called "the way of life for an entire society." As such, it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, art (Eliot, 2010).

The researcher defines culture procedurally as the body of knowledge acquired over time. In this sense, multiculturalism values peaceful coexistence and mutual respect creates acceptance among the different cultures inhabiting the same planet. Sometimes the word "culture" is also used to describe certain practices within a subset of a society, subculture, or counterculture

❖ **Political Values**

Political values they are the values that each person has, which help to understand the policy in one way or another. According to this concept, a political value is what makes a particular person support a specific ideology. This concept has been modified throughout recent history by the emergence of new ideas (Goren, 2005).

The researcher defines political values procedurally as the values that every person possesses, which help to understand politics in one way or another. According to this concept, political value is what makes a particular person support a particular ideology.

❖ **Forging Policy**

Foreign policy is the mechanism national governments use to guide their diplomatic interactions and relationships with other countries. A state's foreign

policy reflects its values and goals and helps drive its political and economic aims in the global arena (Nye, 2011).

The researcher defines foreign policy procedurally as the sum of the state's activities resulting from its official contacts with the various actors of the international system, according to a well-planned program with specific goals, which aims to change the behavior of other countries or to maintain the status quo in international relations.

1.8 Study Structure

This academic study is systematically organised into five chapters, each serving a distinct function to ensure a coherent flow of the research process and findings:

- Chapter One: This chapter provides an overview of the study, including the background of the research topic, the statement of the problem, the research questions and objectives, and the significance and scope of the study. It also introduces the conceptual underpinnings that frame the research and outlines the expected contributions to theory, policy, and practice.
- Chapter Two: This chapter offers a comprehensive examination of existing scholarship on the key concepts relevant to the study, such as soft power, international relations, and public perception. It also discusses the theoretical perspectives, reviews previous empirical findings, and develops the conceptual framework and hypotheses that guide the empirical analysis.
- Chapter Three: This chapter details the research design, including the population and sampling procedures, data collection methods, and the development and structure of the questionnaire. It also explains the statistical

tools and analytical techniques employed such as descriptive statistics and Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate the relationships among the study’s variables.

- Chapter Four: This chapter presents the results of the empirical investigation, drawing on statistical analyses such as frequency distributions, descriptive statistics, tests of reliability and validity, hypothesis testing, and the assessment of the measurement and structural models. It interprets the findings in light of the research objectives and connects them to relevant theories and prior studies.

- Chapter Five: The final chapter provides a synthesis of the study’s findings, highlighting their theoretical, policy, and practical significance. It also outlines the limitations of the research and offers recommendations for policy improvement and future research directions, thereby closing the loop between the empirical results and their implications for both scholarship and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature surrounding public perception, soft power, and international relations. It situates the study within existing scholarship while identifying the conceptual foundations that guide the research. The review begins by examining the evolution of soft power as a theoretical and practical construct, followed by its application in different global and regional contexts, with a particular focus on the UAE.

The chapter also highlights how public perception functions as a moderating factor that shapes the effectiveness of soft power practices in influencing international relations. By analysing previous studies, key debates, and theoretical perspectives, the review underscores the gaps in the literature particularly the limited focus on the Gulf and small-state contexts and explains how this research extends the discussion.

Furthermore, the chapter presents the conceptual framework and hypotheses of the study, showing how they are grounded in established theories of international relations, including realism, liberalism, and soft power theory. By integrating these theoretical perspectives with empirical insights, this literature review provides a

foundation for understanding how the UAE deploys its cultural, political, and foreign policy tools, and how the perceptions of domestic and international audiences mediate their impact on international relations..

2.2 About the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Following the withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf region, seven sheikhdoms (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah) agreed in 1971 to form the UAE. This federal union granted each emirate significant autonomy, while designating matters such as foreign affairs, defence, and federal economic policy for central control (Waxin et al., 2018). The UAE has since developed one of the most advanced economies in the Middle East, classified as a high-income nation (Shirazi et al., 2009). Its rapid growth has been underpinned by oil and gas wealth concentrated largely in Abu Dhabi, which financed the early development of modern infrastructure, public services, and welfare systems.

Over time, however, the UAE adopted a deliberate strategy to diversify beyond hydrocarbons, positioning Dubai as a global hub for trade, logistics, tourism, and financial services (Waxin & Bateman, 2016; Rashnabadi, 2025). This economic diversification was not merely an economic policy but also a strategic soft power approach, aimed at enhancing the UAE's international image as a modern, globally integrated state (Almezaini, 2012). Dubai's global branding through mega-events such as Expo 2020 and Abu Dhabi's leadership in renewable energy through Masdar City reflect how economic and environmental initiatives are mobilised as instruments of national soft power (Krzymowski, 2020).



Figure 2. 1 Map of the United Arab Emirates

Constitutionally, the federal government is mandated to ensure employment opportunities for Emirati citizens and to equip them through education and training (Waxin & Bateman, 2016). The UAE Vision 2021 identified “talented human capital” as a core enabler of national competitiveness, underscoring the strategic link between human resource development and the country’s global aspirations (Scott-Jackson & Michie, 2017). Yet despite its success, academic research on Emirati public institutions and human capital systems remains limited partly due to restricted access to official data and the sensitivity surrounding government operations (Ewers & Dicce, 2016).

Culturally, Emirati society is rooted in Islamic traditions and tribal values, emphasising religion, family, education, loyalty, and achievement (Al-Harathi, 2005). However, the country’s economic model depends heavily on expatriate labour, which constitutes nearly 90% of its workforce. This dual labour market creates both opportunities and challenges: while global talent accelerates development, it also

raises questions about national identity, cultural cohesion, and the Emiratisation policies designed to increase citizen participation in the workforce (Pinnington et al., 2018). Emiratisation focuses on three pillars enhancing education, reducing dependence on oil, and regulating labour market participation but has struggled with structural imbalances such as public-sector wage premiums and private-sector reluctance to employ nationals (Cummings, 2018).

Critically, the UAE's domestic structure directly shapes its foreign policy and soft power posture. Its reliance on expatriates necessitates projecting an image of openness and stability abroad, while its small citizen population pushes the state to cultivate high-skilled diplomats who can represent Emirati interests globally. This interplay between internal human capital strategies and external diplomatic ambitions demonstrates how the UAE uses both economic and cultural instruments to reinforce its soft power on the international stage (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022). Thus, understanding the UAE's domestic evolution is essential for analysing its international behaviour and soft power strategies.

Public perception is widely recognised as one of the most influential factors guiding individuals' decisions, behaviours, and responses to social and political environments. It represents the cognitive and emotional framework through which individuals interpret external stimuli, integrate them into mental schemas, and subsequently act toward a particular object, issue, or event (Koswatta et al., 2023). In this sense, public perception not only reflects accumulated knowledge but actively shapes attitudes and actions, making it a critical driver of collective behaviour in national and international contexts.

Although the terminology of public perception is relatively recent, the underlying concept has deep intellectual roots. Historically, philosophers used it in epistemology to investigate the conditions and mechanisms of knowledge formation, while sociologists adopted it to explain how shared meanings and collective consciousness are socially constructed (Sekar et al., 2023; Egelhofer, 2023). This dual heritage highlights the multidimensional nature of public perception as both an individual cognitive process and a socially embedded construct.

Public perception can be defined as the set of mental images and interpretations developed through interaction with the external environment, filtered by personal experiences, values, cultural background, and prior knowledge (Aysolmaz et al., 2023). It goes beyond passive observation: as Silamy Norbert (1980) notes, perception is an active cognitive reconstruction of reality, influenced by the perceiver's social context, memories, and expectations. This implies that individuals interpret new information through existing cultural and ideological lenses, reinforcing or reshaping their mental representations (Westlake et al., 2023).

As such, public perception functions as both a subjective awareness and a strategic social mechanism. It provides individuals with internalised models of their surroundings, which they use as reference points for decision-making and behaviour planning (Iqbal et al., 2023). These internal models carry cultural meanings, reflecting collective norms while remaining subjectively experienced. Consequently, public perception does not merely mirror reality but selectively organises and prioritises aspects of it according to social and cultural significance (Gordon et al., 2023).

Importantly, public perception is inherently dynamic. It crystallises through a continuous process involving sensory input, memory, social identity, and unconscious biases, producing overlapping or even contradictory mental images within a society (Murray et al., 2023). This dynamism explains why societies can hold competing perceptions about the same phenomenon an issue especially relevant to international relations, where state actions are judged not only by their material outcomes but by how they are perceived by domestic and foreign audiences.

From an international relations perspective, public perception can significantly shape the legitimacy and effectiveness of a state's foreign policies, cultural diplomacy, and political messaging. It can amplify or constrain soft power efforts: favourable public perception reinforces credibility and attracts global partners, while negative perceptions undermine trust and diminish diplomatic influence (Jing et al., 2023). Thus, understanding public perception is crucial for analysing how soft power strategies succeed or fail in achieving international objectives, particularly in image-sensitive contexts like the Gulf region.

2.4 Soft Power

The concept of soft power was first introduced by Joseph Nye in his 1990 article in *Foreign Policy* and further elaborated in his seminal book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (Nye, 2021). Nye sought to challenge the traditional notion that power is primarily rooted in coercive or material capabilities. Instead, he proposed an alternative form of influence based on attraction a state's ability to shape the preferences and behaviours of others through its culture, political values, and foreign policy credibility (Rothman, 2011; Nye, 2011). This

reconceptualisation marked a paradigm shift in international relations thinking by drawing attention to the immaterial and ideational dimensions of power, which had long been overshadowed by military and economic considerations.

Nye's argument emerged within the broader context of changing global power structures at the end of the Cold War. Earlier, in collaboration with Robert Keohane, Nye had highlighted the growing role of economic interdependence and non-state actors in shaping international outcomes (Nye, 2014; Nye, 2019). As globalisation accelerated and the influence of transnational networks deepened, the limits of traditional "hard power" became increasingly evident. The collapse of the Berlin Wall and the unipolar dominance of the United States underscored that sheer military might could not guarantee legitimacy, trust, or long-term influence (Almezaini, 2012; Alshehri, 2021). This geopolitical shift created the conditions for soft power to gain prominence as a strategic tool for states navigating an interconnected international system.

In political science, power has traditionally been understood as the ability to influence others to obtain desired outcomes, whether through coercion, inducement, or persuasion (Dahl, 1957; Guzzini, 2005). Classical theorists such as Friedrich (1961) and Rabini framed power as a hierarchical relationship based on subordination, in which persuasion or rewards are used before resorting to coercion or force (Alshehri, 2021). In contrast, Nye's framework positions soft power as non-coercive: it operates not by forcing others to act but by making them want the same outcomes, aligning their preferences with those of the influencing state. This logic aligns with liberal and

constructivist approaches in international relations, which emphasise ideas, norms, and legitimacy as key drivers of state behaviour (Hill, 2016; Hutchings & Suri, 2015).

The significance of soft power lies not only in its non-coercive nature but also in its strategic adaptability. Nye (2008; 2014) identified three primary resources of soft power: culture (when it is attractive to others), political values (when they are upheld consistently), and foreign policies (when they are perceived as legitimate and ethical). This triad reframes how states pursue their national interests, suggesting that global influence can be cultivated through credibility, reputation, and shared norms rather than through dominance alone (Krzymowski, 2020). In practice, this means that while hard power can produce short-term compliance, soft power builds long-term consent and partnership, which are more sustainable in an era of complex interdependence.

The rise of soft power also reflects broader structural transformations in the international system. The devastation of the World Wars and the failures of militarised foreign policy strategies pushed many states to explore alternative means of influence (Ali Alhashmi, 2019). The spread of global media, international institutions, and transnational civil society further elevated the role of perception, legitimacy, and communication in global politics (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022). Consequently, power today is often conceptualised as operating on three interconnected “chessboards” (Nye, 2011): the top board of military power, the middle board of economic competition, and the bottom board of transnational issues such as climate change, pandemics, and terrorism where soft power resources are most decisive.

More recently, the concept has evolved into smart power, which refers to the strategic combination of hard and soft power resources to achieve foreign policy objectives (Alshehri, 2021). However, scholars note that smart power depends on a strong soft power foundation, as hard power without legitimacy often breeds resistance rather than cooperation (Trunkos, 2021). This underlines Nye's assertion that soft power is not a substitute for hard power but an essential complement that enhances its effectiveness by cultivating trust and goodwill (Nye, 2019).

In sum, soft power has become a central concept in contemporary international relations, offering an essential lens for analysing how states especially small and medium powers build influence through attraction and credibility rather than coercion. For countries such as the UAE, which lack extensive military capabilities but aim to play an outsized role on the global stage, soft power offers a strategic pathway to shape international norms, forge partnerships, and strengthen their diplomatic presence.

2.5 The Evolution of Soft Power Concept

Although Joseph Nye is widely credited as the first to formally conceptualise soft power as a coherent theoretical framework, the underlying logic of influence through attraction rather than coercion has existed throughout human history. Ancient philosophical traditions, such as those of Confucius in China and Socrates in Greece, emphasised persuasion, moral authority, and cultural refinement as means of shaping collective behaviour without the use of force (Nye, 2021). Similarly, in the Islamic tradition, historical accounts show how many early communities embraced Islam through the moral example and persuasive appeal of the Prophet Muhammad's

message rather than coercive measures (Baycar & Rakipoglu, 2022). These cases illustrate that the roots of soft power long predate its formal naming.

Before Nye, elements of soft power were foreshadowed in Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony during the early twentieth century. In his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci argued that dominant groups maintain power not only through coercion but by shaping the ideological and cultural norms of society, creating "consent" among the governed (Boubtane, 2021). France was among the first modern states to operationalise this approach, using its language, educational systems, and cultural missions to promote a positive image of French civilisation in its colonies (Diwan, 2021). Britain and the United States similarly promoted liberal and democratic ideals aligned with capitalist free-market systems to legitimise their global influence, especially during the interwar period. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, for example, embedded principles of peace, cooperation, and reconstruction in post World War I diplomacy an early attempt to align values with influence, though it ultimately failed to prevent World War II (GLOBAL SOFT POWER INDEX, 2023).

The post-World War II period witnessed more structured efforts to use soft power. The U.S. launched the Fulbright Program in 1946 to cultivate goodwill through academic and cultural exchange, deliberately shaping the perceptions and values of foreign elites (Grix et al., 2019). As Nye later observed, American popular culture including films, music, and television often penetrated societies more effectively than overt political campaigns, shaping global attitudes toward the U.S. long before formal diplomatic engagement (Hill, 2016). This form of influence became especially salient during the ideological rivalry of the Cold War, when the U.S. and the Soviet Union

competed not only through arms races but also through cultural, educational, and ideological outreach.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nye (1990, 2004, 2011) introduced soft power as a systematic framework, arguing that in an increasingly interdependent and media-saturated world, the ability to attract is as crucial as the ability to coerce. The U.S. relied heavily on soft power to consolidate its post-Cold War unipolar role, exporting liberal-democratic values, human rights norms, and market-oriented reforms. Initiatives such as the 2004 “Greater Middle East” project, though framed as empowering women and fostering knowledge societies, were also criticised as attempts to reshape Arab societies along Western lines, thereby demonstrating the controversial nature of soft power when used as a tool of normative dominance (Hudson, 2022; Ibrahim & Al-Azzawi, 2022).

The Arab Spring uprisings further illustrated the potency of soft power dynamics, where social movements leveraged digital media and persuasive narratives to mobilise populations and pressure regimes without direct military force (Karki & Dhungana, 2020). These events highlighted how soft power can emerge not only from states but also from civil society actors and networks capable of shaping public opinion. This period also gave rise to the concept of smart power, which Ernest Wilson defines as the strategic combination of hard and soft power to achieve foreign policy objectives efficiently (Khan, 2012). While smart power underscores the complementary nature of coercion and attraction, it also reinforces Nye’s assertion that soft power forms the necessary foundation for sustainable influence.

Debates among contemporary theorists further refined the understanding of soft power. Michel Foucault viewed power as diffused and disciplinary, describing soft power as an indirect form of compulsion that shapes public consciousness and behaviour through discourse and norms (Krzymowski, 2020). Zhang conceptualised soft power as combining civilisational, economic, and propagandistic tools to persuade global audiences, while Ernest Wilson highlighted its psychological dimension in shaping public opinion (Krzymowski, 2022). Nye, however, deliberately excluded economic inducements from his definition, emphasising culture, values, and policy legitimacy instead. Despite their differences, these perspectives converge on the idea that soft power is fundamentally about influencing minds and preferences through non-coercive means (Nye, 2019).

In summary, the concept of soft power evolved from ancient ethical persuasion to cultural hegemony, to Cold War cultural diplomacy, and finally into Nye's formalised theory. Its evolution reflects shifting global structures and the growing salience of legitimacy, reputation, and perception in international relations. This historical trajectory underscores why soft power has become indispensable for states particularly small and medium powers like the UAE that seek to amplify their global influence without relying on coercion.

2.6 International Relations

International Relations (IR) is broadly defined as the study of interactions across national borders, encompassing the behaviour of states, international organisations, multinational corporations, and even transnational networks of civil society actors. At its most fundamental level, IR examines how sovereign states interact within an

anarchic global system where no central authority exists to regulate their conduct (Charountaki, 2018). These interactions extend beyond formal diplomacy to include economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and security arrangements that shape the international order.

The scope of IR is not confined to government policies alone; rather, it encompasses the broader institutional, economic, and social factors that influence state behaviour. For instance, global corporations, humanitarian organisations, and advocacy networks often play critical roles in shaping perceptions of legitimacy and authority in world politics (Lilyblad, 2019). Thus, IR provides the conceptual and analytical tools necessary to interpret how political, economic, and cultural dynamics intersect across borders to produce both opportunities and tensions within the international system.

2.6.1 Theoretical Perspectives in International Relations

The theoretical foundations of IR provide diverse lenses for explaining the behaviour of states and other actors. Realist scholars argue that the international system is defined by power competition, where states act rationally to maximise their security and survival in a self-help system (Drezner, 2020). Liberal theory, in contrast, highlights the role of cooperation, institutions, and interdependence, suggesting that international organisations such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organization can mitigate conflict and encourage collaboration (Aggestam & True, 2020).

Constructivist perspectives emphasise the significance of identities, norms, and social interactions, asserting that ideas and values can shape interests and outcomes just as much as material resources (Aalberts, 2018). For example, shared norms around

human rights or environmental protection influence the conduct of states even when such commitments may not yield immediate material benefits. This theoretical diversity demonstrates that IR is not a static discipline but rather a contested field where different paradigms compete to explain complex global realities. By applying these theories, scholars and policymakers can better understand the interplay of hard power, institutions, and shared ideas in shaping global politics.

2.6.2 Contemporary Issues in International Relations

The scope of international relations has expanded considerably in recent decades to reflect the complexities of globalisation and interconnectedness. Traditional concerns such as sovereignty, war, and diplomacy remain central, but they are now complemented by pressing transnational issues. Global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and cyber security increasingly dominate IR discourse (Chidozie & Oluwatobi, 2017). For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored how public health crises transcend borders and require international coordination, while at the same time revealing deep inequalities in vaccine distribution (Martin, 2019).

Similarly, environmental degradation and climate change have been reframed as security threats capable of triggering migration flows, resource conflicts, and humanitarian crises (Vucetic, 2020). The rapid pace of technological innovation has also added new dimensions to IR, with issues like artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, and digital diplomacy now shaping international agendas. These developments illustrate how IR must continuously adapt to address emerging challenges while still

engaging with long-standing debates about power, order, and cooperation in world politics.

2.6.3 Cooperation and Conflict in Global Politics

A central paradox of IR is the coexistence of cooperation and conflict as enduring features of world politics. States frequently cooperate through alliances, security agreements, and trade partnerships to pursue shared goals, yet competition for power, resources, and influence remains a persistent reality (Vucetic, 2020). For example, while global institutions like the United Nations and the World Health Organization promote international cooperation, disputes over national sovereignty or security concerns often undermine collective decision-making.

The rise of multipolarity in the 21st century has further complicated this dynamic, as emerging powers such as China and India increasingly challenge Western dominance in global governance (Drezner, 2020). Regional conflicts, economic rivalries, and ideological divides illustrate that cooperation is rarely free of competition. Nonetheless, history demonstrates that sustained cooperation, whether in areas such as nuclear arms control or climate agreements, is possible when mutual interests align. This dual nature of cooperation and conflict highlights the fluidity of the international system, where stability and instability are in constant interplay.

2.6.4 International Relations and the UAE Context

For small yet strategically ambitious states like the United Arab Emirates, IR provides a framework to understand how influence can be cultivated without reliance on traditional military power. The UAE has leveraged its geographic position, economic

diversification, and cultural diplomacy to strengthen its international standing (Charountaki, 2018). By investing in infrastructure, education, renewable energy, and global events such as Expo 2020, the UAE has positioned itself as both a regional hub and a global player. Its mediation efforts in regional conflicts, participation in humanitarian relief, and hosting of international institutions reflect its commitment to multilateralism and cooperative security (Krzymowski, 2020).

At the same time, the UAE's use of soft power strategies through cultural initiatives, tourism, and global branding illustrates how states can shape international perceptions beyond the traditional confines of diplomacy and military strength. In this way, the UAE exemplifies how smaller states can effectively navigate a complex global order by combining economic resources, cultural initiatives, and diplomatic innovation to advance their foreign policy objectives.

2.7 Soft Power Strategies

A nation's soft power fundamentally rests on the strength of its culture, political values, and policies (Nye, 2008). Among these, cultural diplomacy has historically been one of the most effective instruments for projecting soft power. Banks (2011) highlights that culture has long served as a platform for engagement between people of diverse lifestyles, traditions, and beliefs. Such engagement fosters opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and the pursuit of better ways of living. While cultural diplomacy is state-driven, cultural exchange can often prove even more powerful, as it creates space for authentic interactions that build mutual respect and lasting connections. Through these exchanges, individuals are able to listen, communicate, and cooperate thereby laying the foundation for peaceful coexistence. When cultural initiatives are

,anchored in shared values, they promote collective efforts toward common objectives reinforcing international understanding and strengthening ties between nations.

Schneider (2009) argues that the full potential of cultural diplomacy remains underutilized, even as digital technologies increasingly connect people and enhance international relations. In today's interconnected world, cultural knowledge and mutual understanding are playing a more central role in shaping foreign policy, given that globalization has facilitated the rapid spread of ideas across borders. Social media, in particular, has empowered younger generations to engage with diverse cultures in new ways, reshaping how they perceive other nations. Popular culture such as music, film, and art has been especially influential in redefining international images, with the United States serving as a prominent example of how cultural products can extend soft power even in politically sensitive contexts like Iraq. Banks (2011) similarly stresses that the expansive influence of culture complicates traditional notions of foreign policy, as its impact often exceeds the boundaries of government-directed initiatives. In this sense, cultural interactions themselves rather than state-imposed frameworks frequently become the primary drivers of international engagement.

An alternative perspective is offered by Minkov et al. (2017), who revisit Hofstede's cultural dimensions with particular emphasis on individualism and collectivism. Their study, conducted across 56 developed and developing countries, highlights how cultural transformation can reshape global interactions and mutual understanding. The research underscores that while societies differ in their orientations whether prioritizing individual autonomy or collective identity these differences do not necessarily hinder cooperation. Instead, when individuals from diverse cultural

contexts share their perspectives and practices, they contribute to the formation of a broader, more resilient global culture. Such exchanges foster incremental improvements in mutual trust and collaboration, ultimately enhancing international relationships. Unlike Schneider's (2009) broader view of culture's expansive influence, Minkov et al. (2017) narrow their analysis to the interplay between individualism and collectivism, but their findings similarly affirm the role of cultural interactions as a foundation for diplomacy and cross-border engagement.

Scholars have increasingly examined how states employ diplomacy to elevate their international standing. Nair, Janenova, and Serikbayeva (2020), for instance, explore Kazakhstan's efforts to strengthen its global reputation and soft power as part of its ambition to be ranked among the world's top thirty nations by 2050. Their study reviews national strategies and highlights the challenges Kazakhstan must overcome to achieve this goal, particularly in relation to international benchmarks and global recognition. This case underscores how smaller or emerging states adopt deliberate soft power strategies to shape their image and advance their international objectives

Uberoi (2018) emphasizes the role of national identity within the framework of multiculturalism, noting its importance in Britain since the 1970s. His study highlights that citizens were initially unfamiliar with the diverse practices and methods through which national identity could be promoted. However, he concludes that national identity is most effectively shaped through multicultural inclusion, where individuals share common values despite religious or cultural differences. In this way multiculturalism fosters a collective sense of belonging, enabling societies to build a stronger and more cohesive national identity

Dinnie (2010) argues that inclusiveness through multiculturalism is a powerful means of advancing national objectives and projecting a positive international image. By embedding multicultural awareness within education, particularly at an early stage governments can cultivate citizens who value diversity and global acceptance of differences. Such awareness not only strengthens national identity but also equips citizens to carry these values abroad, fostering peaceful coexistence and international friendships. For example, individuals educated in multicultural principles in Britain are more likely to recognize the benefits of diversity when relocating to countries such as the United States. In this sense, multiculturalism contributes not only to domestic harmony but also to enhancing a nation's international reputation and relational soft power.

Liu and Turner (2018) emphasize a similar perspective on national identity but frame it through the influence of international cultural forces. They argue that globalization and mobility are reshaping the way national identity is formed, with educational exchange serving as a particularly powerful driver. The international mobility of Chinese students, especially their studies in the United States and Europe, has been pivotal in shaping China's modern identity. Many returnees introduced new cultural practices and perspectives, which have contributed to building a more progressive society at home while also strengthening global connections. This two-way cultural exchange not only exposed foreign audiences to Chinese traditions but also allowed Chinese society to absorb and adapt elements from abroad, thereby narrowing cultural divides. Liu and Turner (2018) note that this process has been supported by state-led policy initiatives such as "Chinese Wisdom", "Chinese Theories" and the "Chinese Road" which together advance China's cultural soft power. As a result, China has

positioned itself as increasingly influential in international relations by leveraging cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges as central components of its soft power strategy.

Unlike the United States and Russia, which have a long-standing history of ideological rivalry and the projection of influence, China only entered this field relatively recently. Its political and cultural isolation until the late 1970s forced the country's leadership to explore new and innovative approaches to applying soft power. Scholars suggest that China's contemporary model of soft power, which combines cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and carefully crafted narratives of modernization, has in some respects proven more effective than the traditional methods employed by the U.S. and Russia (Cai et al., 2009; Liu & Turner, 2018).

China's national identity has not always been consolidated, and the use of soft power in East Asia has at times diminished in relevance due to the persistence of aggressive state behaviour. Historically, soft power gained prominence in the region when countries like Japan advanced narratives of a "peaceful rise." Initiatives such as the Cool Japan campaign, which showcased creativity and cultural exports, successfully drew international attention and strengthened diplomatic ties. Yet, sustaining soft power in East Asia has proven challenging, as ongoing territorial disputes and assertive policies have often overshadowed cultural diplomacy. For instance, China's rigid border stance toward Japan and its tensions with the Philippines over maritime claims illustrate how coercive approaches can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of soft power. As Sun (2013) observes, escalating rivalries across the region have diluted

efforts to promote attraction and persuasion, leaving soft power initiatives vulnerable in the face of hard power priorities.

A review of Nye (2003) and Mandelbaum (2002) highlights the contradictions in the application of soft power across Asia. Both works suggest that regional tensions such as the Indo-Pakistani rivalry and the persistent China Taiwan conflict have hindered the success of soft power strategies, creating a paradox where attraction and persuasion are overshadowed by geopolitical disputes. However, Cho and Jeong (2008) present a counter-narrative, arguing that China has remained firmly committed to cultivating soft power as part of its broader rise in both regional and global affairs. They point to China's systematic promotion of cultural values, dissemination of its national narratives, and strategic export of its traditions as key instruments of influence. These initiatives have positioned China as a formidable competitor to the United States, enhancing its global visibility and enabling it to project influence well beyond its immediate region.

While peaceful coexistence remains essential in shaping relations between states, inherent differences among nations continue to challenge the dynamics of international interactions. The growing involvement of the United States in regional conflicts has further complicated the effective practice of soft power. Against this backdrop, Hall (2012) highlights the evolution of India's diplomatic strategy, particularly since 2010, with a notable shift toward technology-driven public diplomacy. Through initiatives such as the Indian Public Diplomacy portal, managed by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India has embraced "Diplomacy 2.0," using digital platforms to expand its global presence and strengthen its international relationships. This

innovative approach has allowed India to promote its image not only within Asia but also across regions such as Africa, where cultural exchange and mutual engagement have reinforced its international standing. By combining technology with cultural diplomacy, India has leveraged soft power to enhance its political and economic influence globally, underscoring its role as an active and strategic user of soft power in contemporary international relations.

In contrast to East Asia, the Middle East has long been shaped by sectarian tensions, particularly between Iran and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which contributed to Iran's regional isolation. Beydoun and Zahawi (2016) note that U.S.-led sanctions on Iran limited its access to international investment, especially from states aligned with American interests, further reinforcing this isolation. Nevertheless, U.S. influence eventually encouraged shifts in the diplomatic posture of countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, creating the conditions for partial easing of sanctions.

This development highlights how external actors can employ soft power to mediate regional disputes and gradually reintegrate an isolated state into the international system. By promoting negotiations and shaping diplomatic choices, the U.S. demonstrated the capacity of soft power to facilitate economic openings and to foster incremental progress toward peace in the GCC region. In this sense, the Iranian case illustrates the dual potential of soft power: it can both constrain through exclusion and encourage reintegration when conditions allow.

As highlighted earlier, the central aim of soft power policies is to shape public-sphere processes in target countries by building influence and legitimacy. Securing support

,from local populations and political communities requires a diverse mix of economic political, social, and cultural tools. Such instruments often take the form of high-visibility initiatives that enhance goodwill and credibility. For example, large-scale infrastructure projects such as those funded by China through its overseas investment programs illustrate how states use development assistance to cultivate loyalty among both political elites and ordinary citizens in host countries (Lee, 2009). These initiatives go beyond material benefits; they create symbolic value by associating donor states with progress, modernity, and prosperity, thereby reinforcing their broader diplomatic objectives

Another important dimension of soft power lies in the strategic use of national culture to persuade and engage foreign populations. Scholars widely agree that governments must prioritize the promotion of their cultural assets abroad as a means of shaping public attitudes and strengthening international ties. For instance, studies of U.S. cultural policy have shown that sustained intercultural dialogue, supported through diverse strategies and funding for local initiatives, plays a vital role in influencing perceptions within the public sphere (Schneider, 2009). In practice, this requires mobilizing cultural elites, artists, and intellectuals as representatives of national identity who can act as agents of cultural diplomacy. By sharing the central values, traditions, and creative achievements of their societies, these actors extend the cultural presence of their state and foster goodwill among foreign communities.

In examining the comparative influence of cultural diplomacy, Schneider (2009) highlights how values such as equality, openness, and fairness enhanced the attractiveness of American cultural outreach in Russia when compared with the more

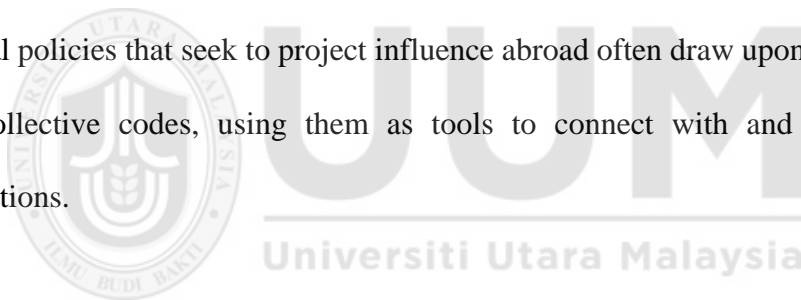
rigid Russian approach. This example illustrates how cultural policies, when strategically designed, can operate as a persuasive form of soft power, positioning one nation's cultural model as more appealing and relevant than that of the target country. When foreign populations perceive another state's cultural practices as progressive or aspirational, they are more likely to lend support to its broader political and diplomatic initiatives. For this reason, states that invest in cultural soft power must aim not only to share their heritage but also to cultivate authority and credibility as cultural leaders in the eyes of external audiences.

Strengthening a nation's cultural authority abroad inevitably expands its broader influence in international affairs. The United States provides a clear example through its deliberate positioning as a global guardian of democratic values. By framing itself as the custodian of these values, the U.S. effectively assumes the role of an advisor to other states aspiring toward democratization. This strategic positioning enables the U.S. to shape foreign policy outcomes and guide international norms, not through coercion or direct pressure, but through the persuasive appeal of its cultural and ideological narrative.

In the realm of cultural strategies, culture serves soft power much like brand identity serves marketing. Just as corporations cultivate a brand identity to win consumer trust and loyalty, nations design cultural strategies to enhance their global appeal and secure support for their policies. A central aspect of this process is the creation of a compelling "national brand myth," one that draws upon distinctive cultural codes and narratives and can be projected internationally (Cayla & Arnould, 2008). For states, the challenge lies in tailoring these cultural narratives to resonate with the specific

values and expectations of different foreign societies, ensuring that their soft power initiatives are both contextually relevant and persuasive.

A defining feature of cultural policies within a state's soft power strategy is their orientation toward shaping the population of the target country as the primary object of influence. To fully appreciate this role, it is essential to consider the concept of national identity. Uberoi (2018) describes national identity as a set of features that form the cultural code of the modern citizen, shaping how individuals interpret events, values, and social realities. This identity is deeply rooted in the traditions and culture of one's homeland, which are transmitted through family structures, community practices, and broader social institutions during formative years. Consequently, cultural policies that seek to project influence abroad often draw upon these traditions and collective codes, using them as tools to connect with and impact foreign populations.



Where cultural policies are deployed as instruments of soft power, the role of emotion becomes central. Strategies that promote a state's cultural identity abroad often rely on shaping the emotional perceptions of foreign audiences, cultivating positive associations with the nation's values, traditions, and symbols (Serazio, 2017). In this sense, cultural diplomacy can operate much like brand marketing, where carefully constructed narratives or "cultural myths" are used to enhance reputation and generate goodwill. To achieve this, governments frequently engage cultural elites, including artists, academics, performers, and innovators, who serve as ambassadors of national culture. By highlighting creativity, heritage, and intellectual achievements, states can create emotional resonance that fosters curiosity and affinity among foreign publics.

This approach positions cultural diplomacy not only as a tool of attraction but also as a carefully designed branding strategy that strengthens the state's international profile.

The sustainability of cultural strategies must be examined within the unique conditions of each state. In this context, "sustainability" refers to the capacity of governments to consistently implement and adapt their cultural policies abroad over time while remaining competitive against rival actors (Billard & Moran, 2019). The international arena increasingly resembles a space of cultural competition, where states with proactive soft-power agendas promote their narratives and values in foreign societies. Success in this environment requires not only long-term commitment but also the ability to monitor competing states' cultural initiatives and adjust strategies accordingly. By doing so, governments can maintain credibility, ensure continuity of influence, and secure an advantage in shaping global perceptions.

Another key element of sustainability in cultural policies lies in a state's capacity to adapt to the cultural codes of the target country. Effective communication must respect and engage with the host nation's cultural identity rather than confront it (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). When a cultural strategy disregards or contradicts local traditions, it risks provoking resistance or even hostility, as the population may perceive such actions as an affront to their values. This, in turn, can damage diplomatic relations and undermine the intended goals of soft power. For this reason, sustainable cultural policies must be grounded in careful analysis of the target country's cultural framework, allowing states to tailor their initiatives in ways that strengthen mutual respect, enhance cooperation, and ultimately improve their standing in the international arena.

The final dimension of sustainability in cultural policy concerns the political changes within the state implementing soft power strategies. Cultural diplomacy is by nature a long-term process, requiring sustained dialogue and cooperation over decades rather than producing immediate results (Dinnie, 2010). Frequent shifts in political leadership particularly in systems where electoral cycles bring new elites to power can disrupt or even reverse ongoing initiatives, undermining their continuity and credibility.

UNESCO, through the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, plays a central role in protecting the cultural legacies of states for future generations (Lowe, 2013). While its primary mandate is heritage preservation, these efforts also intersect with the development of soft power strategies. By safeguarding monuments and intangible heritage, states gain opportunities to showcase their cultural richness and historical continuity on the global stage. As Blake (2008) notes, presenting cultural heritage as a symbol of national identity not only fosters international awareness but also enhances global recognition of a nation's unique contribution to world civilization. This visibility often translates into increased cultural tourism and scholarly engagement, reinforcing the state's image as a developed and respected global actor. In this way, heritage preservation becomes both a cultural responsibility and a strategic soft power instrument (Lowe, 2013).

The Emirates brand has become one of the UAE's most visible instruments of soft power, strategically positioned on global platforms that extend far beyond aviation. The Emirates airline is not only a world-class carrier serving more than 160 destinations, but its sponsorship ventures such as the Emirates Stadium in London and

the Emirates Air Line cable car across the River Thames have embedded the brand into the cultural and economic fabric of the United Kingdom. Football, in particular, represents a unique vehicle of cultural diplomacy: as a global sport that transcends borders, its association with Emirates reinforces the UAE's visibility and credibility in international society. In 2019, the Scottish Financial News reported that football contributed approximately £8 billion to the UK economy, with Arsenal among the top five clubs driving this growth, thereby making "Emirates" a household name in British culture.

Beyond aviation and sports sponsorship, state-owned enterprises such as the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) have played an equally vital role in projecting Emirati influence. Since its establishment in 1971, ADNOC has been central to the UAE's socio-economic transformation, creating employment opportunities, supporting infrastructure development, and investing in education and healthcare. In 2019, ADNOC launched its Energy for Life campaign, underscoring the UAE's commitment to reliable and responsible energy production. As Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed stated, the UAE seeks to use its energy resources "to promote prosperity and strengthen bridges with our friends and partners in the international community" (The National, 2019). Together, Emirates and ADNOC illustrate how branding, corporate diplomacy, and strategic investment function as complementary dimensions of the UAE's broader soft power strategy.

2.7.1 Top Soft-power Countries

Recent rankings from Brand Finance's Global Soft Power Index 2024 show that Germany, which was number one in 2021 for its strong governance, reliability, and

educational reputation, has since slipped to 5th place (Brand Finance, 2024a). While it still leads in areas like governance and “sustainable future” its decline reflects eroding perceptions in terms of “good relations with other countries” and “helpfulness to nations in times of need”. (Brand Finance, 2024a)

What stands out in 2024 is the performance of Gulf states, especially the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE has climbed the rankings substantially rising eight places, to 10th globally, driven by deliberate soft power strategies including nation branding hosting of flagship events like Expo 2020 and COP28, and a strong showing in business & trade and reputation metrics (Brand Finance, 2024b). China has also made big gains, moving into 3rd place due to improvements in education & science and business & trade (Brand Finance, 2024a)

The United Kingdom remains a major player in the soft-power arena, retaining a top position in recent rankings. In the Global Soft Power Index 2024, the UK ranks 2nd, maintaining its status as a leading nation brand behind the United States (Brand Finance, 2024b; ORF, 2024). While historical indexes such as Brand Finance’s 2021 report noted a score decline where the UK dropped 3.9 points to 57.9 out of 100, partly due to its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic the country’s soft power profile proved resilient (Brand Finance, 2021). Despite criticisms of leadership decisions during the pandemic, the UK continued to perform strongly in pillars such as international relations and governance, even showing improvements in rank within those categories. David Haigh, CEO of Brand Finance, emphasized that the UK’s enduring strengths its global cultural reach, the legacy of the English language, and institutional soft power help it weather short-term turbulences (Brand Finance, 2021).

Although the U.S. has seen some fluctuations in soft-power rankings in recent years, its mix of soft-power instruments remains extensive and instructive. In 2024, the United States continues to top the Global Soft Power Index with a record score of 78.8 across multiple pillars, including Familiarity & Influence and Arts & Entertainment (Brand Finance, 2024). Hollywood plays a central role in this dominance: American films and media exports project U.S. values, lifestyles, and narratives globally, shaping perceptions through popular culture (Guan, 2023). This cultural influence, combined with the U.S. government's use of commercial nationalism promoting its own economic and political model through soft power has long been a subject of analysis (Bolin & Miazhevich, 2018).

Movies, television, and mass media help reinforce the portrayal of the American way of life as aspirational, encouraging foreign audiences to adopt or admire U.S. norms and institutions (Castillo, 2019). But the U.S. soft power apparatus is not limited to entertainment alone. Social and cultural capital also diffuse through migration, academic exchanges, diaspora networks, and the reach of American institutions overseas (Marrow & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). Collectively, these tools allow the U.S. to support its diplomatic objectives not solely through coercion, but via attraction, narrative power, and institutional embedding.

Compared to other leading soft-power actors, Russia presents one of the most complex and least understood cases in terms of national branding and soft-power projection. Its strategy has often been contradictory, shaped by confrontation with Western states, while simultaneously remaining a central player in global discussions. Since 2014 following its intervention in Ukraine, Russia has faced widespread sanctions and

diplomatic isolation aimed at curtailing its political and economic influence (Delcour Wolczuk, 2015). These measures sought to pressure Russian elites into adopting & more cooperative policies. Yet paradoxically, despite these constraints, Russia has remained highly visible in international affairs, leveraging selective instruments of soft power such as cultural diplomacy, media outreach, and scientific cooperation to project itself as a global actor. This contradiction underscores the ambiguity of Russia's soft-power model: constrained by sanctions and reputational challenges, but still effective in maintaining global attention and influence through targeted initiatives .and strategic positioning

To understand Russia's enduring influence in the modern world, it is crucial to examine the tools that underpin its soft-power strategy. Unlike the United States or China, Russia does not rely heavily on traditional instruments of commercial nationalism, nor has it developed a strong tourism sector capable of projecting a compelling image abroad (Bunakov et al., 2018). Rather than presenting itself as a prosperous and attractive nation-state brand, Russia's soft power is rooted in portraying itself as a reliable and trustworthy partner in international relations.

This positioning has been reinforced through Russia's role as a peacekeeper, especially in conflict zones where Western influence has appeared ineffective. For instance, Russian engagement in Syria was pivotal in countering ISIS, a role that elevated its image as a decisive and capable global actor. Despite ongoing criticism over its actions in Ukraine, Russia has cultivated an alternative image in other regions, particularly the Middle East, where it is often regarded as a stabilizing force. Russian elites emphasize loyalty to international law and present their state as a dependable ally, contrasting

themselves with the United States, which is frequently accused of inconsistency or neglect of its commitments (Dimitrova & Dragneva, 2009).

The application of soft power in contemporary international politics underscores its importance as a strategic tool for advancing national objectives. Leading global actors actively deploy soft-power strategies, each tailored to their unique political, economic, and cultural contexts. While the approaches differ, they all share the same outcome of enhancing national influence and legitimacy on the world stage. This diversity in strategies highlights the need to continually examine evolving methods of soft-power application and to anticipate how such practices may be reshaped in the future.

2.7.2 Soft Power Strategies of Middle States (Saudi Arabia, India and Brazil)

The role of middle powers in advancing soft power strategies has become increasingly visible in recent decades, particularly as states outside the traditional Western sphere seek to shape global perceptions and influence international relations. India provides one of the most illustrative examples. With its deep civilizational heritage dating back to the Indus Valley, India has long projected soft power through its culture, philosophy, and religion (Wagner, 2010). Its diversity reflected in multiple languages, religious traditions, and rich cultural practices has historically facilitated international engagement, extending from ancient links with Persia and Rome to Southeast Asia. Moreover, India's extensive diaspora has become a significant vehicle of cultural influence, reinforcing its soft power appeal globally (Kos-Stanišić & Car, 2021).

Saudi Arabia represents another striking example of a middle state leveraging soft power. Its religious significance as the custodian of Islam's holy cities of Makkah and Madinah affords it unique influence across the Muslim world (USC Center of Public Diplomacy, 2019; "The Sacred Journey," 2023). Saudi Arabia has also begun recalibrating its global image by reducing promotion of strict Salafism abroad and emphasizing cultural inclusivity to improve relations with Western audiences (Alghannam, 2024). In addition, Vision 2030 embeds soft power aims within broader development and branding efforts, promoting cultural, heritage, and tourism projects as part of the Kingdom's diplomatic outreach (Guzansky & Zalayut, 2024).

Brazil offers a different yet equally compelling illustration of soft power practices among middle states. As Latin America's largest country and one of the top ten economies globally, Brazil has consolidated influence through cultural exports music, dance, football, cuisine and by engaging in multilateral diplomacy (Bry, 2017; Chatin, 2016). Brazil's development and technical cooperation programs, particularly in Africa and Latin America, underscore its commitment to solidarity-based diplomacy, which helps reinforce its image as a benign actor in the Global South (Bry, 2017).

Taken together, the experiences of India, Saudi Arabia, and Brazil demonstrate how middle states utilize diverse resources to build and sustain soft power. While their approaches differ India focusing on civilizational heritage and diaspora networks, Saudi Arabia on religious legitimacy and emerging cultural openness, and Brazil on cultural vibrancy and development diplomacy all three underscore the broader relevance of soft power for states seeking influence beyond their immediate geographic boundaries. For the UAE, examining these cases offers valuable

comparative insights into how small and middle states can deploy cultural, political, and economic assets in complementary ways to enhance international legitimacy and strength diplomatic ties.

2.7.3 Soft Power Strategies of Small States (Singapore, Qatar)

Small states often face structural constraints in exerting influence due to their limited territorial, demographic, and military resources. To offset these limitations, they strategically deploy soft power tools to shape international perceptions, build legitimacy, and gain access to decision-making platforms that might otherwise be closed to them (Chong, 2010; Tan, 2015). The experiences of Qatar and Singapore illustrate how small states can amplify their global profiles through carefully coordinated soft power strategies that integrate cultural diplomacy, branding, education, and selective elements of hard power. Their cases provide relevant benchmarks to critically analyse how small states convert intangible resources into political influence, aligning closely with Nye's (2004) conceptualisation of soft power as the "ability to shape the preferences of others."

Qatar has pursued an exceptionally high-visibility approach centred on sports diplomacy. Hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022 became the flagship of a broader strategy to transform Qatar's international image from a marginal Gulf state to a globally engaged and modern nation. Studies show this sports-focused soft power is deeply institutionalised, involving state ministries, corporate sponsors, and partnerships with international federations (James, 2021; Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015; El-Dabt et al., 2025). Qatar has complemented these efforts with extensive cultural programming and media diplomacy through Al Jazeera, using them to frame

narratives of innovation, progressiveness, and regional leadership (Galily, 2025; Al-Dosari, 2021). This aligns with constructivist arguments that norms, identity, and reputation are socially constructed and can be reshaped through sustained discursive practices.

However, this strategy has faced persistent allegations of “sportswashing,” where symbolic achievements are used to obscure domestic governance issues such as migrant labour rights and restrictions on freedom of expression (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018; Al Thani, 2021). Scholars caution that this exposes Qatar to the risk of “soft disempowerment,” where perceived inconsistencies erode credibility (Stamnes & Moriconi, 2022). While legal reforms like minimum wage laws and revisions to the Kafala system have been introduced, many argue they remain insufficient to fully align image with reality. This tension reflects a broader paradox of small-state soft power: visibility can magnify both reputational gains and reputational vulnerabilities. The long-term success of Qatar’s strategy thus depends on converting symbolic prestige into substantive policy credibility.

Singapore, by contrast, has pursued a more incremental and multi-pronged approach rooted in education diplomacy, nation branding, and cultural engagement. It has positioned itself as a regional knowledge hub by offering prestigious scholarships and building international academic networks through initiatives led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Singapore International Foundation (Chia, 2015; Gopinathan & Lee, 2011). Unlike Qatar’s high-profile megaprojects, Singapore embeds soft power in its day-to-day institutional architecture, integrating education policy into broader foreign policy objectives to diffuse Singaporean governance norms (Lee, 2015; Burke

& Saramago, 2018). This low-key but persistent strategy has cultivated enduring transnational goodwill, echoing constructivist insights on the slow socialisation of norms through institutional contact.

Nation branding forms another critical pillar of Singapore's soft power. The state actively curates an international image of cosmopolitanism, innovation, and multicultural harmony, leveraging its urban design, sustainable infrastructure, and economic dynamism to project credibility (K. Tan, 2018). This branding strengthens its attractiveness for global business, talent, and tourism. Cultural and public diplomacy reinforce this effort, drawing on Singapore's diverse heritage and participation in global debates like the "Asian Values" discourse to position it as a thought leader on governance models (Chong, 2004; Vijayan, 2025). While the direct causal impact of these measures on diplomatic outcomes is difficult to quantify, the consistency of Singapore's global reputation suggests their cumulative effectiveness.

Notably, Singapore also blends soft and hard power through what scholars call "smart power." Its contributions to peacekeeping and humanitarian operations project reliability and responsibility, extending its influence despite its small size (Tan, 2015). This contrasts with Qatar's reliance on symbolic spectacle: Singapore's approach is quieter but institutionally embedded, reducing reputational risk and building durable legitimacy. Scholars argue this has allowed Singapore to "virtually enlarge" its presence and wield influence disproportionate to its material capacity (Chong, 2010).

Comparatively, Qatar exemplifies a visibility-intensive model reliant on spectacle and global media saturation, whereas Singapore represents a credibility-intensive model

rooted in institutionalised competence. Qatar's strategy yields rapid image gains but is vulnerable to backlash if domestic realities contradict external narratives. Singapore's strategy is slower but more sustainable, reinforcing perceptions of reliability and trustworthiness. These cases highlight two contrasting pathways for small states to accumulate soft power and illustrate that the success of soft power depends not merely on resources deployed but on the perceived alignment between image and underlying governance. This debate directly informs the analysis of the UAE, which, like Qatar and Singapore, is a small state navigating global arenas where legitimacy, reputation, and perception critically shape diplomatic influence.

2.8 Soft Power Practices

Soft power practices encompass the diverse strategies through which states seek to enhance their international standing by appealing to shared values, culture, policies, and reputation rather than coercion or force. For the UAE, soft power has become a central element of its foreign policy, reflecting a deliberate effort to project influence through diplomacy, cultural exchange, education, and strategic communication. The following subsections examine key domains of these practices, highlighting how they contribute to strengthening the UAE's international relations and global image.

2.8.1 Foreign Policy

There is a broad scholarly consensus that every sovereign state must possess a coherent foreign policy, as no state can function effectively in isolation from the international system (Berg & Vits, 2018). A state without a clear foreign policy is often likened to "a ship lost at sea without a compass," drifting without direction or purpose (Walt, 2018). Foreign policy serves as the central instrument through which a state seeks to achieve its national interests, safeguard its sovereignty, and position itself within the

community of nations. It defines how a country interacts with others, advances its security, economic, and ideological objectives, and shapes its role within the international order (Schumacher & Bouris, 2017).

Despite its importance, defining foreign policy precisely has long posed a challenge for scholars of International Relations (IR) and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). While definitions vary, most agree that it entails deliberate and meaningful actions taken by the political leadership of a state toward external actors. Koga (2018), for instance, frames foreign policy as the attempt to influence or change other states' behaviour to advance one's own goals. However, Rosyidin (2017) reminds us that foreign policy is not solely about change at times, it is equally about maintaining the status quo when doing so aligns with national interests. Thus, foreign policy encompasses both continuity and transformation in a state's external behaviour.

A longstanding debate in FPA concerns the interaction between domestic and international determinants of foreign policy. Darwich and Kaarbo (2020) argue that these dimensions are deeply "interconnected," meaning foreign policy decisions cannot be understood without considering the internal political, economic, and bureaucratic contexts from which they emerge. Shiffrinson (2020) similarly notes that foreign policy is often rooted in long-standing ideological narratives embedded within state institutions, reflecting broader historical trends in domestic politics. This aligns with neoclassical realist perspectives, which stress that systemic pressures shape state behaviour, but their impact is filtered through domestic political structures, leaders' perceptions, and state capacity.

Foreign policy is also shaped by developmental goals and structural positioning in the global system. Hill (2019) highlights how many states particularly postcolonial and developing ones pursue foreign policies centred on national autonomy, technological self-reliance, and resistance to the perceived “freezing” of the global power structure. These policies often manifest as South–South alliances, strategic partnerships, or efforts to recalibrate the asymmetries of international economic relations. Yet, as Magcamit (2020) observes, the strategies available to so-called “middle powers” remain contested and varied, as their influence depends not only on material capabilities but also on the credibility and consistency of their foreign policies.

Domestic political culture, especially national self-image, is another crucial factor shaping foreign policy orientation. Rein (2017) notes that even when self-image appears to conflict with rational power-maximising behaviour, it often acts as a guiding narrative for foreign policy decisions, particularly regarding international human rights issues. Neack (2018) similarly finds that public opinion especially in liberal democracies can shape foreign policy priorities by pressuring leaders to uphold human rights and democracy abroad. This underscores that foreign policy is not purely elite-driven; it also reflects popular legitimacy considerations and identity narratives.

In sum, foreign policy is a complex outcome of systemic constraints, national identity, public opinion, and institutional path dependencies. For smaller or emerging states like the UAE, foreign policy represents a vital soft power tool: it projects national values, builds legitimacy, and cultivates influence in multilateral settings where hard power resources are limited. This makes foreign policy not only an external instrument of

statecraft but also a mirror of domestic priorities and narratives, deeply intertwined with the state's soft power strategies.

2.8.1.1 The Impact of Global Economic Transformations on UAE Foreign Policy

Global economic transformations particularly after the 2008 financial crisis have been a defining force in reshaping the UAE's foreign policy trajectory. Young (2017) explains how the UAE responded to this instability by reinforcing a state-led capitalism model, using its financial strength to sustain influence across volatile periods. The government channeled significant investments into foreign markets, such as Egypt and Serbia, which allowed it to preserve its international presence despite global downturns. In parallel, the UAE accelerated economic diversification to reduce dependence on oil revenues, developing sectors such as logistics, finance, real estate, tourism, and technology. Projects like Dubai Metro and Masdar City symbolise this shift, showing how domestic economic reform became an instrument for strengthening foreign policy objectives and projecting influence across the region.

2.8.1.2 Regional Dynamics and the GCC Context

The experience of the 2008–2009 global financial crisis exposed structural vulnerabilities within the economies of the GCC states, revealing the limits of their reliance on energy revenues and underscoring the importance of coordinated regional responses (Alramadan,2022). As Toksoz (2010) observes, the crisis had an especially pronounced impact on Dubai, where a severe real-estate market collapse and liquidity shortages threatened to undermine investor confidence.

This episode highlighted the interdependence among GCC member states and reinforced the UAE's perception that regional economic coordination could serve as a buffer against external shocks. The UAE's capacity to respond effectively, due in part to its more diversified economy where non-oil sectors such as logistics, finance, and tourism contribute significantly to GDP allowed it to recover more swiftly than several of its neighbours (Ahmed,2015). The speed of this recovery not only stabilised domestic conditions but also enabled the UAE to resume proactive diplomatic engagement at the regional level, projecting itself as a reliable partner during a period of volatility.

These dynamics underline how economic resilience evolved into a core pillar of the UAE's foreign policy posture within the GCC, shaping its approach to both security and diplomacy. The lessons of the crisis encouraged the UAE to advocate for stronger regional integration mechanisms, including deeper financial cooperation and harmonised regulatory standards, as part of its broader soft-power strategy (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022). By positioning itself as both a stabiliser and a source of expertise in economic diversification, the UAE enhanced its credibility and influence in the Gulf, demonstrating that sustained domestic reforms could strengthen a country's capacity to exercise diplomatic leadership in a complex regional environment.

2.8.1.3 Strategic Economic Statecraft in Foreign Policy

The UAE's success in translating economic strength into diplomatic influence has become one of the most distinctive features of its foreign policy over the past two decades (Mason, 2018). Rather than relying solely on traditional political or military

instruments, the UAE has increasingly used its considerable economic resources, most notably its sovereign wealth funds, targeted foreign direct investments, and extensive development aid programmes to build durable partnerships and enhance its international standing (Krzymowski, 2022). These economic tools are not simply financial transactions; they are deployed in a deliberate and strategic manner to reinforce political relationships, strengthen regional cooperation, and project a stable and reliable image of the UAE to the world.

Young (2017) describes this approach as a form of “reciprocal diplomacy,” in which carefully chosen investments are designed to foster long-term ties of mutual benefit between the UAE and its partner countries. This strategy has been particularly evident in the Middle East and Africa, where Emirati investment in infrastructure, renewable energy, and logistics has often been accompanied by political dialogue and security cooperation. By aligning economic support with diplomatic engagement, the UAE has positioned itself as a credible and pragmatic partner one that can deliver tangible benefits while also promoting stability in strategically important regions.

These strategies demonstrate that economic capacity, when deployed with foresight, can serve as an effective form of soft power. By investing in infrastructure projects, development aid, and regional market integration, the UAE not only supports its own economic growth but also strengthens its diplomatic credibility. Such initiatives enhance the country’s reputation as a dependable partner capable of contributing to shared prosperity. In this way, the UAE’s economic statecraft has become an essential mechanism for advancing both national interests and regional stability, underscoring the central role of economic diplomacy in the country’s broader soft power agenda.

2.8.1.4 Pivot to Asia and the Global South

A notable response to global economic realignments has been the UAE's pivot toward Asia and other emerging economies. Toksoz (2010) highlights that, in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, the UAE deepened its economic and diplomatic engagement with China, India, and other Asian powers to diversify its partnerships beyond Western markets. This outreach reflects a strategic attempt to balance traditional Western alliances with new ties to the Global South, expanding the UAE's geopolitical footprint. Strengthened trade, technology, and investment links with Asian and African economies now support the UAE's broader ambition to position itself as a global connector and regional hub.

2.8.1.5 Challenges and Future Directions in UAE Foreign Policy

While digital and economic innovations have strengthened the UAE's foreign policy, they also pose challenges. Cybersecurity vulnerabilities, reputational risks, and exposure to public backlash on social media remain persistent concerns (Adesina, 2017). Furthermore, maintaining credibility requires ensuring that the UAE's external image aligns with domestic reforms, particularly in labour rights and sustainability. Addressing these challenges will require continued investment in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and strategic communications. By balancing technological advancement with reputational safeguards, the UAE can sustain its global influence while navigating an increasingly complex and competitive international environment.

2.8.2 Culture

Culture has long been recognised as a central component of national identity and a key driver of soft power. Numerous studies have attempted to define culture by comparing

societies through different criteria or dimensions, yet no single definition has gained universal consensus (Wajner, 2021). Culture is often described as the “collective programming of the mind” that distinguishes members of one group from another, encompassing the shared values, traditions, beliefs, and behaviours that shape a community’s way of life (Anheier, 2020). It incorporates both tangible and intangible elements knowledge, art, morals, customs, and habits acquired by individuals as members of a society (Udok, 2020).

From an international relations perspective, culture operates as a symbolic and ideological resource. It not only shapes domestic cohesion but also contributes to how states are perceived externally, thereby influencing diplomatic engagement and cooperation (Cromwell & Tadevosyan, 2020). Cultural diplomacy the strategic use of cultural exchanges, heritage, arts, and language to build mutual understanding has become an increasingly important foreign policy instrument, especially for smaller states seeking to expand influence without coercion (Meares & Bennett, 2020). In this sense, culture functions as a form of normative power, projecting values and narratives that enhance a nation’s legitimacy and attractiveness.

Intercultural dialogue, therefore, is more than a symbolic gesture; it is a practical mechanism for fostering peace, managing diversity, and building trust among states (Luquis & Pérez, 2021). Such exchanges can help defuse international tensions by highlighting shared human values and protecting cultural diversity as a fundamental human right. Moreover, cultural heritage represents the collective identity of peoples and is tied to their rights over land, resources, and self-determination (Domínguez & Luoma, 2020). While this principle has often been discussed in the context of

indigenous communities, it is equally relevant to modern states such as the UAE, which use their cultural heritage to assert identity and legitimacy on the global stage.

In the soft power framework, culture interacts closely with foreign policy and political values. Cultural narratives can reinforce foreign policy goals by framing them as extensions of national identity and shared civilisational missions, while public perception acts as a filter through which these cultural messages are received and evaluated. If domestic and international audiences perceive cultural outreach positively, it strengthens diplomatic credibility and enhances international relations. Conversely, cultural messages perceived as inauthentic or politically motivated may trigger scepticism, undermining trust.

Thus, culture is not merely a background variable but an active, dynamic instrument of statecraft. For the UAE, promoting cultural heritage, tolerance, and innovation aligns with its broader foreign policy strategy of portraying itself as a cosmopolitan hub and bridge between East and West. This cultural positioning reinforces its political values and amplifies its soft power influence, especially when supported by positive public perception.

2.8.2.1 Museums as Instruments of Cultural Diplomacy

Investment in world-class museums has become a central pillar of the UAE's cultural diplomacy, with the Louvre Abu Dhabi serving as the most prominent example. This landmark museum symbolizes cultural exchange and positions the UAE as a bridge between global civilizations. Established through a strategic partnership between the UAE and France, the Louvre Abu Dhabi reflects the UAE's ambition to intertwine its

national identity with global artistic heritage, strengthening its geopolitical standing in the Middle East (Grincheva, 2019). The museum's location within the Saadiyat Cultural District further reinforces this vision, as the district is designed to embody the UAE's aspiration to become a global hub where East meets West. Through this form of "museum diplomacy," the UAE leverages cultural infrastructure to promote dialogue, attract international tourism, and enhance its diplomatic influence.

2.8.2.2 Cultural Festivals and National Identity-Building

The UAE has increasingly recognised international cultural festivals as strategic instruments for both cultural diplomacy and nation branding, positioning itself as a global meeting point for artistic exchange and creative dialogue. Flagship events have served not merely as entertainment platforms but as diplomatic arenas that draw artists, filmmakers, and cultural practitioners from diverse regions of the world (Saber et al., 2018). By convening these global networks, the UAE projects an image of openness, creativity, and cosmopolitanism, thereby strengthening the country's international profile as a vibrant hub of cultural innovation.

These festivals have a dual significance. On the one hand, they function as channels for cross-cultural dialogue, enabling Emirati cultural institutions to interact directly with global audiences and practitioners, thereby deepening mutual understanding (Gołębiowski, 2020). On the other hand, they serve as vehicles for nation-building, reinforcing narratives of the UAE as a tolerant, progressive, and culturally rich society. The deliberate curation of artistic programmes ranging from classical performances to contemporary visual arts and international cinema reflects an effort to balance respect for heritage with the embrace of global creativity.

The international attention generated by such festivals contributes not only to enhancing the UAE's soft-power reputation but also to its economic and diplomatic strategies. High-profile cultural events attract tourism, foreign investment, and international partnerships, demonstrating how the creative economy can complement diplomatic outreach. By positioning culture as both a domestic unifier and a global connector, these initiatives have helped to strengthen national identity while advancing the UAE's long-term ambition to be a trusted and influential actor in international affairs (Baycar, 2023).

2.8.2.3 Educational and Knowledge Exchange as Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy in the UAE has increasingly been advanced through education and knowledge exchange programmes, reflecting the country's recognition that intellectual collaboration is a vital pathway to building long-term international relationships (Antwi-Boateng & Alblooshi, 2025). The establishment of prestigious international branch campuses, most notably New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), as well as Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, Khalifa University's global research partnerships, and other academic initiatives, has created platforms for cross-cultural learning and scholarly collaboration. These institutions bring together students, researchers, and faculty from diverse cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary backgrounds, thus creating an environment where ideas and experiences are exchanged in ways that transcend national boundaries (Knight, 2015; Wilkins & Huisman, 2025).

Furthermore, knowledge exchange initiatives, such as international research collaborations, faculty exchanges, joint conferences, and scholarship programmes for foreign students, serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy (Edward J, 2025). These

programmes allow the UAE to cultivate goodwill among future global leaders many of whom develop personal and professional ties to the country during their studies. This form of engagement not only enriches the UAE's domestic academic environment but also creates enduring transnational networks that support its diplomatic objectives.

By promoting education as a soft power asset, the UAE strengthens its cultural ties and diplomatic relationships with both partner countries and the global academic community. This approach enhances the UAE's reputation as a hub for innovation and intellectual exchange in the Middle East, expanding its influence on the international stage. In doing so, education functions not merely as a domestic policy priority but as an integral component of the UAE's broader cultural diplomacy strategy, reinforcing its efforts to build credibility, trust, and collaboration in global affairs (Dyakov & Khusikhanov, 2025).

2.8.3 Political Values

Political scientists broadly define political values as enduring, abstract ideals about desirable or undesirable end states of social and political life that serve as reference points for evaluating policies, institutions, and leaders (Connors, 2019). Unlike political attitudes, which are more situational and fluid, political values are relatively few, central, and deeply embedded within the self, thus shaping long-term political orientations (Alper, 2020). They influence a wide array of judgments, including attitudes toward welfare spending, tolerance, equality, and the evaluation of political candidates (Kalmoe, 2020). As such, political values function as moral compasses in

navigating complex political environments and filtering political information (Feinberg et al., 2020).

However, contemporary research challenges the assumption that political values are fixed. Studies suggest that individuals' endorsement of political values can shift depending on how issues are framed, with social influence and situational contexts shaping value salience (Connors, 2020; Wachs & Schaff, 2019). This perspective reframes political values as flexible rather than static, capable of adaptation when confronted with new social norms or political narratives. This adaptability is especially relevant in rapidly modernising societies, where domestic reforms and global engagement reshape public expectations and redefine traditional political priorities.

In international relations, political values often serve as the normative layer of soft power. They underpin a state's legitimacy and credibility by presenting its governance model as principled and attractive. When consistently upheld, values such as justice, inclusivity, tolerance, and human rights can enhance diplomatic trust and strengthen alliances. Yet when actions contradict declared values, international credibility may erode, undermining diplomatic relations. Thus, political values both inspire and constrain foreign policy by setting boundaries on what is considered acceptable behaviour in global affairs.

For the UAE, political values are closely tied to its nation-building narrative and its vision of stability, moderation, and global cooperation. These values form part of its external identity and influence its approach to conflict resolution, humanitarian diplomacy, and multilateralism. They also interact with culture by embedding these

ideals into Emirati social traditions, and with foreign policy by shaping the moral framing of diplomatic initiatives. Crucially, public perception functions as a mediator of these values if domestic and international audiences perceive the UAE's values as authentic, they reinforce its soft power; if perceived as inconsistent, they may weaken trust and engagement.

Moreover, beyond differences among political systems, civilizations, and value traditions, most modern states including the UAE share fundamental goals: sustaining peace, fostering cooperation, and contributing to a stable political and economic world order (Orakhelashvili, 2020; Kolodko, 2020). Political values, therefore, are not only cultural expressions but strategic instruments that align national identity with global norms, enhancing a state's capacity to influence others through attraction rather than coercion.

2.8.3.1 Balancing Tradition and Modernity in Political Discourse

The UAE's political values are shaped by its need to balance traditional Gulf Arab norms with modern governance principles demanded by global partners. On one hand, tribal solidarity, loyalty to leadership, and respect for hierarchy remain central to Emirati political identity (Heard-Bey, 2005). On the other, the state actively promotes values such as gender equality, innovation, and meritocracy to align with international expectations and enhance its competitiveness. This dual commitment is visible in reforms expanding women's representation in the Federal National Council, as well as policies fostering youth empowerment and entrepreneurship (Karolak, 2020). Scholars argue that this hybrid model has allowed the UAE to maintain domestic legitimacy while gaining international credibility, demonstrating how political values can be

strategically adapted to serve both internal cohesion and global engagement (Ulrichsen, 2020).

2.8.3.2 Political Values in Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Political values not only shape the UAE's domestic governance but also guide its foreign policy orientation. The UAE consistently emphasises moderation, peaceful conflict resolution, and humanitarian engagement in its international conduct. Its proactive diplomacy in mediating conflicts such as facilitating the Abraham Accords between Israel and several Arab states demonstrates how its political values are operationalised in global affairs (Lacroix & Thompson, 2021). Likewise, the UAE's climate diplomacy (hosting COP28) and extensive humanitarian aid programs embody its commitment to cooperative global governance. These activities portray the UAE as a principled yet pragmatic actor, using its political values to build alliances and legitimacy within the international system (Barakat & Milton, 2021). This linkage between domestic values and foreign policy strengthens its soft power and enhances its ability to influence global agendas.

2.9 Comparative Debate Between Variables

While foreign policy, culture, political values, and public perception are often examined as distinct dimensions of soft power, their influence on international relations is deeply interdependent and sometimes competitive. Foreign policy tends to exert the most immediate and visible impact because it directly shapes diplomatic decisions and state behaviour, yet it depends heavily on cultural appeal and credible political values to be perceived as legitimate. Culture operates more gradually,

fostering long-term affinity and trust, but its effect can be undermined if foreign policy actions contradict the values it symbolises.

Political values act as a normative compass that frames both cultural projection and foreign policy priorities, but they can generate tension when they clash with pragmatic interests, leading to accusations of inconsistency or hypocrisy. Public perception acts as a moderating force that can amplify or erode all three variables positive perception can enhance the persuasive power of culture and values, while negative perception can neutralise even well-designed foreign policy efforts. Thus, these variables function less as isolated drivers and more as mutually reinforcing or competing forces, with their combined effectiveness hinging on their alignment and perceived coherence in the eyes of domestic and international audiences.

2.9.1 Interactions between Foreign Policy, Culture, and Political Values

Foreign policy, culture, and political values are often examined as separate pillars of statecraft, yet in practice they operate as interwoven dimensions that mutually shape a country's international behaviour and image. Scholars note that political values provide the normative foundation for foreign policy choices, influencing which goals are deemed legitimate or ethical to pursue (Feinberg et al., 2020; Connors, 2019). For instance, democratic or human-rights-oriented political values often push states to promote good governance norms abroad, thereby embedding value-based objectives within their foreign policy agendas (Hill, 2015).

Culture functions as a framing mechanism that gives symbolic meaning to these political values and helps communicate them externally (Meares & Bennett, 2020). A state's cultural heritage and practices shape how its political ideals are packaged and perceived internationally; cultural diplomacy can thus reinforce the legitimacy of foreign policy by embedding it within widely respected national traditions (Anheier, 2020). Nye (2014) argues that cultural resonance can make a state's political values more attractive to foreign publics, thereby amplifying its soft power.

However, the literature also reveals tensions and contradictions among the three variables. When foreign policy decisions appear to contradict proclaimed political values or cultural norms such as supporting authoritarian allies despite advocating democracy this inconsistency can erode credibility and trigger accusations of hypocrisy (Darwich & Kaarbo, 2020; Shiffrinson, 2020). Likewise, if foreign policies are perceived as undermining national culture or sovereignty, they can provoke domestic resistance, even if they align with rational strategic interests (Rein, 2017).

At the same time, when all three elements are aligned, they can create a reinforcing cycle of legitimacy and influence. Political values give direction, culture gives identity and symbolic depth, and foreign policy provides institutional action. Krzymowski (2022) highlights how states that integrate their foreign policy objectives with culturally embedded values achieve greater continuity in international relations.

Finally, public perception operates as a moderating lens through which these overlaps are interpreted. Positive public perception can harmonise tensions between values, culture, and policy, while negative perception can amplify contradictions and diminish

soft power (Kim & Kim, 2022). This underscores the need for states to actively manage the narrative coherence among their cultural diplomacy, political ideals, and foreign policy strategies to maintain credibility and effectiveness on the global stage.

2.9.2 The Role of Public Perception

Public perception plays a pivotal role in shaping how states' soft power resources such as foreign policy, political values, and cultural outreach translate into tangible international influence. Scholars widely agree that the effectiveness of soft power depends not only on the resources a state possesses but also on how these resources are perceived, interpreted, and received by domestic and international audiences (Nye, 2004; Zaharna, 2007). In this sense, public perception functions as a filtering mechanism that can amplify or dampen the intended impact of soft power strategies on international relations.

When public perceptions are positive and align with a state's projected image, they can amplify soft power by enhancing credibility, legitimacy, and trust (Melissen, 2005; Cull, 2022). For instance, international goodwill generated by humanitarian aid or cultural diplomacy often strengthens bilateral ties and boosts a state's reputational capital, which can facilitate diplomatic negotiations and foreign policy objectives (Chitty & Wang, 2017). Similarly, domestic public approval can give governments the political capital needed to pursue ambitious foreign policy agendas, as leaders are more likely to maintain consistent policies when supported by their citizens (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017). This resonates with constructivist perspectives, which stress that shared norms and positive social identities reinforce cooperative international behaviour (Wendt, 1999).

Conversely, negative or misaligned public perceptions can dampen soft power efforts by eroding trust and credibility. Research on international image crises shows that reputational damage whether from human rights controversies, corruption scandals, or policy inconsistency can neutralise even well-funded cultural and public diplomacy campaigns (Entman, 2008; Cull, 2022). For example, Bjola and Manor (2023) highlight how poorly managed digital diplomacy can trigger backlash that undermines long-term influence. From a symbolic interactionist view, such negative frames alter the meaning attached to a state's policies, leading audiences to interpret them as self-serving rather than cooperative. This can weaken alliances, reduce soft power attractiveness, and even provoke counterbalancing behaviour from other states.

In the Middle Eastern context, scholars observe that public perception is especially influential because legitimacy and image management are tightly linked to regime stability and diplomatic credibility (Ulrichsen, 2021; Zayani, 2021). For the UAE, positive public perceptions both among its citizens and in international audiences have magnified the impact of its cultural diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and foreign investment initiatives, positioning it as a trusted and forward-looking partner (Rickli & Almezaini, 2016). However, research warns that any perceived gap between stated political values and actual practices can quickly dampen this influence, highlighting the fragile and contingent nature of perception-based soft power (Zayani, 2021).

2.9.3 Conflicts and Synergies among the Variables

,While foreign policy, culture, and political values can mutually reinforce each other they also frequently generate tensions that complicate a state's soft power strategy. These conflicts often emerge when instrumental policy goals clash with normative

value commitments or cultural narratives. For example, research shows that states sometimes adopt foreign policies driven by security or economic imperatives that contradict their professed democratic or human-rights values, which can undermine their credibility and reduce soft power effectiveness (Hyde-Price, 2017). Such “value interest gaps” are particularly salient in small states like Singapore or Qatar, where maintaining strategic alignments (e.g., with major powers) can force pragmatic compromises that appear inconsistent with official political ideals (Chong, 2010; Kamrava, 2017)

Cultural diplomacy can also create friction with foreign policy aims if promoted narratives trigger resistance or are perceived as cultural intrusion. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) argue that norms spread effectively only when they resonate with local beliefs; when they clash, they can provoke nationalist backlash that erodes international goodwill. For instance, studies on U.S. cultural exports show that perceived cultural imperialism can dampen acceptance of American policy initiatives (Tomlinson, 1991; Nye, 2004))

Conversely, these three variables can act synergistically when they are aligned under a coherent narrative framework. When foreign policy behaviour visibly embodies domestic political values such as transparency, rule of law, or humanitarian concern and is communicated through culturally resonant symbols, it enhances credibility and emotional appeal. This synergy strengthens soft power’s persuasive pull by linking interests, identity, and imagery in a mutually reinforcing feedback loop (Melissen Zaharna, 2007 ;2005)

In the UAE context, for example, foreign policy promoting tolerance (e.g., the Abraham Accords) has been framed through cultural initiatives such as interfaith dialogue and museums, while drawing on national values of coexistence. Studies show that this alignment has bolstered the UAE's reputation as a moderate and modern actor in a turbulent region (Ulrichsen, 2021)

Ultimately, soft power is most durable when these variables operate in synergy, but most vulnerable when they pull in conflicting directions. Aligning them requires institutional coherence and strategic narrative management especially for small states that lack the material buffers to absorb reputational damage from perceived hypocrisy or cultural dissonance

2.9.4 Matrix of Variable Influence on International Relations in the UAE

Context

To critically assess how the independent variables interact with international relations in the UAE, it is essential to compare their relative strengths, limitations, and contextual relevance. The table below synthesises insights from the literature on Gulf foreign policy, soft power, and public diplomacy, illustrating how foreign policy culture, political values, and public perception shape the UAE's international standing in complementary but sometimes uneven ways.

Table 2. 1

Matrix of Variable Influence on UAE IR

Variable	Key Mechanisms of Influence	Strengths in UAE Context	Limitations	Contextual Relevance to UAE International Relations	Reference
Foreign Policy	Bilateral, multilateral diplomacy, economic aid, strategic alliances	Strong institutional capacity; agile diplomacy; high economic leverage (energy, trade)	Can appear interest-driven; value–interest gaps risk reputational costs	Central pillar of UAE soft power projection; defines external identity and alliance-building strategies	(Hyde-Price, 2017; Ulrichsen, 2021)
Culture	Cultural diplomacy, heritage promotion, cultural mega-projects	Global cultural hubs; strong creative economy investments	Cultural branding can be perceived as image-centric or superficial	Supports image of UAE as modern, tolerant, and cosmopolitan; enhances attractiveness and tourism appeal	(Melissen, 2005; Cull, 2022)
Political Values	Framing foreign policy through norms (tolerance, moderation, governance)	Promotes stable and predictable governance image; aligns with global norms of moderation	Criticism over democratic deficits can undermine credibility	Lends normative legitimacy to foreign policy and enhances UAE’s role in global governance forums	(Kamrava, 2017; Connors, 2019)
Public Perception (Moderator)	Domestic and international opinion shaping, media narratives, nation branding	Amplifies or dampens the credibility of other variables; can mobilise societal support	Volatile and vulnerable to external criticism, misinformation, or policy inconsistencies	Critical amplifier: positive perception enhances soft power effectiveness; negative perception erodes gains	(Entman, 2008; Nye, 2004)

The matrix shows that foreign policy functions as the UAE's structural engine of soft power, while culture provides emotional appeal and political values confer normative legitimacy. Public perception operates as a meta-variable, capable of amplifying these positive effects when aligned or eroding them when dissonance emerges. For example, the UAE's foreign policy of promoting interfaith tolerance gains persuasive power when framed through cultural initiatives (e.g., Abrahamic Family House) and perceived as rooted in national values of coexistence (Ulrichsen, 2017). Conversely, when public narratives question the authenticity of reforms (e.g., labour rights issues), perception risks undermining the credibility of otherwise effective policies (Entman, 2008; Nye, 2004).

This comparison underscores the need for strategic narrative integration ensuring that the UAE's cultural, political, and policy outputs consistently reinforce one another to produce durable soft power outcomes.

2.10 Theoretical Perspectives Linked to the Variables

Understanding the relationship between foreign policy, culture, political values, and public perception in shaping international relations requires anchoring these variables in established international relations (IR) theories. Foundational theorists have long debated how states exercise power and influence, offering diverse lenses that illuminate the dynamics of soft power strategies, particularly in small-state contexts like the UAE

Realism, as articulated by Hans J. Morgenthau, emphasises that states are primarily driven by the pursuit of power and national interest within an anarchic international

system (Morgenthau, 1948). From this perspective, foreign policy is a tool for maximising national power to ensure survival. Similarly, Kenneth Waltz's neorealism situates foreign policy behaviour within the constraints of the international system's structure, arguing that power balancing shapes states' external actions (Waltz, 1979). Applying these realist views explains the UAE's efforts to use foreign policy to elevate its strategic relevance despite its small size, while also highlighting the competitive environment in which it operates.

In contrast, liberal theories place greater emphasis on political values, domestic institutions, and cooperation. Liberal scholars argue that shared democratic norms and values can promote peace and foster stable international relations (Keohane & Nye, 1977). The UAE's projection of values such as tolerance and modernization aligns with this liberal logic, portraying political values as a means to build credibility and trust with other states. Similarly, Susan Strange's structural power theory expands this view by stressing the importance of shaping global knowledge, finance, and production structures to achieve influence (May, 1996), which supports the role of normative political values as part of broader systemic power.

Culture is best illuminated by constructivist perspectives and the English School. Constructivists argue that international politics is socially constructed through shared norms, identities, and ideas (Wendt, 1992). Hedley Bull similarly highlights that states form an "international society" bound by common cultural and normative understandings (Bull, 2012). These perspectives explain how the UAE leverages cultural diplomacy arts, heritage, language, and education to build international

legitimacy and strengthen relationships, not merely as symbolic tools but as mechanisms that reshape how other actors perceive its identity

Finally, public perception is central to Joseph Nye's soft power theory, which holds that power increasingly depends on the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce (Nye, 1990; 2004). Nye argues that soft power derives from culture, political values and foreign policy when they are seen as legitimate and attractive by others. Public perception thus operates as a mediating force that amplifies or dampens the effectiveness of soft power resources. Constructivists also reinforce this notion by asserting that public opinion and shared beliefs shape state behaviour and international outcomes (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998).

In sum, these theoretical foundations illustrate how each variable contributes to international relations: realism and neorealism contextualise foreign policy as strategic power-seeking; liberalism and structural power frame political values as instruments of normative influence; constructivism and the English School explain cultural diplomacy as identity-building; and soft power theory highlights public perception as the enabling mechanism that converts these resources into international legitimacy. This theoretical grounding provides a robust framework for examining how the UAE mobilises soft power practices to enhance its international relations despite the structural constraints faced by small states

2.10.1 Realist Perspectives on Foreign Policy

Realism remains one of the most enduring and influential theoretical traditions in the study of international relations, and it provides a powerful lens for understanding

foreign policy as a strategic instrument of state power. Rooted in the works of Hans J. Morgenthau, classical realism views international politics as governed by objective laws rooted in human nature, where states act primarily in pursuit of national interest defined in terms of power (Morgenthau, 1948). From this perspective, foreign policy is not driven by moral ideals or international norms, but by the pragmatic need to survive and enhance state power within an anarchic global system. This logic suggests that even small states such as the UAE must design foreign policies aimed at maximising their security and autonomy amidst larger regional and global powers

Neorealism (structural realism), advanced by Kenneth Waltz, shifts the realist focus from human nature to the structure of the international system, arguing that the anarchic nature of this system compels states to adopt self-help strategies (Waltz, 1979). According to Waltz, the distribution of material capabilities determines how states behave: those with fewer resources must compensate through strategic alignments and diplomatic balancing. This insight is particularly relevant to the UAE which despite its small geographic and demographic size has pursued an active foreign policy to elevate its strategic significance and counterbalance larger regional actors. Realist logic explains why the UAE invests in strategic partnerships, military cooperation, and proactive diplomatic initiatives to secure its survival and protect its interests

Furthermore, realism conceptualises international relations as a zero-sum competition where relative gains matter more than absolute gains (Grieco, 1988). This means states are less concerned with overall prosperity than with ensuring that rivals do not gain more. In the UAE context, this explains its competitive regional policies, where

cooperation often coexists with hedging strategies designed to prevent strategic marginalisation. Realist scholarship also underscores the primacy of state sovereignty arguing that foreign policy decisions are ultimately shaped by power calculations rather than normative or ideological commitments (Mearsheimer2003).

Realist theory frames foreign policy as a rational tool used by states regardless of size to navigate an anarchic system, secure their survival, and enhance their power. Applying realism clarifies why the UAE pursues an assertive and diversified foreign policy, using strategic alliances, defence partnerships, and diplomatic outreach to amplify its influence far beyond its material size.

2.10.2 Liberal and Structural Perspectives on Political Values

Liberalism, as one of the foundational theories of international relations, offers an important framework for understanding political values and their influence on foreign policy behaviour. Unlike realism, which prioritises power and security, liberal theory emphasises the role of domestic political institutions, individual rights, and normative commitments in shaping state preferences and actions. Classical liberal thinkers such as Immanuel Kant argued that republics are more inclined to maintain peaceful relations because their leaders are accountable to citizens who bear the costs of war (Kant, 1970). This argument evolved into the modern democratic peace theory, which suggests that democratic states tend to avoid conflict with one another because of shared political values and institutional constraints (Doyle, 1986). From this perspective, a state's political values, such as support for human rights, rule of law and participatory governance, become core drivers of its external behaviour, influencing its patterns of cooperation and alignment with other states.

Structural liberalism (often called neoliberal institutionalism) further strengthens this link by highlighting how international institutions can embed and transmit political values across borders. According to Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, complex interdependence reduces the utility of coercion and increases the importance of credibility, transparency, and shared norms (Keohane & Nye, 1977). In this sense political values are not just internal guides but resources that can enhance trust and predictability in international relations. States that uphold liberal political norms are often seen as more reliable partners in trade, diplomacy, and security arrangements. This logic applies even to smaller states such as the UAE, which can elevate their international standing by selectively promoting certain political values such as good governance, tolerance, and social inclusion in line with liberal expectations.

At the same time, liberal approaches acknowledge that political values can be constrained by structural realities. While liberal states may aspire to promote democracy and human rights, they often temper these goals when strategic or economic interests are at stake (Moravcsik, 1997). This tension explains why even value-driven states sometimes align with authoritarian regimes or overlook rights violations for pragmatic reasons. For the UAE, adopting aspects of liberal political values while maintaining its unique governance system illustrates this pragmatic balance. It seeks to present itself as a modern, tolerant state that embraces diversity while still retaining centralised political control an approach that allows it to engage with liberal democracies without compromising domestic stability.

In sum, liberal and structural perspectives underscore that political values are both drivers of state preferences and tools for building international legitimacy, yet they

remain filtered through domestic priorities and systemic constraints. Recognising this duality is essential for analysing how the UAE mobilises selective political values to strengthen its soft power while navigating the competitive international environment

2.10.3 Constructivist Perspectives on Culture

Constructivism offers a powerful lens for understanding the role of culture in shaping international relations, contrasting sharply with the materialist assumptions of realism and liberalism. While realism focuses on power and liberalism on institutions, constructivism developed prominently by Alexander Wendt argues that the international system is socially constructed through shared norms, values, and identities rather than being fixed or purely driven by material capabilities (Wendt, 1999; 1992). From this perspective, culture is not simply a background variable but an active force that influences how states define their interests, interpret the behaviour of others, and build stable patterns of cooperation or rivalry.

Cultural norms shape the identities and role conceptions that states adopt in the international arena. Wendt (1999) explains that states act based on their understanding of “who they are” and “who others are” meaning that cultural elements such as language, religion, traditions, and collective memory become embedded in state identities. Similarly, Peter Katzenstein highlights how national security policies are shaped not only by material threats but also by cultural and normative contexts that define what counts as a threat or acceptable behaviour (Katzenstein, 1996). For smaller states, cultural identity can serve as a crucial diplomatic asset, allowing them to project uniqueness and build emotional resonance with foreign publics an essential dimension of soft power.

Importantly, constructivist scholarship underscores that cultural influence is mutual and dynamic: it is not only projected outward but also reshaped through international interaction. Martha Finnemore demonstrates how states internalise global cultural norms such as human rights or humanitarianism, through processes of socialisation which in turn alter their behaviour and expectations of others (Finnemore, 1996). This suggests that states seeking to enhance their soft power must continuously align their cultural diplomacy with evolving international norms to sustain legitimacy and credibility. In the context of the UAE, for example, cultural projects promoting tolerance and interfaith dialogue serve both as expressions of local heritage and as strategic responses to global expectations of inclusive governance.

Constructivism therefore reframes culture as a constitutive element of international politics rather than a peripheral one. It explains how cultural narratives, symbols, and values can shape the very structure of international relations by influencing the identities, preferences, and behaviour of states. Understanding the cultural dimension through a constructivist lens is essential to analysing how the UAE employs culture as a core pillar of its soft power strategy, using it to construct a distinctive international identity that enhances its influence in a competitive global environment.

2.10.4 Public Perception through Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Public perception plays a pivotal role in shaping international relations because it influences how citizens interpret foreign policy actions and how governments gauge public legitimacy for external engagement. Two theoretical frameworks Symbolic Interactionism and the Agenda-Setting Theory offer valuable lenses for understanding this influence.

Symbolic Interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead (1934) and later expanded by Herbert Blumer (1986) posits that human behaviour is guided by , meanings created and shared through social interaction. Public perceptions are therefore not fixed reactions to objective realities; they are socially constructed interpretations, shaped by symbols, narratives, and collective meanings circulating in society. In the realm of international relations, this means citizens form views of foreign actors, cultural identities, or policy decisions through symbolic cues national flags, diplomatic rituals, cultural events, or media portrayals. As Blumer(1986) ,notes people act toward things“ ,on the basis of the meanings those things have for them” .and those meanings are continuously negotiated in social contexts

This interpretive process links directly to the Agenda-Setting Theory formulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), which argues that the media does not tell people what to ,think, but rather what to think about. By prioritising certain international events leaders, or cultural narratives, media outlets shape the salience of foreign policy issues & in the public mind. Numerous studies such as (McCombs, 2004; Scheufele Tewksbury, 2007) have shown how sustained media emphasis can elevate the importance of specific international topics, framing them as either threats or opportunities, and thereby shaping public expectations of state behaviour. In the UAE context, state-linked media and cultural diplomacy channels often highlight narratives of tolerance, innovation, and humanitarianism, which reinforce positive perceptions .of the country abroad while fostering national pride domestically

Combining these two perspectives clarifies how public perception can amplify or dampen the effectiveness of soft power. Symbolic interactionism explains the

,meaning-making process that gives foreign policy symbols their persuasive power while agenda-setting theory explains how the salience of these symbols is managed within public discourse. Together, they show that public perception is not a passive reflection of government action but an active force that can legitimise or undermine soft power strategies. This understanding is critical for analysing how the UAE's soft power practices succeed or falter depending on their resonance with both domestic and international audiences

2.11 UAE as a Case Study of Small-State Soft Power

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) provides a compelling case study of how small states can deploy soft power to amplify their influence in global affairs despite structural constraints such as limited population, geographic size, and hard power resources. Small-state scholars argue that states with constrained material capabilities often turn to niche diplomacy, branding, and coalition-building to “punch above their weight” in international relations (Ingebritsen et al., 2012). (Cooper & Shaw, 2009 ; ,The UAE exemplifies this pattern through its strategic cultivation of cultural appeal diplomatic activism, and economic openness to bolster its global image and shape international narratives

According to the Global Soft Power Index 2022, the UAE ranked 15th globally and 1st in the Middle East and North Africa, outperforming regional peers across indicators such as culture, governance, international relations, and media presence (Brand Finance, 2022). This achievement reflects deliberate state efforts to transform soft power into a core pillar of foreign policy. The UAE's soft power strategy formalised with the launch of the UAE Soft Power Council in 2017, aims to integrate

cultural diplomacy, development aid, humanitarian engagement, and global event & hosting to consolidate its international standing (AlKetbi, 2017; Antwi-Boateng, Alhashmi 2022)

The UAE has sought to overcome its small-state vulnerability through high-visibility initiatives that build reputational capital. Hosting Expo 2020 Dubai, the World Government Summit, the Dubai Airshow, and the World Future Energy Summit exemplify its “venue diplomacy”, which projects an image of modernity, innovation, and global connectivity (Grix & Brannagan 2024). This strategy aligns with Nye’s notion that soft power derives from cultural attractiveness, political values, and credible foreign policy. By positioning itself as a hub for dialogue, the UAE attracts international attention disproportionate to its size, similar to other successful small-state models (Cooper & Shaw 2009).

At the cultural level, the UAE promotes a narrative of tolerance, multiculturalism, and peaceful coexistence through initiatives like the Year of Tolerance (2019) and the Abraham Family House, enhancing its normative appeal (Antwi-Boateng, 2020). At the diplomatic level, it acts as a mediator in regional conflicts, engages actively in multilateral institutions, and deploys extensive foreign aid, ranking among the top global donors relative to GNI (OECD, 2022). At the humanitarian level, the UAE has institutionalised humanitarian diplomacy as part of its “Principles of the 50”, signalling its commitment to global public goods (Baycar & Rakipoglu 2022).

Importantly, the UAE has sought to embed public perception management as a formal dimension of its soft power, recognising that image and legitimacy are crucial for

small states operating in competitive geopolitical environments. National branding effortssuch as (the UAE Nation Brand, Global Happiness Index positioning) and the .global prominence of the Emirati passport have bolstered its visibility and credibility Scholars note that this brand-building strategy mirrors small-state soft power approaches that rely on symbolic capital rather than coercion (Melissen & de ,Keulenaar2017).

Overall, the UAE demonstrates how a small state can leverage soft power to compensate for limited hard power, transforming reputational resources, cultural pluralism, and diplomatic activism into strategic influence. Its experience underscores the theoretical argument that small states can transcend structural constraints through niche specialisation and identity-based diplomacy (Ingebritsen et al., 2012 ,Nye ; ,Cooper & Shaw ;20042009).

2.11.1 UAE's Unique Geopolitical Position

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) occupies a highly strategic geopolitical position at the intersection of the Arabian Peninsula, the Arab Gulf, and the Indian Ocean maritime corridor, giving it outsized significance in global trade, security, and energy flows relative to its small size. Situated along the Strait of Hormuz a vital chokepoint through which around one-fifth of the world's oil supply passes the UAE has leveraged its geographic location to emerge as a critical node in global logistics, energy transit, and naval security architectures (Roukanas & Sklias, 2021; Ulrichsen, 2020). This geographical advantage has underpinned its ability to engage major powers and regional actors alike, positioning itself as a key partner in maintaining Gulf maritime security and energy market stability (Roberts, 2023).

Beyond energy, the UAE's location has enabled it to become a global aviation, shipping, and finance hub linking Asia, Europe, and Africa. Dubai and Abu Dhabi host two of the world's busiest airports and container ports, providing the UAE with logistical leverage that enhances its diplomatic appeal and economic resilience (Kolykhalov, 2023). These infrastructural and geographic advantages bolster the UAE's capacity to pursue an active foreign policy and soft power strategy, offering major powers (the US, China, EU, India) a stable platform for commerce and military cooperation in a turbulent region (Ulrichsen, 2020).

Importantly, the UAE's geopolitical posture is not merely geographical but also positional rooted in its ability to balance relations among rival blocs and act as a bridge between the Global North and South. The UAE has cultivated close security ties with the United States, strategic economic relations with China, and growing partnerships with emerging powers like India and Brazil, demonstrating diplomatic agility uncommon for small states (Roberts, 2023; Roukhanas & Sklias, 2021). Scholars argue this hedging strategy allows the UAE to maximise strategic autonomy, reduce vulnerability, and amplify its influence within multilateral forums such as the UN, OPEC, and the Arab League (Hazbun, 2018).

This unique geopolitical positioning reinforces the UAE's soft power: its role as a logistics and energy hub attracts investment and talent, while its image as a neutral mediator enhances its diplomatic credibility. Its geographic centrality also allows it to host global events such as Expo 2020 Dubai and COP28 which project modernity and innovation while consolidating its role as a convening power in international politics (Roukhanas & Sklias, 2021). Thus, the UAE's geography operates as both a material

and symbolic asset that enables it to transcend traditional small-state limitations and exert disproportionate influence in global affairs.

2.11.2 Cultural Diplomacy and Nation Branding

Cultural diplomacy has become one of the UAE's most visible and effective soft power tools, serving as a deliberate strategy to enhance its international reputation and shape global perceptions of the Emirati state. Over the past decade, the UAE has invested heavily in cultural infrastructure, global events, and creative industries to project an image of openness, innovation, and cosmopolitanism. This approach aligns with the logic of "nation branding," where states strategically manage their international image to attract investment, talent, and political goodwill (Melissen & Sohn, 2016).

The UAE has established world-class cultural institutions such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, the Sheikh Zayed National Museum, and the Etihad Museum designed to present the country as a regional cultural hub linking East and West. These projects operate as cultural flagships that communicate narratives of modernity and tolerance, while simultaneously reinforcing Abu Dhabi's identity as a global capital of culture (Exell & Rico, 2014; Hertog, 2013). This institutional infrastructure is complemented by large-scale cultural festivals and events including Art Dubai, the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, and Dubai Expo 2020 which attract global cultural elites and media coverage, amplifying the UAE's cultural presence worldwide (Khalaf, 2022).

In parallel, the UAE has integrated cultural diplomacy into its official foreign policy architecture. The UAE Soft Power Council, created in 2017, coordinates cross-ministerial efforts to enhance the country's image, explicitly linking cultural initiatives to broader foreign policy goals (Almezaini & Rickli, 2017; Hertog, 2013). Central to this strategy is the promotion of the UAE's narrative as a model of religious tolerance and multicultural coexistence. The country hosts the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi housing a mosque, church, and synagogue side by side as a symbolic expression of interfaith dialogue (AlShehabi, 2017). It has also declared 2019 as the "Year of Tolerance," embedding cultural diplomacy within national identity-building efforts.

Scholars argue that these cultural policies amount to a coherent nation branding campaign aimed at repositioning the UAE from an oil-dependent Gulf state to a knowledge-based, culturally vibrant hub (Melissen & Sohn, 2016; Khalaf, 2022). Nation branding theory emphasises that states attempt to shape international perceptions through curated symbols, narratives, and cultural outputs (Anholt, 2023). The UAE's branding emphasises innovation, tolerance, and global connectedness values reflected in its futuristic urban landscapes, multicultural population, and leadership in hosting global events like Expo 2020 and COP28.

While largely successful, researchers also caution that the UAE's cultural diplomacy faces challenges of credibility and sustainability. Critics note that external narratives of openness may sometimes conflict with domestic restrictions on expression, raising questions about the depth of liberalisation (Davidson, 2024). Nonetheless, most scholars agree that cultural diplomacy has significantly enhanced the UAE's visibility,

legitimacy, and soft power capital on the global stage, functioning as a vital pillar of its broader foreign policy and international relations strategy.

2.11.3 Humanitarian Diplomacy and Global Engagement

Humanitarian diplomacy has become a central pillar of the UAE's global engagement strategy, functioning as both a moral imperative and a deliberate instrument of soft power. The country has leveraged humanitarian aid, development assistance, and disaster relief as tools to project its image as a benevolent, responsible, and globally minded actor. This approach aligns with the concept of "donor diplomacy," whereby states enhance their international legitimacy and influence through targeted humanitarian interventions (Krzymowski, 2022).

Over the past decade, the UAE has consistently ranked among the world's leading foreign aid donors relative to its Gross National Income (GNI). According to the OECD, the UAE was the top donor globally in 2016 and 2017 in terms of Official Development Assistance (ODA) as a percentage of GNI, and it has maintained a strong position since, channelling billions of dollars to over 140 countries (OECD, 2023; UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). This aid portfolio covers humanitarian relief, infrastructure reconstruction, health, and education, with major contributions to conflict-affected regions such as Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan. Scholars argue that this generosity enhances the UAE's moral authority and reinforces its diplomatic credibility, especially within multilateral forums (Ulrichsen, 2020).

In addition to financial assistance, the UAE has institutionalised humanitarian diplomacy through specialised agencies such as the Emirates Red Crescent and the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI). These organisations coordinate relief missions, build hospitals, and sponsor food aid programmes, reflecting a shift from charity to structured humanitarian governance (Barakat & Milton, 2020). The UAE's swift global response during the COVID-19 pandemic delivering medical supplies and vaccines to over 135 countries has been widely cited as a demonstration of its operational capacity and international solidarity (Masoud, 2025).

The UAE also leverages its hosting of international summits and partnerships with UN agencies to anchor its humanitarian diplomacy within multilateral systems. Abu Dhabi regularly hosts the Reaching the Last Mile Forum, the World Government Summit, and major humanitarian logistics hubs such as the International Humanitarian City in Dubai, which serves as the largest global logistics centre for UN and NGO aid operations (International Humanitarian City, 2023). These platforms not only strengthen the UAE's global profile but also embed it as an indispensable node in international relief supply chains.

However, some scholars caution that humanitarian diplomacy may carry reputational risks if perceived as politically instrumentalised or disconnected from domestic reforms (Davidson, 2022). Nevertheless, the dominant view in the literature is that the UAE's humanitarian outreach has substantially expanded its soft power capital and positioned it as a constructive global partner. By intertwining humanitarianism with

diplomacy, the UAE has crafted a hybrid model of engagement that enhances its standing in both regional and international governance networks.

2.12 Underpinning Theory

This study adopts a multi-theoretical framework to comprehensively explain the dynamics between soft power practices and international relations within the UAE context. While Soft Power Theory (Nye) serves as the primary theoretical foundation, explaining how attraction and persuasion shape international influence, the study also integrates Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and Symbolic Interactionism to contextualise each of the core variables. Foreign policy is examined through a Realist lens, highlighting the pursuit of national interests in an anarchic international system. Political values are interpreted using Liberal and structural perspectives, emphasising the role of shared norms and institutional cooperation. Culture is explored through Constructivism, which views identities and norms as socially constructed and central to state behaviour. Finally, public perception is grounded in Symbolic Interactionism, which explains how social meanings shape individuals' responses to soft power practices. This integrated approach ensures that each variable is rooted in an appropriate theoretical tradition while maintaining coherence under the overarching logic of soft power, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how these dimensions collectively shape the UAE's international relations.

2.12.1 Soft Power Theory

Joseph Nye introduced the concept of "soft power" in the late 1980s. For Nye, power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the results you want. And there are several ways to achieve this: you can coerce them with threats; And you can get them to pay; Or you can group them together to make whatever you want. This soft

power getting others to want the results you want works to cooperate rather than coerce people (Quitow & Thielges, 2020).

It can be compared to "hard power", which is the use of coercion and push. So soft power can be used not only by states but also by all actors in international politics and relations, such as NGOs or international institutions (Tella, 2018a) through directing public perception towards creating solid international relations. It is also considered the "power flip side" that indirectly allows you to get the results you want (Kugiel, 2017). A country's soft power relies on three resources: its culture (in places attractive to others), its political values (when achieved at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (Clarke et al., 2017; Nye Jr, 2019).

A country may get the results it wants in world politics because other countries do admiring its values, imitating its example, aspiring to a level of prosperity and openness and wanting to do the same. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and bring others into global politics such as public perception or opinion, not just to force them to change through the threat of military force or economic sanctions. This soft power makes others want the results you want and cooperates with public perception rather than coercing them (Keating & Kaczmarek, 2019).

Soft power resources are the assets that produce the attraction that often leads to convincing public perception. So Nye asserts that "seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values such as democracy, human rights, and individual opportunity are very seductive." A fundamental aspect of soft power that is often overlooked is that different parts of the population are attracted to or repelled by

different things, ideas, images, or expectations. Soft power is hindered when policies, culture, or values repel others rather than attract them (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018).

In his book, Nye (2021) argues that soft power is a more difficult tool for governments to wield than hard power for two reasons: Many of its vital resources are outside government control, and soft power tends to "work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, sometimes taking years to achieve desired results."

Nye (2011), in the *Future of Power* reiterates that soft power is a descriptive rather than a normative concept. Therefore, soft power can be used for unfair purposes. Hitler, Stalin, and Mao used a great deal of soft power in the eyes of their followers, but that didn't make it any good. Bending is not necessarily better than bending the arm. So that Nye also claims that soft power is not inconsistent with realist international relations theory. Soft power is not a form of idealism or liberalism. It is simply a form of power, and the only way to get the desired results (Kazun, 2017).

2.12 Realist Perspectives on Foreign Policy 2.

Realism is one of the foundational theories of international relations and remains pivotal for understanding foreign policy as a pursuit of national interest under anarchy. Classical realist Hans Morgenthau (1948) argued that politics is governed by objective laws rooted in human nature, which drives states to seek power for survival and security. Later, Kenneth Waltz (1979) advanced neorealism (structural realism), shifting the emphasis from human nature to the structure of the international system, where the distribution of capabilities (polarity) constrains states' choices. From this

perspective, foreign policy is primarily shaped by systemic pressures rather than domestic preferences.

Realists argue that because the international system lacks a central authority (anarchy), states must be primarily concerned with self-help, security, and relative power (Mearsheimer, 2003). This makes foreign policy a strategic tool for ensuring survival in a competitive environment. Even small states though lacking military power can exercise influence by carefully managing alliances, hedging strategies, and niche diplomacy to enhance their relevance (Elman, 1995). Applied to the UAE, this explains its active engagement in security partnerships, balancing between global powers, and investing in advanced defence capabilities as a way to safeguard sovereignty and deter external threats.

However, realism has been criticised for neglecting non-material factors such as identity, values, and public perception, which often influence the legitimacy and reception of foreign policy decisions (Keohane, 1986). Nonetheless, realism provides a crucial foundation for this study by clarifying the power-seeking logic underpinning the UAE's foreign policy, which complements its soft power approach. By situating foreign policy within realist theory, the study acknowledges the UAE's behaviour as a rational small state seeking survival, security, and prestige in a volatile regional order goals that inform its deployment of soft power instruments.

2.12.3 Liberal and Structural Perspectives on Political Values

Liberalism provides a contrasting lens to realism by emphasising the role of norms, values, and institutional cooperation in shaping international relations and state

behaviour. Foundational liberal theorists such as Immanuel Kant (1795) envisioned the emergence of a “perpetual peace” rooted in republican constitutions, economic interdependence, and international law, which collectively restrain conflict and promote cooperation. Contemporary liberal scholars, including Robert Keohane (1984) and Andrew Moravcsik (1997), argue that state preferences are shaped not solely by power calculations but by domestic political values, social identities, and institutional commitments. From this perspective, political values such as democracy, human rights, and rule of law serve as guiding principles that influence states’ external behaviour and their willingness to engage in cooperative international frameworks.

Structural or neo-Gramscian approaches expand this liberal view by recognising how dominant values can be embedded within global governance systems, thereby producing hegemonic structures of consent (Cox, 1981; Gill, 1993). These perspectives argue that liberal political values often function not only as normative commitments but also as strategic instruments for shaping international order. States can project their domestic political ethos internationally to legitimise their influence and cultivate alliances, while also embedding these values in international institutions to sustain their preferred order. In this sense, political values operate both as ethical norms and structural tools of influence.

In the context of the UAE, political values such as tolerance, stability, and technocratic governance have been promoted as part of its national identity and international image. While not liberal in the Western democratic sense, these values are framed as contributing to global stability, economic openness, and multicultural coexistence, which resonate with liberal norms of order and cooperation (Ulrichsen, 2020).

Embedding such values in foreign policy enables the UAE to position itself as a reliable and norm-abiding partner, thereby amplifying its soft power appeal. Thus, liberal and structural perspectives help explain how the UAE's political values are not only internal governance principles but also strategic resources for international legitimacy and influence.

2.12.4 Constructivist Perspectives on Culture

Constructivism emerged as a major theoretical framework in international relations by challenging the materialist assumptions of realism and liberalism. It emphasizes that state behaviour is shaped not only by material capabilities but also by ideas, identities, and shared cultural norms. Foundational constructivist scholars such as Alexander Wendt (1992) argue that "anarchy is what states make of it," meaning that international politics is socially constructed through interaction, and that norms and cultural expectations play a central role in shaping state identities and interests. Similarly, Peter Katzenstein (1996) highlights that cultural and normative structures define what states consider appropriate behaviour, which in turn influences how they pursue their interests in the international system.

Culture, from a constructivist perspective, is not merely a background variable but an active force that shapes the meaning and legitimacy of political action. Norms embedded within cultural contexts guide how states interpret threats, form alliances, and construct foreign policies (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). This lens underscores that power is not only about coercion or economic incentives but also about the ability to shape global understandings and social meanings. In practice, cultural diplomacy,

heritage promotion, and symbolic representation become tools for constructing favourable identities and securing recognition from the international community.

In the UAE's case, the promotion of values such as tolerance, multiculturalism, and religious coexistence illustrates how cultural narratives are strategically employed to shape external perceptions and consolidate soft power. The country's investments in cultural institutions (like the Louvre Abu Dhabi), interfaith dialogue initiatives, and global expos serve as mechanisms to embed a positive cultural identity into international networks. From a constructivist standpoint, these efforts demonstrate that culture is not just a passive attribute but a socially constructed instrument of influence, allowing small states like the UAE to enhance their standing by reshaping international expectations of their role.

2.12.5 Symbolic Interactionism and Public Perception

Symbolic interactionism, developed by Herbert Blumer (1986), posits that social reality is created through human interaction and the shared meanings individuals assign to symbols, behaviours, and experiences. Rather than being a fixed reflection of objective facts, public perception is formed through continual social interpretation, where individuals construct meaning based on their interactions and collective discussions.

Applied to international relations, this framework explains how people interpret a state's culture, political values, or foreign policies not solely by their material outcomes but through the meanings they attribute to these actions in social contexts. Public perception becomes a product of dialogue, negotiation, and shared

understandings within social groups, professional communities, and diplomatic circles.

In the UAE context, symbolic interactionism clarifies how Emirati citizens and diplomats internalise and reinterpret the state's soft power initiatives such as cultural diplomacy, humanitarian engagement, or foreign policy principles through their own social experiences and conversations. This process shapes their level of identification with these initiatives, which in turn affects how they represent the UAE abroad. Consequently, public perception serves as a meaning-making mechanism that can either amplify or diminish the effectiveness of soft power practices in strengthening international relations.

2.12.6 Contribution to Theory

This study contributes to the advancement of international relations scholarship by integrating multiple theoretical perspectives Soft Power Theory, Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and Symbolic Interactionism into a unified framework to examine the determinants of international relations in a Gulf context. While these theories have been widely discussed in Western and Asian settings, their empirical application in the Middle East, particularly within the United Arab Emirates, has been limited. By applying these well-established theories to the UAE's foreign policy environment, the study addresses a significant gap in the literature and demonstrates their explanatory value in a non-Western context.

Furthermore, this research extends existing theoretical models by introducing public perception as a moderating variable, a dimension often overlooked in traditional international relations theories. By showing how public perception amplifies or dampens the impact of foreign policy, political values, and culture on international relations, the study enriches these theories with a socio-cognitive dimension. This theoretical contribution not only challenges the conventional state-centric assumptions of Realism and Liberalism but also supports Constructivist and Symbolic Interactionist views on the role of shared meanings and social interpretations in shaping state behaviour. Thus, the study offers an original theoretical contribution by localising and expanding global IR theories within the distinctive socio-political setting of the UAE.

2.13 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

The conceptual framework serves as a guide for structuring the relationships among the study's key variables, providing a clear foundation for analysis. It helps to visualise how the core concepts interact and supports a systematic approach to exploring their connections. This section introduces the framework that underpins the study and outlines the hypotheses formulated to guide the empirical investigation

2.13.1 Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework examines how soft power practices influence the international relations of the United Arab Emirates while incorporating the moderating role of public perception. The framework brings together five core variables: the independent variables of foreign policy, culture, and political values, which represent key dimensions of soft power; the dependent variable of international relations; and the moderating variable of public perception.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the conceptual framework, presenting the relationships among these variables in a clear and integrated manner. The framework assumes that soft power practices can enhance international relations by fostering credibility, trust, and cooperation between the UAE and other nations. However, the impact of these practices is shaped by the way they are perceived by both domestic and international audiences. Positive public perception can amplify the influence of foreign policy, cultural outreach, and political values in strengthening diplomatic relations, whereas negative perception may limit or even undermine their intended impact.

By emphasising the role of perception, the framework highlights that the effectiveness of soft power strategies depends not only on the quality of policies and initiatives but also on the narratives and images that shape their reception. In the context of the UAE, which actively promotes its identity as a progressive and stable nation, incorporating public perception into the framework reflects the reality that diplomatic influence in today's interconnected world relies heavily on attraction, legitimacy, and credibility.

This conceptual framework provides a structured foundation for the study's empirical analysis, guiding the exploration of how soft power operates in practice within the UAE's international relations.

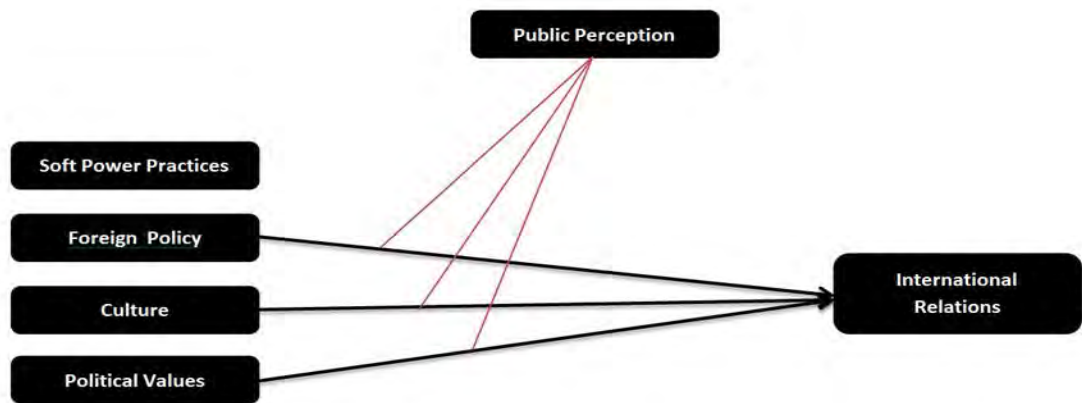


Figure 2. 2 Conceptual Framework

2.13.2 Hypothesis Development

Based on this conceptual framework and the underpinning theories discussed earlier, the study develops a set of hypotheses to empirically test the relationships between the identified variables. The model proposes that foreign policy, culture, and political values each exert a positive influence on international relations, and that public perception moderates these relationships, either amplifying or weakening their effects.

Figure 2.2 illustrates these hypothesised relationships, showing the three independent variables (foreign policy, culture, and political values) linked to the dependent variable (international relations), with public perception acting as the moderating variable. This structure aligns the hypotheses directly with the theoretical foundations and ensures a coherent flow from conceptual design to empirical testing

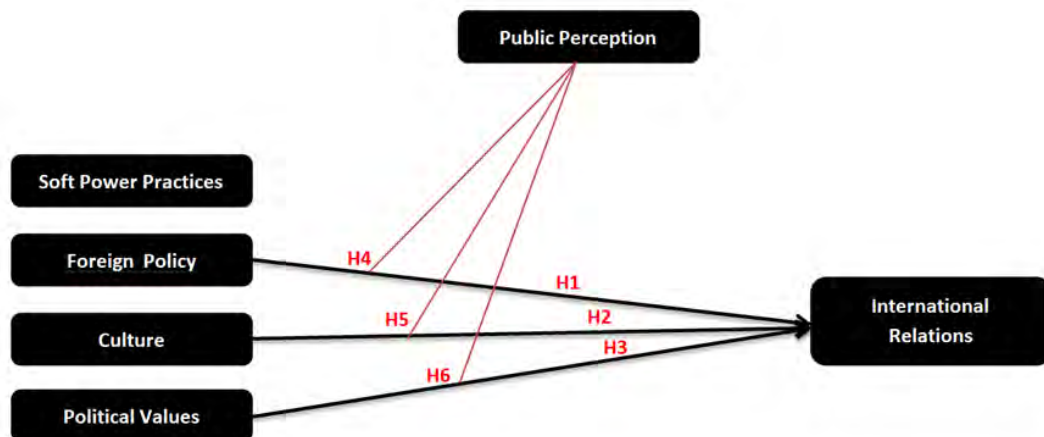


Figure 2. 3 Hypothesis

2.13.2.1 Foreign Policy and International Relations

Foreign policy is widely recognised as a central determinant of a state’s position and influence in the international system. Numerous studies affirm that the Emirati experience with foreign policy aligns with the scholarly consensus that every state requires a distinctive foreign policy framework to ensure its continuity, security, and international engagement (Keating & Kaczmarska, 2019; Nye Jr., 2019; Darwich & Kaarbo, 2020). The nexus between domestic determinants and international ambitions has long been debated in foreign policy analysis, and the UAE represents a compelling case of successfully balancing both dimensions.

The UAE has developed a foreign policy model aimed at playing an active and constructive role on the global stage, practising diplomatic engagement grounded in mutual respect and cooperation. Its approach, deeply rooted in the vision of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, is characterised by moderation, dialogue, and

adherence to international law and the Charter of the United Nations. This strategic orientation emphasises building relations based on affection, tolerance, and non-interference in others' internal affairs while promoting peaceful dispute resolution and supporting global peace and stability.

This diplomatic orientation has enabled the UAE to establish wide-ranging partnerships across political, economic, cultural, scientific, educational, and health domains, strengthening its status as a credible international actor (Saber et al., 2018; Al Suwaidi, 2021; Krzymowski, 2022; Al Zaabi & Awamleh, 2019; Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022; Krzymowski, 2020; AlKetbi, 2017). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has served as the country's principal gateway to the world, projecting the Emirati leadership's values of human fraternity, humanitarian assistance, and multilateral cooperation.

- **Hypothesis 1:** Foreign policies have a significant positive impact on the international relations of the UAE.

2.13.2.2 Culture and International Relations

Culture is increasingly recognised as a vital instrument of soft power that fosters dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation among nations. Cross-cultural exchanges and intercultural dialogue have been shown to contribute to peacebuilding and to strengthen international relations, including in the case of the United Arab Emirates. Within the UAE, cultural diversity is not only preserved but actively promoted, and cultural rights are regarded as fundamental human rights. This commitment reflects the UAE's belief that cultural pluralism enhances its global image and facilitates its engagement with other states.

The cultural values and heritage of the Emirates form a core component of the country's national identity and soft power. These cultural assets resonate internationally, positioning the UAE as a hub of coexistence and innovation in the Arab world. The recognition and protection of cultural heritage is also closely linked to international norms on the rights of indigenous peoples, including rights to land, resources, and cultural continuity, which are considered essential for their physical and cultural survival. By safeguarding and projecting its cultural heritage, the UAE contributes to its self-determination narrative while enhancing its legitimacy and attractiveness abroad.

Moreover, cultural diplomacy enables the UAE to build networks of trust, improve its reputation, and strengthen its role in international organizations and multilateral forums. Such efforts align with global trends, where cultural identity is leveraged as a tool to create positive perceptions and enduring partnerships. Thus, promoting Emirati culture internationally not only strengthens national identity but also enhances the country's diplomatic reach and international relations (Al Zaabi & Awamleh, 2019; Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022; Saber et al., 2018; Al Suwaidi, 2021).

- **Hypothesis 2:** Emirati culture has a positive influence on the international relations of the UAE.

2.13.2.3 Political Values and International Relations

Like other successful states, the UAE promotes its political values as guiding principles that help shape decision-making and behaviour in complex political

environments. Research suggests that political values act as cognitive filters, enabling individuals and institutions to interpret political information and navigate intricate political landscapes. However, some studies also caution that individuals' endorsement of political values can be context-dependent rather than fixed; the framing of political issues can alter the salience of these values, and their influence may be constrained by situational factors such as candidate evaluation or policy context. This perspective challenges the notion of political values as static guides, instead emphasising their flexibility and the role of social influence in shaping their application (Saber et al., 2018; Al Suwaidi, 2021).

In the Emirati context, political values are deeply rooted in the nation's historical, social, and cultural foundations. They represent an organic link between the country's founding principles, its political evolution, and the ideals of Emirati society. The UAE has consistently sought to project positive political values such as stability, moderation, tolerance, and respect for international law as central pillars of its foreign policy identity. Emirati national groups recognise that, despite social, political, and ideological differences, advancing the national interest requires strengthening the country's influence, soft power, and international relations by promoting constructive political values (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022; Krzymowski, 2020; AlKetbi, 2017).

Furthermore, while contemporary civilizations and political systems differ in their values, there remains a shared set of fundamental interests among nations, including the UAE. These include fostering peace, international cooperation, and the establishment of a just global political and economic order. The promotion of

universally acknowledged and publicly shared political values is essential to achieving these objectives and enhancing the UAE's credibility and influence in international affairs (Krzyszowski, 2022; Al Zaabi & Awamleh, 2019)

- **Hypothesis 3:** The UAE's political values have a positive impact on its international relations.

2.13.2.4 Public Perception as a Moderator

Public perception represents a state of self-awareness that strongly shapes individuals' judgments regarding policies, governance, and international relations. It can influence how the public evaluates the political values practiced by a state and their linkage to the state's conduct in international relations. Public perceptions function as internalised cognitive models shaped by the surrounding social and political environment, and they form the lens through which individuals interpret a state's foreign policy behaviour, its political values, and the overall nature of its international engagement (Aysolmaz et al., 2023).

The process of constructing and synthesising cultural and political meaning among the public is closely intertwined with general perception, shaped by individuals' cultural backgrounds and the dominant political values within their society and state (Kazun & Kazun, 2020). Public perception serves as a mental framework that links foreign policy, culture, and international relations. This framework can crystallise into collective mental images that shape societal attitudes, even if these perceptions sometimes contradict one another (Che-Ha et al., 2016).

In the Emirati context, public perception develops through the public's evaluation of the state's foreign policies, cultural practices, and political values, informed by their social affiliations and cultural identity. These perceptions influence broader public beliefs, attitudes, and opinions about international relations and their relevance to foreign policy, cultural initiatives, and political values (Dowler et al., 2006; Egelhofer et al., 2023). As such, public perception acts as a moderating variable that can either strengthen or weaken the relationship between soft power resources and international relations outcomes.

- **Hypothesis 4:** Public perception moderates the relationship between foreign policy and international relations of the UAE.
- **Hypothesis 5:** Public perception moderates the relationship between political values and international relations of the UAE.
- **Hypothesis 6:** Public perception moderates the relationship between culture and international relations of the UAE.

2.14 Development of Constructs and Measurement Items

This section reviews the main constructs of the study and the measurement items used to capture them. The constructs culture, political values, foreign policy, public perception, and international relations were developed based on established literature in soft power and international relations. Existing instruments from different scholars were compared, and the most relevant items were adapted to suit the context of the UAE.

2.14.1 Culture Items

Culture is widely recognised as a central dimension of soft power, operating through language, heritage, education, and artistic expression to shape international attraction. Wu (2023) highlights the increasing role of cultural branding in positioning states within global networks, emphasising how cultural exchanges strengthen perceptions of credibility and trust. Similarly, Krzymowski (2022) underscores the cultural foundations of the UAE's international influence, noting that events such as Expo 2020 and cultural diplomacy programmes serve as pivotal instruments of attraction. Arizpe (2015) further argues that cultural industries and creative sectors are now integral in sustaining soft power, especially in non-Western contexts seeking visibility in global politics. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that culture is not a peripheral element but rather a key pillar of soft power strategies. The present study draws on these works to develop questionnaire items that capture cultural perception in terms of heritage, arts, global events, and intercultural communication, ensuring alignment with both international scholarship and the Emirati context.

2.14.2 Political Values Items

Political values represent another essential component of soft power, influencing how international audiences evaluate the legitimacy and credibility of a state. Köse, Özcan, and Karakoç (2016) emphasise that democratic norms, governance practices, and political inclusivity form a vital part of a country's image abroad. More recently, Kyriakidis, AlDulaimi, and Molaeb (2024) extend this argument to the Gulf region, demonstrating how perceptions of political stability, reform initiatives, and governance effectiveness shape external evaluations of Arab states. Another study by Wehling (2013) highlights that political values operate not only as abstract ideals but

as tangible markers of credibility in international relations. Building on these insights, this study adapts and refines items that assess perceptions of the UAE's political values, particularly in relation to governance quality, stability, and alignment with internationally recognised norms.

2.14.3 Foreign Policy Items

Foreign policy has long been recognised as the most visible dimension of soft power serving as the arena where diplomatic choices and strategic alliances directly shape perceptions. Kaarbo (1996) illustrates how small states utilise foreign policy initiatives as a form of niche diplomacy to gain disproportionate influence. Rahman expands on this by showing how foreign policy decisions can amplify or (2019) undermine a state's credibility depending on their consistency with international norms. In the UAE context, Krzymowski (2022) identifies foreign policy as a cornerstone of its soft power projection, highlighting the use of humanitarian aid climate diplomacy, and conflict mediation as instruments of attraction. Drawing from these perspectives, the present study employs items that measure public perceptions of UAE foreign policy in terms of credibility, consistency, and its role in strengthening international cooperation.

2.14.4 Public Perception Items

Public perception plays a decisive role in the effectiveness of soft power, as it reflects how international and domestic audiences interpret a country's cultural initiatives, political values, and foreign policy choices. Westlake et al. (2023) stresses that perception is socially constructed and can amplify or weaken a country's diplomatic efforts depending on prevailing narratives. More recent contributions, such as

Koswatta et al. (2023), highlight the psychological dynamics of perception, showing how individuals rely on cultural frames when evaluating foreign states. Likewise, Jing et al. (2023) identify national reputation as a critical dimension of perception, where positive images strengthen attraction and negative stereotypes can undermine legitimacy. By engaging with these perspectives, this study develops questionnaire items that capture how Emirati soft power is received and interpreted, thereby recognising perception as both a mediator and outcome of soft power strategies.

2.14.5 International Relations

International relations form the broader context in which soft power operates, linking state behaviour to patterns of cooperation, conflict, and global reputation. Chong (2007) emphasises that small states often use soft power as a substitute for limited hard power resources in order to secure diplomatic recognition. Rahman (2019) underscores how participation in international organisations and global governance structures enhances credibility and influence. In the Gulf region, Krzymowski (2020) demonstrates that the UAE has strategically leveraged humanitarian diplomacy, climate commitments, and regional mediation to strengthen its international profile. Complementing these works, Raustiala & Slaughter (2002) notes that in an era where military options are increasingly ineffective, soft power is a critical pathway for advancing foreign policy objectives. Drawing on this scholarship, the present study develops items that assess perceptions of the UAE's international relations in terms of its ability to build partnerships, contribute to global governance, and enhance diplomatic influence.

2.15 Summary

This chapter provided the theoretical foundation for the study. It began with an introduction and then presented a comprehensive review of the key variables foreign policy, culture, political values, public perception, and international relations drawing on relevant prior studies to establish their conceptual bases. The chapter also incorporated debates on the interactions, overlaps, and potential synergies or conflicts among these variables, highlighting their significance within the UAE context.

Furthermore, it outlined the underpinning theories that frame the study, linking each variable to appropriate international relations theories to strengthen the scholarly grounding. Building on this theoretical base, the chapter developed a detailed conceptual framework that illustrated the proposed relationships among the study's variables, followed by the formulation of hypotheses to be empirically tested in subsequent chapters. This systematic structure ensures that the study's empirical model is firmly rooted in established theory and existing literature.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted for the present study. It explains the overall research design, the sampling strategy, the participants involved, the development of the questionnaire, the procedures of data collection, and the techniques applied to analyze the data. The methodological choices made here are guided by the objectives of the research and the theoretical framework established in Chapter Two.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the study focuses on examining the role of public perception as a moderating factor in the relationship between soft power practices and international relations in the context of the United Arab Emirates. Specifically, the independent variables are identified as foreign policy (FP), political values (PV), and culture (CU). The dependent variable is international relations (IR), while public perception (PP) serves as the moderating variable.

By adopting this methodological framework, the study seeks to generate empirical evidence that demonstrates how soft power operates in practice and how public perception shapes the effectiveness of soft power instruments. The design of this methodology section ensures that each stage of the research process is systematically

explained, from the selection of respondents to the justification of the analytical tools, thereby ensuring transparency and replicability.

3.2 Research Design

This research is an investigative research as well as quantitative research tensions and also research on tensions about social phenomena with evidence in measurable or even numerical form. It is based on statistical analysis of data and also leads to reliable and valid results as well as insurance claims. Since it is in fact a scientific study of society, it is clear; It examines attitudes, assumptions, ideas, fads, seasons, and societal systems as well as providing additional insight into the population. As revealed by Sharp (2009), social research relies on rational and practical reviews. This is why social research is deductive in nature, and it attempts to validate theories through data collection and data analysis, and its goal is to examine, explore, summarize, and elucidate. Social research is a systematic attempt to collect, analyze, and decode relevant information that explains how social characteristics, behaviors, and connections between individuals and organizations influence each other.

The need to efficiently achieve the objectives of this study updated the researcher's choice of quantitative approach. The reason for this choice is that the researcher really wants to validate the relationships that exist between the study variables, and this is consistent with the views of (Kelley et al., 2003) and also (Williams, 2007). Quantitative research methodology is supposed to help structure and validate by showing relationships between variables to be able to generalize, and much more, choosing quantitative research methodology has several comparative benefits when compared to referring to qualitative research, such as opportunity awareness (it doesn't

take much of opportunities compared to qualitative insights), effectiveness, (implementation does not require a lot of information) and also has good conveniences for studying a large sample (Al-Zawawi et al., 2007).

It is in fact also a tomographic survey method, due to the fact that the data collected will certainly only cover the time period of the study (Creswell, 2010). Again, the choice of a cross-sectional survey rather than a longitudinal survey research method is in fact because the researcher aims to collect data that clarify the opinion of subjects as well as colleagues that cannot be easily obtained using other resources such as posterior sources (Angrist & Pischke, 2010 ; Watson, 1998). And as far as this study is concerned, the choices are justified. The research process and its stages are presented:

- Research philosophy, which is positive research
- Research approach - deductive approach
- Systematic selection - quantitative research
- Research strategy - an applied study using the survey
- Data collection and data analysis - quota sampling, direct collection, PLS
- SEM statistical analysis.

3.3 Research Philosophy

Every piece of study is predicated on beliefs about how we see the world and how to best comprehend it. Of course, no one truly understands how to comprehend the world in the best way, and philosophers have debated this issue. Since this has been a subject of discussion for at least two millennia, we will just look at how the majority of contemporary social scientists address the question of how we know the world around

us (Adams et al., 2004). Positivism and post positivism are the two primary philosophical systems, and they are both crucial viewpoints for modern social science. There are also more schools of thought, including feminism, constructivism, relativism, subjectivism, interpretation, deconstruction, and others (Crossan, 2013).

This research philosophy is the idea of positivism because the author believes that the research problem can be shown in numbers. The opposing viewpoint is one that rejects metaphysics and holds that the purpose of knowledge is to just explain the facts that we experience (Holden & Lynch, 2004). Simply said, science's goal is to understand what is observable and measurable. And in a hopeful worldview, science was viewed as a means of discovering the truth and gaining sufficient knowledge of the world to foresee and manage it.

And the world and the cosmos were unavoidable because they operated according to rules of cause and effect that can be identified if we utilize the special methodology of science. The circumstance holds that experience is the best teacher and that the fundamentals of science are measurement and observation. The core element of the scientific method is experimentation, which involves making an effort to distinguish between natural laws through modification and direct observation (Mkansi & Acheampong, 2012).

3.4 Research Approach

The two research methodologies that are most often used are inductive and deductive. The use of the inductive approach facilitates the generation of novel concepts and generalizations, while concurrently scrutinizing the validity of underlying

assumptions, theories, or hypotheses. Deductive reasoning follows a logical progression from general premises to specific conclusions. This approach is sometimes denoted as a "top-down" tactic. The formulation of a theoretical framework pertaining to the subject matter under investigation may be initiated.

Next, our attention is directed on narrower hypotheses that may be assessed. When collecting data to address research hypotheses, there is a greater emphasis placed on the work of Kothari (2004). Ultimately, this facilitates the examination of hypotheses in light of specific empirical evidence, so allowing for the evaluation of the accuracy of our original assumptions. The present research adopts a deductive strategy, since it starts with a comprehensive examination of the issue, using relevant studies and existing information to formulate a hypothesis via logical reasoning (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014).

3.5 Approach Selection

Systematic selection encompasses the use of either quantitative or qualitative methodologies, or a blend of both. In order to achieve the goals and objectives of the study, qualitative research utilizes several methods such as interviews, focus groups, and experiments. The process of data analysis includes the identification of recurring patterns among responses and the subsequent critical evaluation of such patterns (Rihoux, 2006). In contrast, the process of data analysis in quantitative research entails a meticulous assessment and interpretation of the data, with a deliberate endeavour to comprehend the underlying factors that contributed to the principal findings (Snell, 2011).

Quantitative approaches employ a distinct methodology that relies on precise measurements and statistical, mathematical, and numerical analysis of data obtained through surveys, questionnaires, opinion polls, or computational techniques applied to pre-existing statistical information. Quantitative research focuses on the collection and analysis of numerical data pertaining to diverse populations or the exploration of particular occurrences. The present research may be classified as a quantitative study due to the use of a numerical coding scale ranging from 1 to 5 for the initial data collected, which was afterwards analysed using SPSS (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015).

3.6 Research Strategy

A research strategy provides the overarching framework that guides the approach to answering the research questions and achieving the study's objectives. As defined by Verschuren (2003), it is the systematic plan that determines how data will be gathered, analyzed, and interpreted to produce meaningful findings. In the present study, a quantitative survey research design was adopted, employing a structured questionnaire as the main instrument for primary data collection.

This strategy is particularly appropriate for the current research because it enables the systematic measurement of perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to soft power practices and their influence on international relations in the context of the United Arab Emirates. By quantifying these perceptions, the study is able to statistically examine the hypothesized relationships among the key variables foreign policy, political values, culture, and international relations with public perception serving as a moderator.

The study also employs a descriptive analytical approach, which allows for both the presentation of clear demographic and descriptive patterns as well as the testing of theoretical relationships through statistical models. This approach ensures that the research does not merely describe existing conditions but also interprets the patterns in light of the underpinning theories of soft power and international relations.

Surveys were chosen as the most suitable method because they provide access to a larger pool of participants, enabling the collection of a diverse range of responses. This enhances the generalizability of the findings while ensuring that individual differences in perceptions are captured. Depending on feasibility and access, surveys may be directed at the entire target population (a census) or at a carefully defined subset, such as employees, diplomats, or members of organizations relevant to the UAE's international relations context.

Overall, this strategy provides the study with a reliable and replicable framework that ensures consistency, objectivity, and the capacity to produce evidence-based insights into the relationship between soft power and international relations.

3.7 Study Population and Sampling Methods

3.7.1 Study Population

A study population is a defined group of individuals known for their related characteristics. All individuals within a population usually share a common, essential, or defining attribute. The study population is considered one of the most important elements of research design. As Castillo and Fernández-Canteli (2009) note, the study population can be classified into two parts: the target study population and the

accessible study population. The target population refers to the whole group of people that researchers are interested in generalising their conclusions to (also called the theoretical population). The accessible population, on the other hand, is the population from which researchers can realistically collect data and apply their conclusions in other words, a subset of the target population.

For the purposes of this research, the study population consists of Emirati employees engaged in diplomatic, political, or public relations roles within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and selected UAE embassies abroad, including personnel based at the Ministry's headquarters in Abu Dhabi. Administrative and technical staff who do not contribute to foreign policy or public diplomacy are excluded, as they fall outside the scope of this study.

This focus is deliberate and aligns with the objectives of the research, which examines how soft power practices influence international relations. Diplomatic, political, and public relations personnel are directly involved in designing, implementing, and communicating the UAE's soft power strategies, whereas administrative or technical staff perform internal operational functions and have no direct role in policy formulation, diplomatic negotiations, or external representation. Including non-diplomatic staff could introduce irrelevant variance and dilute the validity of the findings. Restricting the population to employees who actively engage with international stakeholders ensures that the data reflect informed perspectives on soft power and international relations, thereby enhancing the internal validity and relevance of the study.

3.7.2 The Study Sample

As it is impractical to survey the entire population of 5,000 employees, a representative sample was determined. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table, a population of this size requires a minimum of 357 respondents to achieve generalizable results at a 95% confidence level. This target is also consistent with Hair et al.'s (2010) recommendation that sample size should be at least ten times the maximum number of predictors in a regression model. Achieving this number provides sufficient statistical power for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), the analysis technique used in this study.

To ensure representativeness, the sample is stratified across different categories of employees. Specifically, the respondents include:

- a) Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters staff in Abu Dhabi (policy formulation and international cooperation).
- b) Diplomatic staff in selected UAE embassies abroad (public diplomacy and bilateral relations).
- c) Other relevant foreign policy units involved in international communication and cultural promotion.

By distributing the sample across these categories, the study ensures that the perspectives captured reflect the diversity of roles within the UAE's foreign policy apparatus. This design allows conclusions to be more accurately generalized to the broader target population. To avoid bias linked to hierarchical positions, the sample includes respondents from various levels within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies (junior officers, mid-level staff, and senior officials) ensuring that the data

reflect a range of perspectives and are not skewed toward only key officials or role models.

Table 3. 1
Morgan Sample Table

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	1000000	384

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

3.7.3 Sampling Technique

The population is 5,000 employees and the target sample size is 357; However, proper selection of samples is essential to ensure that participants are effective providers of the population landscape. And since the sample will be selected from specific categories of the study population (not every employee can be selected) and obtaining

a complete list of employees' names is not possible for sovereign reasons, so the selection will not be random and our sample is not random.

Also, the foreign workers are heterogeneous elements, as the opinion may differ among the workers according to the following classifications

- Employees in the mother ministry in the state
- Employees in the Gulf regional environment
- Staff in foreign embassies (Western Society)
- Employees in the rest of the world

Accordingly, this study adopts a stratified sampling method to ensure that respondents are drawn proportionally from relevant institutions and categories. The strata include employees from different departments within the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as staff members in selected UAE embassies worldwide. This approach is suitable for quantitative research because it guarantees representation across key groups, reduces sampling bias, and provides a more accurate reflection of the population under study. Within each stratum, respondents are identified based on their functional role and level of participation in diplomatic or public engagement activities, which ensures that the data collected is directly aligned with the research objectives.

3.7.4 Unit of Analysis

In survey-based research, the term “unit of analysis” refers to the level at which data are collected and analysed. The choice of an appropriate unit of analysis is critical to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the population under study. Depending on

the research objectives, the unit of analysis can be an individual, group, community, or organisational entity, based on how the data are aggregated and interpreted.

For the purpose of this research, which examines the impact of soft power practices (foreign policy, culture, and political values) on international relations, with public perception as a moderating variable, the unit of analysis is individual Emirati employees working in diplomatic, political, and public relations roles. These individuals are employed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in Abu Dhabi and in selected UAE embassies abroad. Focusing on individual-level data allows for the direct assessment of their perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding the UAE's soft power strategies and their influence on international relations outcomes.

This individual-level unit of analysis is appropriate because it enables data collection from professionals who are directly involved in designing, implementing, or representing the UAE's international policies and public diplomacy efforts. Their positions within the MoFA and embassies give them informed insights into how soft power mechanisms operate in practice, while ensuring responses reflect the official and experiential dimensions of UAE diplomacy. This approach aligns with the study's goal of analysing how personal perceptions and experiences shape the effectiveness of national soft power strategies in international relations.

3.8 Data Collection

This study relied exclusively on online survey distribution to collect data from employees of the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies worldwide. The questionnaire was prepared in both English and Arabic, allowing respondents to select

their preferred language. A back-translation process was applied to ensure equivalence and accuracy between the two versions.

An official letter of approval was obtained from Universiti Utara Malaysia and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate the process and ensure the study was conducted formally. Following this, the questionnaire link was distributed through the ministry's internal communication channels and embassy intranet systems, which enabled access to respondents across multiple international locations.

To maximise the response rate, 714 online questionnaires were distributed (double the minimum sample size of 357 (Hair et al., 2008, Elkheloufi & Yean, 2022)). The self-administered format ensured that participation remained voluntary, confidential, and free from duplication.

3.9 Study Tool (Questionnaire)

In social science research, the choice of an appropriate data collection tool is critical to ensuring both reliability and validity of the results. While some studies rely heavily on secondary data already documented in existing literature or official reports, this research emphasizes the importance of collecting primary data directly from respondents. Previous research has highlighted that people's attitudes, perspectives, and opinions often provide deeper insights into the functioning of social, political, and economic systems, particularly when secondary sources are limited or insufficient (López-Gamero et al., 2009; Wagner, 2007). In such cases, the impressions and perceptions of individuals become an indispensable source of knowledge.

For the purposes of this study, a structured questionnaire was designed and employed as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was carefully adapted and modified from established and validated instruments used in prior peer-reviewed studies to ensure both its relevance to the present research context and its ability to capture the constructs under investigation. This adaptation process involved reviewing previous scales, refining items for clarity, and tailoring the wording to align with the UAE's cultural and diplomatic context.

The questionnaire was organized into five main sections, each corresponding to a group of variables central to this study: foreign policy, political values, cultural factors, international relations, and public perception (as a moderating variable). Each section consisted of multiple items designed to measure respondents' opinions and attitudes toward the constructs. The items were arranged on a Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree), which enabled the quantification of perceptions and facilitated their subsequent analysis using statistical techniques such as PLS-SEM.

To ensure the quality, reliability, and validity of the questionnaire, a two-stage process was applied. First, a pilot study was conducted with a smaller sample to test the clarity and comprehensibility of the items. Feedback was collected and used to refine ambiguous statements, adjust the wording, and improve the overall flow of the instrument. Second, statistical tests for reliability and validity (such as Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted) were carried out once the main data were collected, confirming that the instrument met acceptable thresholds for research standards.

The questionnaire served as a systematic and reliable tool for capturing the perceptions of respondents in relation to the UAE's soft power strategies and their impact on international relations. Its design, grounded in prior research yet carefully adapted to the present study, ensures that the collected data are both contextually relevant and theoretically meaningful.

3.9.1 Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire designed for this study was divided into two main sections, each serving a distinct purpose. The first section focused on gathering demographic information about the respondents and their respective organizations. These demographic variables included age, gender, job title, educational level, and years of work experience. Collecting such background data is important, as it provides insight into the diversity of the sample and allows for subgroup comparisons, thereby enhancing the interpretation of the study's findings. For example, understanding whether perceptions of soft power differ according to professional seniority or educational background can shed light on how public perception is shaped across different social and organizational categories.

The second section of the questionnaire was directly related to the core variables of the research model. This part included items that measured respondents' views on the independent variables foreign policy, political values, and cultural factors as well as the dependent variable, international relations, and the moderating variable, public perception. Each construct was represented by multiple statements, carefully adapted from previous validated instruments, and designed to capture the attitudes and opinions of respondents in relation to the UAE's soft power strategies and their outcomes.

To measure these variables, the study employed a five-point Likert scale, also known as Playkart-5, as recommended by Sekaran and Bougie (2016). The scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. This format was chosen because it is simple to construct, administer, and record, while also being widely accepted in social science research. The Likert scale enables respondents to express the degree of their agreement with each statement, thus providing nuanced data rather than forcing binary responses.

Once the data were collected, each item was subjected to statistical analysis using specialized software. Individual items were examined separately, and in some cases, aggregated to compute mean scores for each construct. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how respondents collectively perceived the elements of soft power and their influence on international relations. The use of the Likert scale offered a significant methodological advantage, as it facilitated the quantification of subjective perceptions and enabled their inclusion in advanced statistical models such as PLS-SEM.

By structuring the questionnaire in this two-part format demographics followed by the main research constructs the study ensured both clarity for respondents and alignment with the objectives of the research. The design allowed the questionnaire to serve not only as a data collection tool but also as an analytical framework for linking individual perceptions with broader theoretical constructs.

3.9.2 Measuring Research Tools

The measurement of constructs in this study was guided by validated scales drawn from prior empirical research in international relations, political science, and

management studies. Instead of relying on a single pre-existing instrument, the questionnaire integrated items from diverse sources, ensuring that each construct was operationalized in a manner consistent with both theory and context. This approach enhanced construct validity while allowing the model to capture the unique characteristics of the UAE case study. The list of questions is as follows:

❖ **Foreign Policy (FP)**

- 1- The UAE pursues a foreign policy that influences the behavior of other countries.
- 2- The UAE's foreign policy intersects with its national interests.
- 3- The foreign policy of the UAE is characterized by balance and pragmatism.
- 4- The foreign policy of the Emirates takes into account the moral image of the Emirates in the world.
- 5- The UAE's foreign policy takes into account the UAE's position in the world.
- 6- The UAE's foreign policy contributed to its assumption of an influential position in the region and the world.
- 7- The UAE's foreign policy reflects the UAE's endeavor to spread peace and stability in the world.
- 8- The UAE's foreign policy contributes to the consolidation of the Emirates as a rising power in the region.
- 9- The UAE's foreign policy takes into account the specificities of countries.
- 10- The UAE's foreign policy is open to the world.
- 11- The UAE's foreign policy is commensurate with the size of the Emirates and its regional and international weight.

12- The UAE's foreign policy fits the nature of the regional and international conflict.

❖ **Political Values (PV)**

- 1- Political values are the essence of the Emirati self
- 2- Political values direct Emirati political behavior.
- 3- The political values of the Emirates are related to racial equality and tolerance.
- 4- The political values of the Emirates are flexible and acceptable.
- 5- The UAE's political values are a lever for its foreign policy.
- 6- The UAE's political values are an effective Emirati soft power tool.
- 7- The political values of the Emirates reinforce the peaceful character of the Emirates.
- 8- Emirati political values promote peace and stability in the world.

❖ **Cultures (Cu)**

- 1- The culture of the Emirates is the essence of the Emirati self
- 2- The culture of the Emirates directs the Emirati political behavior.
- 3- The UAE culture is characterized by racial equality and tolerance.
- 4- The UAE culture is flexible and acceptable.
- 5- UAE culture is a lever for its foreign policy.
- 6- UAE culture is an effective Emirati soft power tool.
- 7- The culture of the Emirates enhances the peaceful character of the Emirates.
- 8- The culture of the UAE promotes peace and stability in the world.

❖ **International Relations (IR)**

- 1- The UAE pursues international relations that influence the behavior of other countries.
- 2- The international relations of the UAE intersect with its national interests.
- 3- The international relations of the UAE are characterized by balance and pragmatism.
- 4- The UAE's international relations take into account the moral image of the UAE in the world.
- 5- The UAE's international relations take into account the UAE's position in the world.
- 6- The international relations of the UAE contributed to its obtaining an influential position in the region and the world.
- 7- The UAE's international relations reflect the UAE's endeavor to spread peace and stability in the world.
- 8- The UAE's international relations contribute to consolidating the UAE's position as a rising power in the region.
- 9- The international relations of the United Arab Emirates take into account the specificities of countries.
- 10- The international relations of the UAE are open to the world.
- 11- The international relations of the United Arab Emirates are commensurate with the size of the Emirates and its regional and international weight.
- 12- The international relations of the UAE are commensurate with the nature of the regional and international conflict.

❖ **Public Perception**

- 1- The general perception of the Emirati people supports the country's foreign policy.
- 2- The general perception of the Emirati public is affected by the cultural dimension of the UAE.
- 3- Public perception is influenced by the political values of the United Arab Emirates.
- 4- The general perception of the public affects the international relations of the United Arab Emirates.
- 5- Public perception represents a stabilizing factor for the state's policies in the field of its international relations.
- 6- Public perception is a motivating factor for soft power practices in the field of international relations.
- 7- The general perception of the Emirati people is essential in the strategies of the UAE's international relations.
- 8- The general perception of the Emirati people supports the efforts of the UAE's international relations to spread peace and prosperity.
- 9- The public opinion of the Emirati people reflects well-established political values.
- 10- The general perception of the Emirati people is a lever for the Emirati soft power.

3.10 Pre-Test

The pre-test is a fundamental step in social research, as it helps ensure that research tools are clear, functional, and appropriate before large-scale data collection begins

Although pre-tests are widely recognised as essential in survey-based studies (Hunt et al., 1982), they have often received less methodological attention than other stages of the research process. Nevertheless, a robust pre-test can reveal practical issues that might otherwise compromise the quality of the findings

Regardless of whether a study relies on surveys, interviews, direct observations, or secondary data, a pre-test is indispensable. It serves as the first opportunity to evaluate how the proposed research instruments such as questionnaires or interview protocols perform in practice with a small sample drawn from the intended population. By trialling the instruments, the researcher can identify confusing wording, problematic scales, or even the tone of introductory remarks that may affect respondents' willingness to participate

For example, a questionnaire may appear well-designed on paper yet prove difficult for respondents to comprehend during testing. Open-ended questions might elicit very few responses, suggesting that they need rephrasing to encourage fuller participation. Similarly, an interviewer may discover during pre-testing that respondents perceive the interview as unimportant or irrelevant, prompting adjustments to the opening script to build trust and engagement

As Kline (2023) notes, the pre-testing stage is often “the most likely to be squeezed out due to cost and time pressures” yet neglecting it can have serious consequences for data quality and validity. Reports on pre-tests remain relatively rare in the social-science literature, but documenting this step is crucial because it demonstrates the

rigour of the research design and provides transparency about how data-collection instruments were refined

In this study, the pre-test was undertaken to assess the clarity, relevance, and usability of the questionnaire before proceeding to the pilot study. This stage provided valuable insights into how respondents interpreted the questions, the adequacy of the Likert-scale format, and the appropriateness of the overall structure. Adjustments made as a result of the pre-test improved the instrument's face validity and content validity ensuring that it was well-suited for use in the subsequent phases of the research.

3.11 Pilot Study

Before the full-scale data collection, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate the clarity, validity, and reliability of the questionnaire (Sekaran, 2007). The initial draft of the survey instrument was reviewed by a panel of three experts: two academics from the Department of International Relations at Abu Dhabi University and one senior employee of the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their feedback on wording sequencing, and item relevance was incorporated into a revised version of the questionnaire

The revised instrument was then tested with 28 respondents who were not included in the final study sample. The purpose of the pilot was to identify potential issues with the survey items and to ensure that the constructs were understood as intended. Minor modifications were made based on feedback from the pilot, which improved both the clarity and usability of the instrument

3.12 Data Analysis Technique

This study applies both SPSS version 26 and SmartPLS 3.0 for data analysis. SPSS is used primarily for descriptive statistics and preliminary analysis, while SmartPLS 3.0 is employed to test the hypothesised relationships among the study's constructs using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).

PLS-SEM is appropriate for this research for several reasons. First, the study involves latent variables such as soft power, public perception, and international relations, which cannot be measured directly and therefore require a structural modelling approach. Second, the research model is complex, containing multiple constructs and relationships that need to be tested simultaneously, including mediating and moderating effects. Third, PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for prediction-oriented studies and is robust when working with relatively small to medium sample sizes, unlike covariance-based SEM (e.g., AMOS), which often requires larger samples (Hair et al., 2011).

The analysis in SmartPLS follows the recommended two-step procedure. The first stage evaluates the measurement model, confirming the reliability and validity of the constructs through tests such as composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. Once the measurement model is established, the second stage evaluates the structural model, which estimates the relationships among constructs, assesses explanatory power through R^2 values, and determines the predictive relevance of the model (Sarstedt & Schloderer, 2010).

By using PLS-SEM, this study ensures that measurement error is accounted for and that the hypothesised relationships between constructs can be examined with accuracy. This approach is essential for testing the proposed framework, as it provides the only suitable means to simultaneously analyse the interactions between soft power, public perception, and international relations.

3.12.1 Normality Test

Before conducting advanced statistical modelling, it was necessary to evaluate the distribution of the dataset. Normality was assessed using graphical techniques such as histograms, stem-and-leaf plots, and boxplots, in addition to numerical checks. These steps ensured that the data did not display extreme skewness or kurtosis that could bias subsequent analyses. Although PLS-SEM does not strictly require multivariate normality, testing the data distribution remains important to verify assumptions and to provide a clearer picture of the underlying dataset prior to model estimation (Hair et al., 2016).

3.12.2 Multicollinearity Test

To avoid redundancy among predictors, multicollinearity was tested using variance inflation factor (VIF) values. High intercorrelations among independent variables can inflate standard errors and undermine the accuracy of path coefficients. Following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019), VIF values below the threshold of 5 were considered acceptable, indicating that collinearity was not a concern in the model. This test was particularly relevant given the inclusion of multiple soft power constructs (foreign policy, political values, culture) that could conceptually overlap.

3.12.3 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics were conducted to provide a comprehensive overview of the respondents' demographic characteristics and general tendencies in their responses. Frequency distributions and mean values were calculated to summarise key variables. This step allowed the researcher to highlight the diversity of respondents across age, gender, education, job title, and years of professional experience within the UAE context. Beyond demographics, descriptive analysis also offered a preliminary understanding of the central tendencies and dispersion in responses related to foreign policy, cultural diplomacy, political values, and international relations. According to Healey (2005), descriptive statistics serve as a foundation for more complex analyses by clarifying the midpoint and spread of responses.

3.12.4 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

The primary analytical technique employed was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3.0 software. PLS-SEM was selected because it is highly suitable for prediction-oriented research involving latent variables, as in the case of this study's focus on soft power constructs and their impact on international relations moderated by public perception. Unlike covariance-based SEM, PLS-SEM performs well with relatively small to medium sample sizes and does not impose strict distributional assumptions (Hair et al., 2016).

The analysis followed the standard two-step approach: (i) assessment of the measurement model, which established the reliability and validity of constructs through tests such as Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE); and (ii) assessment of the structural model, where path coefficients,

significance levels, R^2 values, and predictive relevance (Q^2) were examined. Bootstrapping and blindfolding procedures were employed to generate robust estimates and evaluate the significance of hypothesised relationships.

3.12.5 Validity and Reliability Tests

Reliability and validity checks were carried out to ensure that the measurement instruments were both consistent and accurate. Reliability was evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, with values above the recommended threshold of 0.7 indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Validity was assessed in two forms: convergent validity, confirmed through AVE values above 0.5, and discriminant validity, tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios. Both tests were essential in verifying that the constructs foreign policy, political values, culture, international relations, and public perception were conceptually distinct yet measured with adequate precision.

3.12.6 Pearson's Correlation Analysis

As a preliminary step prior to SEM, Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to explore the linear relationships between key constructs. Correlation values range from -1.0 (perfect negative correlation) to +1.0 (perfect positive correlation), with values close to zero indicating no correlation (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). While PLS-SEM provides a more comprehensive analysis by estimating causal paths, Pearson's correlation was useful in providing an initial overview of the degree and direction of associations among soft power practices, public perception, and international relations in the UAE context.

3.12.7 Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is one of the most widely used measures in structural equation modelling because it quantifies the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variable(s). In the context of this study, R^2 indicates how effectively the constructs of soft power foreign policy, political values, and culture together with the moderating role of public perception, account for variations in international relations outcomes.

A higher R^2 value signifies a stronger explanatory power of the model, demonstrating that the independent variables meaningfully predict the dependent variable. As Hair et al. (2016) explain, R^2 values of around 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 can be considered substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively, in social science research. By reporting R^2 , this study evaluates the extent to which the proposed theoretical framework is empirically supported and how much of the change in international relations can be attributed to soft power factors.

3.12.8 Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Beyond measuring explanatory power, it is equally important to assess whether the model has predictive relevance for new or omitted data. Predictive relevance (Q^2), first introduced by Stone (1974) and Geisser (1975), evaluates the model's capacity to predict the endogenous variables rather than merely explaining their historical variation.

The Q^2 value is typically obtained through a cross-validated redundancy approach using the blindfolding procedure available in PLS-SEM software such as SmartPLS. According to Chin (2010), a Q^2 value greater than zero indicates that the model has predictive relevance, while higher values suggest stronger predictive capability. In this study, assessing Q^2 helps establish whether the relationship between soft power practices, public perception, and international relations holds predictive value for practical policy applications in the UAE, not just statistical associations within the sample.

3.12.9 Hypotheses Testing

Testing the research hypotheses is a critical step in validating the conceptual framework and determining whether the proposed relationships among variables are statistically significant. Following the guidance of Hair et al. (2016), this study uses path coefficients, along with associated T-statistics and P-values, to evaluate the significance and strength of the hypothesised relationships.

The path coefficient reflects both the magnitude and direction of the relationship between an independent variable and the dependent variable. The P-value represents the probability that the observed effect occurred by chance, with commonly accepted thresholds for significance being 0.05 (5%), 0.01 (1%), and, in more exploratory studies, 0.10 (10%). T-statistics complement this by indicating the robustness of the path coefficient; values above 1.96 are significant for a two-tailed test, while those above 1.65 are significant for a one-tailed test.

By applying bootstrapping procedures within SmartPLS, the study derives these statistics to test each hypothesis. This approach provides robust estimates even for complex models and small-to-medium sample sizes. Through hypothesis testing, the study confirms whether the proposed theoretical linkages between soft power practices, public perception, and international relations in the UAE are statistically valid and meaningful.

3.13 Informed Consent

In this study, careful attention was given to ensuring that the principles of informed consent were upheld throughout the data collection process. Prior to participation, all respondents were provided with a clear explanation of the purpose of the research, its relevance to the UAE's international relations and soft power strategies, and the way in which their input would contribute to academic and policy insights. Participants were explicitly informed that their involvement was voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage without facing any negative consequences

To maintain confidentiality, no personal identifiers such as names, job titles, or organizational affiliations were disclosed in the final report. The researcher ensured that all responses were treated with strict privacy and stored securely, accessible only for the purpose of academic analysis. This approach was particularly important given the sensitivity of topics such as foreign policy, political values, and public perception which may reflect participants' professional and national identities

The researcher also acknowledged potential challenges, including the length of the questionnaire and possible reluctance from respondents to share opinions on politically or culturally sensitive matters. To mitigate these issues, the instrument was refined to ensure clarity and brevity, while still capturing the required constructs. Furthermore, where possible, the researcher engaged directly with respondents to clarify questions, build trust, and emphasize the academic not political nature of the study. By creating a respectful and transparent interaction, the study ensured that participants felt comfortable and confident in contributing their views.

3.14 Summary

The study followed a deductive approach, as the study begins with a set of hypotheses and ends with the conclusion of the hypotheses. As the study is quantitative research because it is based on statistical analysis and numerical measures and uses covariance techniques. The study is exploratory research because it is exploratory in nature because the field of study has sufficient prior knowledge to build initial hypotheses. Also, the study is a scientific method because it follows systematic steps that start with assumptions and end with approval / rejection. The population of this analysis is approximately 5,000 working in diplomatic work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies around the world. The target sample size is calculated based on Morgan's sampling method and the appropriate sample size proportional to the study population is 357. Therefore, quota sampling is the appropriate data collection technique for this particular study.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This section outlines the methodology adopted by the researcher for analysing the collected data and provides the rationale for selecting specific analytical techniques. Before importing the returned questionnaires into the SPSS version 23 data editor, the responses were carefully examined for completeness and accuracy. Particular attention was paid to identifying missing data and detecting any response patterns that suggested linearity or inconsistency. This initial screening followed the recommendations of established scholars such as Odom et al. (2002) and Weaver and Maxwell (2014) . Subsequently, the researcher ensured that the data met the fundamental assumptions of statistical analysis specifically regarding distribution, correlation, and the absence of anomalies or missing values.

Descriptive statistics were utilised to obtain a more thorough comprehension of the demographic characteristics of the data and to describe the sample. The model evaluation was performed in two steps, utilising both measurement and structural models, as suggested by previous publications, such as (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014; Henseler & Chin, 2010). The measuring model was assessed for convergent and discriminant validity, composite reliability, and average variance. Derived using the

defined criteria set forth by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), Gefen, Straub, and Boudreau (2000), and Fornell and Larcker (1981).

The researcher tested the hypothesis using both moderated and unmoderated channels, following the bootstrapping approach outlined by Hair Jr. et al. (2014). The structural model underwent evaluation utilising the Chin (1998), Cohen (1988), Fornell and Cha (1994), and Cohen (1988) criteria for coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Afterwards, the suitability of the model's fit was assessed using the methodology devised by Wetzels et al. (2009).

4.2 Response Rate

A grand total of 714 questionnaires were distributed to all workers within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies worldwide for the explicit goal of this research endeavor. The researcher personally distributed questionnaires to the relevant divisions of the UAE government ministry that are responsible for administering Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies worldwide to their employees. Therefore, only 412 questionnaires out of the total 714 were completed and returned.

Moreover, the final ratio is equivalent to 58%. Among the 412 surveys obtained, 79 were considered unacceptable because the respondents left substantial portions blank. As the respondents completed all the required sections, we were able to analyze the remaining 333 surveys. The outcome produced a response rate of 47%, which was deemed authentic. According to Sekaran and Bougie's (2016) research, a survey response rate of 30% is deemed satisfactory. Hence, the observed response rate of 47% in this situation is deemed sufficient for analysis.

Table 4. 1
Response Rate of the Questionnaire

Item	Frequency	Percentage %
Distributed questionnaire	714	100
Returned questionnaires	412	58
Unusable questionnaires	79	11
Useable questionnaires	333	47

4.3 Pilot Study: Cronbach’s Alpha Results

Reliability and validity are critical requirements in PLS-SEM for assessing the measurement (outer) model (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). Before testing the structural relationships among constructs, it is essential to confirm the internal consistency of the measurement scales. Following satisfactory results from the factor loadings, the next step was to evaluate the reliability of the variables using Cronbach’s alpha.

Table 4. 2
 Cronbach’s Alpha Values

Variables	Values
Foreign Policy	0.912
Political Values	0.755
Cultures	0.702
International Relations	0.945
Public Perception	0.921

As shown in Table 4.2, the Cronbach’s alpha values range from 0.702 to 0.945. All constructs exceed the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70, demonstrating that the measurement items used in this study exhibit acceptable to excellent internal consistency. These results confirm that the scales are reliable and can be used for further analysis of the structural model.

4.4 Data Preparation and Screening

Preliminary data screening is a crucial step in preparing a dataset for multivariate analysis because it helps detect inconsistencies, errors, or irregularities that could compromise the accuracy of subsequent statistical tests (Hair et al., 2010). By addressing such issues at the outset, researchers can ensure that the final analysis is based on reliable and high-quality data.

In this study, all responses were carefully entered and coded using SPSS version 23, a widely adopted statistical software for data management and diagnostic analysis. Each questionnaire item was assigned a unique serial code to ensure accuracy during entry and to facilitate easy traceability in case of corrections. To further streamline the process, each section of the survey was assigned a distinct label corresponding to the relevant study variable: FP1–FP12 for Foreign Policy, PV1–PV8 for Political Values, CU1–CU8 for Culture, IR1–IR12 for International Relations, and PP1–PP10 for Public Perception.

The researcher carefully reviewed the dataset after entry to identify and correct potential errors such as incomplete entries, out-of-range responses, or inconsistencies in coding. Each survey section was also categorised by demographic variables such as respondents' age, gender, education level, and professional background to ensure that subsequent analyses could incorporate these factors as needed.

This systematic approach to data preparation provided a strong foundation for the later statistical procedures described in the subsequent sections. By ensuring the integrity

and consistency of the data at this early stage, the study enhanced the validity and reliability of its later findings (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Hair et al., 2010).

4.4.1 Analysis of Missing Values

Missing data is one of the most common challenges in quantitative research and can significantly affect the validity and reliability of statistical results. Even a small proportion of missing values typically exceeding 5–10% of the dataset can introduce bias, reduce statistical power, and compromise the accuracy of parameter estimates (Hair et al., 2010; Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Therefore, careful screening for missing responses is considered a critical preliminary step before proceeding with any advanced statistical analyses, particularly in studies employing structural equation modelling (SEM), where complete data enhances the robustness of model estimation.

For this study, the dataset underwent a thorough examination immediately after data entry. Each questionnaire item and demographic variable was reviewed for incomplete or omitted responses using SPSS version 23. The inspection revealed that the dataset was fully complete, with no missing values detected across either the demographic section or the items measuring the core research constructs.

This finding carries significant methodological benefits. First, it eliminates the need for data imputation or deletion techniques such as mean substitution, regression-based estimation, or listwise deletion which can distort relationships among variables and reduce the representativeness of the sample. Second, the completeness of the data ensures that all 333 valid responses collected during the survey could be fully utilised in the analysis, thus maximising the statistical power and preserving the integrity of the results.

Moreover, the availability of a complete dataset enhances the generalizability of the findings by avoiding potential sampling bias that might arise from excluding incomplete cases. It also contributes to the stability of parameter estimates in subsequent procedures, such as normality testing, measurement model evaluation, and structural path analysis. Overall, the absence of missing data represents a notable strength of this research, supporting the robustness and credibility of the conclusions drawn from the statistical analyses..

4.4.2 Normality Test

Normality assessment is essential to determine whether the data distribution meets the assumptions of certain statistical techniques. While covariance-based SEM requires normally distributed data (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007; Hair et al., 2007), PLS-SEM is more flexible and can handle non-normal data effectively (Reinartz et al., 2009; Wetzels et al., 2009). However, highly skewed data may distort standard errors during bootstrapping and affect the accuracy of significance tests (Hair et al., 2012; Chernick, 2008).

To confirm the suitability of the data, the study assessed normality using both graphical and statistical approaches, including Q–Q plots and the skewness and kurtosis values of each item (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Field, 2009). The results showed that all skewness values were below 1.5 and all kurtosis values were below 3.0, which falls well within the acceptable thresholds for normality (Hair et al., 2007). The calculated z-scores for skewness and kurtosis were also within ± 2.58 (Pallant, 2015), indicating no serious deviations from normality.

These results confirm that the dataset demonstrates moderate normality, which enhances the reliability of the parameter estimates and supports the use of PLS-SEM for subsequent analysis. Although PLS-SEM does not require strict normality, confirming approximate normality increases the robustness and interpretability of the model estimates in this study.

Table 4. 3
Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
FP	333	1.00	5.00	3.732	0.831	0.281	0.293
PV	333	1.00	5.00	3.584	0.642	0.314	0.322
Cu	333	1.00	5.00	3.289	0.863	0.223	0.323
IR	333	1.00	5.00	3.231	0.791	0.512	0.174
PP	333	1.00	5.00	3.394	0.635	-0.423	-0.146

Note: CR: Crisis Response, Et: Effectiveness, Ec: Efficiency, Rs: Responsiveness, AI: Artificial Intelligence.

4.4.3 Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity refers to the presence of strong correlations between two or more exogenous latent constructs in a regression model (Sekeran & Bougie, 2016; Hair et al., 2010). High multicollinearity can distort the estimated regression coefficients and inflate standard errors, which reduces the significance of path coefficients (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Hair et al., 2006; Field, 2009). When exogenous variables are highly correlated, it becomes difficult to distinguish their individual contributions to the dependent variable, which can threaten the validity of structural equation modelling (SEM) results (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

To ensure the robustness of the data, this study examined multicollinearity using two approaches: the correlation matrix and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) with tolerance values (Peng & Lai, 2012; Chatterjee & Yilmaz, 1992).

- The correlation matrix showed that none of the correlation coefficients between exogenous constructs exceeded 0.90, which indicates the absence of problematic pairwise correlations (Hair et al., 2010).
- The VIF values for all exogenous constructs were found to be below 5.0, and all tolerance values were above 0.20, as shown in Table 4.4. These values are well within the recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2011; Amoroso & Cheney, 1991).

These results confirm that multicollinearity is not present in this dataset. This is important because it means that the predictor constructs in the model are sufficiently distinct from one another, allowing for a more accurate estimation of their individual effects on the dependent variable. The absence of multicollinearity also enhances the reliability and interpretability of the path coefficients in the structural model, supporting the validity of subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table 4. 4
Correlation Matrix

		CR	Et	Ec	Rs	AI
FP	Pearson	1				
	Correlation Sig. (1-tailed)					
PV	Pearson	.183**	1			
	Correlation Sig. (1-tailed)					

		CR	Et	Ec	Rs	AI
Cu	Pearson	.351**	.543**	1		
	Correlation Sig. (1-tailed)					
IR	Pearson	.191**	.185**	.255**	1	
	Correlation Sig. (1-tailed)					
PP	Pearson	.313**	.134*	.162**	.571**	1
	Correlation Sig. (1-tailed)					

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (01-tailed)

Table 4. 5
Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics		
		B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(constant)	2.374	0.266			0.000	0.664	1.462
	FP	2.286	0.112	0.161	4.941	0.000	0.673	1.521
	PV	2.177	0.113	0.083	5.892	0.000	0.641	1.592
	Cu	1.836	0.084	0.105	7.106	0.000	0.345	3.083
	PP	2.395	0.182	0.106	5.745	0.000	0.802	1.274

a. Dependent Variables: IR

4.5 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Table 4.6 presents a succinct summary of the distribution of samples according to demographic factors. The analysis comprises a total of 369 samples. The majority of responses were male, at 68.7% of the total. The majority of respondents (39.3%) were between the ages of 25 and 39. In addition, those with incomes ranging from 8001-

16000 AED make up 32.8 percent of the total income. Moreover, with respect to the credentials or educational achievements of the employees, it is clear that the majority (28.4%) of respondents have a Diploma. Moreover, the data about the respondents' work experience indicates that 34.2% of them had accumulated 15 years or more of work experience.

Table 4. 6
Demographic Analysis

Demographic	Categories	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	218	65.4
	Female	115	34.6
	Total	333	100
Age	Less than 30 years old.	45	13.5
	Between 30 and 40 years.	114	34.3
	Between 41 and 50 years.	133	39.8
	51 years old and more.	41	12.4
	Total	333	100
Job Title	Branch manager	11	3.2
	Sector manager	37	11.5
	Department manager	62	18.5
	General manager	98	29.4
	other	125	37.4
	Total	333	100
Educational level	PHD	26	7.9
	Master	124	37.3
	Bachelor	183	54.8
	Total	333	100
Experience	1-5 Years	38	11.3
	6-10 Years	76	22.8
	11-15 Years	72	21.6
	16-20 Years	34	10.1
	21 Years or more	113	34.2
	Total	333	100

4.6 Evaluation of PLS-SEM Result

An evaluation of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) results was carried out to assess both the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model) of this study. This evaluation was conducted after completing the preliminary descriptive analysis of the main constructs. PLS-SEM was selected as the analytical technique because it is well suited for studies aiming to test complex models with multiple latent variables, especially when the data may not fully meet the assumptions of normality (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013).

The analysis began by examining the outer model, which focuses on the reliability and validity of the indicators that measure each latent construct. This stage ensures that the observed variables such as the items measuring foreign policy, political values, culture, public perception, and international relations are statistically sound and accurately represent the theoretical constructs. According to Hair et al. (2014), the outer model evaluation must establish three key criteria: Indicator reliability (factor loadings), Internal consistency reliability (composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha), and Convergent and discriminant validity (average variance extracted (AVE) and Fornell–Larcker criterion).

Only after confirming that these criteria are met can the structural model be meaningfully assessed. In this study, all measurement items were treated as reflective indicators, as they are assumed to be manifestations of their respective latent constructs. Reflective measurement models assume that changes in the latent variable cause changes in the observed indicators. This decision was guided by the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2, which conceptualised each construct as a single

underlying dimension. Because of this unidimensional assumption, the study did not model any second-order (hierarchical) constructs.

Once the outer model was confirmed to be reliable and valid, the analysis proceeded to the inner model, which evaluates the hypothesised relationships between the latent constructs. The inner model shows how the three main soft power dimensions foreign policy, political values, and culture predict the dependent construct international relations, and how this relationship is moderated by public perception. This step evaluates the strength, direction, and statistical significance of the hypothesised paths. The key indicators examined in this stage include the path coefficients (β), their t-statistics, p-values, effect sizes (f^2), and the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the dependent variable. These metrics show how much variance in international relations is explained by the soft power components and how strongly public perception influences those relationships.

SmartPLS 3.0 was used to estimate the model, following the guidelines of Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, and Hair Jr. (2014). Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was performed to generate standard errors and to assess the significance levels of the hypothesised paths. This approach increases the stability of the results and reduces sampling bias, which is especially important in complex models such as the one tested in this study (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010).

Overall, the evaluation of the PLS-SEM results ensures that the measurement tools used in this study are reliable and valid, and that the hypothesised relationships among the constructs are empirically supported. This two-step approach validating the outer

model first, then assessing the inner model strengthens the credibility of the statistical analysis and provides a solid foundation for testing the proposed conceptual framework linking soft power practices, public perception, and international relations in the UAE context.

4.7 Assessment of Measurement Model (Outer Model)

PLS-SEM evaluates research models through two main components: the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). The measurement model assessment focuses on verifying that the indicators used accurately measure their respective constructs. According to Ringle, Wende, and Will (2005), the use of PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate when the research model is complex and the primary aim is theory development and prediction. In this study, PLS-SEM was used to examine the relationships between foreign policy, political values, and culture (as the soft power components), public perception (as a moderating construct), and international relations (as the dependent construct).

All the measurement items in this study are modelled as reflective indicators, meaning the items are expected to reflect the underlying latent construct rather than form it. Reflective measurement models are depicted by arrows pointing from the construct to the indicators. This is appropriate because each item is considered an observable manifestation of its respective latent construct, and changes in the construct are expected to cause corresponding changes in the items. In contrast, formative models assume the opposite direction of causality. As recommended by Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009), this study followed a two-step procedure to ensure accurate PLS-

SEM results: first assessing the measurement model for reliability and validity, and only then assessing the structural model.

4.7.1 Indicator Reliability

The first stage of the outer model evaluation involved assessing indicator reliability. This was done by examining the outer loadings of all indicators on their respective constructs using the standard PLS algorithm in SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). According to Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011) and Henseler et al. (2009), a loading of 0.70 or higher indicates that the indicator shares at least 50% variance with its construct. While Hulland (1999) suggested that items with loadings below 0.40 should be removed, Hair et al. (2014) note that indicators with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 may be retained if removing them does not improve the composite reliability (CR) or average variance extracted (AVE) beyond the acceptable threshold.

The results showed that all indicators achieved loadings above 0.70, as displayed in Figure 4.1, which presents the PLS-SEM path model with the outer loadings. This means that each item demonstrates a strong correlation with its latent construct and contributes meaningfully to the measurement model. Because all loadings exceeded the recommended threshold, no items were removed from the model. As summarised in Table 4.7, the constructs also recorded satisfactory CR and AVE values, which further supports their internal consistency and convergent validity.

Confirming high indicator reliability is a critical prerequisite for proceeding with structural analysis because it ensures that the observed variance in the indicators is largely attributable to the latent constructs rather than to measurement error. In this study, establishing reliable indicators for foreign policy, political values, culture, public perception, and international relations ensures that the subsequent hypothesis testing is based on accurate and stable measurements. This reinforces the methodological robustness of the study and supports the validity of its theoretical model.

Table 4. 7
Indicators Outer Loadings

Latent Constructs	Indicators	Standardized Loadings
Foreign Policy	FP1	0.794
	FP2	0.692
	FP3	0.317
	FP4	0.644
	FP5	0.712
	FP6	0.775
	FP7	0.683
	FP8	0.757
	FP9	0.798
	FP10	0.670
	FP11	0.894
	FP12	0.808
Political Values	PV1	0.582
	PV2	0.566
	PV3	0.552
	PV4	0.487
	PV5	0.666
	PV6	0.563
	PV7	0.698

Latent Constructs	Indicators	Standardized Loadings
	PV8	0.639
Cultures	Cu1	0.443
	Cu2	0.521
	Cu3	0.610
	Cu4	0.682
	Cu5	0.362
	Cu6	0.655
	Cu7	0.440
	Cu8	0.503
International Relations	IR1	0.863
	IR2	0.808
	IR3	0.841
	IR4	0.784
	IR5	0.850
	IR6	0.816
	IR7	0.724
	IR8	0.837
	IR9	0.825
	IR10	0.686
	IR11	0.776
	IR12	0.668
Public Perception	PP1	0.852
	PP2	0.808
	PP3	0.866
	PP4	0.827
	PP5	0.298
	PP6	0.780
	PP7	0.786
	PP8	0.758
	PP9	0.788
	PP10	0.868

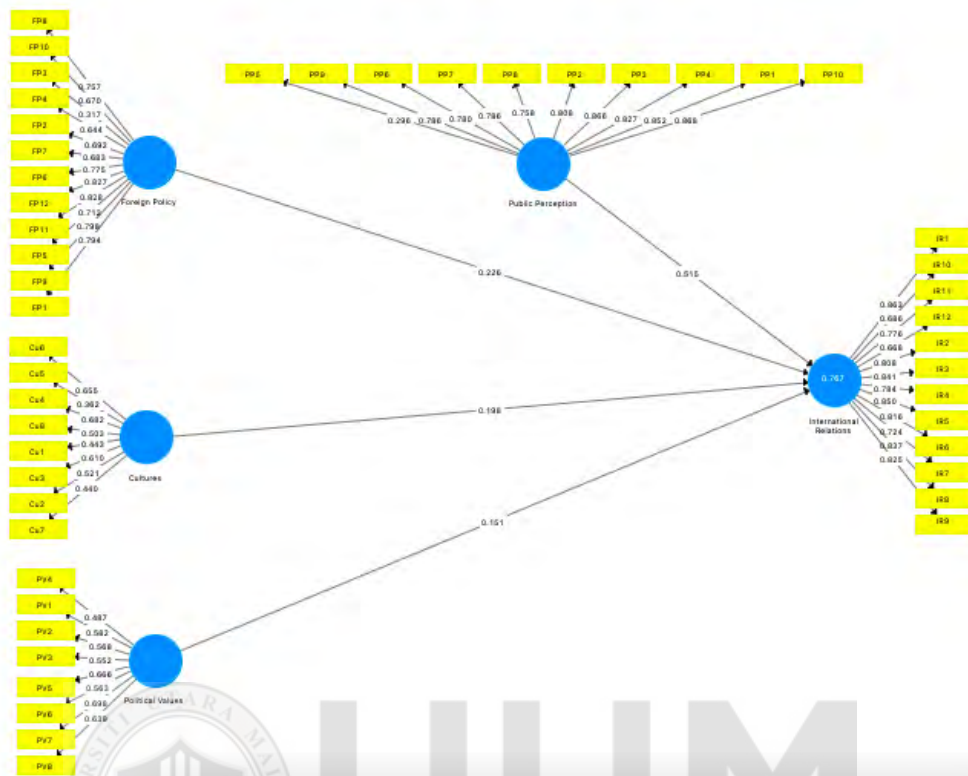


Figure 4.1 The PLS-SEM Path Model

4.7.2 Composite Reliability

Internal consistency reliability refers to the degree to which the items within a construct produce consistent and stable responses. In PLS-SEM, composite reliability (CR) is the most widely recommended measure for assessing internal consistency, as it accounts for the actual outer loadings of each item rather than assuming equal indicator contributions, as Cronbach's alpha does (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). Evaluating CR ensures that each construct in the model is measured with precision and that its indicators are functioning cohesively as a group.

According to Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009), CR values should be above 0.60 for exploratory research and above 0.70 for more advanced, confirmatory studies.

Hair, Anderson, Babin, and Black (2010) also state that values between 0.70 and 0.90 are considered satisfactory, while values above 0.95 may indicate redundancy among indicators. Therefore, the CR analysis provides an essential benchmark to verify whether the measurement model achieves an acceptable level of internal consistency before testing the structural paths. The results of the composite reliability analysis are presented in Table 4.8, and all constructs achieved values well above the recommended 0.70 threshold.

Table 4. 8
Composite Reliability

Variables	Composite Reliability
Foreign Policy	0.926
Political Values	0.815
Cultures	0.757
International Relations	0.953
Public Perception	0.937

These findings confirm that all five constructs exhibit high internal consistency reliability. The lowest CR value, 0.757 for Culture, is comfortably above the 0.70 threshold, indicating that the items measuring cultural elements are sufficiently cohesive. Political Values also achieved a strong score of 0.815, suggesting that the items collectively capture this construct reliably. The highest CR values were recorded for Foreign Policy (0.926), Public Perception (0.937), and International Relations (0.953). These very high values reflect strong interrelatedness among their indicators and show that respondents answered consistently across items measuring these constructs.

Importantly, none of the constructs recorded values above 0.95 except International Relations (0.953), which is only slightly higher and still acceptable. This suggests that the items are highly consistent without being excessively redundant. Establishing high composite reliability is a critical prerequisite before proceeding to convergent and discriminant validity testing, as it confirms that the constructs are measured with precision and minimal random error.

In summary, these results provide robust evidence that the measurement model demonstrates strong internal consistency across all constructs. This strengthens the credibility of the outer model and supports the validity of using these constructs for foreign policy, political values, culture, public perception, and international relations for further hypothesis testing in the structural model.

4.7.3 Average Variance Extracted

After confirming the internal consistency reliability of the constructs through composite reliability, the next step was to establish convergent validity, which assesses the extent to which indicators of the same construct are strongly related to each other (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). Convergent validity ensures that the items designed to measure the same latent variable are indeed capturing a common underlying concept (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013).

In PLS-SEM, the most widely used statistic for evaluating convergent validity is the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). AVE measures the average amount of variance in the indicators that is captured by the latent construct relative to the amount of variance due to measurement error. According to Hair, Anderson, Babin, and Black

(2010) and Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013), an AVE value of 0.50 or above is considered acceptable. This means that at least half of the variance in the indicators is explained by the underlying construct, indicating satisfactory convergence. The results of the AVE analysis are shown in Table 4.9, and all constructs exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50.

Table 4. 9
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variables	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Foreign Policy	0.519
Political Values	0.507
Cultures	0.509
International Relations	0.628
Public Perception	0.607

These results confirm that all five constructs in the model demonstrate adequate convergent validity. The three soft power constructs Foreign Policy, Political Values, and Culture each recorded AVE values just above the threshold, indicating that their indicators consistently capture their respective underlying concepts. Although these three constructs have slightly lower AVE values compared to the others, they still meet the recommended minimum, which means they do not suffer from weak or inconsistent indicators.

The highest AVE scores were for International Relations (0.628) and Public Perception (0.607), suggesting particularly strong convergence among their indicators. These higher values reflect that the respondents provided consistent answers to items measuring these constructs, and that the constructs are conceptually well defined.

According to Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013), as long as AVE values exceed 0.50, the constructs can be considered valid and do not need to be eliminated from the model. Therefore, no items or constructs were removed at this stage. Establishing convergent validity is an essential prerequisite before testing discriminant validity and structural relationships, because it confirms that the measurement items reliably represent their latent variables.

In summary, the AVE results provide strong evidence that the indicators for foreign policy, political values, culture, public perception, and international relations all converge on their respective constructs. This supports the robustness of the measurement model and ensures that the subsequent structural analysis is built upon conceptually valid and empirically sound constructs.

4.7.4 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity refers to the degree to which multiple indicators designed to measure the same construct are highly correlated and capture a shared underlying concept (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). Establishing convergent validity is crucial in PLS-SEM, as it ensures that the indicators consistently represent the intended latent variable rather than unrelated dimensions (Hair et al., 2014). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity is assessed by examining both the outer loadings of indicators and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct. High outer loadings (preferably ≥ 0.708) and AVE values (≥ 0.50) indicate that the construct explains a substantial proportion of the variance in its indicators.

In this study, the convergent validity of all constructs (foreign policy, political values, culture, public perception, and international relations) was confirmed through their AVE values and strong outer loadings. The AVE values ranged from 0.507 to 0.628 (see Table 4.10), with International Relations recording the highest AVE (0.628) and Political Values the lowest (0.507). These results show that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its items, which satisfies the criterion proposed by Chin (1998) and Hair et al. (2010). The consistently high outer loadings (all above 0.70) further support the conclusion that the indicators are valid reflections of their respective constructs.

Although the AVE values for Foreign Policy, Political Values, and Culture are slightly above the minimum threshold, they are still considered acceptable in social science research, especially when supported by high composite reliability (Hair et al., 2014). Their results suggest that the items measure conceptually diverse aspects of these constructs while still representing a common dimension, which aligns with the theoretical framework of this study.

Overall, these findings confirm that all constructs exhibit satisfactory convergent validity. This is a critical prerequisite before testing discriminant validity and the structural relationships in the model. Establishing convergent validity provides confidence that the latent constructs in this study covering the UAE's soft power practices, public perception, and international relations are conceptually coherent and empirically well defined.

4.7.5 Discriminant Validity

After confirming the reliability and convergent validity of the constructs, the next step was to establish discriminant validity, which refers to the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the model (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). Establishing discriminant validity is critical because it verifies that each construct measures a unique concept and that the indicators of one construct are not unduly correlated with indicators of another construct. Without adequate discriminant validity, the theoretical distinctiveness of the constructs cannot be supported, which would threaten the validity of the structural model.

The most widely accepted method for assessing discriminant validity in PLS-SEM is the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). According to this criterion, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct should be greater than the construct's highest correlation with any other construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). This ensures that a construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs.

The results of the Fornell–Larcker test are presented in Table 4.10. The diagonal elements show the square roots of the AVE values, while the off-diagonal elements show the inter-construct correlations. The findings confirm that for all constructs (Foreign Policy, Political Values, Culture, Public Perception, and International Relations) the square roots of their AVE values were higher than their correlations with any other construct. This demonstrates that each construct is empirically distinct and captures a unique dimension of the overall model.

Table 4. 10
Discriminant Variable

	Cu	FP	IR	PV	PP
Cu	0.637				
FP	0.419	0.720			
IR	0.601	0.653	0.792		
PV	0.446	0.317	0.553	0.698	
PP	0.447	0.576	0.309	0.469	0.779

Note: The values in the diagonal cells (bold) are the square root of the AVE while the un-bolded values are the correlations.

Additionally, cross-loading analysis was conducted as a supplementary test of discriminant validity. In this approach, each indicator's loading on its assigned construct should be higher than its loadings on all other constructs (Hair et al., 2017; Chin, 1998). The results, shown in Table 4.11, indicate that all outer loadings are greater than their cross-loadings. This confirms that each indicator loads most strongly on its intended construct and does not overlap with indicators from other constructs.

Together, the results of the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loading analyses provide strong evidence of discriminant validity. This means that the five constructs used in this study (foreign policy, political values, culture, public perception, and international relations) are conceptually and empirically distinct from one another. Establishing discriminant validity is essential before assessing the structural model because it ensures that the relationships tested among these constructs are not inflated by conceptual overlap.

Table 4. 11
Cross Loadings

Constructs	Cu	FP	IR	PP	PV
Cu1	0.443	0.143	0.157	0.246	0.215
Cu2	0.521	0.047	0.271	0.196	0.193
Cu3	0.610	0.333	0.418	0.160	0.289
Cu4	0.682	0.286	0.420	0.325	0.287
Cu5	0.462	0.020	0.075	0.080	0.055
Cu6	0.655	0.411	0.467	0.409	0.368
Cu7	0.440	0.198	0.262	0.229	0.246
Cu8	0.503	0.020	0.195	0.142	0.193
FP1	0.367	0.794	0.350	0.309	0.402
FP2	0.350	0.693	0.372	0.185	0.368
FP3	0.247	0.517	0.114	0.094	0.197
FP4	0.256	0.644	0.371	0.166	0.367
FP5	0.282	0.712	0.445	0.231	0.409
FP6	0.291	0.775	0.401	0.213	0.318
FP7	0.312	0.683	0.299	0.155	0.371
FP8	0.274	0.757	0.342	0.265	0.414
FP9	0.258	0.798	0.468	0.247	0.313
FP10	0.233	0.670	0.408	0.177	0.312
FP11	0.441	0.828	0.326	0.355	0.320
FP12	0.286	0.827	0.401	0.220	0.446
IR1	0.524	0.347	0.863	0.378	0.308
IR2	0.467	0.372	0.808	0.366	0.355
IR3	0.395	0.338	0.841	0.391	0.321
IR4	0.426	0.274	0.784	0.417	0.374
IR5	0.392	0.283	0.850	0.355	0.239

IR6	0.380	0.346	0.816	0.306	0.271
IR7	0.342	0.366	0.724	0.367	0.362
IR8	0.238	0.387	0.837	0.399	0.264
IR9	0.278	0.333	0.825	0.329	0.340
IR10	0.300	0.397	0.686	0.314	0.371
IR11	0.356	0.313	0.776	0.227	0.343
IR12	0.295	0.440	0.668	0.369	0.335
PP1	0.403	0.382	0.373	0.853	0.383
PP2	0.309	0.325	0.265	0.809	0.297
PP3	0.311	0.256	0.412	0.866	0.402
PP4	0.291	0.367	0.378	0.827	0.374
PP5	0.185	0.235	0.367	0.696	0.330
PP6	0.305	0.287	0.389	0.780	0.424
PP7	0.326	0.267	0.288	0.784	0.346
PP8	0.316	0.380	0.325	0.758	0.242
PP9	0.341	0.379	0.366	0.786	0.305
PP10	0.361	0.223	0.320	0.862	0.372
PV1	0.190	0.115	0.328	0.282	0.783
PV2	0.224	0.116	0.163	0.368	0.751
PV3	0.136	0.038	0.165	0.352	0.763
PV4	0.244	0.318	0.322	0.387	0.672
PV5	0.269	0.218	0.318	0.266	0.652
PV6	0.071	0.128	0.241	0.363	0.763
PV7	0.414	0.303	0.289	0.398	0.698
PV8	0.316	0.115	0.261	0.159	0.639

In conclusion, the findings confirm that the measurement model achieves satisfactory discriminant validity, thereby supporting the use of these constructs in the subsequent structural analysis and hypothesis testing.

4.8 Assessment of Structural Model

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model (outer model), the next step involved assessing the structural model (inner model) to evaluate the hypothesised relationships among the study's constructs. While the measurement model establishes how well the indicators represent their underlying constructs, the structural model tests the causal paths between the latent constructs based on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013; Hair et al., 2017).

This stage focused on examining the direct effects of the three independent constructs (Foreign Policy, Political Values, and Culture) on the dependent construct International Relations, and subsequently assessing the moderating role of Public Perception on these relationships. The objective was to determine how effectively the soft power components influence international relations and whether public perception strengthens or weakens these relationships.

To estimate the path relationships, SmartPLS 3.0 was used with a bootstrapping resampling procedure of 5,000 subsamples, which generates standard errors and t-statistics to test the significance of the path coefficients (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler et al., 2009). This non-parametric approach improves the stability and reliability of the results, especially in complex models.

Several key statistical indicators were used to evaluate the structural model. These included the path coefficients (β) and their t- and p-values to test the significance of hypothesised relationships; the coefficient of determination (R^2) to assess the proportion of variance in the dependent construct explained by the predictors; the effect sizes (f^2) to gauge the practical impact of each independent variable; and the Stone–Geisser Q^2 statistic obtained through the blindfolding procedure to evaluate the model's predictive relevance.

Assessing the structural model using these criteria provided a comprehensive understanding of the strength and direction of the relationships in the proposed framework. The results of these analyses are presented in the following subsection, which reports the statistical outcomes and evaluates the support for each hypothesis.

4.8.1 Results of Direct Hypotheses Testing

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed to examine the three direct hypotheses (H1–H3) of this study. These hypotheses tested the relationships between the three independent constructs (Foreign Policy, Political Values, and Culture) and the dependent construct International Relations. This analysis addressed the study's objectives and research questions by determining how strongly the core dimensions of soft power predict international relations within the UAE's diplomatic context.

The path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values were obtained using the PLS-SEM algorithm in SmartPLS 3.0, with a sample of 333 respondents and 5,000 bootstrap resamples. The path coefficient values indicate the strength and direction of the

relationships, while the t- and p-values demonstrate their statistical significance (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015).

H1: Foreign Policy → International Relations

The analysis showed that foreign policy has a significant positive relationship with international relations ($\beta = 0.226$; $t = 3.111$; $p < 0.01$). This result supports H1 and indicates that stronger and more effective foreign policy strategies are associated with improved international relations outcomes. The moderate effect size of this path suggests that foreign policy initiatives, such as diplomatic engagement, global partnerships, and foreign missions, meaningfully contribute to shaping the UAE's global relationships. This finding aligns with previous studies that identified foreign policy as a cornerstone of the UAE's external image and global positioning (Krzyszowski, 2022; Al Suwaidi, 2021).

H2: Political Values → International Relations

The results also confirmed that political values have a significant positive influence on international relations ($\beta = 0.151$; $t = 2.235$; $p < 0.05$), supporting H2. Although the effect size is smaller than that of foreign policy, it remains statistically meaningful, indicating that the UAE's political values such as governance ethics, human development priorities, and commitment to regional stability positively contribute to its international standing. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that political principles serve as soft power assets that build trust and credibility in international forums (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022; Al Zaabi & Awamleh, 2019).

H3: Culture → International Relations

Similarly, the findings revealed that culture has a significant positive relationship with international relations ($\beta = 0.198$; $t = 3.048$; $p < 0.01$), thus supporting H3. This indicates that cultural initiatives, heritage promotion, and intercultural engagement activities enhance the UAE's international relations by fostering mutual understanding and goodwill. The result supports earlier studies that emphasized the cultural dimension as a vital pillar of soft power that strengthens bilateral and multilateral ties (Saber et al., 2018; Al Suwaidi, 2021).

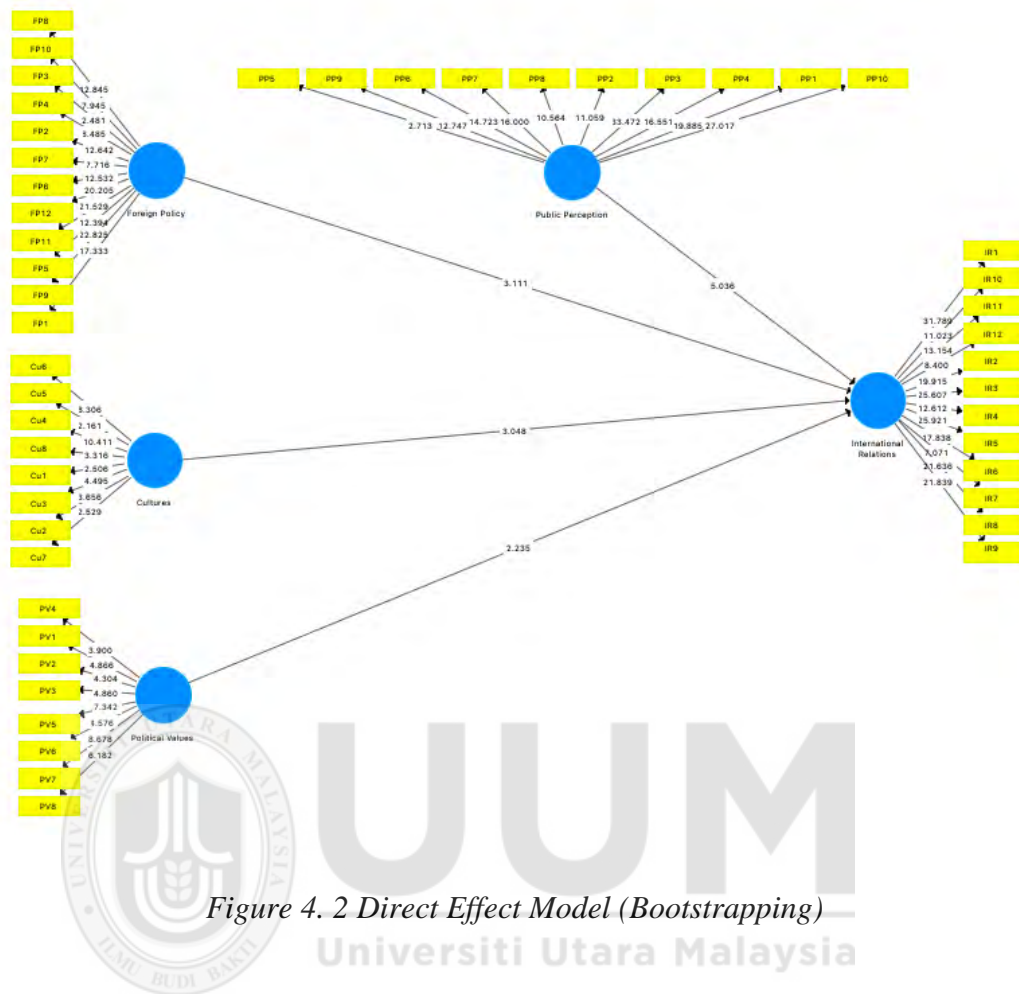
Overall, these results show that all three dimensions of soft power (foreign policy, political values, and culture) have significant and positive effects on international relations. This confirms the theoretical assumption that these constructs are integral drivers of the UAE's soft power framework and are central to its strategy of maintaining and expanding its influence globally. The statistical results are summarised in Table 4.12.

Table 4. 12
Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. error	T-Value	P values	Decision
H1	FP-> IR	0.226	0.073	3.111	0.002	Supported
H2	PV-> IR	0.151	0.068	2.235	0.026	Supported
H3	Cu-> IR	0.198	0.065	3.048	0.002	Supported

Note: Values are calculated using PLS bootstrapping routine with 306 cases and 5000 samples (one-tailed).

***indicates the item is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level, ** indicates the item is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, and * indicates the item is significant at the $p < 0.1$ level.



4.8.2 Results of Moderating Hypotheses

After testing the direct relationships, the study proceeded to assess the moderating effect of Public Perception on the relationships between the three soft power constructs (Foreign Policy, Political Values, and Culture) and International Relations. A moderator is a variable that influences the strength or direction of the relationship between an independent and a dependent variable (Henseler & Chin, 2010).

This study employed the product indicator approach as recommended by Chin et al. (2003) and Hair et al. (2014). This method multiplies the indicators of the predictor and moderator constructs to generate interaction terms, which are then analysed within

the PLS-SEM framework. It is especially suited to PLS models when both the predictor and moderator are reflective constructs.

SmartPLS 3.0 was used to construct the structural model Figure 4.3 and analyse the interaction effects. The results presented in Table 4.13 indicate that Public Perception significantly moderates all three relationships, as shown by the following statistics:

H4: Public Perception × Foreign Policy → International Relations

The interaction effect was significant ($\beta = 0.078$; $t = 1.980$; $p < 0.05$), confirming H4.

This suggests that the influence of foreign policy on international relations becomes stronger when public perception is positive. In other words, foreign policy initiatives such as diplomatic outreach, strategic partnerships, and participation in global forums have a greater impact on the UAE's international standing when they are perceived favourably by domestic and international audiences. When public perception is negative or indifferent, the effect of foreign policy is weakened, which reinforces the notion that public support and recognition are critical to foreign policy success.

H5: Public Perception × Political Values → International Relations

The moderating effect was also significant ($\beta = 0.051$; $t = 2.209$; $p < 0.05$), supporting H5. This means that the contribution of political values (such as governance ethics, national vision, and commitment to stability) to international relations outcomes increases under conditions of favourable public perception. When citizens and external observers perceive the UAE's political values as credible, ethical, and aligned with international norms, these values are more effectively translated into soft power

influence. This aligns with constructivist views that shared norms and legitimacy enhance the acceptance of political values across borders.

H6: Public Perception × Culture → International Relations

The moderating effect was again significant ($\beta = 0.098$; $t = 2.041$; $p < 0.05$), confirming H6. This indicates that cultural initiatives and heritage diplomacy contribute more strongly to international relations when they are positively perceived by the public. Cultural exports, arts, and heritage campaigns build stronger international connections when they resonate positively with target audiences. Negative or weak perception reduces their impact, highlighting the importance of managing the UAE’s cultural image.

Table 4. 13
Testing the Moderating Effect of Public Perception

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. error	T-Value	P values	Decision
H4	FP-> PP-> IR	0.078	0.025	1.980	0.049	Supported
H5	PV-> PP-> IR	0.051	0.042	2.209	0.037	Supported
H6	Cu-> PP-> IR	0.098	0.052	2.041	0.034	Supported

The results indicate that public perception significantly strengthens the relationship between soft power resources (foreign policy, political values, and culture) and international relations outcomes. This finding supports Nye’s (2004) assertion that soft power only becomes effective when it is recognised and accepted by others. In other words, the UAE’s cultural initiatives, political values, and foreign policy strategies

exert greater influence on international relations when they are perceived positively by both domestic and international audiences. From a constructivist perspective, the moderating effect also reflects the role of shared norms and identities in shaping global outcomes. In the Middle Eastern context, where image and legitimacy are critical, the results suggest that favourable public perception amplifies the UAE's ability to convert its soft power resources into diplomatic influence and international credibility.

4.8.3 Assessment of Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is a key measure used to evaluate the explanatory power of a structural model in PLS-SEM. It indicates the proportion of variance in the endogenous construct that can be explained by its exogenous predictors (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013; Henseler et al., 2009). In other words, R^2 reflects how well the independent variables account for changes in the dependent variable. Higher R^2 values signify stronger explanatory power and a better-fitting model (Hair et al., 2014).

In this study, International Relations was the main endogenous construct, while Foreign Policy, Political Values, and Culture were its exogenous predictors. As shown in Table 4.14, the R^2 value for International Relations was 0.759. This means that the three soft power constructs collectively explain 75.9% of the variance in International Relations.

This R^2 value is considered substantial according to the commonly cited benchmarks in PLS-SEM, where values around 0.25 are regarded as weak, 0.50 as moderate, and 0.75 as substantial (Hair et al., 2011; Cohen, 1988). Achieving an R^2 value close to

0.76 indicates that the model has strong predictive power and captures the major factors influencing international relations outcomes in the UAE's diplomatic context. Such a high R^2 also suggests that the selected predictors (foreign policy, political values, and culture) are conceptually appropriate and empirically robust drivers of international relations. This provides strong support for the theoretical framework of this study, which posited that these three dimensions of soft power are central to shaping international relations. It also demonstrates that the model offers meaningful explanatory insights that can be valuable for policy-makers and diplomatic strategists seeking to understand and strengthen the UAE's international position.

Table 4. 14
Variance Explained in the Endogenous Latent Constructs

Latent Constructs	Variance Explained (R^2)
International Relations	0. 759

In summary, the R^2 value of 0.759 confirms that the model explains a substantial proportion of variance in international relations, providing confidence in the overall structural model and reinforcing the theoretical assumptions underlying this research.

4.8.4 Effect Size (f^2)

While statistical significance shows whether relationships exist, it does not reveal how much each predictor contributes to explaining the variance in the dependent construct. Therefore, the effect size (f^2) was calculated to determine the practical contribution of each exogenous variable to the endogenous construct (International Relations). The f^2 statistic measures the change in R^2 when a particular predictor is included in the model compared to when it is excluded (Cohen, 1988; Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003).

According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively. Thus, even when a path is statistically significant, the f^2 value provides a clearer picture of its actual strength in influencing the dependent variable. As shown in Table 4.15, the f^2 of foreign policy, political values, and cultures on international relations are 0.139, 0.070, and 0.114, respectively.

Table 4. 15
Effect size (f^2) of international relations and Interaction Terms

Endogenous construct	Exogenous constructs	Effect Size
IR	FP	0.139
	Cu	0.114
	PV	0.070

These findings indicate that Foreign Policy has the strongest effect size among the three predictors, approaching the threshold of a medium effect. Culture shows a small-to-moderate effect, while Political Values demonstrate a small effect on International Relations. Although all three paths are statistically significant, these f^2 values clarify that foreign policy initiatives contribute more substantially to explaining the variance in international relations compared to political values or cultural initiatives.

This pattern aligns with the strategic emphasis observed in the UAE's diplomatic approach, where foreign policy frameworks such as proactive bilateral relations, humanitarian diplomacy, and strategic alliances often serve as the primary vehicle for enhancing international relations. The lower f^2 for political values suggests that while they reinforce credibility and legitimacy, they may not independently drive international engagement as strongly as foreign policy actions. Similarly, the moderate

f^2 for culture reflects its growing but still supplementary role in strengthening international ties through heritage diplomacy and cultural exchange programmes.

In summary, the f^2 results provide important insight beyond statistical significance by showing that foreign policy has the most substantial practical contribution to international relations, followed by culture and political values. This underscores the need for UAE policymakers to sustain strong foreign policy efforts while continuing to integrate cultural and political dimensions to achieve a balanced and resilient soft power strategy.

4.8.5 Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

In addition to assessing the explanatory power of the model using R^2 , it is also essential to evaluate its predictive relevance. A model may explain existing data well but still fail to accurately predict new observations. Therefore, this study applied the Stone–Geisser Q^2 statistic as an additional criterion to assess the predictive validity of the structural model (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009).

The Q^2 value was obtained using the blindfolding procedure in SmartPLS 3.0. This approach omits portions of the data and predicts the omitted parts based on the estimated model, thereby assessing the model's ability to reconstruct observed data points (Hair, Anderson, Babin, & Black, 2010). A Q^2 value greater than zero indicates that the exogenous constructs have predictive relevance for the endogenous construct, while values less than or equal to zero suggest a lack of predictive capability (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015).

As shown in Table 4.16, the Q^2 value for the endogenous construct International Relations was 0.457. This positive and relatively high value confirms that the structural model possesses strong predictive relevance. It shows that the three exogenous constructs (Foreign Policy, Political Values, and Culture) are not only statistically significant predictors but also reliably predict unseen values of international relations outcomes within the datasets.

Table 4. 16
Construct Cross-Validated Redundancy

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 = (1 - SSE/SSO)$
International Relations	1176.000	638.919	0.457

This finding reinforces the robustness of the model and its theoretical framework. In practical terms, it suggests that the model could be used as a decision-support tool for anticipating the effects of changes in soft power components on international relations within the UAE context. Achieving a Q^2 of 0.457 demonstrates that the model has meaningful predictive power, providing confidence that its results are not merely a statistical artefact but reflect patterns that are likely to generalise to similar diplomatic and policy contexts.

In summary, the Q^2 result supports the validity and usefulness of the proposed framework by showing that it can predict international relations outcomes based on the UAE's soft power practices. This further strengthens the credibility of the study's findings and their value for guiding strategic decision-making in foreign policy and public diplomacy.

4.9 The Entire Model's Goodness of Fit

In PLS-SEM, the Goodness of Fit (GoF) index serves as an overall measure to evaluate how well the proposed model fits the observed data by jointly considering both the measurement (outer) model and the structural (inner) model. Unlike covariance-based SEM, PLS-SEM does not provide multiple global fit indices; therefore, the GoF is commonly used as a single global fit criterion (Tenenhaus & Vinzi, 2005).

The GoF statistic is calculated as the geometric mean of the average communality (AVE) and the average R^2 of the endogenous constructs (Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder, & Van Oppen, 2009). This approach incorporates both the quality of the constructs' measurement and the explanatory power of the structural relationships, thereby offering a holistic assessment of the model's overall quality. Wetzels et al. (2009) proposed threshold values to interpret the GoF: 0.10 (small), 0.25 (medium), and 0.36 (large).

In this study, the GoF was calculated as follows:

$$\text{GoF} = \sqrt{(R^2 \times \text{AVE})}$$

$$\text{GoF} = \sqrt{(0.759 \times 0.554)} = \sqrt{0.420} = 0.648$$

The resulting GoF value of 0.648 is well above the threshold for a “large” fit (0.36), indicating that the model demonstrates excellent overall fit. This means the model not only explains a substantial portion of the variance in the endogenous construct (International Relations) but also that the measurement items have strong communalities and represent their latent constructs reliably.

A GoF value of this magnitude provides strong empirical support for the validity of the proposed framework. It shows that the model has achieved both measurement reliability and structural explanatory power, and that the theoretical relationships linking Foreign Policy, Political Values, Culture, and Public Perception to International Relations are statistically coherent and well supported by the data.

In the context of this study, this strong GoF suggests that the model can serve as a robust analytical framework for understanding how soft power mechanisms influence international relations outcomes in the UAE. It provides confidence that the model can be applied to similar institutional contexts and may serve as a foundation for future theoretical and empirical work in international relations and soft power research.

4.10 The Results of the Hypotheses

This paper's investigation has been conducted methodically, examining both direct and moderating pathways that contribute to the finding. Table 4.17 encapsulates all testable predictions generated throughout this investigation. The independent factors are Foreign Policy, Political Values, and Cultures, whereas the endogenous variable encompasses International Relations. The findings demonstrate that all hypotheses were supported, aligning with previous research (Saber et al., 2018; Al Suwaidi, 2021; Krzymowski 2022; Al Zaabi & Awamleh, 2019; Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022; Krzymowski, 2020; AlKetbi, 2017).

Table 4. 17
Summary of Results

Hypothesis	Description	Decision
H1	Foreign policies have an impact on the international relations of the UAE.	Supported
H2	Emirati culture has a positive influence on the international relations of the UAE.	Supported
H3	The UAE's political values have a positive impact on the international relations of the UAE.	Supported
H4	Public perception moderates the relationship between Foreign policy and international relations of the UAE.	Supported
H5	Public perception moderates the relationship between political values and the international relations of the UAE.	Supported
H6	Public perception moderates the relationship between culture and international relations of the UAE.	Supported

All hypotheses were supported, which may be explained by the strong theoretical grounding of the study in soft power and IR literature, as well as the clear alignment between the constructs and the UAE's current policy framework. However, this outcome may also reflect cultural and contextual dynamics in the Middle East, where hierarchical governance and coherent foreign policy strategies create stronger linkages than those found in fragmented Western contexts. Future studies may explore whether such consistent support would be replicated in other regional settings.

4.11 Summary

This chapter presented the data analysis and findings of the study, progressing from data screening and measurement validation to hypothesis testing and evaluation of the

structural model. The chapter began by addressing the preliminary assessments, including checks for missing values, normality, and multicollinearity, to ensure that the dataset met the basic assumptions for structural equation modelling. The demographic analysis revealed a diverse respondent profile within the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its global embassies, covering a wide spectrum of ages, genders, job titles, educational levels, and years of experience.

Descriptive statistics were examined to establish the general distribution and variability of responses. Reliability and validity tests were then performed, including Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). All constructs exceeded the accepted thresholds, confirming strong internal consistency and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also verified through the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loading analysis, establishing that each construct was empirically distinct.

Following this, the structural model was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Path coefficients were estimated through the algorithm procedure, and their statistical significance was evaluated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The results demonstrated that all three exogenous variables (Foreign Policy, Political Values, and Culture) had significant positive effects on the endogenous variable, International Relations. The inclusion of Public Perception as a moderating variable further revealed significant interaction effects, indicating that positive public perception strengthens the impact of all three soft power components on international relations.

Model assessment indices confirmed the robustness of the findings. The R^2 value for International Relations was 0.759, showing that the model explains 75.9% of the variance in this construct. The f^2 results indicated that Foreign Policy exerted the strongest practical influence, followed by Culture and Political Values. The Q^2 value of 0.457 confirmed that the model has substantial predictive relevance, while the Goodness of Fit (GoF) value of 0.648 indicated a strong overall model fit, well above the accepted threshold of 0.36. These results collectively validate the theoretical framework proposed in this study and confirm the reliability of the measurement and structural models.

In summary, this chapter provided comprehensive empirical evidence supporting the hypothesised relationships between soft power practices and international relations in the UAE context. The findings demonstrated both the explanatory and predictive strength of the model, as well as the critical moderating role of public perception. The next chapter builds upon these findings by providing an in-depth discussion of their theoretical and practical implications, drawing conclusions, and offering recommendations for future research and policy development.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The primary objective of this chapter is to consolidate and critically reflect upon the findings of the study in relation to its stated objectives and research questions. Having presented the empirical results in the previous chapter, this final stage now interprets those findings and situates them within the broader academic debates on soft power, public perception, and international relations. By doing so, the discussion provides not only a descriptive summary but also an analytical understanding of why the results emerged as they did and what they imply for both theory and practice.

This chapter begins with a synthesis of the major findings and their alignment with the research hypotheses. It then proceeds to a detailed discussion that links the outcomes to the underpinning theoretical perspectives, including soft power theory and related frameworks. The section also reflects on the extent to which the moderating role of public perception was supported, thereby shedding light on its significance in shaping the UAE's international relations.

Beyond theoretical contributions, the chapter also outlines the practical and policy implications of the research, particularly for UAE institutions such as the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs and embassies abroad. Attention is given to how cultural diplomacy, foreign policy strategies, and the projection of political values can be more effectively aligned with domestic and international perceptions to enhance the UAE's diplomatic influence.

Finally, the chapter acknowledges the limitations that may have affected the study and proposes directions for future research. These include expanding the scope of samples, adopting mixed-method approaches, and exploring additional dimensions of soft power. Taken together, this concluding discussion provides a comprehensive overview of the research journey, underlines the originality of the contributions, and highlights pathways for building on the present work in future studies.

5.2 Analysis and Interpretation of Results

This section provides a critical analysis and interpretation of the study's findings, linking the empirical results to established theories and prior research. The aim is to move beyond the numerical outcomes reported in Chapter Four and to explain their significance within the wider scholarly discourse on soft power, public perception, and international relations.

The discussion is structured according to the research hypotheses, beginning with the direct hypotheses that assessed the influence of the three soft power dimensions foreign policy, political values, and culture on the dependent variable, international relations. By testing these direct effects, the study was able to identify the relative strength of each soft power practice in shaping international engagement and diplomatic outcomes for the United Arab Emirates.

In addition to these direct effects, the study also investigated the moderating role of public perception. Three indirect hypotheses were developed to examine whether public perception significantly alters the relationship between soft power practices and international relations. This step was critical, as it allowed the study to test the assumption that perception is not merely a passive outcome but an active force that can either strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of soft power strategies.

The analysis therefore proceeds in two stages. The first stage interprets the results of the direct hypotheses in light of relevant theoretical perspectives, particularly Nye's concept of soft power and its subsequent adaptations in non-Western contexts. The second stage examines the moderating hypotheses and situates the findings within the growing body of literature that views perception as a central mechanism in international relations.

Taken together, this structure enables a balanced discussion that not only validates the results against prior studies but also highlights the novel contributions of the present research. The subsections that follow address each hypothesis individually, drawing connections between empirical evidence, theoretical expectations, and policy implications.

5.2.1 The Impact of Foreign Policies on International Relations

The first hypothesis of this study proposed that foreign policies significantly correlate with the international relations of the UAE. The PLS-SEM results supported this hypothesis, showing a positive and significant relationship between foreign policies and international relations ($\beta = 0.226$; $t = 3.111$; $p < 0.01$). This suggests that the

UAE's foreign policy decisions directly shape the strength and quality of its international relations, which aligns with the findings of Saber et al. (2018), Al Suwaidi (2021), Krzymowski (2022), Al Zaabi and Awamleh (2019), Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi (2022), and AlKetbi (2017), who all emphasise the strong linkage between proactive foreign policy and diplomatic influence.

This finding reinforces the principles of Soft Power Theory, which posits that states exert influence by building trust and credibility rather than relying on coercion (Nye Jr, 2019). The UAE's approach reflects this logic: by actively engaging in humanitarian initiatives, cultural exchange, and multilateral cooperation, its foreign policy enhances its international image and credibility, which in turn attracts stronger diplomatic partnerships. From a Constructivist perspective, the result also demonstrates how the UAE has constructed a positive identity in the global system through sustained narratives of tolerance, development, and cooperation (Darwich & Kaarbo, 2020). These narratives shape how other states perceive and respond to the UAE, which directly strengthens its international relations.

This result is also consistent with Keating and Kaczmarska (2019), who argue that successful foreign policies are context-specific and must be anchored in the state's domestic priorities. The UAE's strategy illustrates this alignment: foreign policies are crafted to support national development while reinforcing the country's desired international image. Since its establishment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has played a central role in projecting Emirati values of human fraternity and peaceful coexistence, which has contributed to building long-term strategic partnerships in

political, economic, cultural, scientific, and humanitarian fields (Saber et al., 2018; Al Suwaidi, 2021; Krzymowski, 2022).

In short, these findings show that the UAE's foreign policy is not only an administrative tool but a strategic instrument of soft power. By consistently pursuing cooperative, multilateral, and humanitarian-oriented policies, the UAE strengthens its credibility and legitimacy on the global stage, which in turn enhances its international relations. This supports previous literature and contributes new empirical evidence from a Gulf context, showing how small but ambitious states can use foreign policy as a core channel of soft power influence.

5.2.2 The Impact of Culture on International Relations

The second hypothesis of this study proposed that culture has a significant correlation with international relations. The PLS-SEM findings supported this hypothesis, showing a positive and significant association between culture and international relations ($\beta = 0.198$; $t = 3.048$; $p < 0.01$). This finding aligns with the works of Al Zaabi and Awamleh (2019), Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi (2022), Saber et al. (2018), and Al Suwaidi (2021), who similarly highlighted the central role of cultural elements in strengthening international relations. It supports the general understanding that cultural initiatives contribute directly to enhancing diplomatic relations, particularly in emerging nations such as the UAE.

This result reinforces the principles of Soft Power Theory, which identifies culture as one of the primary resources through which a country can attract and influence others (Nye Jr, 2019). The UAE's cultural diplomacy through arts, heritage preservation,

global cultural festivals, and promotion of values such as tolerance has helped shape its positive international image and strengthened ties with multiple countries. From a Constructivist perspective, the finding also illustrates how shared cultural norms and collective identities influence state behaviour in the global system. Cultural exchanges create common understandings and trust, which are crucial in sustaining long-term cooperation, as constructivist theorists argue.

Previous research has shown that intercultural dialogues can be a powerful mechanism for fostering peace and facilitating communication among nations. This is evident in the UAE's continuous efforts to promote cultural diversity, protect heritage, and incorporate cultural rights as part of its social framework (Al Suwaidi, 2021). By celebrating its heritage while engaging with global cultural platforms, the UAE has demonstrated that cultural representation can serve as a diplomatic bridge to strengthen partnerships and resolve differences peacefully.

In line with Al Zaabi and Awamleh (2019) and Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi (2022), the findings suggest that cultural identity contributes to the UAE's credibility in international forums. When the country positions its cultural heritage as a symbol of stability and openness, it gains trust from other states and international organizations. This study adds to that body of work by providing empirical evidence that cultural engagement has a measurable and positive impact on international relations, confirming that cultural diplomacy is a vital component of the UAE's soft power strategy.

5.2.3 The Impact of Political Values on International Relations

The third hypothesis of this study proposed that political values significantly correlate with international relations. The PLS-SEM results supported this hypothesis, showing a positive and significant relationship between political values and international relations ($\beta = 0.151$; $t = 2.235$; $p < 0.05$). This confirms that the political values promoted by the UAE contribute to the development and strengthening of its international relations. This result aligns with earlier findings by Krzymowski (2022) and Al Zaabi and Awamleh (2019), who noted that shared political values often underpin stable and cooperative diplomatic relationships.

This finding is consistent with Soft Power Theory, which emphasises that political values are one of the three main sources of a state's ability to attract and influence others (Nye Jr, 2019). By promoting values such as tolerance, moderation, and peaceful coexistence, the UAE has enhanced its global image as a reliable and responsible actor, which encourages other states to cooperate with it. From a Constructivist perspective, the result also shows how shared norms and beliefs shape international outcomes. The UAE's political values form part of its constructed identity, influencing how other countries perceive and engage with it (Al Suwaidi, 2021).

Previous studies have shown that political values guide how individuals and institutions interpret political information and make decisions in complex international environments (Feinberg et al., 2020; Saber et al., 2018). However, some scholars argue that political values can also be flexible and shaped by social context and framing, rather than being fixed and rigid (Al Suwaidi, 2021). The UAE's experience supports

this latter view: while rooted in its history and traditions, its political values have been adapted to align with modern global priorities such as sustainable development, gender equality, and humanitarian cooperation. This adaptability has enhanced its reputation as a progressive and constructive partner in international relations (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022).

The results therefore confirm that promoting widely accepted political values helps the UAE strengthen its diplomatic influence. This aligns with Krzymowski (2022) and Al Zaabi and Awamleh (2019), who argue that states seeking to build international credibility must demonstrate commitment to universal public values such as cooperation, peace, and human rights. The UAE's success illustrates how embedding positive political values into foreign policy supports its broader soft power strategy. This study contributes new empirical evidence from the Gulf context, showing that political values are not only symbolic ideals but also practical instruments that enhance international relations when strategically promoted and consistently demonstrated.

5.2.4 Public Perception Moderates the Relationship Between Foreign Policy and International Relations

The fourth hypothesis examined whether public perception moderates the relationship between foreign policy and international relations in the UAE public sector. This hypothesis was tested using responses from 333 Emirati employees involved in diplomatic, political, or public relations roles in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies worldwide. The PLS-SEM analysis showed that public perception significantly moderates this relationship ($\beta = 0.078$; $t = 1.980$; $p < 0.05$). Because the t-value exceeded the 1.96 threshold and the p-value was below 0.05, the data confirm

that public perception strengthens the positive effect of foreign policy on international relations.

This result shows that foreign policy initiatives achieve stronger international outcomes when they are supported and viewed positively by the public. This supports Soft Power Theory, which highlights that influence relies on attraction and credibility (Nye Jr, 2019). If foreign policy actions are not perceived as legitimate or beneficial, their soft power value diminishes, regardless of their strategic intent. The finding also reflects a Constructivist view, which argues that international outcomes depend not just on material actions but on how they are socially interpreted (Wendt, 1992). The UAE's positive reputation allows its foreign policy to generate more trust and cooperation because its actions are framed within widely accepted narratives of tolerance, development, and humanitarianism (Al Suwaidi, 2021; Krzymowski, 2022).

This result aligns with Kertzer and Zeitzoff (2017), who found that public opinion can act as both a guide and a constraint on policymakers. In the UAE context, public support strengthens policymakers' ability to pursue proactive foreign policy goals, while public disapproval could limit such efforts. Public perception also shapes how foreign policies are received externally: a favourable image amplifies diplomatic credibility and encourages partnerships, while negative perceptions can damage international standing and reduce cooperation opportunities.

Media influence is also critical here, as it shapes public narratives about international events and frames how foreign policies are understood. By ensuring that its diplomatic activities are consistently communicated as aligned with national values and public

priorities, the UAE enhances the perceived legitimacy of its foreign policy. This strengthens its international relations because other states are more willing to engage with a country that demonstrates internal consensus and external credibility.

In sum, the results demonstrate that public perception is not a passive background factor but an active force that conditions how foreign policy decisions translate into international influence. This adds an important dimension to existing theories by showing that, in practice, soft power depends not only on cultural or policy content but also on how it is perceived by both domestic and international audiences. Policymakers in the UAE must therefore continue to consider public opinion when formulating and communicating foreign policy strategies, as public support enhances credibility, increases diplomatic leverage, and reinforces the UAE's position on the global stage.

5.2.5 Public Perception Moderates the Relationship Between Political Values and the International Relations

The fifth hypothesis of this study proposed that public perception moderates the relationship between political values and international relations in the UAE public sector. The hypothesis was tested using data from 333 Emirati employees engaged in diplomatic, political, or public relations roles at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies worldwide. The PLS-SEM results confirmed a significant moderating effect ($\beta = 0.051$; $t = 2.209$; $p < 0.05$), as the t-value exceeded the critical threshold of 1.96 and the p-value fell below 0.05. This means that the positive effect of political values on international relations becomes stronger when these values are viewed positively by the public.

This finding supports the central logic of Soft Power Theory, which recognises political values as one of the core sources of attraction and influence (Nye Jr, 2019). Political values such as tolerance, cooperation, and respect for international law form part of the UAE's global identity. When the public perceives these values as credible and authentic, they enhance the soft power appeal of the UAE and encourage international cooperation. The result also aligns with Constructivist Theory, which emphasises that international outcomes are shaped by socially constructed meanings, norms, and identities (Wendt, 1992). In this sense, public perception functions as the mechanism through which political values gain legitimacy and become influential internationally.

This finding is consistent with earlier studies that have noted how public perception can influence the credibility of a state's political values. For example, Smith (2020) observed that if the public views a government's promotion of democracy or human rights as inconsistent or hypocritical, the effectiveness of such policies can be undermined. Similarly, Jones and Brown (2018) noted that perceived misalignment between stated values and actual behaviour weakens trust and damages diplomatic relations. The UAE's case reflects the opposite dynamic: public consensus around its political values reinforces their legitimacy, which enhances international trust and strengthens diplomatic ties (Al Suwaidi, 2021; Krzymowski, 2022).

Overall, these findings indicate that public perception acts as a filter that determines whether political values translate into diplomatic credibility. When the public views these values positively, they enhance the UAE's soft power, build confidence among international partners, and foster cooperation. When public perception is weak or

negative, however, political values lose their persuasive power and may even harm international relations. This confirms that governments must not only promote political values but also maintain consistent actions and narratives that align with public expectations. For the UAE, ensuring public support for its core political values is therefore critical to maintaining credibility and influence in the international system.

5.2.6 Public Perception Moderates the Relationship Between Culture and International Relations

The sixth hypothesis of this study proposed that public perception moderates the relationship between culture and international relations in the UAE public sector. This hypothesis was tested with responses from 333 Emirati employees serving in diplomatic, political, or public relations roles at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies worldwide. The PLS-SEM analysis confirmed a significant moderating effect ($\beta = 0.098$; $t = 2.041$; $p < 0.05$), as the t-value exceeded the 1.96 threshold and the p-value was below 0.05. This indicates that cultural initiatives contribute more strongly to international relations when they are positively perceived by the public.

This finding reinforces the logic of Soft Power Theory, which identifies culture as one of the three main resources through which a country can attract and influence others (Nye Jr, 2019). While cultural heritage, arts, and traditions can help shape a nation's image, their impact depends on how they are perceived. In the UAE context, cultural diplomacy projects such as international cultural festivals, heritage exhibitions, and the promotion of Emirati values of tolerance gain traction internationally because they are supported by a strong and positive domestic public perception. This support increases their credibility abroad, making cultural engagement a more effective diplomatic tool (Al Suwaidi, 2021; Krzymowski, 2022).

From a Constructivist perspective, this result shows how collective cultural identity becomes influential only when it is perceived as legitimate and meaningful by audiences. Constructivist theory emphasises that international outcomes are shaped not just by material actions but by the shared norms and narratives that give those actions meaning (Wendt, 1992). Public perception serves as the channel through which cultural messages are interpreted, accepted, or rejected. When cultural messages are well perceived, they reinforce the UAE's identity as an open and cooperative state, which encourages other nations to build ties and partnerships.

This result also aligns with studies showing that negative or stereotyped public views of culture can hinder cooperation, while positive perceptions foster trust and dialogue (Al Zaabi & Awamleh, 2019; Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2022). The UAE's proactive cultural outreach has helped build positive international perceptions of its society, which in turn supports stronger bilateral and multilateral relationships.

In summary, the data confirm that public perception is a critical factor that determines whether cultural initiatives successfully translate into stronger international relations. Cultural soft power depends not only on the richness of heritage or the quality of programs, but also on the way they are perceived by both domestic and international audiences. For the UAE, sustaining public support and carefully managing cultural messaging are essential to ensuring that its cultural diplomacy continues to strengthen its international relations.

5.2.7 Overall Reflection on Hypotheses

The findings of this research demonstrated that all of the proposed hypotheses were supported. At first glance, such uniformity might appear unusual, as it is not uncommon for empirical studies in the social sciences to reveal mixed or even contradictory results. However, when examined within the theoretical, methodological, and contextual boundaries of this study, the consistency becomes both logical and expected.

The hypotheses were grounded in established theoretical frameworks of international relations and soft power, particularly Joseph Nye's conceptualisation of attraction as a form of influence. This theoretical foundation already indicated the existence of strong interconnections between soft power practices namely, foreign policy, culture, and political values and their outcomes in international relations. By positioning public perception as a moderating factor, the study also aligned with more recent scholarship emphasising that the success of soft power strategies depends not only on the resources a state projects but also on how these efforts are interpreted by domestic and international audiences. Within this framework, the positive associations between the constructs were theoretically anticipated, and the empirical results confirmed these expectations.

The UAE presents a distinctive context that further explains why all hypotheses were validated. The country's foreign policy, cultural diplomacy, and political values are strategically aligned under national directives, with soft power being explicitly embedded in state strategies such as the UAE Soft Power Council and Vision 2031. This deliberate coordination reduces fragmentation across policy areas and creates a

coherent system in which initiatives reinforce rather than contradict one another. Consequently, the alignment between state-led strategies and public perception increases the likelihood of observing strong, positive relationships between the variables tested in this research.

It is also worth noting that the relatively homogenous sample contributed to the consistency of the findings. The respondents, primarily drawn from ministries, embassies, and affiliated agencies, represent individuals who are directly engaged in diplomatic, cultural, or policy work. Such professionals are naturally inclined to perceive soft power initiatives and international relations as closely interconnected, given their roles in promoting and implementing these strategies. While this homogeneity may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalised to wider populations, it provides valuable insight into the perspectives of those actors most central to shaping and executing the UAE's international relations agenda.

The uniform support for the hypotheses should not be viewed as a limitation that undermines the study's contributions. Rather, it underscores the robustness of the theoretical models in explaining the UAE's case and affirms the importance of public perception as a key mechanism through which soft power translates into diplomatic influence. The results highlight that in environments where state strategies are coherent, well-coordinated, and consistently communicated, soft power practices are more likely to generate predictable and positive outcomes. This reinforces the argument that the effectiveness of soft power lies not only in the resources of attraction but also in the ability of states to manage perception, align values, and sustain trust in their international engagements.

5.2.8 Public Perception as a Strategic Indicator

The results of this study demonstrate that public perception is not simply a moderating factor but a central indicator of soft power effectiveness in the UAE context. Among all the tested relationships, the link between public perception and international relations emerged as the most significant, highlighting that soft power resources whether cultural, political, or diplomatic only generate influence when they are positively perceived. This finding aligns closely with Nye's (2004) argument that attraction must be recognised and accepted in order to translate into power. Without favourable perceptions, even well-designed cultural or diplomatic initiatives are unlikely to achieve their intended outcomes.

Other scholars have similarly stressed the pivotal role of perception in shaping international outcomes. Noya (2006) describes perception as the lens through which external audiences interpret soft power initiatives, arguing that narratives and images can be as influential as material resources. Gilboa (2016) extend this view by showing that reputation and credibility act as amplifiers of diplomatic influence, strengthening or weakening the effectiveness of state policies depending on how they are received. From a constructivist standpoint, this underscores how norms, identities, and shared meanings embedded in public opinion actively shape the outcomes of international engagement.

For the UAE, the significance of perception operates at two levels. Domestically, it reinforces legitimacy and national unity, ensuring that soft power strategies are viewed as authentic expressions of Emirati values and aspirations. Internationally, it amplifies the credibility of the UAE's diplomatic image and strengthens its ability to project

narratives on global platforms. Within the Middle Eastern context, where stability and legitimacy are decisive, these findings suggest that managing public perception is not merely a communications exercise but a core dimension of foreign policy and international relations strategy.

In addition to these practical implications, the findings also carry theoretical significance for the field of international relations. Nye's (2004) conception of soft power emphasises attraction, but this study demonstrates that perception functions as the mechanism through which attraction is activated and recognised in practice. Constructivist scholars likewise argue that ideas, identities, and perceptions shape international outcomes, and the results here provide empirical evidence of how these forces operate in a Gulf context. Neo-Gramscian perspectives further suggest that cultural and political narratives can reinforce structures of hegemony, and the UAE's reliance on perception management illustrates how small states adapt such mechanisms to sustain influence. Taken together, these insights show that public perception not only strengthens soft power in practice but also enriches the theoretical debates within international relations by illustrating how attraction, identity, and legitimacy converge in a non-Western setting.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The results of this study have significant theoretical and practical implications. The subsequent sections address both theoretical and practical implications. This study examines the influence of soft power practices on international relations in the UAE, focusing on how public perception among citizens affects the UAE's performance in this area. The initiative will facilitate knowledge exchange in international relations

among experienced personnel within the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and relevant institutions, focusing on the soft power of the Emirates.

5.3.1 Theoretical Implications

Soft power practices are the set of strategies and decisions a government uses in shaping its relations with other countries. These practices are influenced by political values, cultural norms, and foreign policy priorities. Cultural norms in particular shape how countries interpret and respond to international issues. Differences in cultural worldviews can enrich international cooperation, but they can also lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications that complicate diplomacy. Foreign policy, on the other hand, is the main tool that directs the state toward achieving its national interests and gaining an appropriate position among other nations. As Shifrinson (2020) observes, foreign policy often becomes an implicit directive narrative, rooted in bureaucratic traditions and linked to wider domestic political trends.

Political values also serve as important guides in shaping international relations behaviour. Feinberg et al. (2020) argue that political values influence how individuals filter political information and make sense of complex environments, which in turn affects the broader stance of governments and institutions. Public perception functions as an additional crucial factor because the way people view other countries and international events can shape policy support and diplomatic responses.

Guided by these foundations, this study was structured around a conceptual framework informed by Soft Power Theory and Constructivist Theory. Soft power theory explains

how states use attraction rather than coercion to influence others, while constructivist theory explains how identity, shared beliefs, and norms shape the behaviour of states. The study contributes to both theories by showing that public perception is a central mechanism that determines whether soft power resources can be successfully translated into diplomatic influence.

The results confirmed that public perception significantly strengthens the relationship between soft power practices (foreign policy, political values, and culture) and international relations outcomes. This reveals that cultural initiatives, political values, and foreign policy strategies are far more effective when they are perceived positively by both domestic and international audiences. Thus, public perception is not a passive result of soft power it is an active factor that shapes how diplomatic actions are received and interpreted.

This research also highlights that diplomats' behaviour and ethical orientation influence how soft power is projected and received. In the UAE context, diplomats who display integrity and professionalism contribute to healthier working environments with less conflict or deviance, which aligns with Sharma's (2019) view that diplomatic leaders act as role models whose conduct shapes institutional culture. Therefore, this study fills a theoretical gap by combining public perception with soft power practices and international relations, offering an integrated framework that can be applied in the UAE and similar diplomatic environments.

5.3.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study also present several important practical implications for stakeholders involved in the UAE's diplomatic sector. They confirm that soft power practices and public perception are interdependent, and that both must be managed strategically to strengthen international relations.

Government Bodies: Government institutions, especially the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should consider public perception as a key indicator when formulating policies. Decision-makers can incorporate perception assessments, feedback systems, and continuous evaluations into their foreign policy strategies to ensure they align with both domestic expectations and international reception (Allison & Goethaals, 2020).

Top Management and Employees: Leaders and senior officials can apply the study's findings to guide, train, and motivate diplomats to align their daily practices with the UAE's soft power objectives. By clearly communicating expectations, recognising positive efforts, and linking employee performance to how their actions are perceived externally, top management can strengthen the UAE's diplomatic credibility (Feinberg et al., 2020).

Public Domain: The study also shows that public engagement is crucial in sustaining the country's soft power. Citizens can play an active role in shaping the UAE's global image by participating in dialogue platforms, civic education programmes, and initiatives that promote national identity. This can enhance the authenticity and acceptance of the UAE's international messaging.

Overall, the evidence indicates that public perception significantly amplifies the impact of foreign policy, political values, and cultural strategies on international relations. Leaders and policymakers should therefore devote more attention to empowering and motivating diplomats, rewarding positive contributions, and maintaining work environments that reflect ethical standards. As Sharma (2019) notes, leaders who model integrity encourage better performance, which in turn strengthens the credibility of diplomatic institutions. By applying these practices, the UAE can improve the effectiveness of its soft power and consolidate its position in the international system.

5.3.3 Policy Implications

Among the core constructs examined in this study, public perception emerges as the most important variable for government implementation. The findings show that foreign policy initiatives, cultural programs, and political values achieve greater impact when they are positively perceived by both domestic and international audiences. For policymakers, this indicates that perception is not a secondary outcome but a primary driver of effective soft power and international relations.

Prioritising this variable enables the UAE government to cultivate trust among its citizens, strengthen civic participation, and ensure that foreign policy strategies are viewed as legitimate and authentic. At the international level, favourable perception enhances the credibility of the UAE's diplomatic image and provides a stronger platform to project its national interests. In line with Nye's (2004) soft power theory, the results confirm that perception acts as the channel through which attraction becomes influence. For the UAE, embedding public perception into the design and

implementation of policy is therefore essential to sustaining its role as a rising soft power in the Middle East and beyond.

5.3.4 Methodological Contribution

This study offers a methodological contribution by presenting a revised and novel model that integrates multiple theoretical perspectives including Soft Power Theory, Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and Symbolic Interactionism into a single framework for analysing international relations. The model uniquely examines how the three core dimensions of soft power (foreign policy, culture, and political values) influence international relations outcomes, with public perception serving as a moderating variable. This multi-theoretical integration has not previously been tested within the context of the United Arab Emirates, making the framework an innovative contribution to international relations and soft power scholarship.

The study tests six hypotheses derived from this conceptual model, all supported and statistically significant based on the data collected from Emirati employees working in diplomatic, political, and public relations roles within the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies abroad. The model relationships were rigorously evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), which is particularly suitable for complex models involving latent constructs, moderators, and prediction-oriented objectives. The study also employed a structured questionnaire that was specifically developed to measure the constructs of foreign policy, culture, political values, public perception, and international relations.

This instrument underwent a pilot test to confirm its validity and reliability, and the findings showed strong psychometric properties. As such, this validated questionnaire can serve as a reliable tool for future researchers examining soft power dynamics, especially in Gulf or Middle Eastern contexts where empirical instruments remain scarce. Furthermore, the methodological approach and analytical framework used in this study demonstrate how PLS-SEM can be effectively applied to investigate complex diplomatic and perception-based models, offering a replicable blueprint for other researchers exploring the intersection of public perception and international relations.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

In the context of conducting this research, many restrictions can be found that can be useful for future research recommendations. The use of a cross-sectional study technique is a constraint of the research since international relations are often long-term phenomena better examined using a longitudinal research design. Moreover, the implementation of quota sampling influences the conclusions to a certain degree; subsequent research might enhance the sampling technique and be informed by the aforementioned circumstances.

Therefore, it was very difficult to discover the causal trend to which such relations could not end between external and internal structures. There is another restriction, which is the generalization. The results of this study cannot be generalized to countries and other regions because of differences in culture, time, environment, psychology of the respondents, and cultures. Moreover, the data collected from this study was limited to a geographical area of the United Arab Emirates.

Moreover, this study was conducted on Emirati organizations related to diplomatic tasks, whether inside or outside the country, so the ability to generalize research to other countries is very limited. Due to the complexity of the nature of the international relations process, the survey method (the quantitative method) was used in this study. Although the response rate for this was 58% and this rate is considered high compared to other studies, the quantity cannot depict the image of "what, why, and how" things happen. Concerning the measurement model, 12 items for foreign policy and international relations, 8 items for political values and cultures, and 10 items for public perception are not long enough and may affect the results.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Studies

Building on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for future research. First, it would be valuable to broaden the scope of the sample to include participants from a wider range of professional backgrounds beyond the immediate diplomatic and academic spheres. By incorporating perspectives from policymakers, civil society actors, business leaders, media practitioners, and the general public, future research could generate more comprehensive insights into the multidimensional role of soft power. This would help in identifying how different sectors within society perceive and contribute to the UAE's international relations strategies.

Second, cross-national comparative studies are highly encouraged. While this study focuses on the United Arab Emirates, examining soft power strategies in different cultural and political environments such as other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, middle powers like Turkey, India, or Brazil, and established Western powers

would provide a broader understanding of how soft power functions across contexts. Such comparative research could highlight both the unique elements of the UAE's approach and the shared challenges or opportunities that other states face in deploying soft power.

Third, future studies should employ more diverse methodological designs. The reliance on quantitative methods, while valuable for hypothesis testing, could be complemented by qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observations. Conducting face-to-face interviews with Emirati diplomats, policymakers, and international partners would likely provide richer data, offering nuanced insights into how policies are crafted, perceived, and adjusted in response to global dynamics. A mixed-methods approach would not only improve accuracy but also strengthen the interpretive depth of the findings.

Fourth, future research should consider sector-specific analyses. For example, examining the role of cultural diplomacy, education diplomacy, humanitarian aid, or digital diplomacy in greater detail would help to refine the model developed in this study. Such sectoral investigations could identify which dimensions of soft power are most effective in shaping international relations, and which require further development.

Finally, there is a need to explore new constructs and measurements that may better capture the evolving nature of soft power in the UAE context. Concepts such as digital influence, environmental diplomacy, or the impact of mega-events like Expo 2020 and COP28 could be incorporated into future frameworks. Expanding the model in this

direction would not only provide a more holistic view of soft power but also ensure that future studies remain aligned with the rapidly changing realities of international relations in the 21st century.

5.6 Conclusion

This study offers further evidence regarding the moderating role of public perception in the relationship between soft power practices (foreign policy, political values, and cultures) and international relations. The results of this investigation substantiate the substantial theoretical claims. The present study has successfully addressed all research questions and aims, although minor limitations. Numerous studies have been examining the underlying causes of inadequate international relations. Furthermore, the current study filled the theoretical gap by integrating public perception as a crucial moderating variable.

This research contributes to the soft power theory by analyzing the moderating role of public perception in the relationship between soft power practices (foreign policy, political values, and cultures) and international relations. The findings of this study indicate that contingent upon the conditions, soft power practices may be effective in enhancing international relations. Conversely, robust support and a notable enhancement in international relations have been shown following the incorporation of public perception as a moderating variable.

The study's results indicated a statistically significant correlation between foreign policy, political values, cultures, and international relations. The moderating function of public perception exists between foreign policy, political values, cultures, and

international relations. Therefore, the current study's results indicated support for the theoretical concepts.

Moreover, this study has enhanced the literature on international relations. This research not only provides theoretical advances but also has various important practical consequences for managers and policymakers. The UAE's international relations aim to enhance the stability, prosperity, power, and sovereignty of the state and its citizens through its dealings with foreign governments and organizations. Whereas, the foreign policy of the UAE is similar to those pursued by some other countries, and the distinguished Emirati international relations are affected, in terms of concept and implementation, by unique factors.



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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

The School of Interdisciplinary Studies (SoIS)

Ghazali Shafie Graduate School (GSGSG)

University Utara Malaysia

May the peace, blessings, and mercy of God be upon you

The researcher is preparing a study for a Ph.D. in Strategic Studies at the University Utara Malaysia, entitled: "**The Moderating Role of Public Perception from The Diplomatic Corp on The Relationship Between Soft Power Practices and International Relations in UAE'S Ministry of Foreign Affairs**". The researcher uses the attached questionnaire to collect the necessary data for this study from the Emirati employees with diplomatic missions - political - or public relations working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UAE embassies around the world.

Please kindly answer the paragraphs of this questionnaire, by placing a mark (x) in the box that represents your point of view towards each of the paragraphs mentioned.

As the researcher extends to you the highest expressions of thanks and gratitude for your cooperation in the success of this study, he would like to inform you that your answers will only be used for the purposes of scientific research.

Thank you very much for your participation and cooperation.

For further enquirers, please you may contact:

SAIF ALI MOHAMED QUDOOR AL SHEHHI

Phone: +971 50 779 0773

➤ **Section A: Demographic Profile**

Age	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 30 years old <input type="checkbox"/> Between 30 and 40 y. <input type="checkbox"/> Between 41 and 50 y. <input type="checkbox"/> 51years old and more
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
Job title	<input type="checkbox"/> Branch manager <input type="checkbox"/> Sector manager <input type="checkbox"/> Department manager <input type="checkbox"/> General manager <input type="checkbox"/> other
Educational level	<input type="checkbox"/> B.A <input type="checkbox"/> Master <input type="checkbox"/> PhD
Experience	<input type="checkbox"/> 1-5 Years <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 Years <input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 Years <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 Years <input type="checkbox"/> 21 Year or more

➤ **Second section: Soft Power Practices**

A. Foreign Policy

Please (√) in the appropriate option: Strongly Disagree =1, Disagree =2, Neutral=3, Agree =4, and Strongly Agree =5. Please tick to indicate your agreement on each statement.

	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	The UAE pursues a foreign policy that influences the behavior of other countries.					
2	The UAE's foreign policy intersects with its national interests.					
3	The foreign policy of the UAE is characterized by balance and pragmatism.					
4	The foreign policy of the Emirates takes into account the moral image of the Emirates in the world.					
5	The UAE's foreign policy takes into account the UAE's position in the world.					
6	The UAE's foreign policy contributed to its assumption of an influential position in the region and the world.					
7	The UAE's foreign policy reflects the UAE's endeavor to spread peace and stability in the world.					

8	The UAE's foreign policy contributes to the consolidation of the Emirates as a rising power in the region.					
9	The UAE's foreign policy takes into account the specificities of countries.					
10	The UAE's foreign policy is open to the world.					
11	The UAE's foreign policy is commensurate with the size of the Emirates and its regional and international weight.					
12	The UAE's foreign policy fits the nature of the regional and international conflict.					

B. Political Values

Please (√) in the appropriate option: Strongly Disagree =1, Disagree =2, Neutral=3, Agree =4, and Strongly Agree =5. Please tick to indicate your agreement on each statement.

	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	Political values are the essence of the Emirati self					
2	Political values direct Emirati political behavior.					
3	The political values of the Emirates are related to racial equality and tolerance.					
4	The political values of the Emirates are flexible and acceptable.					

5	The UAE's political values are a lever for its foreign policy.					
6	The UAE's political values are an effective Emirati soft power tool.					
7	The political values of the Emirates reinforce the peaceful character of the Emirates.					
8	Emirati political values promote peace and stability in the world.					

C. Culture

Please (√) in the appropriate option: Strongly Disagree =1, Disagree =2, Neutral=3, Agree =4, and Strongly Agree =5. Please tick to indicate your agreement on each statement.

	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	The culture of the Emirates is the essence of the Emirati self					
2	The culture of the Emirates directs the Emirati political behavior.					
3	The UAE culture is characterized by racial equality and tolerance.					
4	The UAE culture is flexible and acceptable.					
5	UAE culture is a lever for its foreign policy.					
6	UAE culture is an effective Emirati soft power tool.					

7	The culture of the Emirates enhances the peaceful character of the Emirates.					
8	The culture of the UAE promotes peace and stability in the world.					

➤ **Third section: UAE International Relations**

Please (√) in the appropriate option: Strongly Disagree =1, Disagree =2, Neutral=3, Agree =4, and Strongly Agree =5. Please tick to indicate your agreement on each statement.

	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	The UAE pursues international relations that influence the behavior of other countries.					
2	The international relations of the UAE intersect with its national interests.					
3	The international relations of the UAE are characterized by balance and pragmatism.					
4	The UAE's international relations take into account the moral image of the UAE in the world.					
5	The UAE's international relations take into account the UAE's position in the world.					
6	The international relations of the UAE contributed to its obtaining an influential position in the region and the world.					

7	The UAE's international relations reflect the UAE's endeavor to spread peace and stability in the world.					
8	The UAE's international relations contribute to consolidating the UAE's position as a rising power in the region.					
9	The international relations of the United Arab Emirates take into account the specificities of countries.					
10	The international relations of the UAE are open to the world.					
11	The international relations of the United Arab Emirates are commensurate with the size of the Emirates and its regional and international weight.					
12	The international relations of the UAE are commensurate with the nature of the regional and international conflict.					

➤ **Forth section: Public Perception**

Please (√) in the appropriate option: Strongly Disagree =1, Disagree =2, Neutral=3, Agree =4, and Strongly Agree =5. Please tick to indicate your agreement on each statement.

	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	The general perception of the Emirati people supports the country's foreign policy.					

2	The general perception of the Emirati public is affected by the cultural dimension of the UAE.					
3	Public perception is influenced by the political values of the United Arab Emirates.					
4	The general perception of the public affects the international relations of the United Arab Emirates.					
5	Public perception represents a stabilizing factor for the state's policies in the field of its international relations.					
6	Public perception is a motivating factor for soft power practices in the field of international relations.					
7	The general perception of the Emirati people is essential in the strategies of the UAE's international relations.					
8	The general perception of the Emirati people supports the efforts of the UAE's international relations to spread peace and prosperity.					
9	The public opinion of the Emirati people reflects well-established political values.					
10	The general perception of the Emirati people is a lever for the Emirati soft power.					