

Adapting Soft Power in Tourism Management in Thailand

Received: August 1, 2022

Revised: August 8, 2022

Accepted: September 12, 2020

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Abstract

Tourism and travel are significant economic activities throughout the world. Thailand has high tourism potential as well as diverse and unique tourism resources in comparison to other countries. This is an academic article that aims to describe the concept of "soft power" and how some countries used soft power to promote their tourism industries in order to provide guidelines for adapting the soft power concept to promote Thai tourism. The economic and cultural benefits of multiple soft powers have heightened the government's efforts to support Thai cultural traditions in order to drive the economy and build the country's reputation. Thailand can use soft power to promote Thai tourism. Soft power is a valuable marketing tool. A prominent soft power resource in Thailand can boost Thai tourism and increase Thailand's global competitiveness.

Keywords: soft power, tourism management, Thailand

Introduction

Tourism is an important economic activity all over the world. Tourism creates new business opportunities, helps local businesses as a significant source of employment and income, and increases foreign exchange earnings (Manzoor et al., 2019). Thailand is a country with high tourism potential as well as tourism resources that are diverse and unique in comparison to other countries. Natural attractions include mountains, waterfalls, hot springs, seas, various islands, antiques, and religious sites that demonstrate civilization. Competition in the tourism industry, both within Thailand and internationally, has highlighted the importance of incorporating culture as part of developing products or services that are distinct from competitors.

Among several types of tourism, cultural tourism is one of the most outstanding and fastest growing segments in the twenty-first century (Jureniene & Jurene, 2019). Recreational and cognitive travel are becoming an inseparable part of human existence in this age of globalization. There is a wide range of travel objectives, duration, and destinations.

Cultural attributes will help Thailand generate more revenue. Thai culture is an outstanding culture that distinguishes Thailand from other Asian countries. Thailand has high

potential for the application of the soft power concept. Thailand can develop a tourism industry based on the following factors: a great culture, historical heritage, multifaceted tourist resources, and friendly local people. The Thai government is now reaching out to a wider audience with the kingdom's 5F high-potential cultural products and services. Thai boxing, Thai textiles and design in the fashion industry, Thai food and cuisine, Thai television series and films, and Thai festivals are among the 5F products. The government will also place an emphasis on contemporary Thai art. Thai artists' works will be displayed at both local and international events. In addition, the administration will assist in the development of human art resources and the promotion of Thai art and culture at tourist attractions (National News Bureau of Thailand, 2022).

The economic and cultural positives resulting from multiple soft powers have made the government more alert in its efforts to support Thai cultural traditions in order to drive the economy and build a reputation for the country. The Ministry of Culture, which is an important relevant agency, has developed a policy to enhance cultural work, which has an issue of upgrading Thai soft power to the world stage. General Prayut Chan-ocha, Prime Minister of Thailand, has expressed his vision by assisting and hastening the development of soft power in order to pique people's interest in and focus on Thailand (Thailand Development of Research Institute, 2022).

Soft power is an important marketing tool. In this respect, if the government wants to support the use of soft power to drive the economy and build a reputation for Thailand, the government needs to take into account that culture is something that always sells. If we know how to create value, then in order to develop Thai culture into a soft power that can be sold, the government needs to open up opportunities for creating value in a variety of ways.

Purpose of this academic article

The purpose of this academic article is to describe the “soft power” concept and how to apply soft power to promote their tourism industries in order to provide the guidelines to adapt the soft power concept to promote Thai tourism.

Soft power concept

First and foremost, it is necessary to comprehend the concept of power. According to Nye, power is the ability of people to influence other people's behavior in order to achieve the desired results (Nye, 2003). Power, as the most important tool for achieving the desired goal, has undergone some conceptual changes over time. Power has increased in many different ways and dimensions. Nye (2005) grouped the components of power into three categories: military, economic, and soft power. The elements of power he referred to as "hard power" are the powers of the military. It is in the form of force. While economic power is technically classified as “hard power,” because it uses coercion and payment. Coercive

powers have frequently been used in international geopolitics to control the politics and economies of other countries, or to restore the power balance and gain more economic and political advantages.

Thirty-two years after Nye (1990) introduced the term "soft power" and proposed the corresponding theory, it appears to be well-known and widely accepted among academics, journalists, and policymakers. According to Nye (2005), he stated that "soft power consists of a country's history, geography, cultural diversity, economic strength, social pattern, democratic development, the prevalence and impact of civil society organizations, science and technology infrastructure, and values such as art and sports that social life produces in the intellectual sense." Soft power refers to a country's, institution's, or individual's ability to achieve desired results through attraction. In today's changing world politics, the use of hard powers (coercion and payment) is difficult to obtain succession; thus, powerful countries have also adapted a soft power approach to bring a country's economic growth, security, and competitiveness (Hussin, 2018; Elmassah, 2015; Nye, 1990).

Soft power also influences economic power. The concept of soft power can be applied to both national and international policies. Soft power has an impact on the fundamentals of economic structure such as production technology, corporate organizational model, management science, brand strategy, and innovation (Yavuzaslan and Cetin, 2016).

Brand Finance's Global Soft Power Index is entirely survey-based annual research from 100,000 respondents worldwide from 120 national brands to study perceptions of national brands. The method by which the Soft Power Index is calculated provides in-depth information on the economic, business, governmental, and administrative dimensions. International affairs increase the efficiency issue in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak this year.

The Global Soft Power Index 2022 composition has been influenced by how well nations have managed their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that The United States reclaims first place, followed by the United Kingdom, Germany, and China. All four countries have played important roles in developing vaccines for COVID-19 (Brand Finance, 2022). Another example was Russia, where the soft power score fell as a result of the invasion of Ukraine, which negatively impacted people's attitudes toward Russia.

In Asia, China has the best-ever performance in the Global Soft Power Index, higher than Japan, the United States and Germany. China's Global Soft Power Index score increased by +9.9 points to 64.2, moving it from eighth to fourth place overall. Though China's performance may have surprised some in the West, it was widely anticipated in many developing countries. China's economy increased by 8.1 percent in 2021, and exports grew by 30 percent to new highs as customers had more demand for Chinese goods (Brand Finance, 2022).



Figure 1 The world's top 10 soft power nations 2022 (Brand Finance, 2022)

Soft power in tourism industry

Soft power is a tool for the development of international politics and foreign policy that uses tourism as a cultural consumption tool to inform other countries about the country's values, beliefs, and activities. Soft power can increase cultural consumption in other countries that are target customers for the tourism industry. When tourists visit the host country, their psychological, emotional, sensitive, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual well-being will be influenced by their interactions with locals. They will open their minds and foster mutual trust with local people to understand the way of life in the host countries. While travelers interact with locals, they have a chance to gain new experience. In the event that they like it, travelers will absorb and imbibe the culture of another society/community. The more tourists have the opportunity to learn about local culture, the greater their development and deeper understanding of the destination country's values, culture, and way of life (Ooi, 2014, 2016).

Soft power attributes can be divided into two categories: short-term and long-term, which include media, digital technology, music, food, tourism, education, arts and literature, and the environment. The greater and deeper a country's allure, the greater and deeper foreigners' engagement. For example, people buy traditional food from countries they like at markets in their home countries in the shortest term, while others plan to visit specific countries to travel or study abroad in the longer term, and some people emigrate to their preferred countries in the longest term.

Tourism, in particular, generates revenue for the government, attracts inward investment, and creates jobs. All of these benefits will encourage destination countries to form friendly political alliances with major source countries. Tourism may persuade destination countries to pursue good political relations with origin countries, which may result in economic benefits. People-to-people communication is key in the tourism industry, so stakeholders in the tourism supply chain must improve their service quality. Local tour operators, for example, must learn the language and culture of tourists, and commercial organizations must understand and interpret consumer preferences and behavior in order to provide appropriate service to a specific group of customers (Kings 2014).

The Soft Power in tourism industry in Asia

Several articles have been written about soft power in China, Japan and South Korea. As a result, this article examines other countries that use the concept of soft power to promote tourism. There are two types of soft power act as outstanding role in tourism, the first one is food tourism and the second one is religion tourism. Hussin (2018) stated that food tourism plays an important role in soft power approaches, supported by Reynolds (2012) stated that food is a type of soft power used as a tactic in diplomacy because it can promote and motivate the ideas and perceptions of tourists toward a destination country. Food is a consumable with cultural and historical significance. When domestic and international tourists visit any country, they usually believe that food (gastronomy) is the main attraction (Hussin, 2018). Because each country has its own traditional cooking style, food also informs tourists about the differences between the culture they are visiting and their own (Hegarty & O'Mahoney, 2001). In the aspect of religion, religious tourism, the oldest form of tourism, can be the soft power which can also influence the behavior of people. The soft power rootlets move very deep. Soft power draw traditional, religious, ethno-linguistic and constructive relations with other nations (Amaresh, 2021). People beings have travelled to different religious sites as tourists or pilgrimage (Manhas and Nair, 2020). Temples, mosques, gurudwaras, churches and other major religious centres, as socioeconomic structures, are tangible assets in terms of travel destinations.

Malaysia: food tourism as the soft power

In year 2022, Malaysia is ranked 39th with a score of 38.5, up from 36.9 in 2021. The tourism policy demonstrates that Malaysia is open to visitors from all countries. The government has also opened its arms to Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and other Asians, regardless of origin, race, ethnicity, or culture. Although Malaysia is a Muslim country, it can attract more tourists from China, which is a non-Muslim country. In this case, gastronomy (food) played an important role in the development of Malaysia's image (Hussin, 2018). A country can gain maximum benefits with a good and genuine presentation and application of soft power.

In order to promote food tourism in Malaysia, Gani et al. (2018) recommended taking control of the situation by putting more emphasis and action into ensuring hygienic issues in food preparation and the surrounding environment are well addressed. It is critical to have accurate and sufficient information in order to promote food tourism and raise tourist awareness. While they may already have information available on the internet or social media, it is critical for authorities to be aware of the type and content of this information. It is recommended that information be updated on a regular basis and include interesting facts such as the ingredients used, originality, authenticity, and some history of the dishes. Government authorities should focus on improving the image of local cuisine and tourists' satisfaction with their dining experiences. This could improve their perception of the quality of their visit and encourage their positive behavioral intentions.

Furthermore, Malaysia will promote halal production in 2021 by signing an agreement with South Korea to improve Korean hospitality services for Muslims by promoting Seoul as a Muslim-friendly-city. They hope that the cooperation strategies will open up business opportunities for Malaysian industry players with more than 170 Korean target companies ranging from manufacturers to restaurants and spas within the next two years. To promote the convenience of Muslims visiting Korea, the Korean Tourism Organization has launched a Muslim-friendly restaurant classification program. It will be developed to raise awareness in other segments of the hospitality industry, such as lodging, tourist destinations, and package tours. By providing a Muslim-friendly service evaluation program, it is critical to introduce Malaysian standards into the Korean hospitality industry. Moreover, Malaysia has launched an education project to raise awareness of Muslim-friendly services in the Korean hospitality industry by teaching Koreans about Muslim-friendly guidelines over two-day training courses that include halal fundamentals, audits, and halal competency and governance (Whitehead, 2021).

India: Religious tourism as the soft power

Religious tourism as soft power is emerging as a critical component in bolstering India's Act East Policy (AEP) and strengthening India's relations with Southeast Asia (SEA) and beyond. Because of its pilgrimage history, this region can serve as a platform for developing a religious tourism hub that will attract tourists from across India, its immediate neighbors, and Southeast Asia (SEA). Hindu pilgrims visit Kamakhya Temple (one of the oldest and most revered Tantric practices) and Bhubaneswari Temple in Assam, as well as Iskcon Temple (known for its Bhagavad Gita Animatronics, Mahabharata Light and Sound show, and Ramayana Art Gallery), and Shree Govindajee Temple in Manipur. India's north-east region is adorned with its rich flora and fauna, scenic beauties with appealing tourist hotspots, myriad cultural diversity belonging to different ethnic groups, and, most importantly, the potential for religious tourism, particularly to attract Buddhist pilgrims from the East and SEA (Oinam, 2022).

In order to use religion as a motivator to attract tourists, India requires support from strategic partners in the SEA. To strengthen India's relations with the East and the SEA, it must promote religious tourism, particularly Buddhism, as one of the main pillars of India's AEP's soft power. It will create more opportunities, primarily for trade between India and the SEA.

Guidelines to adapt the soft power concept to promote tourism industry in Thailand

A policy for developing soft power and being empowered must be able to have a long-term positive impact until it becomes a national brand or image. Thailand has a soft power that is well-known in the food and tourism industries. The entertainment industry, which is frequently discussed, is still a work in progress. The government must devote significant resources to the correct point. Thailand's ranking in the World Soft Power Index has

dropped from 33rd in 2021 to 35th in 2022 (Workpoint today, 2022). The drop in ranking implies a drop in attractiveness, which will have an impact on the economy.

How powerful is a country to be named in the soft power Index? It can be noticed by how that country's Soft Power has inadvertently infiltrated people's daily lives. For instance (Workpoint today, 2022), Germany was a country that used soft power to influence Thais. What do Thais think of German brands? The Thais trusted German car brands and appliances, as well as the taste and quality of German beer. Japan exports comic books, manga, animation, and related products all over the world, including toys, tourist attractions, and food collectibles. Electronics, smartphones, K-pop culture, Korean dramas, and tourism will all be available in South Korea. Football is the most visible aspect of England.

In Thailand, "soft power" has recently become a buzzword because of a performance by Thai rapper Danupha Khanatheerakul, aka "Milli," at the world-famous Coachella music festival in California. Milli ate mango sticky rice on stage, which made people interested in the Thai dessert. (Thai PBS, 2022). In this case, Milli has made the Thai music industry become famous in a unique way. The music industry in Thailand can benefit from soft power in terms of economic revenue.

As Thailand is an outstanding country for food tourism, Rojanaphruk (2022) proposed that, Thailand can promote Thai food as a soft power. The government should establish a semi-governmental organization whose main task would be to promote Thai food abroad and ensure Thai food excellence at home. The fund for promotion should be received from the Ministry of Culture. Thailand can promote a national "pad thai" or "pad kra pao", fermented fish sauce or "nam pla", and even popular fruits like mango, durian, and others. Furthermore, Thai traditional alcoholic beverages such as rice wine, craft beer, and even wine can be promoted too.

In addition, Thailand's religious tourism industry, which is vital due to the country's deep religious roots, remains a significant contributor to economic growth. Religious tourism in Thailand encompasses a wide range of religious tourism, including traditional festivals and various religious activities. Among Thailand's many religions, Buddhism is the most prominent. Precepts, meditation, and wisdom activities, which are the primary goals of Dhamma practice, should be promoted (Ruttanavisanon and Agmapisarn, 2022). In order to increase the perception of Buddhist tourism to influence foreign tourists, the government should promote religious tourism as a soft power to influence foreign tourists who like to visit Thai temples and encourage them to participate in temple activities. The government should improve the ease of access to temples by soliciting funds to improve road accessibility to temples and should assist in publicizing temple information on government department websites (Lertputtarak and Supitchayangkool, 2021) by using digital media to demonstrate temple history and Dhamma practice (Anuwichanont et al. 2019).

Beside soft power, Nye (2009) created the term "smart power" in 2003 to address the misconception that a single power approach could produce the desired policy outcomes. According to Nye, soft and hard power tools cannot be replaced and must be used in tandem to be effective. Nye proposed the use of contextual intelligence in the concept of smart power, which means converting soft and hard power resources and tools into smart power strategies. Nye (2008). Dr.Santitarn Sathirathai, Group Chief Economist Sea Limited, stated that the 5Cs are strengths that can be linked to being a 'soft power' to create a 'branding' of Thailand. Care: good public health, inclusiveness, and the spirit of people coming out to help one another. Culinary: Thai food, Thai kitchen, and a self-contained Thai cooking class can be adapted to travel. Creativity: The creative incorporation of Thai-ness into modern life. Culture: a cultural issue Thai-ness is distinct. Corridor: Thailand's gateway strategy, the Corridor Connecting Asian economies such as China and India. However, it is not enough to rely solely on story or branding; soft and hard power must be combined to create 'smart power,' which necessitates a solid foundation, cutting-edge technology, a reliable supply chain, and high quality to make Thai economic will grow into a powerful and long-lasting smart power (Techsauce, 2020). Hence, if the Thai government wishes to strengthen its soft power. The government should also create an ecosystem that supports the creative economy, which will play a significant role in soft power development.

Conclusion

Building an internationally famous tourist city necessitates a strong tourist soft power and a wealth of tourist resources that can attract both domestic and international tourists. The economic and cultural benefits of multiple soft powers have heightened the government's efforts to support Thai cultural traditions in order to drive the economy and build the country's reputation. In order to promote soft power for Thai tourism, the government should focus on developing a brand for the country (Nation Branding) in order to create or develop an identity or prominent reputation for Thailand's resources in accordance with the tastes of the target tourists. Develop creative industries by combining knowledge and innovation with Thai culture or way of life, which is a prominent soft power resource in Thailand, to support Thai tourism and increase Thailand's competitiveness on the global stage.

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