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**PhD Dissertation Defense**

Entitled

*THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES SOFT POWER IN THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS CONTEXT*

by

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Abstract

In the modern world, soft power is a significant concept referring to the ability of nations to influence others without the need to use force or threats. Developed nations have made a great effort to enhance their soft power practices to become able to utilize this power to influence fellow nations. The United Arab Emirate's soft power is still considered a relatively new area of practical academic discipline. Nonetheless, the UAE's soft power practices remain essential in determining its position among countries. In order to develop the Soft Power Strategy, objectives and needs must be outlined. To address these objectives and needs, mix-method research was conducted to (1) determine the effect of soft-power practices (Humanitarian aid, Economic diplomacy, Cultural diplomacy, Academic diplomacy) on international relations mediated by media framing from the citizens' perspective, and (2) assess the current soft power situation of the UAE and propose the best way forward. Two studies were conducted. The first was a quantitative survey, with eight specific hypotheses tested using online survey results and data collected through stratified sampling. A total of 300 respondents were selected from seven Emirates from UAE to respond to the online questionnaire using SurveyMonkey. Data analysis was done using nonparametric Spearman Rho correlation tests, and the results show that the relationships between variables are all positively significant. Findings show that a higher level of soft power practices will promote the UAE internationally. It has also been found that media framing theory is applicable to increase the level of soft power. However, the relationship between cultural diplomacy and international relations, as well as framing and cultural diplomacy, were higher than the other examined factors. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to suggest the best soft power policies to strengthen the UAE's image internationally. The following factors were ranked based on effectiveness: (1) cultural diplomacy, (2) media mediation effect, (3) foreign diplomacy, (4) nation branding, (5) economic diplomacy, (6) educational diplomacy, (7) humanitarian aids, and (8) sports diplomacy were explored using thematic analysis of citizens' point of view. The qualitative study was conducted through an interview done with twenty diplomats to test the validity of the generated factors. The thematic analysis of the data was done with ATLAS.ti software. The results show that all diplomats agreed that cultural diplomacy is one of the most effective soft power, which confirms the citizens' point of view. The diplomats were also asked to rate the effectiveness of eight-factors of soft power that were extracted from the survey, of which results show that they rated all eight factors as highly effective. However, amongst the eight factors, the foreign diplomacy initiatives most effective, and media mediation factors were rated least effective. In conclusion, the UAE must continuously measure the perception of its citizens to continuously be informed about which areas require to focus on with regard to its Soft power strategy.

**Keywords:** Soft power, framing theory, international relations, humanitarian aid, cultural, economic, and academic diplomacies.