

SOFT POWER AND PLACE BRANDING IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: EXAMPLES OF THE TOURISM AND FILM INDUSTRIES

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ABSTRACT

A state's global influence can be systematically and strategically developed through policies and planning of a carefully crafted national brand and soft power strategies. The United Arab Emirates has actively employed policies and strategies to create a positive brand image of the country to increase its regional and global standing as an emerging regional power. The country's progress strong international brand has attracted significant foreign investment, international tourists, and a reputation as a great place to work and live. The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between soft power, place branding, and diplomacy, and to illustrate this relationship through a description of the film and tourism industries in the UAE.

Key Words: Place Branding; Public Diplomacy; International Tourism; City Branding; Economic Diversification; Cultural Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

“There is a world of difference between a leadership that is based on love and respect, and one that is based on fear”

H.H. Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

Vice President and the Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai

Traditionally, a state's power was characterized by the size and strength of its military, its

economy and its ability to project its policies globally through diplomatic means. More recently, the concept of soft power has highlighted the potential for states to project influence through non-military including science, technology, culture, humanitarian action, and the economic. A state's global influence can be systematically and strategically developed through policies and planning of a carefully crafted national brand. While the concept of branding has traditionally been an alternative and unconventionally political concept; more recently, place branding has provided a framework for the strategies for the projection of soft power for states (Brown & Ainley, 2009, p6).

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between soft power, place branding, and diplomacy, and to illustrate this relationship through a description of the film and tourism industries in the UAE. For the UAE, investments in the sectors like tourism and film constitute more than just economic diversification strategy but are part of larger strategies of national branding, cultural diplomacy, and soft power development. Through these sectors images of progress, economic prosperity, stability, security, cosmopolitanism, and diversity are projected as part of a national brand to the rest of the world, which in turn has the potential to impact the UAE's diplomatic relations and regional and global influence.

STATE POWER, BRANDING AND DIPLOMACY

The capacity to pursue and achieve strategic plans through purposeful action is part of the power of a state (Tellis, 2001). The attainment of the desired outcomes is achieved through means of coercion, payments and/or attractions (Gray, 2011). Coercion and payments are considered 'hard power' and attraction is a means of 'soft power,' and both of these conceptualizations of power encompass, at times, alternative ideas, institutions, and interactions in a state's foreign policy (Wagner, 2005).

A state's hard power is the ability to influence and/or coerce another state(s) through the use of rewards or threats of harm through coercive military and non-military means (Wilson, 2008, p114). Military and economic interventions are considered hard power tools and a state might employ them strategically with specific timeframes and objectives (Hayden, 2012, p10). Further, just the threat of using coercive force is a fundamental component of a state's hard power (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin 2014, pp73).

Hard power methods of coercion have, traditionally, been the focus of the academic literature from the fields of international relations and politics (Gil, 2009, p116). More recently, the power of attraction has emerged as an important area of scholarship. Studies

focusing on soft power have examined how states develop and achieve strategic plans and policies by attracting other countries, often due to the admiration, aspiration, and emulation of its values and prosperity levels (Nye, 2008, p94). The argument is that the power of influence of a state does not to be coercive, but can capitalize on the country's social, economic, and cultural achievements (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin 2014, p75). States' plans and policies can be considered 'smart power,' which is the combination or overlap of soft power with hard power (Nye, 2012). The development of smart power is attained when a state develops and combines its resources of military, economy, foreign policy, culture and value to achieve its plans in the most efficient manner (Chong, 2015). In the case of the UAE, there is clear evidence of a 'smart power' strategy. While the focus of this paper is on the soft power, it is important to note the UAE has emerged as a strong regional military power, with a modern, well equipped, and well trained armed forces. The analysis of the relationship between the 'hard' and 'soft power' of the UAE and the future of UAE's smart power should be examined in more depth. For now, this paper will keep the focus on soft power and the relationship with place branding and diplomacy.

Soft Power, Place Branding and Diplomacy

Soft power represents the values that draw attraction, admiration, aspiration, and emulation. Soft power can develop from resources from the public and private sector institutions including a country's universities, religious and business organizations, sports teams and even its people (Shearer, 2014). These resources, however, can only be considered a 'soft power resource,' if they also align with the state's national objectives (Duanmu, 2014). Internal policies, practices, strategies and cultural values adopted when dealing with other states and organizations are all influenced by a country's national strategic objectives. Often these are dependent upon a government's ability to efficiently and effectively mobilize its resources to attract and influence not only other states but their citizens as well through public diplomacy (Tsygankov, 2006).

The state has to present an attractive culture, policies, and values successfully and failure to do so would result in a low level of soft power and influence (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin 2014). If not carefully managed, images can have an adverse effect, cause repulsion or be seen as 'propaganda' by other states (Nye Jr, 2008). Thus, successful packaging of soft power resources through a strategic place brand is vital for economic and diplomatic relations.

In marketing, 'a brand' is the identifying symbol, name, design or a combination of all, which allows a company or product to be differentiated from competitors (Kotler &

Gerner, 2002). Similarly, a place or national brand is the distinctive characteristic, often emerging from the wider political, economic, social, cultural and environmental policies and strategies of a place, which make up the symbolic representation of that nation. A country's place brand represents both how the state promotes and represents its identity and values to the world, and the reputation of the state among other states and non-state actors (Dinnie, 2012). Thus foreign relations are influenced by both the image and reputation promoted/developed through place branding and as a result is strategically important.

A strong country brand is essential for global competitiveness and maintaining peaceful relations, geopolitical relevance, and economic stability and growth (Pamment, 2014). Successful branding strategies enable states to attract more foreign investment (Arrow & Lind, 2014) and overall political advantage regionally and globally (Morrissey & Udomkerdmongkol, 2012). Simply, branding is about identity and influence (Melewar, Gupta, & Dinnie, 2013).

The notion of nation branding is also evolving, as countries' branding strategies have also turned inward and countries have started to consider how its place brand affects their citizens and residents (Morrissey & Udomkerdmongkol, 2012). States manage their identity, reputation, and loyalty of their citizens through forms of public diplomacy that promote and nurture a sense of belonging and 'buy-in' to the strategies and policies (Ham, 2008). The United Arab Emirates provides an excellent example of the relationship of place branding, soft power, and public diplomacy, as it has emerged as a regional power through innovative policies and strategies.

The United Arab Emirates as an emerging regional and global power.

The United Arab Emirates is a small nation of 86,300 sq km in the Middle East, neighboring Saudi Arabia to the south and the Sultanate of Oman to the east. Although the UAE is a relatively young country established in 1971, it has been able to leverage its significant oil and gas resources into one of the world's most competitive emerging economies (Al-Mulali, Sab, & Binti, 2011). The speed of the country's development has caught the attention of academics and practitioners. The Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai are what Bagaen (2007) identifies as 'Instant Cities' created through accelerated urbanization and progressive economic development. As successful city-states, both have emerged as leading international tourism destinations as well as globally competitive business centers. By adopting a model based on the establishment of a diverse range of economic free zones, Abu Dhabi and Dubai have been able to attract multi-national corporations, international experts, and tourists from around the world.

Despite oil and gas revenue accounting for the largest percentage of economic income for the UAE, the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai are pursuing an economic diversification and innovation strategy to sustain economic growth and development (Khan & Agha, 2015). The Emirate of Dubai has managed to reduce the contribution of oil to the economy to less than 2 percent of GDP, and over the last several decades have invested oil revenues into other industries including, tourism, real estate and shipping and logistics (Mills, 2015). The UAE has set a target to reduce its national GDP oil dependency from 30 percent to just 5 percent by the year 2021, which would be quite an accomplishment, considering that oil accounted for 90 percent of the country's GDP in the 1970s (Nagraj, 2015). The UAE's successful formula for diversifying its economy has come to fruition due to visionary leadership, attractive economic incentives and policies, and peace and security. Significant investments in transportation infrastructure have made the UAE a leading global transportation and shipping hub. Forty-one billion dirhams was invested in local infrastructure in 2015 alone (Kane, 2015). Moreover, different cultures and nationalities have migrated to the UAE contributing to the growth, diversity, and development of the country. The low import duties and zero tax on corporate and personal income are other components to the UAE's attractiveness (Bagaeen, 2007).

UAE is home to the world's fifth largest reserve of natural gas and crude oil and has over AED 350 billion in foreign direct investment (UNCTAD, 2014), and is currently the world's 11th most attractive Foreign Direct Investment destination (Augustine, 2014). The UAE has focused significant investment on human development by molding their youth into future citizens of a globalized world while maintaining their Islamic heritage and focusing on cultural advancement and education (Miller, 2008). This vision has been carried through, since the formation of this federation, where the founding father of the UAE stated (Ahamed & Cooper, 2014):

"Future generations will be living in a world that is very different from that to which we are accustomed. It is essential that we prepare ourselves and our children for that new world."

- Late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan

The foundations for the rise of the UAE as an emerging power have been supported by income generated from its oil and gas resources, but the country's leadership and strategic commitment to well-rounded development have allowed the UAE to achieve things that other oil-rich nations have not (Miller, 2008). Due to its recent success, the UAE and several of the country's leading companies have established globally recognized brands. This global appeal is of fundamental importance to the wider foreign policy and international affairs strategy of the country (Wang and Sun, 2012).

With the rise of extremism and terrorism all over the world (Hafez & Mullins, 2015), UAE has focused on promoting tolerance, happiness and supporting youth (Rich, Bickman & Shrier, 2015). The UAE has embraced its role as a global leader in humanitarian aid, action, and development. In 2015, the UAE provided USD8.8 billion in foreign aid to more than 155 countries, which ranks the UAE as the second highest percentage of gross national income in the world (MOFAIC, 2016). The UAE also provided the third highest percentage of gross national income given for emergency humanitarian aid in the world. The UAE recently launched a five-year strategy for foreign assistance that seeks to build upon the historical and cultural values of the country to provide aid to those in need regardless of race, religion, or country, and to align with the global Sustainable Development Goals. The UAE's agenda for foreign assistance seeks to continue to provide effective foreign aid that reflects UAE values and enhances the UAE's global reputation (MOFAIC, 2017).

The UAE recently appointed a Minister of Happiness, Minister of Tolerance, and a 22-year-old woman as the Minister of Youth. These appointments are illustrative of the innovative approach the country has taken to pursue its national objectives proactively (Rothkopf, 2016). The appointment of Minister of Happiness, a first in the world, is reflective of UAE's visionary leadership to proactive governance and public diplomacy. The Minister's role is to ensure the happiness of government entities, which include its employees and the customers it serves (Al Remeithi, 2016). These recent initiatives are reflected by the UN Happiness Index, in which the UAE is the only Middle Eastern country in its top 30 countries (Helliwell, 2016). The Happiness Minister stated that "religious values are an important way people feel happy and connected, so is tolerance, inclusion, and benevolence...all of these values are intrinsic to our national identity and correlate to being more happy" (Al Remeithi, 2016). Her remarks align with the characteristics of soft power influence to garner support for national identity and establish the aspirations of the national brand.

The aggregate result of the policies, developments, investments and vision over the last two decades has led to a strong, internationally recognized, national brand for the UAE. According to the *Nation Brand 2015 Annual Report of the World's Most Valuable Nation Brands*, the UAE now has the 30th most valuable nation brand (Brand Finance, 2015). The report values the UAE National Brand at \$403 billion US Dollars, which indicates that the national brand is a significant asset of the country for attracting investment and tourists and adding value to exports. As a small nation, the UAE's brand value will never be comparable to larger economies, such as the United States. Therefore the report's Brand Strength Index (BSI) is a better indicator of the soft power of the country's national brand (Brand Finance, 2015). The UAE scored 85.9 out of 100 on the BSI, the third strongest brand in the world behind Switzerland and Singapore. The UAE is the ranked

first on the BSI for having a favorable tax regime, and the UAE's strong performance on indicators for goods and services and a regular upward trajectory for the tourism score. These indicators illustrate that the UAE's ability to have a strong appeal to investors, highly skilled expatriate workers, and international tourists (Brand Finance, 2015).

Innovation is another core value of the UAE National brand. The development and promotion of innovation have been a strategic initiative across the country with a focus on increasing the quality of life, economic development, and the projection of a modern, future orientated vision that positions the UAE as a global leader. One example of this is the Dubai Smart City Strategy. While other 'smart' strategies often are focused on the development and use of technology, thus process focused, the Dubai Smart City strategy instead has focused on technological innovation as a catalyst and enabler to transform Dubai into the "happiest city on earth" (Smart Dubai, 2017). To achieve the ultimate goal of the strategy of happiness of the city's citizens, residents, and visitors, the Smart Dubai Initiative includes six dimensions that cut across all the city government sector verticals: Smart Economy, Smart Living, Smart Government, Smart Mobility, Smart Environment, and Smart People (Smart Dubai, 2017). This initiative also includes several innovative strategic initiatives that contribute to the Dubai global brand. These include the world's first Happiness Meter, a citywide live sentiment capture engine to quantify map happiness across both government and private sector entities. In a region known for turmoil, the UAE has been able to develop its strong national brand through a clear strategic brand vision, determination, and significant investment. The following sections discuss at the UAE's soft power within the context of the tourism and the film industries.

Tourism Branding and Soft Power

Investments in the tourism sector have been part of successful economic diversification strategies for many states around the world. The impact of tourism in the international arena goes beyond economic development, as tourism can play a role in the promotion of soft power through cultural diplomacy-- the sharing ideas, values, and cultures across states and between individuals.

The tourism branding strategy of the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi are essential components of the UAE overall place brand (Hatemi, 2016). These strategies are evident in the UAE's national development plan (Vision 2021, 2015), as well as the strategies of each emirate. The Abu Dhabi Tourism Strategy has focused on both leisure and culture (Ponzini, 2011), and the government merged the tourism and culture agencies to form the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority in 2012 (Abu Dhabi Gov., 2012). The development of the Cultural District in Saadiyat Island is another example of the Emirate's dedication in cultivating its cultural capital and furthering its education development plans (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2014). Abu Dhabi has focused on

establishing itself as a regional cultural hub with significant investments including world-class museums including the Zayed National Museum, Louvre Abu Dhabi, and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, which will be the largest Guggenheim museum in the world dedicated to contemporary and modern art. Saadiyat Island is also home to NYU Abu Dhabi and the Sorbonne Abu Dhabi. Additionally, Yas Island has become a world-class leisure destination with hotels, theme parks, concert venues, Formula I race tracks, marinas, and shopping mall. With these cultural and leisure tourism assets, Abu Dhabi Tourism Development and Investment Company have positioned Abu Dhabi as a leading international tourism destination (Bagaen, 2007). Sheikh Sultan Al Qassemi, an Emirati-based commentator and art collector, stated that the establishment of these institutions have been recognized as one of the factors contributing to the UAE's cultural diplomacy and an increase in the UAE's soft power, which has led them to "unprecedented position of importance" (Leech, 2015).

In addition to the externally projected brand image, the impacts of the state's branding and cultural diplomacy efforts can also be directed internally (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). The focus on developing the cultural, educational and leisure assets in Abu Dhabi also have a dual soft power role in supporting the development of the citizenry (Melewar, Gupta, & Dinnie 2013). Emirati leaders recognize that national identity is a critical component to the development of a national brand (Dinnie, 2012). In a state, where the expatriate population greatly exceeds the population of citizens, cultural and national identity can be threatened (Messelly, Dessein, & Lauwers, 2009). The UAE has placed a strategic emphasis on promoting Emirati heritage and culture for visitors, Emirati's and expatriate residents. For example, the Qasr Al Hosn festival, held annually in one of Abu Dhabi's historical forts, aims to "strengthen the appreciation of Emirati heritage and identity" (Qasr Al Hosn, 2015). The festival, organized by the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority, achieves this through themed workshops, tours of old forts, exhibitions, and performances. The preservation of the Emirati identity, culture, and heritage is an important part of the overall UAE tourism development strategy as well as the public diplomacy strategy.

In Dubai, the recent opening of the Etihad Museum provides a state of the art museum dedicated to the founding of the country. Investments have also been made in the rehabilitation and preservation of the major heritage sites including the Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood located on Dubai Creek, which provides visitors an opportunity to see and experience what life was like in Dubai from the 19th century until the 1970s. While the buildings are built with traditional construction materials, the neighborhood now is also an incubator for cultural and artistic activities, heritage events, and the Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Center for Cultural Understanding.

Internationally, Dubai's progress is also recognized through its luxury and iconic real estate ventures, with \$53 billion investment in 2015 alone (Dubai Land Department,

2015). Dubai, for example, has created shopping malls, artificial islands, and luxury hotels, and aims to attract 20 million visitors yearly by the year 2020 (DTCM, 2015). Emirates Airlines and Jumeirah Group, both UAE-based brands, are global leaders in the sector (Nataraja & Al-Aali, 2011). The Jumeirah group was established in 1997 and gained global notoriety for iconic developments including the Burj Al Arab, known as the world's first '7-star' hotel (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2012), and Madinat Jumeirah (Jumeirah Group, 2015). In addition to the developments in the UAE, the Jumeirah Group has also exported the brand globally developments in Europe, Asia, and North America. Jumeirah Group has become an international award winning hospitality group contributing to the UAE's global reputation (Jumeirah Group, 2015).

An illustration of its new position in the world, the UAE won the bid to host the World Expo 2020 in Dubai (Jauncey, 2014). Dubai's successful bid for Expo2020 marks the first time that the Expo was awarded to a city located in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. The theme presented by Dubai is 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future,' which is expected to attract 25 million visitors, between October 2020 and April (Jauncey, 2014).

According to Jay Wang, the Director of Public Diplomacy in the University of Southern California, Dubai's win for the Expo 2020 is one of the most notable global examples of soft power to emerge in 2013. He noted that "World Expos are the single largest promotional event of a nation outside their borders. That's a major platform for countries to reach out to the international public" (Leech, 2015). Global mega-events, such as the World Expo, are also important branding and public diplomacy opportunities for a country and can have long lasting impacts. The UAE has a long track record for successful participation in the world expo, building its first pavilion at the 1970 World Expo in Osaka. The UAE pavilion was voted the most popular Pavilion during the Shanghai Expo in 2010, as it attracted more than 2 million people and was awarded several awards for its iconic design (Wang & Sun, 2012). While Expo 2020 will be the largest event ever hosted in the UAE, the country has also focused on developing the meetings, events and exhibition infrastructure. The UAE doubled its exhibition infrastructure between 2006 and 2010 and has continued to invest in further expansion. The country has successfully hosted global exhibitions and conferences in a diverse range of industries, including more than 100 'mega conferences' and exhibitions (Ahamed & Cooper, 2014). Some of these high profile events include the 2014 Annual Meeting of IMF and World Bank in Dubai, Dubai International Film Festival, Dubai World Cup, Dubai Duty-Free Tennis Championship and Abu Dhabi Film Festival.

States can take an active approach in developing or enhancing its brand in the global arena (Loo & Davies, 2006). 2014). The state brand becomes a part of national policy,

which is included in planning development and governance (Anholt, 2008). The development of this brand is the transformation of the state's values into a meaningful and pragmatic reality (Kaneva, 2011). As transportation and logistics hubs, Dubai and Abu Dhabi are home to large modern international airports. From these two hubs, the country's flag carriers Etihad and Emirates Airlines connect the UAE to the world, sharing and promoting the national (and subnational) brands. Beyond physically transporting people and goods, the UAE has successfully mobilized people's imaginations and perceptions of the country through film. For example, the three-act film presented at the UAE pavilion at the Shanghai Expo 2010 (Cull, 2015) showcased the essence of the UAE with clear imagery with themes of heritage, diversity, cosmopolitanism, prosperity, and modernity. In the film, three scenes portrayed the interaction between a grandfather and a grandson, Emiratis and expatriates in different professions and cultures living in the UAE enjoying a desert landscape, cultural landmarks and modern cityscape (Wang & Sun, 2012). The UAE has also recently hosted and been featured in a range of leading Hollywood and Bollywood movie productions, all of which provide soft power reach to people in countries around the world.

Projecting the UAE to the World Through Film

Another mode of the UAE's soft power projection has been through the investments in the film industry, a unique approach in the Gulf region (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014). The UAE film industry is very young as it dates back to 2001, when the Emirates Film Competition began with only a small group of Emirati filmmakers, showcasing their creations to each other (SANAD, 2015). The turning point of the industry was in 2004 when Dubai hosted its first film festival, the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF), to provide a platform to Emirati filmmakers and an incubator for the region (DCCA, 2015). The success of the UAE's emerging film industry is partly due to the public support it has received from the leaders of the UAE. The Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and the ruler of Dubai, HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who took part in DIFF in 2011, for the premiere of the first major international film filmed in Dubai, *Mission Impossible 5: Ghost Protocol* (Emirates247, 2011).

The UAE film industry started to emerge with the development of production infrastructure beginning in 2008 with the introduction of education division in media entities, the Dubai and Abu Dhabi Film Festivals, New York Film Academy and several funding organizations (Yunis, 2014). Following the success of DIFF, the national film production industry has also seen extensive growth and global reach. The state-owned, Abu Dhabi Media Company, opened Image Nation, a \$1 billion film fund to support local and international co-productions (Image Nation, 2015). Although it had supported several international films such as *The Help*, *Contagion*, and *My Name is Khan*, Image Nation shifted its focus in 2011, to produce and fund Emirati scripts and productions (Yunis,

2014). Such investments present an image that is constructed by the Emirati government and people to the international arena. Nayla Al Khaja (Interview, 2015), one of the UAE's first female Emirati filmmakers stated, "when people hear about Dubai through pop culture, they are intrigued. They come here; it changes the image; it breaks down the stereotypes". Through film, UAE can share its core values and ideas to the world.

The Abu Dhabi's government provided an attractive incentive program for international productions. The government provides a thirty percent cash back incentive to attract production companies that produce television, feature films, music videos, game shows and other productions to the UAE (Abu Dhabi Film Commission, 2015a). The attractive incentives combined with the natural and human-made landscapes of the UAE has brought several recent blockbuster productions to the UAE. For example, parts of the latest film in the Fast and Furious franchise were filmed and set in Abu Dhabi. This movie, in turn, became the fastest film to reach \$1 billion in Hollywood box office history in just 17 days from its global release (Mendelson, 2015). Additional recent productions in the UAE have included the American Soap Opera, *The Bold and the Beautiful* (Awwad, 2014), *Top Gear UK* (Hamilton, 2009), *Star Wars – The Force Awakens*, and many others (Newbold, 2015). The attraction of international filmmakers to the UAE through incentives has, what Al Khaja (Interview, 2015) considers a "snowballing effect." She noted that "when you get international producers here, they go back and spread the word, they bring in more foreign producers to come back and film in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, which then enhances the tourism, film economy, and the image." Hence, this cycle is that is initially developed by the state can form sustainability once a successful image is set.

The combined efforts of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have led to the development of Middle East's largest box office (Oxford Business Group, 2007). Despite its effort in promoting itself as a film production hub, the UAE does not invest or promote films that do not comply with its cultural values. Hollywood produced 'Sex and the City 2', is an example of a big Hollywood production that wished to film in Abu Dhabi but was denied as the movie did not fit with the countries cultural values (Yunis, 2014).

Collaborations with the international filmmakers have been crucial for the growth of the Emirati film industry. Mustafa Abbas (2015, Interview), an Emirati filmmaker stated about the UAE, "I believe they are taking the right steps by being involved with big Hollywood films such as *Star Wars*, *Fast and Furious*, and *Star Trek*. Building relations is always the most important recipe". The Chairman of DIFF, Abdulhamid Juma, stated in a press release after UAE's successful pavilion at the Cannes Film Festival in 2015 that the UAE had managed to collaborate with major film institutes and other emerging Arab filmmakers (Dubai Film and TV Commission, 2015). The UAE had used this opportunity

to present the Emirati Brand through the collaborations of several UAE organizations including the Abu Dhabi Film Commission, Dubai Tourism and Commerce Marketing, Twofour54 and DIFF. These collaborations have provided the UAE an international platform to showcase local talent and to market its industry and service (MENewsWire, 2015). In turn, the UAE has utilized the film industry and the films produced through these collaborations to increase its soft power by becoming "the next cultural power, that can represent Arabs, specifically to the rest of the world" (Al Khaja, Interview, 2015).

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to explore the relationship between place branding, soft power, and diplomacy in the UAE. The UAE has achieved considerable progress in since the emirates united in 1971, and the country has emerged as a progressive modern Islamic state and regional power. The country's progress, supported by a range of successful investments, strategies, and policies, have contributed to a strong international brand that has attracted significant foreign investment, international tourists, and a reputation as a great place to work and live. This paper provided a brief description of how the tourism and film industries illustrate the convergence place branding, diplomacy, and soft power. These are just two examples of a wide range of the policies, strategies, and developments that have contributed to the UAE's positive global reputation.

Recently, in April 2017, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, launched the UAE Soft Power Council, which will report directly to the UAE Cabinet. The council will establish a comprehensive soft power public policy and strategy for the country that will allow the UAE, according to Noura bint Mohammed Al Kabi, Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs and appointed member of the Soft Power Council, "to continue and sustain its achievements and leadership to serve its people, share its success story with the world while promoting dialogue among people across the world, establishing permeant relations to service humanity" (WAM, 2017). This new consolidated and integrated national strategy will focus on coordinating the public and private sectors to achieve soft power in the areas of science, technology, culture, humanitarian and economic development.

Recognizing that this paper has only provided an initial exploration and discussion, future studies should focus on exploring the relationship of place branding, diplomacy and soft power in the UAE, particularly given recent and continuing developments, and in other countries. Empirical studies focused on the development of soft power, the promotion of that power through concerted branding efforts, and the 'return on investment' of soft power strategies will be of particular value moving forward.

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