

Elaboration of the system for evaluating the potential and effectiveness of soft power

N. S. Shilikov

Specialist of the Department of Analytics, Moscow Center for International Cooperation, Moscow, Russia

E-mail: n.shilikov@ano-mcims.ru, n.shilikov@ano-mcims.ru



*** Author**

N. S. Shilikov

**Specialist of the Department of
Analytics, Moscow Center for
International Cooperation,
Moscow, Russia**

* E-mail: n.shilikov@ano-mcims.ru, n.shilikov@ano-mcims.ru

Abstract

This article discusses various ways of evaluating the potential and effectiveness of soft power in the framework of improving the public administration system, and also reveals the genesis of the soft power concept and the place of this phenomenon in the modern system of international relations. In the 21st century, soft power has become one of the main instruments of foreign policy, but even though this concept appeared back in the 20th century, the question of evaluating the performance of government entities in this area remains relevant. Given the highly competitive international environment, government agencies are forced to look for the most effective ways to use their resources of influence. As a result, some advantages and disadvantages of the existing soft power indices and ratings were revealed using the example of the complex soft power index (The Soft Power 30). Ways were found to mitigate the shortcomings of existing indices by expanding the base of sub-indexes, therefore, providing a more comprehensive assessment of the soft power potential. Measures were also proposed to evaluate the effectiveness of soft power programs in terms of monitoring their results.

Keywords: performance evaluation, public administration, international relations, soft power, international ratings, indices, Joseph Nye.

Introduction

In the context of international political uncertainty, efficient soft power is a key condition of a confidential dialogue between countries. The reduction in transaction costs achieved through mutual cultural exchange creates the basis for long-term mutually beneficial relations. The special importance of soft power in solving foreign policy problems is also noted in the applicable Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation¹. However, there is still no consensus on the nature of soft power and methods of

its performance assessment. Nevertheless, the issue of assessing the potential and efficiency of soft power is especially urgent today; this is primarily due to attempts to achieve a best distribution of budget funds. An objective view of state policy aimed at promoting a positive image of the country will certainly allow to timely respond to political challenges, introduce new humanitarian influence programs offsetting the shortcomings of previous decisions and generally provide a higher level of understanding with foreign partners. Analysis and improved methods of compiling the existing ratings and

¹ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by Order No. 640 of the President of Russia dated 30 November 2016) // GARANT URL: <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/71452062/#0> (accessed on 21.03.2021).

indices focused on various aspects of soft power can solve the problem.

Origins of Soft Power and Its Place in the Modern System of International Relations

The term "soft power" was first proposed in 1990 by the American political scientist Joseph Nye, Jr. [Nye, 1990. P. 153]. Having tremendous experience in government agencies (at different times he was the Chairman of the National Security Council's Group for Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs), Professor at Harvard University defined the concept of non-violent influence based on persuasion. In Nye's publications, one can find many definitions of "soft power", but the fullest definition is given in his book "The Future of Power": "soft power is the ability to affect others through the co-operative means of framing the agenda, persuading and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes." [Nye, 2011. P. 20-21]. In many ways, soft power continues the idea of interdependence, which states that nation-states lose their ability to make effective decisions due to the fact that new actors appear in the international political arena represented by transnational corporations and other non-state actors. States are forced to seek new tools to protect their interests and mitigate risks. In parallel, Susan Strange, known as a creator of international political economy, developed her theory of structural power also focusing on new dimensions of power in international relations. According to her theory, instead of competing for territory, states are now engaged increasingly in a different competitive game: they are competing for world market shares as the surest means to greater wealth and therefore greater economic security [Strange, 1987. P. 564]. One of the pillars of structural power is the ability to influence knowledge (whether technical or religious knowledge, as well as leadership in any of its areas) and to control information and knowledge, including their purchase, acquisition and storage. Alongside, the idea of a "third face" of power proposed by Stephen Lukes, who developed the ideas of "faces" of power by Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, represents the ability of the state to influence the wants or preferences of subjects of power by replacing their desires with their own, gained popularity in US academic circles [Lukes, 1974. P. 25]. However, both concepts characterized by a high threshold and insufficient transparency in contrast to ideas proposed by Nye were not widely used in the political discourse.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, states have actively resorted to humanitarian influence in international relations. Thus, in 1934 the British Committee for Relations with Other Countries, known today as the British Council, was created in the UK [Kharitonova, 2018. P. 50]. Even earlier, in 1925, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) was created in the Soviet Union. It was reorganized into the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with

Foreign Countries (SSOD) in 1958 [Silina, 2011. P. 46]. In the Inter-War Period and then during the Cold War, these organizations were instruments of ideological confrontation and the task of establishing trustful bilateral communications was not a priority. As a result, this approach has become irrelevant after the collapse of the bipolar system. Nevertheless, based on the theory of political realism, soft power is not an independent concept, but a euphemism for "propaganda." In turn, in terms of neoliberalism represented by Joseph Nye himself, soft power has a number of fundamental differences from propaganda: it does not allow for imposition or reinforcement and avoids manipulative strategies [Lebedeva, 2017. P. 215]. In the framework of the neoliberal approach, military and economic coercion historically representing the category of "power" among realists is fading into the background, the focus is on reaching consensus using the means of traditional and public diplomacy. However, forcible influence is also allowed. In addition to soft power, Nye identifies "hard" and "smart" powers. The former means the above-mentioned coercion and bribery, and the latter includes a combination of "soft" and "hard" power tools. Some researchers believe that soft power is an extension of "hard" power, indicating the unstable and fragile nature of the former, its dependence on military power and economic well-being². However, Nye himself claims that with the skillful use of soft power, there will be no need for "hard" methods, which will allow to greatly reduce the cost of "hard" power. Moreover, in some cases, the "attractiveness" of states such as Finland or Norway may be even higher than their military and economic weight combined.

Relying on the rich traditions of political theory, Nye managed to summarize the achievements of his predecessors and colleagues and develop a suitable definition of practices aimed at creating a positive image of the state in the international political arena in a changing world order. A.N. Nikitin notes:

"Since early 1990s, another realignment of power and interests, forms of political interaction has taken place in international relations, and it is not yet completed. New sustainable rules for international cooperation from 1991 up to date have not yet developed." [Nikitin, 2018. P. 33].

One can say with a degree of certainty that the emergence of the soft power concept is a side effect of the transition to a new international relations system. Thanks to the emergence of global news networks, rapid development of information technologies and democratization of political institutions in developing countries, the image and reputation of the state achieved through the attractiveness of promoted ideas have become a key aspect of expanding the political influence.

Soft Power Resources: Transforming Potential into Effect

Despite the fact that Nye himself calls his theory "descriptive," giving it a scientific rigor, it contains a number of standard features as it relies on such concepts

² The Rise and Fall of Soft Power // FP URL: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power/> (accessed on 21.03.2021).

as "morality," "kindness," "competence," "beauty," "liberalism," "private property" directly deriving from soft power resources [Kharkevich, 2014. P. 25]. According to Nye's concept, soft power resources include culture (in aspects attractive to others), political values (provided that it embodies them in domestic and foreign policy) and foreign policy (provided that others consider it legal and moral) [Nye, 2004. P. 11]. In addition, Nye notes that the economy can be both a "hard" and a "soft" power resource and that sometimes it can be difficult to draw a line between trade and economic ties between states based on coercion or bribery and persuasion-based trade and

ties. The amount of accumulated direct foreign investment, number of registered foreign-owned businesses, level of trade with foreign countries signal the status of national economy and show the level of openness and willingness to cooperate. Along with this, security, transparency of political processes, developed legislative framework, economy digitalization and economic infrastructure in general are all important criteria in assessing the potential of "soft power." According to the above-mentioned publication, "The Future of Power" by Nye, the logic of soft power conversion into a final outcome can be shown as follows (see Figure 1):

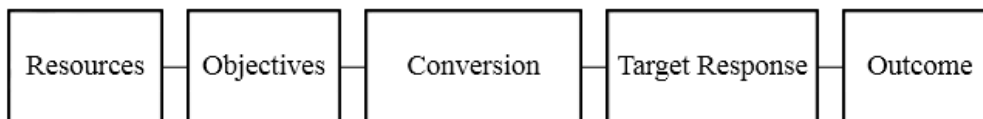


Figure 1: Soft Power Conversion Process

It is worth noting that the availability of resources does not guarantee that they will be used efficiently or will be used at all as the influence potential does not always correspond to decisions aimed at achieving this potential [Lebedeva, 2014. P. 103]. Thus, it is impossible to create a positive image of the country and strengthen its reputation without an appropriate information support communicating the successes and achievements of the state in various social spheres and implementation of integrated cultural, business and scientific cooperation programs to the foreign audience. In particular, in September 2019, in an interview with Izvestia, Joseph Nye noted that tourism and student exchanges are one of the most efficient soft power methods, since these practices allow people to exchange opinions and draw conclusions based on their own experience with representatives of other cultures³.

As a result, diplomatic missions, news agencies, special purpose organizations, non-profit foundations, and universities play a special role in the soft power conversion process. Their work is orderly and sustainable. Making up a complex system of interaction, often led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or a similar state institution), they aim at systematic and targeted performance of current foreign policy tasks. Regarding the successes of Russia in this field, according to the Report on Results of Rosstrudnichestvo's activities for implementation of its powers for 2019, the Agency held a series of large-scale events to introduce the cultural heritage of Russia to the foreign audience as part of comprehensive programs including the Cross Year of Music of Russia and the United Kingdom, Youth Exchange Year in Russia and Austria, Cross Year of Russia and Vietnam, Russia–Greece Language and Literature Year, Russia–Turkey Culture and Tourism Year⁴. The activities of Rosstrudnichestvo

(Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation) are multifaceted: the Agency is promoting Russian culture and education, strengthening the position of the Russian language in the world, developing international relations of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, cross-border cooperation and public diplomacy, improving the cooperation of youth organizations and promoting international development.

However, sometimes it is challenging to identify the outcome of soft power programs. Without clearly defined goals and objectives of these programs, it seems impossible to identify relevant observations required to assess their performance. In addition, according to the diplomats themselves, any positive outcomes of soft power take time and we shall not expect the desired changes to come in the short term⁵. The delayed effect of soft power programs significantly limits the ability to monitor the outcomes of these activities, but it does not exclude them. Some experts believe that changes in public consciousness can be measured using various tools, including opinion polls. However, sometimes researchers are not able to accurately determine the driver of humanitarian influence or the combination of factors leading to changes [Leonard, 2002. P. 90]. Therefore, one can note that the papers benchmarking the soft power in different countries are often focused either on the potential or effect of soft power.

International Ratings and Indices

Several ratings and indices have evolved over the past decade that focus on soft power of countries in general or on its individual components. Expert include the following

³ Postnikova E., Aleshkina N. (2019) Culture is the main source of Russian soft power. Izvestiya. URL: <https://iz.ru/927134/ekaterina-postnikova-nadezhda-aleshkina/kultura-glavnyi-istochnik-rossiiskoi-miagkoi-sily>.

⁴ (2020) Report on the results of the activities of Rosstrudnichestvo on the implementation of the powers vested in it for 2019. Moscow, Rosstrudnichestvo. URL: <https://rs.gov.ru/uploads/document/file/14115/%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4%20%D0%BE%20%D1%80%D0%B>

[5%D0%B7%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%8C%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%85%20%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%202019.pdf](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/archive/cultural/documents/theartofsoftpower-v1-web.pdf) (accessed on 21.03.2021).

⁵ The art of soft power: A study of cultural diplomacy at the UN Office in Geneva // Cultural diplomacy platform URL: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/archive/cultural/documents/theartofsoftpower-v1-web.pdf> (accessed on 01.01.2021).

ratings in the most well-known ratings related to soft power: Global Presence Index assessing soft, economic and military presence, Nation Brands Index (Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index) based on opinion polls and FutureBrand Country Brand Index (FutureBrand Consulting) based on marketing approach [Kharitonova, 2015. P. 53].

Private and state analytical agencies often do this kind of research with a view to a narrow audience represented by specific states, political forces or international organizations, while focusing on the academic papers. Thus, sometimes one can note an unfair selection of information, manipulation of the results by introducing an obvious imbalance of subindexes. However, such untrustworthy researches are often ignored both by the professional community and public authorities when it comes to an objective presentation of the state of international affairs, rather than lobbying for a specific

agenda. There is real competition of analytical centres due to attempts to occupy a prestigious niche in the communication and information analysis market and become a part of scientific history.

In this regard, the comprehensive Soft Power 30 index developed by Portland Communications is of particular interest as it is based both on objective and subjective data (65:35). In total, information on 60 countries is used to prepare this rating, but only 30 are included in the final rating. The key purpose of the rating is to assess the soft power potential of the leading countries, determine the strengths and weaknesses of their international image and offer hands-on advice on the use of soft power resources.

According to the analytical report on the 2019 rating, authors, including Joseph Nye, identify 8 subjective and 6 objective subindexes⁶. Their names and weights are shown in tables below:

Table 1: Subjective sub-indices (The Soft Power 30)

Subjective Subindexes	
Subindex	Weight (in %)
Global Culture	5.2%
Luxury Goods	7.6%
Tech Products	8.3%
Cuisine	12%
Liveability	15.3%
Friendliness	20.6%
Foreign Policy	31%

Table 2: Objective sub-indices (The Soft Power 30)

Objective Subindexes		
Subindex	Summary	Weight (in %)
Culture	Captures the attractiveness of the country's culture, including pop culture, international sporting success and tourist attractiveness.	12.5%
Digital	Captures the general level of digitalization and the ability of the state to use digital diplomacy.	13.1%
Education	Captures the ability of a country to attract international students and includes the assessment of the national education system.	14.3%
Enterprise	Captures the attractiveness of a country's economic model in terms of its competitiveness, capacity for innovation, and ability to foster enterprise and commerce.	18.7%
Engagement	Captures a country's foreign policy resources, global diplomatic footprint, and overall contribution to the international community.	20.6%
Government	Designed to assess a state's political values, public institutions and major public policy outcomes.	20.8%

The data of subjective sub-indices are based on surveys conducted in 25 countries with a total of 12,500 respondents. The Country Reptrak (Global Reputation Index) is compiled in a similar way, based on annual opinion polls assessing an emotional and rational reputation; the questions are divided into three topic groups, i.e. attractiveness of the environment, government efficiency, and developed economy⁷.

Sub-indices are in turn used to assess the objective soft power drivers combining facts from various sources. Information processing includes min-max data normalization. At the end of the report there are lists of data sources. Along with statistics, authors refer to special indices and ratings of other analytical agencies being the basis for their sub-indices. Some of them are shown below.

⁶ The Soft Power 30 // Softpower30 URL: <https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf> (accessed on 21.03.2021).

⁷ Country RepTrak URL: <https://www.reptrak.com/country-reprtrak/> (accessed on 21.03.2021).

In particular, to assess Culture, they use the Power Language Index, FIFA Ranking and ratings of the most visited museums and most popular music albums; for Digital rating they use the E-Participation Index and the Government Online Services Index; the Times Higher Education's World University Rankings and PISA Worldwide Ranking are used for Education based on the average score in mathematics, science and reading; and the Environmental Performance Index to assess the Engagement.

In turn, a number of special economic ratings and indices are used to assess Enterprise, including the global WEF Competitiveness Index, the Heritage Economic Freedom Index, the Corruption Perceptions Index, the Global Innovation Index, Global Talent Competitiveness Index and World Bank Ease of Doing Business rating.

To objectively assess the Government, authors use the Human Development Index, the Freedom House Index, the Gender Equality Index, the Economist Democracy Index, and the Freedom Index Press Freedom Index, Global Go to Think Tank Index developed by the University of Pennsylvania, World Economic Forum Trust in Government Index based on data compiled by the World Economic Forum, and some Worldwide Governance Indicators developed by Daniel Kaufman (Natural Resources Governance Institute and Brookings Institution) and Aart Kraay (World Bank Research Group) with financial support from the World Bank's Knowledge for Change Program.

The Russian Federation is in the 30th place of the rating. Authors of the report indicated that despite the incredible success of the 2018 World Cup in Russia, negative perception of Russia's foreign policy greatly complicate getting into higher positions in the rating. Creating trust by timely communicating their intentions to foreign partners can partially offset this drawback, as rating authors believe. Once in top 20 countries with the most attractive culture, Russia still has serious issues with economic indicators. They also note that Russia can make significant progress thanks to one of the most extensive systems of diplomatic missions.

Despite the fact that the Soft Power 30 has some drawbacks (in particular, when calculating the Digital sub-index, Facebook engagement score for heads of state or government is taken into account ignoring other social networks), the objective sub-indices proposed by the authors largely meet the demand for generic criteria of the soft power of the state. However, the need for a more detailed and balanced picture allows to offer some conceptual additions, including indices based on expert reviews.

For example, to assess Culture, one could use ratings relating to other popular sports, in particular, the IIHF World Ranking showing the national hockey team successes⁸. When calculating this rating, the results of the last Olympic Games and last four World Championships are used.

⁸ The International Ice Hockey Federation // World Ranking URL: <https://www.iihf.com/en/worldranking> (accessed on 01.02.2021).

⁹ OECD FDI Regulatory Restrictiveness Index // OECD. Stats URL: <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=FDIINDEX#> (accessed on 21.03.2021).

To assess the Enterprise, it would be appropriate to use the OECD FDI Regulatory Restrictiveness Index⁹. It focuses on four types of investment restrictions, including authorized capital, licensing, foreign staff and other operational restrictions. The main goal is to make an objective view of how the country's regulatory framework in relation to foreign investment operate. And use the Hays Global Skills Index to complete the picture¹⁰. This index is calculated by Hays Recruiting Experts Worldwide based on the data and methods of the Oxford Economics analytical center and several indicators, including educational flexibility, labour market conditions, labour market flexibility, wage level and trends, and covers 34 countries. The key goal of the index is to give a comparative perspective on changes in development trends of labour markets in different countries.

For the Government, a unique Open Budget Index compiled twice a year by the International Budget Partnership¹¹ can be useful in many ways. The index is based on expert reviews of researchers from different countries who assess three budget accountability components, including the availability of budget information, individual's ability to participate in the budget process, role and performance of control authorities.

For the Engagement, it is worth noting that this sub-index ignores official events aimed at creating a positive image of the state and establishing friendly relations with foreign countries, as well as the amount of budget spend on this activity. At the same time, data on the number of embassies, consulates, missions and cultural representative offices are considered. When making a reliable picture of the situation, it is perhaps necessary to focus on activity, including receptions, round tables and forums, rather than passive features. Although it is now impossible to assess the efficiency of individual events within the global index, their total number can be used as a soft power potential metric. Alongside, the assessment of the budget spend on various foreign policy programs seems equally reasonable and consistent.

In turn, to assess the efficiency of humanitarian activities, a separate index can be developed to consider such general indicators as the number of participants and references in the media, feedback, positive and negative reviews. In some cases, when it comes to business forums supported by government agencies (in particular, the Russian-British Business Forum), the number of multilateral agreements (both formal and informal) made during such events and economic transactions leading to in such agreements. There is a need in sub-indices to individually assess the scientific, business, education, cultural and historical and educational events held abroad. Each sub-index would be focused on aspects inherent to these areas, thereby achieving a higher level of objectivity.

However, the search for data to make such index can cause many difficulties due to the incompleteness and confidentiality of the requested information. Thus, it seems reasonable to introduce a system for collecting and

¹⁰ The Hays Global Skills Index 2019/20 // Hays Recruiting Experts Worldwide URL: <https://www.hays-index.com/full-report/> (accessed on 21.03.2021).

¹¹ Rankings // Open Budget Survey URL: <https://www.internationalbudget.org/open-budget-survey/open-budget-index-rankings/> (accessed on 21.03.2021).

analyzing data at the level of soft power users and to create a special structure responsible for preparing analytical reports for government agencies developing and implementing soft power programs. This system obviously does not imply data collection at the level of several states, since it includes processing of the restricted information. Nevertheless, such innovations can have a positive effect in terms of making an objective view of the governance of a particular country and performance of their activities aimed at realizing the soft power potential. It will also facilitate the distribution of budget funds within the framework of existing targeted programs, the most effective organizations will be able to upscale their activities using the appropriate state funds. Although the conceptualization of individual terms and operationalization of information search and systematization processes, including determining the weight of individual criteria and indicator selection, selecting a method and developing a research program all seem to be an incredibly difficult task, but this is ultimately an adequate condition for improving the public governance system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to note that today the demand for assessment of the efficiency and potential of soft power is growing at an incredible rate, thus naturally leading to emergence of numerous studies on this subject, private and state analytical agencies. Being a relatively new phenomenon in global politics, soft power is a complex phenomenon reflecting the desire of states to search for new ways of cooperation and to create a communicative space for confidential interaction. Competition for the formation of a general indicator of humanitarian influence is key to its emergence regardless of the current political context. Some soft power indices, in particular, the Soft Power 30, consider several dimensions of attractiveness, including the economy, politics and culture, based on industry and special sub-indices. This allows us to argue that such indexes are capable of giving, albeit not always a fairly impartial, but the most detailed assessment of the country's foreign policy influence in an era without global wars, when military power is no longer the main argument in resolving international disputes. In turn, to assess the soft power potential of individual states in a comparative perspective more effectively, it is required to constantly expand the statistical base, improve the methodology by introducing additional sub-indices. In addition, when assessing the performance of soft power programs at the state level, variables corresponding to a specific area of soft power should be taken into account, thorough work should be done to systematize the information associated with the implementation of such programs.

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