A study of international news reports on Thailand: Implications to soft power and nation branding

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Abstract

A positive national image can attract tourism and foreign investment while fostering global trade and a skilled workforce, with cultural events and transparent governance at its core. This paper aims to analyze international news coverage of Thailand in order to determine how the international community perceives Thailand in light of its government's efforts to brand itself through so-called "soft power." The data consisted of 1,755 news clippings retrieved from 27 foreign news outlets (October 1, 2021, to April 30, 2022). Its findings show that global media outlets tend to report that Thailand has attracted international investment, diversified tourism, and innovatively showcased beneficial parts of Thai culture. Through entertainment, it presents Thai values and culture and uses soft power to improve the nation's image. This study contributes to the national plan for capacity building, human resource development, and generating economic value in current circumstances. The country can improve its international status, fortify its foreign connections, and eventually gain economic rewards using its soft power. Thailand is poised to strategically embrace prevailing global trends, harnessing its potent cultural soft power to seize opportunities across diverse sectors. This includes integrating technology into virtual entertainment and tourism and pushing the boundaries in avant-garde realms such as cyber, economic, and lifestyle domains.

1. Introduction

In the new era, there is no limit to the digital world, where technology plays an essential role in communicating stories from one region to another through online media. Thus, people can quickly receive news and learn about events in foreign countries, encouraging broader international connections. However, it should be noted that news coverage affects the images of the countries in which news reports reflect foreigners' perceptions, either good or bad. Therefore, communicating Thailand's information to foreign target groups is an essential mission of a government, which is responsible for enhancing better understanding and creating a positive image for its country. This mission aligns with the Thai government's strategies of creating a society where people are proud to live, improving people's quality of life, and promoting a good image of the nation.

In today's world, soft power is needed to promote a nation's image through a different approach to dealing with its neighbors—encouraging more communication and cooperation between people in the country and the region. Furthermore, the trend of peace, sustainable development, and win-win cooperation has strengthened since the world is changing in a complicated way. As such, many countries are willing to cooperate with others, whether within the region or different ones. Thailand has also taken this issue seriously, as we can see from the government's national strategic plans to promote soft power through different modes of communication. Back in the period of General Prayuth Chan-o-cha's government, a national committee in charge of the country's image promotion through soft power was set up in August 2022. The Cabinet approved the strategic plan for the new designated area for sustainable tourism (Chiang Rai) drafted/planned by The Designated Area for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA). The goal was to promote "the 5Fs"; food, films, festivals, fashion, and fighting; as potential vehicles for soft power.

Until the current government, under the current leadership of Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, the issue of soft power has also been debatable and widespread since it is placing significant emphasis on enhancing the nation's global competitiveness and expediting the creative economy by focusing on soft power policies.

For these reasons, this study tries to determine how the international community perceives Thailand in light of the Thai government's recent efforts to brand itself with soft power by analyzing news coverage of Thailand. The findings of this study are discussed in conjunction with the national branding strategy, and the implications of these findings for future policy are highlighted in the final section.

2. Literature Review

Soft power and nation branding are closely intertwined concepts that reflect a nation's ability to influence others through non-coercive means and shape its global image. Soft power plays a crucial role in nation branding, encompassing the positive aspects of a nation's culture, values, and policies, contributing to its attractiveness. A nation with soft power can leverage its cultural exports, diplomatic relationships, and international partnerships to enhance its brand image, fostering a positive perception that can benefit its economic, political, and social objectives. In essence, the effectiveness of nation branding is often intricately linked to a country's ability to wield soft power and project a compelling narrative that resonates with global audiences.

2.1 Soft power

Coined in the 1990s by Joseph Nye, the term "soft power" has gained popularity in policy and academic circles. According to Nye (1990, pp.116-117), this facet of power—arising when one state convinces others to seek what it intends—may be referred to as "co-optive" power. It is opposed to "hard" or "coercive" power, which involves pressing others to follow one's command. Cultures, ideologies, and institutions are examples of intangible soft power resources often associated with the potential and influence over the urges of other countries.

Both hard and soft power are vitally interwoven. A state's power is less likely to be challenged if others believe in its legitimacy. Other states are more likely to adopt a dominant state's values and beliefs if they find them appealing. A country may avoid the expensive use of coercive power if it can support institutions that make other states take actions in directions favoring the dominant state. This co-optive aspect is a nation's ability to manage a condition such that other nations shape their interests in line with the former. This power is often derived from the cultural and ideological appeal and international bodies' rules and institutions (Nye, 1990, pp.167-168). Soft power goes beyond ordinary influence. Influence can also be based on hard power, such as threats or money. Soft power's key components are, in essence, persuasiveness, the ability to win over others through argument, and the capacity to attract and entice (Nye, 2008, p.95).

Even so, several misunderstandings exist around this concept. As Nye (2006) noted, people frequently mix "resources" for power with "behavior" of using power. To differentiate between "power resources" and "behaviors," Vuving (2009, pp.7-8) offered three "power currencies" that give way to both power and its softness. *Benignity* refers to the favorable views tangibly displayed towards people, particularly while treating a customer. Soft power is built by heightening gratitude and sympathy. *Brilliance* is defined as high performance when accomplishing anything. Soft power is formed by admiration. *Beauty* is the smooth interaction when one embodies specific values. Soft power is provided through its ability to inspire. He further elaborated that soft power instruments encompass cultural festivals, experiential learning, the media, or the training of languages and

cultures. Examples include national mythologies, incentive plans for overseas students, financial advantages to other nations, and international development (Vuving, 2009, pp.11-14).

To understand the roles and functions of soft power, Lee (2009) categorizes that soft power can be used in five main functions: (1) to present peaceful and appealing images of a country; (2) to rally support for foreign and security policies; (3) to influence other nations' approaches and inclinations; (4) to maintain solidarity within a group of countries; and (5) to raise a leader's levels of confidence or internal support.

South Korea and Japan are viewed as countries with significant soft power because they have succeeded in establishing an appealing country reputation overseas, primarily due to the latitude provided to the creative economy. Some analysts view K-pop as an international manifestation of soft power that has sought to expand its reach since the late 1990s (e.g., Kozhakhmetova, 2012; Nye & Kim, 2019). K-pop popularity indicates a Korean endeavor to restructure the artistic industries to export culture openly. Different national identities in K-pop offer the potential for economic prominence through their collective cultural expressions (Valeriano & Aleydis, 2022). Japan has been classed as a "soft power powerhouse" in various aspects, owing to its international appeal as an artistic, gastronomic, and cultural juggernaut (Watanabe & McConnell, 2008). Japan's international democratic support has been a significant part of its foreign policy since the 2000s, exemplifying its soft "political" power (Carminati, 2022). Another example is China's Belt and Road Initiative, a grandiose scheme to link countries to the "Middle Kingdom" that is touted as mutually beneficial. It is underpinned by interconnecting distinct cultures and communities and *ipso facto* economic contributions and incentives to the world (Carminati, 2020)

2.2 Nation branding

Nation branding refers to the apparent trend of nations acknowledging that they should delicately and subtly present their national story to a diverse global audience (Anholt, 1998; Olins, 2002). Despite their multiple sources of soft power, countries with economies in transition generally have a poor brand image because they need more resources and expertise to realize this potential. Treating a country as an organism, Gilmore (2002) believes that purposeful improvement of a country's image with branding may give it a comparative upper hand in generating growth and revenue in tourism and inducing overseas investors.

A consistent national strategy is also one of the goals for nation branding, such as establishing an attractive and feasible long-term plan for a government: any communication activity with the world should promote and strengthen such a process (Anholt, 1998). It entails using marketing communications tactics to modify international perception; in effect, it is a form of cross-cultural communication that parallels advertising to create brand awareness, attraction, and

preference (Fan, 2008b). One form of nation branding is place branding or marketing for economic outcomes (such as boosting tourism or inbound capital). At the same time, another is diplomatic branding for a political purpose. Fan (2008a) maintains that a nation's brand comprises its politics, economy, and culture. They are interdependent and must collaborate to achieve the same objective of enhancing the country's entire image.

Nevertheless, the preceding description of nation branding raises the question of how closely it resembles the concept of soft power. According to Anholt (2010), there is a close relationship between soft power and nation branding. Nation branding is about how a country shows itself to other countries. At the same time, public diplomacy (soft *political* power) is a part of nation branding that focuses on a country's political brand. Nation branding yields a more targeted, culturally neutral, and systematic approach to establishing a global sphere of influence. A strong branding effort may create a positive and enduring impression, bolstering a nation's soft power (Fan, 2008b).

Anholt (2005, p.130) suggests that a national branding strategy should be consistent across the country, such that all external communications reflect the brand to gain a polished national image. As Melissen (2005, p.19) noted, nation branding requires more creativity than public diplomacy: the former entails a broader deployment of financial and human capital, whereas the latter is restricted to cultural and political bureaucrats. In short, nation branding focuses mainly on the economic effects of a country's image. A well-respected idea can be a magnet for visitors, potential employees, and foreign investors. On the other hand, soft power is centered on the ability to inspire and persuade people, particularly worldwide, politically.

The construction of national images and their effects on soft power has long been the research topic. In Poland, for example, the national idea is propagated and altered culturally, but there are inconsistencies between identity and democracy due to the fusion of political control and national identity (Suroviec, 2017). Another example is the rivalry between the United States and China, where culture and mass media, as a form of soft power, play a big part in defining the interaction between the two nations (Servaes, 2012). The kaleidoscope of media, news and current affairs is equally crucial in sending soft power. For example, as Sun (2010) argues, despite the proliferation of Chinese media content worldwide, the gulf in opinion between Chinese and international media outlets on the types of stories that should be reported remains insurmountable. The Chinese foreign-language media always engages in significant domestic and international foreign propaganda (Edney, 2012).

According to the research above, it is evident that the media plays a significant role in distributing and propagating soft power in various situations while also serving as a conduit through

which other nations acquire the image of a country that delivers soft power. This is relevant to the present study, in which the researcher analyses international news coverage on Thailand and discusses its implications for Thailand's current efforts to project its version of soft power.

2.3 Thailand's mixed approach to the two concepts

As explained earlier, there are clear definitions of soft power and nation branding; soft power refers to a nation's ability to influence others through attraction and appeal, while nation branding involves strategically shaping and promoting a positive national image. In the case of Thailand, the contemporary trend of soft power may be traced back to post-coup political aims that required strengthening the country's internal and external image. The project *Thailand 4.0* was designed by the military government, which shows their effort in national branding to cement legitimacy with a promise of inclusive growth to the Thai public to gain trust and loyalty (Desatova, 2018). Regarding the nation's image, the Thai government answered the necessary call to improve its tarnished image, insisting on advocating for the country to use its "soft power" to boost its economy.

One of the events that triggered attention was in April 2022, when a young Thai rapper, Milli, ate mango sticky rice while performing on stage at one of the biggest global music festivals—the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. After that, soft power thrived more expansively and beyond, with the Ministry of Commerce claiming support for the Thai "creative economy," emphasizing economic growth (Seiya, 2022). Another case that is considered phenomenal is Lalisa "Lisa" Manoban, a member of the Korean pop girl group BLACKPINK. Her worldwide popularity makes her one of Thailand's prime soft power exports. In only two hours, her debut solo music video album, which showed her at the Phanom Rung Stone Castle in a gorgeous traditional Thai costume, amassed an incredible 10 million views on YouTube. Following the enormous popularity of Lisa's most recent music video, Thailand's then Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has commended and admired her, citing her as a fantastic example of soft power. He also indicated his readiness to support the nation's soft power to boost value in the creative economy. He expressed his confidence that the Thai creative economy would succeed because Thailand would have its share of handicrafts, traditions, tourism sites, and community-based cultural identities. According to him, this phenomenon would bolster the confidence of the Thai industry and fashion designers in applying Thai culture to the production of merchandise to increase economic value.

In order to optimize the economic advantages of soft power, the then cabinet has implemented a program to ease the nation's entry into international markets. This policy directed government agencies to connect with enterprises and creative professionals aggressively. The 5-Fs

plan of food, film, fashion, fighting (Muay Thai), and festivals was intended to develop Thailand's cultural capital (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, n.d.).

In contrast to the conventional understanding of soft power as political or diplomatic leverage, this paper adopts the Thai government's perspective regarding the additional meaning of soft power and its communication strategy; that is, soft power is a tool of nation branding used to establish an image and reinforce Thai identity to increase economic value and commoditization. Such a strategic stance implies that media presentations and news reports about Thailand play a crucial role in protecting the national image and the soft power the government is keen to exhibit as the nation's cultural capital. As Roselle et al. (2014) posit, strategic narrative in the media can provide insight into the complexities of global relations, especially for the mechanisms of influence in the contemporary media landscape, which is mainly because soft power can be highlighted or subdued in political and strategic communications across the transnational flows of news (Hayden, 2012).

Thailand is ranked third in ASEAN and 41st out of 121 nations in Brand Finance's 2023 Global Soft Power Index. The nation has enormous potential to profit from its rich cultural and creative resources, estimated to be worth US$42 billion, or 8.9% of Thailand's GDP. This study attempts to ascertain how the world community views Thailand in light of the Thai government's attempts to brand itself through the so-called "soft power" by examining foreign news coverage of Thailand.

3. Methodology

Content analysis is used in this study to analyze the news issues about Thailand in international media by evaluating the presence and effectiveness of critical messages in media coverage and assessing how well these messages align with the nation's soft power and branding goals. The process of message analysis involves determining if and to what extent essential statements are included in media coverage, as well as how well these messages fit in with the country's soft power and branding objectives. The following sub-sections are the steps to gather and evaluate information on Thailand from international media.

3.1 Data collection

The news on Thailand was gathered from online sources by visiting the websites of news agencies directly and using Google News to confirm the integrity of the chosen statement. Content, photos, and keywords associated with Thailand (Thai, Thailand, and Bangkok) are used as selection criteria. Using content, photos, and keywords serves as a method for filtering or selecting specific Thailand-related information. The following parts show how each element contributes:

Content refers to the textual information or content related to Thailand considered during the selection process. This involved analyzing articles, news pieces, or textual descriptions to ensure that the chosen material is pertinent to news about Thailand.

Photos include visual content represented by photos. All selected photos visually represented news or events in Thailand, which plays a crucial role in conveying information and enhancing the overall understanding of news stories.

Keywords used in this study refer to specific keywords associated with Thailand, such as "Thai," "Thailand," and "Bangkok." These keywords serve as search terms or filters to identify and prioritize content directly related to or mentioning Thailand. It helps streamline selection by focusing on materials with explicit connections to the chosen keywords.

Combining these elements—content, photos, and keywords—ensures a targeted and relevant selection of news about Thailand. This approach helps streamline the search for information, making it more efficient and aligned with the specific criteria set for the content selection.

News from international media outlets had to be disseminated in English within seven months (from October 1, 2021, to April 10, 2022). As indicated in Table 1, the news clippings sources were 27 international news organizations from three regions—the Americas, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific—which are reputable and significantly impact consumers' perceptions.

Table 1 List of international news agencies by region.

Region	News agencies	Countries
America	CNN	USA
	ABC News	
	CNBC	
	VOA	
	The Newsweek	
	Forbes	
	AP News	
	The New York Times	
	Bloomberg	
	Wall Street Journal	
Europe	Deutsch Welle	Germany
	RT (Russia)	Russia

Region	News agencies	Countries
	Reuters	UK
	BBC	England
	AFP	France
Asia-Pacific	Xinhua	China
	People's Daily	
	Kyodo News	Japan
	Nikkei Asia	
	NHK	
	The Straits Times	Singapore
	Channel News Asia (CNA)	
	Antara News	Indonesia
	The Jakarta Post	
	ABC Australia	Australia
	Aljazeera	Qatar
	South China Morning Post	Hongkok

3.2 Data analysis

Thematic analysis, which examines and summarizes news stories in diverse Thai contexts, has primarily influenced the data analysis approach used to explore information on international news topics. The news essence is divided into 11 main themes based on data gathered from 27 foreign news agencies and 1,755 news clippings about Thailand. These themes include: (1) Economy and investment; (2) International relations and cooperation; (3) Tourism; (4) Public health; (5) Politics, security, and domestic affairs; (6) Sports, culture, and entertainment; (7) Natural resources and environment; (8) Human resource development, rights and freedoms, and equality; (9) Welfare and quality of life; (10) Science, technology, and innovation; and (11) Other news.

After analyzing the dataset, crucial communication issues would be identified to create a favorable perception of Thailand inside the context of the national plan, which is centered on striking a balance between social, economic, and environmental growth.

4. Thailand-related news stories reported by international media

To ascertain the extent of news collection by international news agencies, English-language news from foreign media that presented reports via online channels published from October 1, 2021, to April 30, 2022, was gathered and analyzed using the media audit approach.

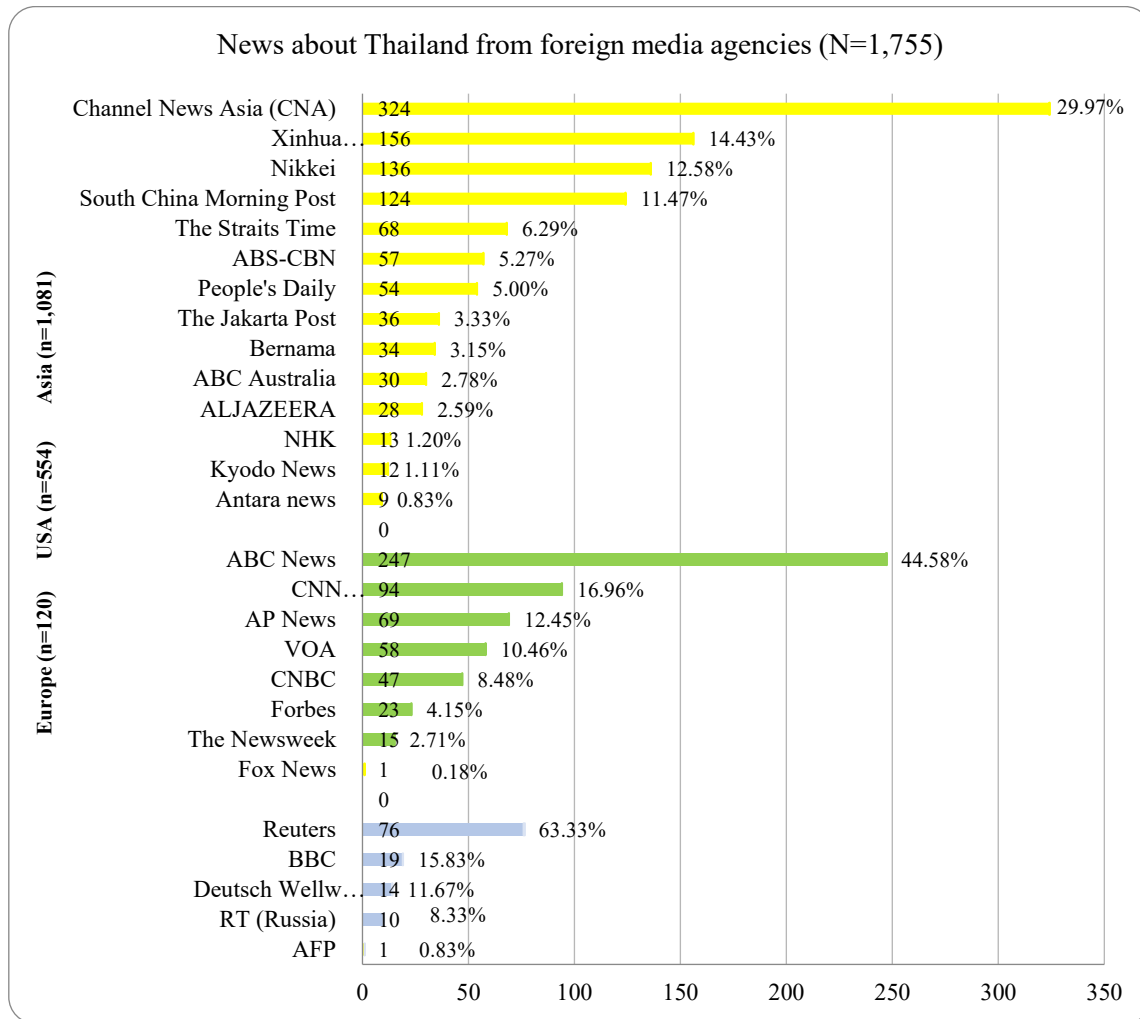As seen in Figure 2 below, 27 highly regarded international news organizations were chosen from three areas.

News about Thailand from foreign media agencies (N=1,755)

Figure 1 List of foreign media and the number of news stories about Thailand.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the results of news gathering about Thailand that was presented by foreign media within seven months revealed that, when news agencies were categorized by region, the news about Thailand was found in the Asia-Pacific region with the highest number (1,081 news), followed by news agencies in the Americas (554 news) and Europe (120 news). ABC News (247 news), Xinhua (156 news), and CNA (324 news) are the top three news organizations that cover Thailand.

Based on the news's materiality and the 11 key concerns' framework, identifying critical communication topics can be described in Figure 2 below.
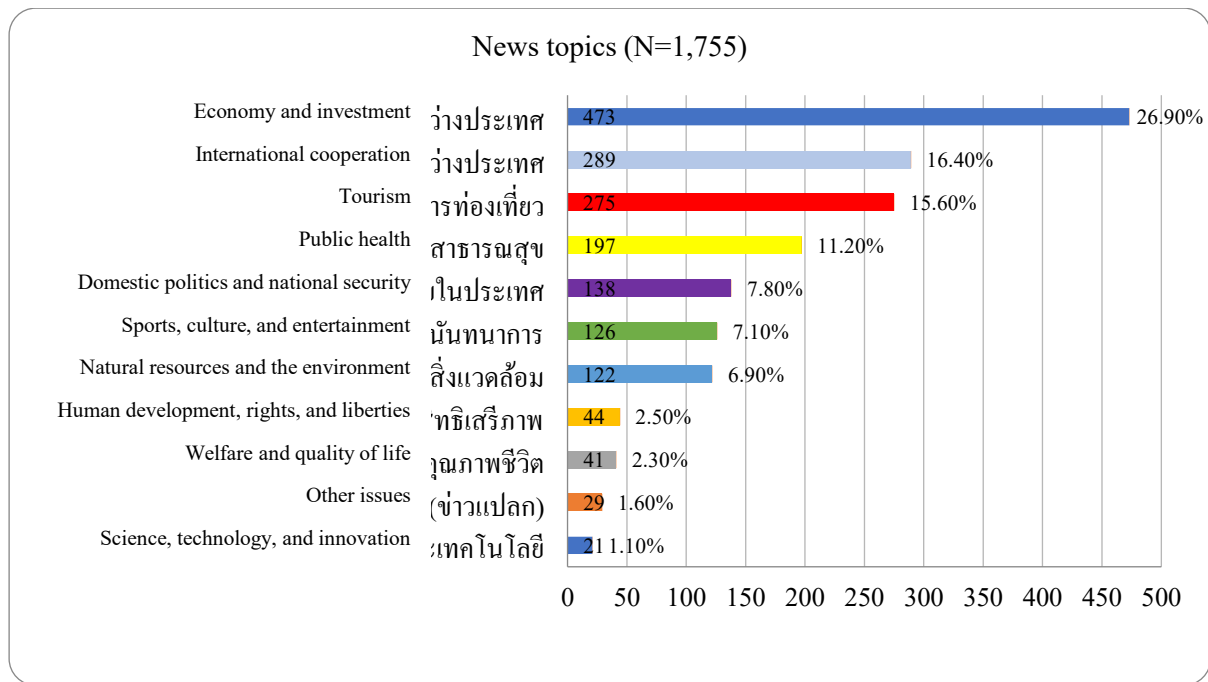
News topics (N=1,755)

Topic	Thai	Value	Percent
Economy and investment	ว่างประเทศ	473	26.90%
International cooperation	ว่างประเทศ	289	16.40%
Tourism	รท่องเที่ยว	275	15.60%
Public health	สาธารณสุข	197	11.20%
Domestic politics and national security	เในประเทศ	138	7.80%
Sports, culture, and entertainment	นันทนาการ	126	7.10%
Natural resources and the environment	สิ่งแวดล้อม	122	6.90%
Human development, rights, and liberties	ทธิเสรีภาพ	44	2.50%
Welfare and quality of life	ุณภาพชีวิต	41	2.30%
Other issues	(ข่าวแปลก)	29	1.60%
Science, technology, and innovation	เทคโนโลยี	21	1.10%

Figure 2 The number of news related to Thailand divided by key themes

As for reports from overseas media outlets, Figure 2 displays the total number of news articles on Thailand sourced from 27 global news websites across three regions, amounting to 1,755 news pieces. The main concerns fall under the following 11 themes:

1) Economy and investment: 473 news stories (26.%), such as digital currency, economic hemp, automobile industry, and economy and investment;

2) International cooperation: 289 news stories (16.4%), such as meetings between Leaders of the country, international cooperation, and assistance to neighboring countries;

3) Tourism: 275 news stories (15.6%), such as Sandbox opening measures, new tourism, pictures of tourist attractions, and cultural activities

4) Public health: 197 news stories (11.2%), such as COVID-19, various sanitation;

5) Thai politics, security, and domestic affairs of 138 news stories (7.8 percent), such as drugs, the monarchy, politics within the country, and the situation in the three southern border provinces;

6) Sports, culture, and entertainment: 126 news stories (7.1%), such as sports competitions (football, golf, winter Olympics), artist news, and entertainment media;

7) Natural resources and the environment: 122 news stories (6.9%), such as climate change, resource management, and environment;

8) Human resource development, rights, liberties, and equality; 44 news stories (2.%), such as population crisis, education, rights to freedom, beliefs, and religions;

9) Welfare and quality of life: 41 news stories (2.3%), such as accidents and crime;

10) Other issues: 29 news (1.6%), such as money news;

11) Science, technology, and innovation: 21 news stories (1.1%), such as high-speed rail technology development, development of caviar

Thailand has a 20-year national plan to improve competitiveness, and the bar graph in Figure 2 shows that the issues that respond most favorably to this strategy are economics and investment. In addition, marijuana is a topic of interest to the foreign media as it has the potential to grow economically and provide value to Thailand's agricultural sector.

Another important topic covered by international media is the investment and growth of the early electric vehicle sector. Thailand serves as a basis of production to attract international investment, diversify tourism, and innovatively showcase beneficial parts of Thai culture. Through artists and entertainment media, it presents Thai values and culture and uses soft power to improve the nation's image. Additionally, it contributes to the national plan for capacity building and human resource development and generating economic value in the current circumstances.

Politics, national security, and international collaboration concerning Thailand's national security plan are other topics frequently discussed in international media. For instance, Thailand's good reputation is impacted by including security cooperation with ASEAN and providing international assistance to neighboring nations.

Unfortunately, Thailand's poor reputation is reflected in the state of affairs in its three southern border provinces, national accidents, and criminal activity. Therefore, enhancing the nation's image through communication with the international media, particularly on matters of preserving peace and preventing and resolving national security issues, such as creating comprehensive security management mechanisms, can help foster confidence in the lives and property of Thai citizens as well as foreign visitors and residents of Thailand.

Thailand must maintain constant communication on public health concerns with locals and visitors. Other epidemics could still be happening as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak issue not being handled. International media outlets have provided nonstop news regarding Thailand's surveillance, management, and efforts to avert pandemics thus far. Yet, the media also brought up other public health concerns that tarnished the reputation, such as importing secondhand surgical gloves into the US.

In essence, elucidating the management approach to address the issue is essential for fostering comprehension, mitigating the unfavorable perception, and sustaining the growth of trust within the global community. Consequently, it is vital to carefully convey a precise explanation via international media

5. Discussion: Leveraging soft power to improve Thailand's image

We can see that the current trends of news reports in relation to Thailand indicate that international media outlets have significantly emphasized a variety of issues, ranging from politics, security, the economy, and social problems. During the data collection period, several issues had been interwoven in the news that directly impacted the perception of Thailand in the media's eyes. First, global investment and the economy had been severely harmed by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This led to the second global problem, which is the increase in product costs due to inflation and the economic recession (theme 1). The third topic on which international media focus is public health and the COVID-19 pandemic (theme 4). Medical research and development, including mental health concerns and physical health care, are of interest.

The findings from the news analysis above make us aware of their implications on Thailand's soft power management schemes, particularly concerning its economy and image related to sports, culture, and entertainment (theme 6). This implies that the Thai government may need to implement policies that encourage the development of this theme of soft power by encouraging the advancement of intellectual property rights and the promotion of sports and tourism. Thailand's soft power can also benefit from transnational cultural presentations by artists and media globally. It may be a component of using such a kind of soft power to boost outsiders' understanding of and access to Thai culture, raising the value of natural resources and environmental concerns economically. Another issue that may not be among the prominent themes is related to energy and climate change, wildlife preservation, forest fire prevention, conservation of natural resources, and the environment (themes 7 and 9). Using environmentally friendly items or technologies is a crucial global trend, including the consumption of clean energy, which hints at the possibility of Thailand investing more in this area to gain credibility in seeing the global trend (hence, soft power) and be able to speak on the international stage that the country is truly ready to be part of the global effort in environmental issue (e.g., Victor, 2011; Krongkaew, 2004).

Based on the conceptual framework proposed by Vuving (2009), we found many news items about Thai people in the tourist and sociocultural domains, suggesting that the image of

Thailand in the eyes of the world is one of "benignity". Given that "benignity" is cultivating positive attitudes towards others, we have discovered a number of news articles on entertainment, sports, and cultural events. Soft power is produced by committed compassion and thankfulness, which are, to use Vuving's phrase, Thai "power currencies" in this context. Global digital media does serve as a vehicle for the application of soft power, boosting the number of international visitors to Thailand and their familiarity with the country, as well as their consumption of Thai-produced media and related goods. The way popular culture is presented in the media successfully exemplifies soft power (e.g., Kim, 2019; McKercher, 2016). As a result, the leisure sector needs to be highly supported, with a focus on the previously established entertainment-related industries. Thailand has reportedly advanced economically and technologically, and international media has a positive perception of the country when it comes to travel. It ought to be well-positioned to draw in foreign investment, given its tourist attractions, cultural events, and creative approach to tourism management. As one of Vuving's (2009, p.14) suggested soft power manifestations, the news materials we identified in our dataset contain cultural events, experiential learning, and language and culture development.

After considering the themes and thus the areas for local soft power promotion, we can also see that by determining critical communications through various activities and channels (including mass media, new media, personal media, and public and private policies at all levels), the Thai government can make use of such cost-effective methods to create an image for Thailand in accordance with its 20-year national strategy and theories related to the concept of creating a national image (e.g., Baxter, 2017). In this regard, this paper asserts that one of the national tactics for fostering positive views and modifying negative attitudes towards Thailand may involve promoting a favorable image of Thailand through soft power via worldwide communication, perhaps by means of its own media channels or content production for international media outlets to use. It is largely because in contemporary communication, the use of global and digital media as a means of distributing soft power (e.g., Tangkitvanich & Wongkitrungruang, 2011) can increase international awareness of the country, especially in tourism and the consumption of Thai goods and entertainment, as some have already made their name on international stage (e.g., Roongsangjun, 2023; Lertputtarak & Samokhin, 2023). Our findings from the previous section also lead us to believe that using the media to present popular culture is vital and likely to be one way to use "powerful" soft power. For example, the film industry may need the active cooperation of the media sector to become profitable from the already-uptrend consumption of Thai-originated "products" and henceforth develop a positive reputation and image worldwide. This may include the showcase of Thai athletes' potential to

foreign nations through soft power in sports (such as Muay Thai). This brings us to another interpretation, which is the community of sports, especially e-sports, should need the Thai government to host international events to promote its idiosyncrasy in playing and entertaining the audiences at the same time because sports are the most thrilling events globally with the growing gaming industry. Thailand should, therefore, take into account this hands-on instrument for enhancing its own "brand". This is in line with Fan's (2008a) theory that place branding—in our example, the city that hosts sporting events—may increase travel and incoming capital. Given their interdependence, promoting sports will help enhance a positive political, economic, and cultural reputation. Cooperation is accordingly required to meet the goal of improving the nation's reputation.

Thailand may further use other forms of soft power to boost and promote the national economy by using communication to project an innovative and technologically driven image that serves as a showcase for the country and its tourist industry. The modern era has brought forth a boom in e-commerce and digital financial transactions as part of everyday living. Supportive communication for agricultural products, such as online food delivery, will generate revenue and provide economic value, which can keep Thailand's reputation positive in the eyes of the world community.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has set out to investigate the media presentation of Thailand in an attempt to interpret its implications for promoting its much-discussed soft power. Since we do not aim to measure or assess the government's performance in soft power, we interpret our findings in the sense that a proactive approach to communication should be encouraged in order to avoid misinterpretation and incorrect assumptions at the international level. Three crucial components of Thai authorities' communication strategy need special attention: (a) preserving the country's well-preserved image of culture-related experiences for international consumption, (b) recognizing the current fallout from internal socio-political issues, and (c) ensuring that unstable politics do not impede the flow of constructive information.

Thai government can utilize transnational news flows to emphasize its soft power or minimize its tarnished image, as Hayden (2012) illustrates. Unfortunately, Thailand has a poor image in terms of domestic problems, politics, and security. The news on welfare, safety, environment, natural resource management, and the level of living of the Thai people was, in general, not adequately attractive. This is because the findings from the preceding section also indicate issues with Thai politics, security, and internal matters. However, it may need further

clarification as to how Thailand's internal politics, its issues around the royal institution, and its problems in the three southernmost border provinces can hamper the soft power promotion effort. It means that adjusting itself to gain a positive image necessitates addressing the whole picture of the country.

That being said, it is highly crucial that foreign media likewise keep an eye on regional political happenings. Thailand's inability to adopt the same strategy as South Korea in its pursuit of soft power (e.g., Nye & Kim, 2019) may be due to the differences in the Korean government's and Thai counterpart's approaches to promoting cultural industries. Reorganizing the creative industry to allow for the unrestricted dissemination of Korean culture is supported by the Korean government. Multiple national identities in K-pop, as Valeriano and Aleydis (2022) stated, provide the possibility for economic importance through their integrated cultural qualities. Thai authorities may take action to stop its domestic issues from impeding its capacity to draw international attention in the same way that South Korea does.

Furthermore, Thai performers, such as Lisa Black Pink and Milli, are starting to share their culture with the rest of the world, and the entertainment industry is growing. This presents a chance to develop soft power in order to elevate Thailand and its culture to a positive and acknowledged national status. This supports Fan's (2008b) claim that using current artists to showcase culture is a form of cross-cultural communication that works similarly to advertising in that it generates interest in, appeal for, and brand recognition. Thailand has to make a good first impression to strengthen its soft power and build a stronger brand to further set foot in industries other than tourism, which it has been well-known for.

Arranging international competitions and endorsing kickboxing as Thailand's national sport (Muay Thai) can demonstrate the appreciation of Thai athletes' talent and may lead to global appreciation alike. The quickly expanding e-sports and gaming industries are particularly noteworthy. Much thought should, therefore, be given to this kind of national image-building instrument for Thailand.

Overall, the study can infer the worth of soft power by examining how a country influences other countries through its use of culture, politics, and ideologies. A country can improve its international status, fortify its foreign connections, and eventually gain economic rewards using its soft power of all forms. Thailand is expected to be able to adapt to the global trends that it may capitalize on its so-called "cultural soft power" to tap into, whether they include technology in virtual entertainment or tourism or even in cyber, economic, or lifestyle avant-garde. Yet, Thailand has to deal with internal political issues that might damage its reputation as a peaceful country.

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