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Soft Power and International Political Marketing

Henry Sun[1] and Phil Harris[2]
[1]Business Research Institute, University of Chester, Chester, UK
[2]Business Research Institute and China Centre, University of Chester, Chester, UK

Keywords

Soft power · Leadership · Public affairs · Political marketing · International political marketing · International relations · Public diplomacy · Political science · Foreign policy · Political communication

Definition: Soft Power and International Political Marketing

Joseph Nye defines soft power as the ability of "getting others to want the outcomes that you want" through persuasion and attraction of one's ideas or the ability to set the political agenda to shape the preferences of others. Nye further argues that in the international arena, besides the military and economic power, there is a third dimension which is characterized as indirect power, cooptive power, and intangible power in contrary to direct power, coercive power, and tangible power. Nye states, "The ability to establish references tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions. This dimension can be thought of as soft power, in contrast to the hard command power usually associated with tangible resources like military and economic strength."

Henry Sun defines international political marketing as following:

> International Political Marketing seeks to establish, maintain and enhance long-term relations among nation-states, political actors and organizations, so that the objectives of stakeholders involved are met. This is done by mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises through cross-border and cross-culture marketing strategy and management.

Soft Power: Definition, Development, and Critique

The leadership terminology Soft Power is first coined by Joseph Nye in his book, *Bond to Lead: the Changing Nature of American Power*, published at the end of Cold War. In this book, Nye defined soft power as the ability of "getting others to want the outcomes that you want" through persuasion and attraction of one's ideas or the ability to set the political agenda to shape the preferences of others. Nye further argues that in the international arena, besides the military and economic power, there is the third dimension which is characterized as indirect power, cooptive power, and intangible power in contrary to direct power, coercive power, and tangible power. Nye

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states, "The ability to establish references tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions. This dimension can be thought of as soft power, in contrast to the hard command power usually associated with tangible resources like military and economic strength" (Nye, 1990, p. 31). Hard power is the power to force someone, through threat or reward, to do something unwillingly. In other words, the application of hard power is to seduce with economic reward or to threat with military power. Instead of the use of carrot and stick, the soft power in foreign policy is the ability of one country to indirectly influence other countries to follow through the attractiveness of its political and cultural values. In his new book *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*, Nye scores foreign policy on three ethical dimensions of intentions, means, and consequences, e.g., the important ethical consequences of Truman's willingness to accept stalemate in Korea rather than use nuclear weapons during the Korean War (Nye, 2020). The appeals and attractions can be seen as part of leadership power through communication and persuasion.

In his dozen of books on world power and leadership, Nye spent great efforts to discuss the wielding of soft power and its application to American foreign policy; for example, in the book *The Paradox of American Power*, he claims that United States has the unsurpassed military, economic, and culture power, "But Americans were largely indifferent and uncertain to shape a foreign policy to guide this power." Nye criticizes the unilateralism foreign policy in post 9.11 eras. His conclusion is that if America wants to keep on being a superpower, it should pay more attention to its soft power (Nye, 2002). In the book *Soft Power, The Means to Success in World Politics*, Nye discussed the interrelationship between soft power and hard power and developed the concept of Smart Power as a balance and combination of powers. Nye further analyzes the application of soft power and points out that it is more difficult to wield soft power because "many of its crucial resources are outside the control of governments, and their effects depend heavily on acceptance by the receiving audiences" (Nye, 2004a, p. 99). For instance, the Hollywood films are not subject to the US government censorship from a political point of view, whereas some of the R-rated films are rejected by many Middle Eastern countries due to their cultural and religious values. The application of hard power is much more straightforward as the government can use military threat or launch a war to gain the result as planned in a reasonable time frame. One nation can also use its economic power to achieve its political goal by foreign aid or economic sanction toward the other country. The application of soft power is much more complicated and takes a much longer time to be effective.

Like any new concept and theory, the terminology of soft power also has been the target of numerous criticisms from both policy makers and scholars. The most debated is the Neorealism critique claiming that in the real world it is not feasible to distinguish hard power and soft power. However, from political marketing point of view, the essence of governing power is political exchange with the credibility as currency, i.e., citizens and interest groups use their voting power in exchange with politicians, parties, and governments for their leadership power; through approval rate in exchange for policy, legislations, and governance; and opinion polls in exchange for soft power with appeal, attraction, and persuasion in foreign policies. In international relations, "the receiving audiences" could be people of all races, interest groups, and nation-states. As presented in the following sections, the cross-culture and cross-border nature of soft power study falls naturally into the domain of international political marketing which is a theoretical and practical answer to the critiques of soft power application. The relationship between soft power and international political marketing can be elaborated through the discussion on the power philosophy and exchange theory.

Power Philosophy, Exchange Theory, and Soft Power Index

In the book *The Powers to Lead*, Nye quoted the power philosophy and leadership strategies from great minds of Lao Tzu, Sun Tzu, Niccoclo Machiavelli, George Washington, and Karl Marx (Nye, 2008). Sun Tzu's leadership power consists of military strategies such as "To subdue the enemy without fighting," which is a perfect example of smart power maneuvering (Sun Tzu, 496 B.C.). As Nye puts it, "Smart warriors, however, know how to lead with more than just the use of force. Part of ancient Chinese wisdom is represented by Sun Tzu, . . . concluded that the highest excellence is never having to fight because the commencement of battle signifies a political failure" (Nye, 2004a, p. 11). This ancient power philosophy is being appreciated by current world leaders in their policies, communications, and even presidential tweets.

Power philosophy can be traced back to sixth century B.C. when Lao Tzu described leadership in his Daoism Philosophy of Harmony, "A leader is best when people barely know he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him, worst when they despise him" (Lao Tzu, 630 B.C.). As the earliest recorded philosopher, Lao Tzu's Dao is based on the virtue of "emptiness" between man and nature. The ancient wisdom of "No leader is the best leader" can be interpreted as the fundamentals of today's soft power studies. In the similar times of Spring and Autumn Wars period, Confucius stresses the virtue of self-restraining, which has similar meaning of soft power's cultural value, as in this popular quote, "Humanity means to restrain oneself and to observe the rites. Once one does this, the whole world will be embraced in one's humane mind" (Confucius, 479 B.C.). The power philosophy development went through different direction such as Machiavelli's principle, "One ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved" (Machiavelli, 1513). Here Machiavelli recommends to his Prince to place hard power which causes fear on top of the soft power of love. Similarly, in his most discussed philosophical book *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel's master–slave dialectic describes the asymmetry power for which the master has authority without responsibility and the slave has responsibility without authority (Ian Jackson, 2017). The essence of this dialectic is the movement or motion of recognizing, in which the two self-consciousness perspectives are constituted in being each recognized as self-conscious by the other.

Adam Smith's power exchanges among "a people of customers," shopkeepers, and governments apply as much to today's world as it did in the eighteenth century to the UK, with the development of the world trading market, the Internet, and global regulatory influence and power. The world is increasingly run by shopkeepers and very full of customers (Harris & Sun, 2017). In his book *Black Country élites: the Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area, 1830–1900*, Richard Trainor also demonstrated the power exchange among various governments and the "shopkeepers" who ran Victorian industrial towns as middle-class leaders who were well connected to regional and national power centers (Trainor, 1993). In the book *Des Kapital*, Karl Marx's social equality revolutions changed the power relationship to market-orientated free exchange where workers are not slaves but free men who exchange their labor for wages from capitalists. Marx elaborated this economic phenomenon of free market exchange from the perspective of class-based political exchange between the worker's struggle for better wages and work conditions and the capitalist's drive for ever greater profits. This political exchange theory can still be seen in the collective bargaining between worker's union and capitalists. As Nye claims that the best summary of leadership history came from Karl Marx: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please. . ." (Nye, 2008, p. 5).

Historically, great leaders also applied the principles of soft power before this modern terminology was coined. As the founding father, George Washington saw the importance of political ideology and values in all governments when he stated, "It is substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular

government. The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government" (George Washington, 1796). In the modern era, world leaders transformed from hard power force toward soft power attraction, persuasion, and exchange. During the Revolution of 1911, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the father of Republic of China, advocated a different approach to power struggle by saying, "For the revolution, we shall use only 10% of the efforts on force and 90% of the efforts on propaganda." Dr. Sun's terminology in Chinese words, 宣传 (pronounced as "Xuanchuan"), has a positive meaning for promoting political and cultural values in comparison to the definition of propaganda as neutral "means of organizing and shaping thought and perception" by The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies (Sun, 2020). Similarly, Nye mentioned the name Mahatma Gandhi over 20 times in his book *The Power to Lead* by quoting Gandhi as the "best modern example" of transforming leader verses transactional leader who approach fellows "with an eye to exchange one thing for another" (Nye, 2008, p. 125). Although Nye does not support which type of leader is better or worse, his terminology of soft power resembles with Gandhi's "power based on love." Another Harvard Professor Tony Saich points out "Presidents FDR and Ronald Reagan used their formidable powers of communication to build a popular and political will to reach beneficial international agreements in tough political climates. The Secretary General of the UN has no hard power through which he or she can get agreement and has to rely on soft power and marketing skills to promote various agendas" (Sun & Zhao, 2011).

International relations, by theory, include the whole complex of exchanges among interest groups, nation-states, and international organizations in all cultural, economic, political, and military aspects. In these international exchanges, whether it is through cooperation or conflict, the application of one country's hard power, such as economic and military power, is usually combined with its soft power, such as ideological, cultural, and social values. With hard power, the influence of the Roman Empire was limited to its military boundary, whereas the American soft power has influences worldwide; for example, its impact on the rebuilding of Germany and Japan after World War II and the ending of Cold War with the collapse of the Berlin Wall. However, in comparison with the current American First policy, Nye points out, "As for liberal means, Trump shows little respect for institutions or rights of other peoples." As a consequence, though the damages remain to be seen, "his lack of respect for institutions and truth produced a loss of soft power. . ." (Nye, 2020, p. 179).

In the past 30 years since the publication of Nye's power books, soft power became a popular term in international relations and was quoted by politicians and scholars around the globe. The studies of soft power with the advanced communication technology made this social science terminology acceptable in both quantitative and qualitative analyses. In his book *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen,* Philip Howard points out that "Conventional social science wisdom is that qualitative methods tend to be best for generating theories, while quantitative methods tend to be best for testing theories" (Philip Howard, 2005, p. 60). Howard and the fellows at Oxford Internet Institute advocate the Big Data researches, such as Computational Propaganda. Joseph Nye also sees the need for quantitative study in his soft power theory. As a result of the advanced information technology, a joint force of academia, practitioners, and government officials made soft power rankings, such as those done by Portland Consultancy for which Nye is one of the contributors. It has been publishing Annual Report on Soft Power 30 since 2015. It measures soft power through a composite index of top 30 countries based on "the quality of a country's political institutions, the extent of their cultural appeal, the strength of their diplomatic network, the global reputation of their higher education system, the attractiveness of their economic model, and a country's digital engagement with the world" (Portland, 2019). For example, Soft Power 30 index "showed that American soft power declined considerably after the beginning of the Trump administration" (Nye, 2020, p. 173). Besides Portland, there are other similar rankings of soft power published by Pew Research Center,

Institute of Government, and Monocle, which provide quantitative research for soft power which made it feasible to analyze the resource and wielding of soft power. The soft power indexes can provide basis for empirical research in other related fields such as international political marketing, just like in the 1980s Azar's "Conflict and Peace Data Bank" provided the basis of quantitative correlation for research on international marketing, economics, politics, and other social sciences (Sun & Bennett, 1988).

International Political Marketing: Definition, Interaction, and Internet

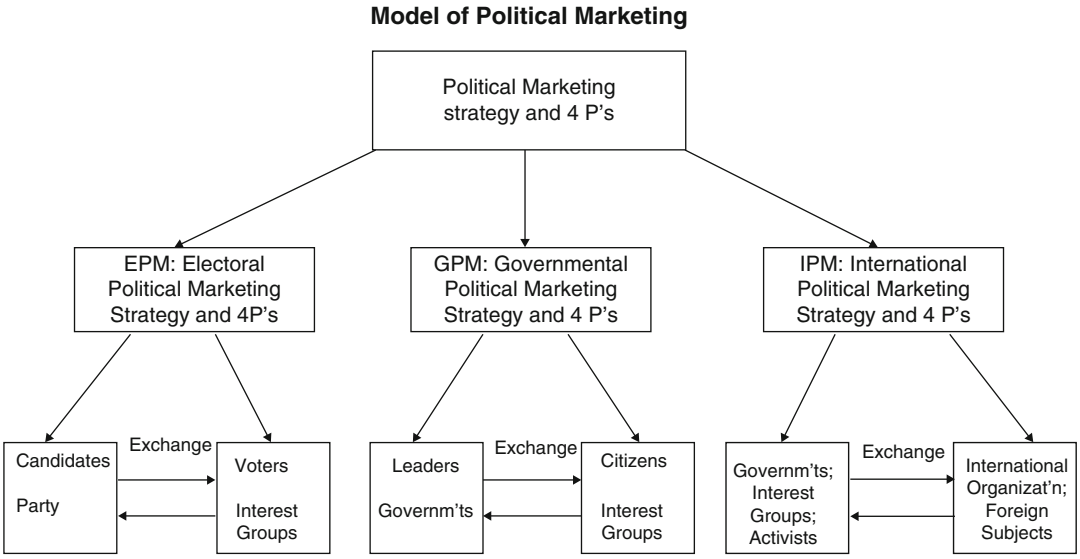
The term "International Political Marketing" was first defined by Henry Sun at the fourth International Conference on Political Marketing based on the interdisciplinary studies of Public Affairs, Political Marketing, Political Communication, International Relations, and International Marketing (Harris & Sun, 2017; Sun & Johnson, 2014; Howard, 2005; Sun & Bennett, 1988; Sun, 1990). However, just like the practices of soft power, political marketing can be traced back to the Ancient Greek democracy in the fourth century B.C. when citizens and philosophers held their debates and communicated their thoughts. The globalization in an information age makes it much easier for the development of both theoretical and practical studies on international political marketing from the relevant fields of marketing, political sciences, communication, and social media with research publications in specialized books, journal publications, and conferences in American, European, and Asia Pacific regions (Sun, 2008a, b; Falkowski & Newman, 2008; Lee-Marshment, et al. 2012; Sun & Zhao, 2011).

In the book *Political Marketing: Theory and Concept*, a theoretic definition is made as: (Ormrod et al. 2013)

> *Political marketing is a perspective from which to understand phenomena in the political sphere, and an approach that seeks to facilitate political exchanges of value through interactions in the electoral, parliamentary and governmental markets to manage relationships with stakeholders.*

Unlike many other definitions, this recent definition of political marketing is focused on two keywords: exchange and relationship. In other words, political marketing is a study of the process of political exchange and relationship maintained among the stakeholders. The exchange and relationship definition would fit well for the further discussion of international political marketing which is an interdisciplinary study of political marketing, political communication, and international relations. Like its definition, there are many models on political marketing. Henneberg established several Models of Political Marketing, which represent the multi-aspects of political marketing, i.e., electoral, governmental, and interest group political marketing (Henneberg, 2002). However, the Henneberg models do not describe the "international phenomena" as they are only mentioned in his article.

The following Triadic Model of Political Marketing, as shown in Chart I, attempts to describe political exchanges in three aspects, i.e., electoral political marketing (EPM), governmental political marketing (GPM), and international political marketing (IPM). This model tries to present a full picture of all the exchange and relationship in political marketing (Sun, 2008b). As shown in this model, there are six sets of interactive political relations in the three pairs of political exchanges. The first group of exchange, shown on the left of Chart I, describes the process of Electoral Political Marketing, where the candidates and parties make political exchange with voters and interest groups. For instance, in his 2012 reelection, Barak Obama was confronted with a daunting task: to convince voters that despite an anemic economic recovery, he deserved to be reelected (Sun & Johnson, 2014). Obama's campaign rhetoric is focused on three words, "jobs, jobs and jobs," seen as the exchange of jobs for votes. The second exchange process, shown in the middle of Chart I, deals with the Governmental Political Marketing for exchanges among leaders, public servants, governments, citizens, and interest groups, e.g., the same White House economic policy can be viewed as "Permanent Campaign" for the political exchange between the citizens and their government. The



Soft Power and International Political Marketing, Chart I Triadic Model of Political Marketing, by Henry Sun

last part of the political marketing model, shown on the right of Chart I, describes the International Political Marketing as cross-culture and cross-border political exchange which has different environment with different players and even different rules of the game. However, it is part of the general political marketing model and shares some basic values – it is the third dimension of the theory and practice of political marketing. The three sets of political exchanges are interrelated elements of any democratic government system. For example, when Obama ratified the trade agreement on Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), the international political exchange was strategically sound, "but encountered Congressional resistance in the face of rising populist pressures at home" (Nye, 2020, p. 164). Foreign policy is a unique aspect of political exchange, thus, the model of political marketing needs to be extended to the international arena for a complete view on both practical and theoretical researches. In process of globalization, any domestic policy will affect the international agenda such as global warming, trade and development, anti-pandemic, and anti-terrorism, which in turn will have impacts on the citizens and interest groups in all the related countries.

The three dimensions of this model, EPM, GPM, and IPM, are interrelated, just like in a family – the parents are EPM's for which candidates will be elected through their political exchanges with voters to win political offices in order serve the people. Once in the political office, GPM and IPM are like twin sons produced for reelection of the winning party to keep the family touch. The relationship between GPM and IPM are like twins brothers – they were born at the same time, engineered by the same parents, and produced with the same genes, i.e., political values. The EPM in Presidential Election will be continued by GPM and IPM in the White House through Permanent Campaign – the political exchanges where the voters cash in with those policy promises made by the candidate. Like the resemblance of twin brothers in appearances, thoughts, and behaviors, GPM and IPM work together hand in hand. A simple logical analysis can lead to that the IPM is the cross-border and cross-culture political exchanges of GPM. They have the same permanent campaign goal for the party or candidates to keep their promises to voters and to win their reelection. For example, in her campaign blueprint book, Hilary Clinton wrote, "We both believe that even if you are 100 percent right, to get things done you still need

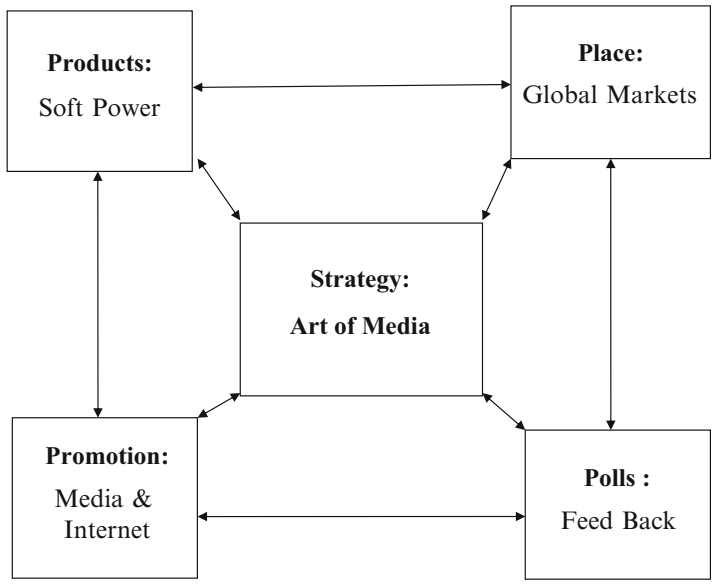
compromise to those who don't agree with you" (Clinton & Kaine, 2016, p. 240). However, the relationship between EPM and IPM is much more complicated due to different interests and exchange time frame just like the generation gap in a family. Unlike the EPM and GPM on domestic policy which has an impact on voters immediately, the IPM on foreign policy usually takes longer distance and time to be felt. For instance, in his 2016 EPM Donald Trump promised to voters that he would withdraw from The TPP and the Paris Accord, both ratified by his predecessor. Once in the White House, "Trump's policy followed his promises. In his first two years, he withdrew from the Paris Climate Accords, rejected the Trans-Pacific-Partnership. . ." and "Trump seems to reject both Bush and Obama doctrines" (Nye, 2020, p. 171). The two examples made a contrary between Clinton's democratic domestic policy and Trump's totalitarian foreign policy. The Triadic Political Marketing Model can analyze Trump's retreat from the international treaties of both Bush's Republican and Obama's Democrat administrations, within the relation between EPM and IPM.

Based the analytical framework of The Triadic Model of Political Marketing, the theoretical definition of International Political Marketing was first made in a research paper presented by Henry Sun at the fourth International Conference on Political Marketing in University of Bucharest, Romania, and in another Sun's article presented at the fifth International Political Marketing Conference at University of Manchester, UK, and then published on Journal of Public Affairs (Sun, 2007, 2008b). Upon some review on the publication of books and journals from relevant fields of political marketing, political management, public affairs, soft power, public diplomacy, foreign policy, political communication, global marketing, and international relations, Sun developed and updated the concept of international political marketing as following:

- *International Political Marketing seeks to establish, maintain and enhance long-term relations among nation-states, political actors and organizations, so that the objectives of stakeholders involved are met. This is done by mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises through cross-border and cross-culture marketing strategy and management.*

This definition reflects the interdisciplinary nature of international political marketing. Like the concept of international political communication described by scholars of political communication (McNair 2018), the study of international political marketing can be viewed as part of the global marketing transformation in both practical and academic world (Sun & Bennett, 1988; Sun, 1990). Similarly transformation is seen from political marketing to international political marketing in the trend of globalization when the practitioners are calling for theoretical answers for what, why, who, where, when, and how, like the development of marketing into international marketing in the 1980s. There are comparative studies of political marketing in different countries such as the edited book on Global Political Marketing (Lee-Marshment et al., 2012) and the cross-culture study of voter behavior (Cwalina, Falkowski, & Newman, 2008). However, as mentioned previously, the study of cross-border EPM should be distinguished from the foreign interference in election, such as in the case of Trump's impeachment and other social-media-related accusations. With the classification of the three dimensions in the Triadic Political Marketing Model, the relationship between EPM and IPM can be studied for elections within one country or the election in an international organization such as the UN, EU, and APEC. Under this model of EPM, GPM, and IPM, the management of international political marketing can be studied and the relationship between international political marketing and soft power can be explained.

Chart II is a model of international political marketing and soft power, which illustrates the relationship between the two interacting concepts. According to this Model, any organization can form international political marketing strategies with Art of Media to manage the International Political Marketing Mix of four Ps: Product of soft power, place in the global markets, promotion through media and internet, and polls for



Soft Power and International Political Marketing, Chart II International Political Marketing Mix, by H. Sun

feedback. With the Soft Power Indexes, the product, can be tested not only as a result of international political marketing, but also a wielding tool, through its attraction and persuasion, impacting on the negotiation power in the political exchange, just like the compounded interest increases the valuation in the financial exchange. The place of the globalized political market consists of interest groups, nation-states, and international organizations; the promotion is through conventional media outlets and social media through the Internet; and the polls are feedback on the efficiency of international political marketing and the impact on soft power. The Art of Media is a study of international political marketing management, including the ancient leadership philosophy and power exchange theory and modern sciences and technology, such as political choice behavior, communication psychology, big data, social media, and Internet of Things, which is a subject for future research.

The above model and analysis reveals the interaction between international political marketing and soft power. In addition, the soft power exchange can be affected by hard power in both positive and negative ways. The combination of both hard power and soft power, as smart power, will also fit into the discussion of the above model. Like the national image or reputation, soft power as a product will not sell itself, but the wield of soft power will increase its influence on political exchanges. In other words, soft power can be viewed as both a product of international political marketing and the resource that strengthens the negotiating position in the political exchange process. As stated previously, power exchange is the essence of international political marketing and its currency is the credibility of stakeholders: nation-states, political actors, and organizations. For example, activists groups wish to exchange through the Paris Accord for their environmental protection goals, the World Health Organization calls for cooperations from all member countries to join force fighting pandemics, and individual leader wields their powers to negotiate for the political exchanges with foreign countries as the so-called Quid Pro Quo in Trump's Impeachment. The Triadic Model of Political Marketing is an analytic tool for the end result of any political exchange – getting the votes in an election, opinion poll, or public referendum – which goes one step further than political communication for the attraction and persuasion of soft power.

With today's communication technology, soft power can be the power of attraction through Internet, social media, and big data. In his book *Power in the Global Information Age,* Ney analyzes the US foreign policy through the

information revolution post-Cold War (Nye, 2004b). The globalization and information explosion provides both opportunity, e.g., accessibility, and threat, e.g., fake news, to the development of soft power and international political marketing application. Similarly, Bruce Newman once points out that the rapid growth of the Internet and the communication infrastructure has made it possible for political marketing to become the tool for politicians, political parties, interest groups, and even governments worldwide (Zhao & Sun, 2008). With the advanced communication technology, soft power and international political marketing interacts much closer through Internet. The International Political Marketing Mix makes the wielding of soft power much more efficiently. Nation-states and interest groups set up their websites as a new market place to promote two-way political exchanges: soft power products with the polls for public opinion feedback. Social media makes it possible for everyone with Internet access to become a publisher, to join the political exchange process, and to maintain the desired political relations.

Joseph Nye points out that to win the peace is much harder than to win a war, and "soft power is essential to win the peace" (Nye, 2004a, XII). International political marketing is the vehicle of winning peace through attraction, communication, and exchange. The international political marketing strategy, Art of Media combining the ancient wisdoms with today's communication technologies, will facilitate all stakeholders to win peace and to avoid war.

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- ▶ Digital Marketing
- ▶ Political Marketing
- ▶ Power

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