

Public communication as a soft power tool: A theoretical approach to building the civilizational image of states

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Abstract---This study aims to analyze the relationship between public communication and soft power, and to highlight its role as a strategic mechanism in building the civilizational image of states. The study adopts a conceptual approach to both public communication and soft power. Public communication is considered a tool that connects the state with its citizens, through which various institutions and official bodies seek to disseminate information, guide public opinion, and strengthen trust, thereby ensuring the provision of appropriate public services across different sectors. Meanwhile, soft power is understood as a state's ability to influence others without resorting to hard power, relying instead on cultural, value-based, and media attractiveness. Within this context, the study clarifies the relationship between public communication and soft power, demonstrating that public communication constitutes the operational mechanism through which the components of soft power are translated into effective communication and media practices. The study highlights that public communication represents an effective strategic mechanism for activating states' soft power by improving their image and enhancing their international presence. It also examines the role of public communication in building the civilizational image of states through the dissemination of a structured media discourse based on narratives that reflect national identity, thereby enabling the production of a positive and influential image of states at both regional and international levels. This takes place within a competitive framework among major powers seeking to strengthen their soft power, which has become a priority for safeguarding national security and expanding influence and control. In a specific context, the study refers to Algeria's experience in the field of public communication as a model that seeks to enhance its civilizational image at both regional and international levels through the development of communication discourse and the improvement of the state's image management. This effort coincides with the growing competition witnessed

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regionally and globally, placing the Algerian state and its various institutions before the challenge of strengthening their presence in the international sphere through the logic of soft power. Algeria relies on national assets that enable it to expand its influence, including its historical heritage, strategic geographical location, and the diversity and richness of its local identity.

Keywords---Public Communication, Soft Power, Civilizational Image, Mental Image, Media Discourse, Algeria.

Introduction

The contemporary world, particularly in the post-Cold War era, has witnessed profound transformations in the structure of human communication due to the rapid development of media, information technologies, and communication systems. This evolution has turned the new communication environment into a central space for the production of knowledge, the circulation of values, and the reshaping of collective consciousness. In light of these transformations, the role of the media has expanded beyond merely transmitting news and information and fulfilling its traditional functions. It has become a strategic actor that contributes to shaping intellectual trends and behavioral patterns within societies and influences the balance of power at the international level.

Within this context, the concept of soft power has emerged as one of the most important approaches for explaining the contemporary influence of states, groups, and institutions at national, regional, and international levels. States—the primary actors in building and promoting their civilizational image—employ elements of cultural, value-based, and communicative attractiveness to strengthen their presence across multiple and interconnected levels, with the aim of extending influence, control, and impact on public opinion. Public communication is among the most prominent tools used by states to activate this form of power by constructing a strategic discourse that reflects their civilizational identity and enhances their image within their environment.

Public communication occupies a central position among the fundamental pillars shaping global perceptions of states and has become a key arena of symbolic competition among them. With the rise of media globalization and the growing influence of digital platforms, governments and institutions increasingly utilize media, public diplomacy, and cultural industries to construct a civilizational image that reflects their values, history, and status on the international stage. Consequently, understanding the relationship between public communication and soft power has become an important academic field for explaining the mechanisms of civilizational influence in the contemporary era.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to provide a theoretical and analytical approach that highlights the role of public communication as a strategic tool for activating soft power and building the civilizational image of states amid growing competition for symbolic influence. It also seeks to address the various digital transformations that have reshaped patterns of communicative influence and to emphasize the role of public communication in activating Algeria's soft power and promoting its civilizational image within the regional and global arenas.

First: Public Communication – A Conceptual Approach

With the beginning of the 1970s and 1980s, and as a reflection of the transformations that occurred in the relationship between the state and European and Western societies, alongside the reforms launched by governments to reshape public governance policies, modernize administrative functions, and move toward decentralization,¹ the intellectual foundations of Public Communication gradually emerged.

¹ Bessières, Dominique. "The Definition of Public Communication: From Disciplinary Issues to Changes in Organizational Paradigms." *Communication & Organisation*, no. 35 (2009), p 42.

These foundations can be understood by tracing the historical contexts of its development, which resulted from cumulative political, social, and historical transformations primarily linked to changes in the structure of the state across different periods. These transformations included the shift from ecclesiastical dominance to the modern state, the evolution of Western democracies and the strengthening of citizens' rights, as well as the growing influence of civil society organizations, trade unions, and various social actors on public performance. Such developments contributed to establishing public communication as an institutional practice characterized by strategic, organizational, and administrative rigor.

From this perspective, it is important to move beyond the historical origins of public communication and examine its conceptual dimension as a fundamental step toward understanding this communicative model and the principles upon which it is based. One of the leading theorists in the field of public communication, Pierre Zémor, defines it as the set of official communications based on the exchange and sharing of information of a public nature, aimed at maintaining social bonds within the framework of the responsibilities of public institutions and bodies entrusted with serving the public interest.² This definition emphasizes the official character of public communication as its primary distinguishing feature and stresses that it should be conducted within the framework of public institutions.

In the same context, Zémor argues that communication in the pursuit of public service must avoid serving private interests, which differentiates it from commercial advertising despite certain similarities in objectives. Instead, it should follow a balanced path that combines authenticity, continuity, and proximity to citizens.³ In other words, its mission is to fulfill a communicative function directed toward individuals and society in a manner that promotes the common good and contributes to improving and strengthening the relationship between public administration and citizens.

Zémor's contributions helped establish a number of principles and foundations that characterize public communication and distinguish it from other forms of communication. These include:⁴

Considering the citizen as an active participant in the communication process rather than a passive recipient.

Emphasizing the specificity of public communication and its distinction from other communicative forms.

Highlighting the importance of building a clear institutional identity to enhance the credibility of public institutions.

Upholding the principle that action and achievement should precede communication and publicity in order to ensure credibility.

According to Michel Le Net, and within the same Francophone perspective that seeks to explain the nature of public communication, it is a communicative approach aimed at addressing the problems faced by individuals and society in their relationship with the administrative apparatus to which they belong, such as corruption and bureaucracy. He emphasizes the close connection between this form of communication and citizen participation in development projects, with the objective of enhancing transparency and reinforcing it by recognizing the citizen as the central actor in the communication process. Citizens are viewed as the primary beneficiaries of all projects and plans intended to bring about comprehensive change in public life.⁵ This perspective highlights the role of public authorities as the entities exclusively responsible for safeguarding the public interest and providing appropriate public services to citizens.

² Harmel, Laurent, and Pierre Zémor. "Public Communication." *Politiques et Management Public* 13, no. 2 (1995), p 152.

³ Zémor, Pierre. "Public Communication: The Challenge of Authenticity." *Revue Française d'Administration Publique*, no. 58 (1991), p 187.

⁴ Zémor, Pierre. "Public Communication: The Challenge of Authenticity." *Revue Française d'Administration Publique*, no. 58 (1991), p 195.

⁵ Le Net, Michel. *Public Communication: The Practice of Information Campaigns*. Paris: Les Études de Documentation Française, 1993, p13

In contrast, scientific approaches within the Anglo-Saxon context define public communication as a set of phenomena related to the production, processing, and dissemination of information that reflects public responses and shapes discussions concerning various public issues. This form of communication is not limited to media practices but extends to all actors, including institutions, companies, associations, civil society organizations, and groups active in the public sphere.⁶ This understanding emphasizes the diversity of actors involved in the communication process and the importance of participation by public authorities, individuals, associations, and other stakeholders in achieving the public interest through collaboration, the exchange of ideas, and constructive dialogue aimed at solving problems and improving both the quality of public services and the relationship between administrations and citizens.

Accordingly, public communication can be viewed as a field of knowledge and practice concerned with the production and exchange of information between public institutions and their audiences, with the aim of influencing public opinion, guiding behavior, and building a relationship of trust and continuity between them. This concept is based on several essential components, including the sender (the institution or the state), the message (the communicative content), the channels (traditional and digital media), and the receiver (the public), in addition to feedback mechanisms that allow for the evaluation of communication effectiveness. Public communication is distinguished by its strategic nature, combining information, persuasion, and awareness-raising. It also relies on principles such as transparency, credibility, interaction, and image management. Its role is not limited to the mere transmission of information; rather, it represents an organizational process aimed at building a continuous relationship between public actors and their social environment.

To understand the effectiveness of public communication, it is necessary to analyze its multiple levels, which reflect its geographical, administrative, and functional dimensions. In the academic literature, public communication is generally classified into several levels according to administrative and geographical criteria. A number of researchers and studies in this field identify three main levels, as follows:

Local–Regional Public Communication

Public communication is considered local when it focuses on its use within an institutional framework to achieve various objectives related to promoting and presenting local institutional structures. Through this form of communication, democratic practices are encouraged by involving citizens in decision-making processes and choices concerning public affairs.⁷

In France, this type is referred to as regional public communication. It encompasses communication activities carried out by local authorities and public bodies that are closely linked to territories and institutions. Its purpose is to inform residents about public services. Various local media outlets are employed, including radio stations, television channels, newspapers, and websites whose services target local audiences exclusively.⁸

Researcher Armand Mattelart points to another meaning of the term “regional.” He explains that French public schools abroad, along with educational institutions associated with Protestant and Catholic missions, rely on a variety of communication networks spread across the world, as well as on spheres of influence established and continuously developed by their members in the field of communication.⁹

This perspective suggests that communication, in its cultural and institutional dimensions, can be built upon linguistic and cultural networks that transcend geographical and political borders. Consequently,

⁶ Beauchamp, Michel, et al. *Public Communication and Society: Guidelines for Reflection and Action*. Boucherville, Quebec: Gaëtan Morin Éditeur, 1991, p 04-05.

⁷ Bouchagour, Djamel. “The Role of Local Public Communication in Tourism Development in Algeria’s Inland Cities.” *Communication and Journalism Review*, National Higher School of Journalism and Information Sciences, Algeria, no. 5 (June 2016), p 125.

⁸ Cap’Com. “What Is Public Communication?” Accessed September 13, 2024. Available at: <https://www.cap-com.org/quest-ce-que-la-communication-publique>

⁹ Mattelart, Armand. *The Invention of Communication*. Paris: La Découverte, Pocket Collection, 2011, p 211

what is termed “regional” in public communication does not necessarily remain confined within the internal space of a single state. For example, regional public communication may describe communication among Arabic-speaking countries in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, given their shared language, religion, customs, and traditions. It may also refer to communication among the Maghreb countries, the Sahel countries, or French-speaking Francophone nations.

National Public Communication

This level refers to the practice of public communication by central governmental institutions (ministries, governments, and similar bodies). It is characterized by a broad geographical scope, making it both a significant challenge and a demanding task for those responsible for managing it.¹⁰

In this context, Pierre Zémor emphasizes the distinctive nature of this level, noting that the state and all public institutions, regardless of their type, play a central role in organization, protection, and future preparedness, particularly during critical periods such as major reforms or crises. This role is considered essential in a modern and complex society.¹¹

This highlights the importance of national public communication, which is distinguished by the size of its target audience, the responsibilities assigned to it, the difficulty of controlling communication messages and selecting appropriate channels, and its crucial role in delivering comprehensive public services to all citizens across cities, regions, and rural areas. These characteristics explain why financial, organizational, and administrative costs at the national level are considerably higher than those associated with local public communication.

Global–International Public Communication

Global or international public communication represents a level at which public service communication is practiced within a broad and comprehensive framework. It is not constrained by geographical boundaries or the administrative structures of states. Instead, it brings together diverse actors within a common scope whenever they share a common objective.

This level is exemplified by the activities of official international organizations. For instance, the global campaigns conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) provide significant opportunities to enhance awareness and understanding of health-related issues, mobilize support for action, and elevate concerns from local and national levels to the international arena.¹² A clear example is the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 and its spread across countries worldwide. Following its declaration as a global pandemic by the WHO, the organization intensified efforts related to prevention, awareness campaigns, vaccination support, and the implementation of preventive protocols.

This level is not limited to official international communication conducted by organizations such as the United Nations (UN). Rather, it is embedded within a broader logic of interconnected societies and extends beyond the traditional framework of interstate relations. It encompasses multiple domains in which public and private actors communicate to justify their actions, influence public opinion, or manage their image on a global scale.¹³

This development reflects a fundamental transformation in the understanding of public communication at the international level and recognition of its capacity to become a strategic cross-border instrument. It no longer serves merely as a means of information exchange and official relations; it can also contribute to shaping global public opinion and managing the image, legitimacy, and influence of states within the global public sphere.

¹⁰ Reghis, Inas. *Local Public Communication and Its Role in Improving Public Service Delivery*. PhD Dissertation, Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University Sétif 2, 2018–2019, p 100-101

¹¹ Zémor, Pierre. *Public Communication: The Challenge of Authenticity*, p 188–189.

¹² World Health Organization (WHO). “WHO Campaigns.” Accessed September 15, 2024. Available at: <https://www.who.int/ar/campaigns>

¹³ Agbobi, Christian. “International Communication: Current State and Research Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century.” *Perspectives Communication 15, Part II* (2015): 65–84. Accessed September 13, 2024. Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/communiquer/1678>

Conclusion

In general, various theoretical approaches agree that public communication can be divided into three principal levels:

The Local Level, which focuses on communication between local authorities and citizens within the framework of public service delivery and community participation.

The National Level, managed by central state institutions and closely associated with the promotion and implementation of public policies.

The International Level, which encompasses communication between states and public institutions and external actors, taking diverse forms such as global diplomacy and international health-awareness campaigns.

Although this classification is widely recognized, the terminology and content associated with each level may vary according to the political, cultural, and organizational contexts of different societies.¹⁴

Secondly: Soft Power: A Conceptual Approach

The concept of Soft Power is considered one of the most significant theoretical contributions to the field of contemporary international relations. It is primarily associated with the work of the American scholar Joseph Nye, who formulated this concept within a framework aimed at rethinking the nature of power in the international system, particularly following the transformations that accompanied the end of the Cold War, the rise of globalization, and the growing importance of non-traditional actors. This concept was introduced not to replace traditional conceptions of power based mainly on military and economic coercion, but rather to complement them by offering a more flexible perspective that relies primarily on attraction rather than coercion¹.

The theoretical origins of the concept of soft power date back to the early 1990s, when Joseph Nye first introduced the idea in his book *Bound to Lead* (1990). He later refined and elaborated its theoretical foundations and academic dimensions in his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004). According to Nye, soft power is an influential instrument that seeks to achieve objectives through attraction rather than coercion or financial inducements. The term “soft power” naturally evokes its opposite, namely hard power.¹⁵ This concept highlights an important premise: states do not rely solely on military or economic power to impose their will; rather, they possess various means through which they can influence others by means of culture and political values.

These means constitute the principal and interconnected sources of soft power through which states seek to enhance their influence within their regional and global environments. They can be summarized as follows:¹⁶

Culture: The extent to which a society’s culture is attractive or unattractive to others. When a society’s culture embodies universal values and its policies promote values and interests shared by others, its ability to achieve desired outcomes increases because of the relationships of attraction and obligation it creates. Conversely, cultures characterized by narrow or exclusive values are less likely to generate soft power.

Political Values: The degree of commitment to these values, whether domestically or internationally, in times of peace or war. Values that a government genuinely upholds through its domestic practices—such as democracy—and through cooperation with others in international institutions, as well as through the promotion of peace and human rights in foreign policy, can exert a strong influence on others.

¹⁴ Agbobli, Christian. *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, translated into Arabic by Mohammed Tawfiq Al-Bujairmi, Al-Obeikan Publishing, 1st ed., 2007, pp. 12–14.

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Ibid.*, p. 32 and following pages.

Foreign Policy: The nature of a state's foreign policy and the extent of its legitimacy and voluntary acceptance by other states and peoples, thereby enhancing the state's international standing.

In this context, the theoretical literature clearly distinguishes between soft power and hard power. While hard power relies on coercive instruments such as military force and economic sanctions to secure compliance and acceptance, soft power is based on attraction and persuasion without the use of violence or direct pressure. Consequently, the former is founded on coercion, whereas the latter is based on voluntary acceptance.¹⁷

Accordingly, it can be said that soft power represents a qualitative shift in understanding international relations. Power is no longer measured solely by military and economic capabilities, but also by a state's ability to influence minds through culture, values, and policies. This makes the concept an important analytical framework for understanding the new dynamics of contemporary global politics. Soft power is based on the principle of attraction rather than coercion, where behavior is shaped through persuasion and by influencing desires and perceptions. It thus reflects a state's ability to produce a positive image of itself within the international system, enhancing its status and influence without resorting to traditional pressure tools. In the medium and long term, this contributes to the construction of the civilizational image of states.

Third: The relationship between public communication and soft power

The relationship between public communication and soft power is a complementary one. Both concepts share the general objective of influencing others without resorting to coercion or hard power, although they differ in the level of analysis and the nature of the tools used. From the above review of the fundamental concepts of both, it can be argued that public communication represents one of the most important operational mechanisms that translates soft power into practical action on the ground, while soft power constitutes the strategic framework that gives public communication its purpose, with a focus on forms of public communication that extend beyond the state's borders to regional and global levels, allowing it to be embodied within the context of international relations.

The concept of soft power, as formulated by the scholar Joseph Nye, is based on the ability of a state or international actor to influence the behavior of others through attraction rather than coercion, using elements such as culture, political values, and credible foreign policies. In other words, soft power is fundamentally built on the capacity to persuade and generate voluntary acceptance and satisfaction among foreign audiences. However, this power cannot be exercised directly or automatically; it requires intermediary tools that transmit messages, construct an image, and build trust. Here, the role of public communication becomes evident.

Public communication is understood as the set of communication activities carried out by governments or official institutions with the aim of addressing internal and external audiences and influencing their perceptions and attitudes toward public policies or the image of the state. This form of communication relies on media channels, communication campaigns, and media diplomacy. Public communication is not limited to the transmission of information; it goes further by constructing meanings and guiding public perception, which makes it a key instrument in shaping international perceptions.

The relationship between the two concepts is manifested in the fact that public communication is the primary operational means for activating soft power, which expresses what a state wants to be in the eyes of others, while public communication answers the question of how this is presented to others and how they are persuaded of it. In other words, soft power represents the symbolic content or asset of the state, whereas public communication represents the channel through which this asset is transmitted and strategically employed. A state may possess an attractive culture, a stable political model, or

¹⁷ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Future of Power*, New York: PublicAffairs, 2011, pp. 14–15.

development achievements, but these elements do not become an effective form of power unless they are marketed and presented through effective public communication.

On the other hand, the success of soft power depends on the quality of public communication in terms of credibility, coherence, and continuity. Inconsistent or unconvincing public communication can weaken soft power rather than strengthen it, because international audiences have become more critical and more capable of verifying information in the context of the digital revolution. Therefore, building soft power requires a communicative discourse that is consistent with the actual reality of policies and behaviors, rather than a purely promotional discourse detached from practice.

In addition, technological development and the emergence of new media have deepened this relationship. Public communication has become more interactive and less one-way, which has expanded the scope of soft power influence. Digital diplomacy, communication campaigns through social media platforms, and direct engagement with global public opinion are all tools that have made public communication more capable of shaping perceptions and enhancing the cultural and political attractiveness of states.

It can be said that soft power represents the long-term strategic level that defines a state's image and position in the international system, while public communication represents the tactical and applied level that translates this image into tangible messages and communicative actions. The relationship between them is not unidirectional; rather, it is a relationship of mutual influence. Effective public communication can enhance soft power, while at the same time strong soft power facilitates public communication and grants it greater credibility among target audiences.

It is evident that public communication and soft power are two complementary elements in building modern state influence. While soft power provides the cultural, political, and value-based foundation of attractiveness, public communication transforms this foundation into carefully designed messages and communication strategies that influence public perception and reshape the state's image on the international stage. Ultimately, the effectiveness of any soft power policy remains dependent on the professionalism and efficiency of the public communication system that supports it.

Fourth: Public Communication as a Strategic Mechanism for Activating Soft Power

Communication practices have undergone profound transformations in recent decades, shifting from a traditional media model based on one-way broadcasting—originally grounded in the classical functions of media embodied in Harold Lasswell's famous "five questions"¹⁸ to more complex models based on strategic and interactive communication. In this context, communication is no longer merely a tool for transmitting information; it has become a means of influence, meaning construction, and perception management, directly intersecting with the logic of soft power.

This transformation coincided with the emergence of the concept of public diplomacy¹⁹, which refers to states communicating with foreign publics rather than relying solely on official diplomatic channels, thereby enhancing their ability to influence international public opinion indirectly.

In this context, media emerges as a central actor in shaping the civilizational influence of states. Its role is no longer limited to reporting news; it now contributes to constructing mental images and shaping

¹⁸ Communication, according to Harold Lasswell's classical model, is analyzed through five questions: Who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect? It is one of the foundational models for studying communication, dividing the process into sender, message, channel, audience, and effect.

Harold D. Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society" in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, ed. Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 84.

¹⁹ Public diplomacy refers to a state's communication with foreign publics in order to build positive relations and influence foreign public opinion. It is considered a tool of soft power, relying on culture, education, media, and international exchange to promote mutual understanding and trust between states. Diplo Foundation. "Types of Diplomacy." Accessed September 13, 2024. Available at: <https://www.diplomacy.edu/topics/types-of-diplomacy/#public-diplomacy>

collective representations at the global level. This role is further reinforced by the findings of a seminal study by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, published in 1972 (“The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media”), one of the foundational works of agenda-setting theory. This study, conducted during the 1968 U.S. presidential election in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, aimed to understand the influence of the media on public opinion during a major political event in the United States by testing the hypothesis that the media influences what audiences perceive as important issues through the prioritization of coverage. This revisits an earlier idea proposed by Cohen that the media may not tell us what to think, but rather what to think about²⁰

According to agenda-setting theory, the power of the media lies in its ability to define which issues appear most important to the public through emphasis and repetition. Thus, when international media outlets select certain issues and highlight specific angles of analysis, they place these issues at the top of global public opinion agendas. As a result, public perceptions of states and their policies are shaped; a country whose news is extensively covered in a positive framing may be perceived positively, and vice versa. This reflects the role of media in directing global attention and influencing the image of states among international audiences. Here, the importance of public communication emerges as a mechanism for coordinating media messages and ensuring their consistency with the state’s strategic objectives, thereby enhancing its ability to build soft power abroad.

The interaction between public communication and public diplomacy is manifested in their shared objective of promoting the international image of states. Public institutions rely on carefully designed communication strategies to present themselves as trustworthy and influential actors within the international system. This requires the production of communicative discourse that reflects national values and highlights achievements, while taking into account the specificities of target audiences. This makes public communication a key instrument in supporting diplomatic efforts and strengthening states’ international presence.

The concept of media diplomacy emerges as one of the key manifestations of this shift, as it refers to the use of international media as both a medium and a tool for managing a state’s image and influencing foreign public opinion*.²¹ This form of diplomacy is based on controlling and directing media messages in ways that serve strategic interests, whether through official channels or transnational media outlets. This dimension represents a practical extension of the use of public communication in activating soft power, especially in light of increasing competition to influence states and societies.

At another level, influence strategies associated with soft power rely on what is known as symbolic influence, which is based on constructing media narratives capable of persuading audiences and shaping their perception. Narratives are not merely stories; they are tools for producing meaning and reshaping symbolic reality, through which certain values are highlighted while others are marginalized. Persuasion and trust-building constitute essential elements for the success of public communication, as influence cannot be achieved without credibility. International reputation management also plays a central role in consolidating a positive and stable image of the state in the minds of global audiences.

Regarding the tools of communicative soft power, they are diverse and include international media, which is one of the most prominent means of transmitting messages and influencing external audiences, in addition to cultural industries that contribute to the dissemination of values and lifestyles, such as cinema and music. Digital communication also stands out as a modern and highly influential tool, as social media platforms have enabled unprecedented opportunities for direct interaction with global audiences. Furthermore, cultural promotion relies on highlighting heritage and national identity as a

²⁰ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, “The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Research: Twenty-Five Years in the Marketplace of Ideas,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 2 (Spring 1993): p. 58.

²¹ Lippmann, Walter. *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921, p 20-21

means of attraction and influence, thereby enhancing the state's presence in the international sphere and strengthening its capacity to exercise soft and sustainable power.

It can be said that public communication is no longer merely an administrative function; it has become a comprehensive strategic mechanism for activating soft power through the use of media, narrative construction, trust-building, and international image management, enabling states to achieve their objectives in an international environment characterized by complexity and intense competition over symbolic influence.

Fifth: Public Communication and the Construction of States' Civilizational Image

The construction of states' civilizational image is one of the strategic dimensions included in the use of public communication to enhance international presence. State influence is no longer measured solely by material capabilities, but also by the ability to produce an attractive and influential civilizational image in global perception. In this context, the concept of civilizational image refers to the comprehensive representations formed by peoples about the identity of a given state, including its culture, values, way of life, and level of development. It differs from the mental image, which is often partial and limited, and from the stereotypical image, which is reductive and simplistic, as the civilizational image is more comprehensive, deeper, and reflects a long-term cumulative construction.

Media discourse emerges as a central tool in shaping this civilizational perception, as its role is not limited to reporting facts but extends to producing meaning and constructing the cultural symbolism associated with states. Through mechanisms of selection and framing, media contributes to highlighting certain aspects of reality while obscuring others, thereby influencing how international audiences perceive a state's identity and status. The experience of South Africa illustrates how media can serve as a strategic tool in building a state's image and enhancing its international standing. Through the use of media discourse focused on values of peace, development, human rights, and democracy, the country was able to overcome its negative image associated with apartheid and build positive relations with peoples, thereby strengthening its regional and global role. In this regard, public communication²² intersects with this function by directing media messages in ways that reflect cultural values and enhance a positive image.

Media narratives play a crucial role in the construction of international status, as they serve as a means of reshaping the mental representations of peoples. Narratives do not merely transmit events; rather, they construct integrated stories that reflect a particular worldview and contribute to the consolidation of stable mental images about states. Through these narratives, countries can enhance their international presence and present themselves as positive and influential actors, which makes public communication a strategic tool for managing and directing these narratives.

Cultural diplomacy is also considered one of the most prominent tools for building a civilizational image, as it relies on disseminating national culture and strengthening cultural exchange with other peoples. Through this form of diplomacy, states seek to present themselves in an attractive manner based on shared values and openness, thereby enhancing their capacity to influence international perception. This dimension represents a practical extension of Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, where culture constitutes one of the most important sources of attractiveness.

The role of cultural and creative industries in this context cannot be overlooked, as they have become effective tools for transmitting a civilizational image and enhancing the symbolic influence of states. Cinema, media, the arts, and cultural tourism constitute key channels for spreading values and lifestyles, contributing to the construction of a positive and sustainable image among global audiences. The

²²Salh, Slimane. "Media Diplomacy: How Can Media Be Used to Build a State's Global Standing?" Al Jazeera, January 26, 2023.

Accessed September 15, 2024. Available at: <https://shortlink.uk/1rzvh>

experiences of many countries have shown that investing in these industries can enhance their international status and strengthen their presence in the global cultural space.

Accordingly, it becomes clear that public communication constitutes a fundamental pillar in building the civilizational image of states, through the use of media discourse, the management of narratives, the strengthening of national identity, and the activation of cultural tools. This enables the production of an integrated image that reflects values and supports international presence within a competitive framework based on attractiveness and symbolic influence.

Sixth: Public Communication in Algeria and its Role in Building the State's Civilizational Image

Public communication in Algeria represents one of the key components in managing the relationship between the state and society, and it is also a strategic tool in building the country's civilizational image at both the domestic and international levels. This field has witnessed significant development in light of the political and media transformations that the country has experienced, particularly with media liberalization and the growing importance of communication in public governance. In this context, public communication is no longer merely an administrative function; it has become a means of promoting transparency and strengthening trust, in addition to its role in highlighting elements of national identity in the international sphere.

Public communication in Algeria is characterized by a plurality of actors, where official institutions, public media outlets, and independent bodies share responsibility for producing and directing communicative discourse. This discourse aims to present a coherent image of the Algerian state, based on historical, cultural, and civilizational elements such as the revolutionary legacy, cultural diversity, and African and Mediterranean depth. However, the effectiveness of this discourse remains dependent on the extent of its coherence with actual practices, as the gap between discourse and practice may negatively affect the credibility of the image presented.

Within the framework of building the civilizational image, public media plays a central role in conveying Algeria's image abroad through the coverage of national and international events, highlighting development achievements, and promoting national culture. However, this role faces multiple challenges, including competition from international media, limited external reach, and digital transformations that have imposed new forms of communication requiring more flexible and innovative strategies.

Public communication in Algeria also contributes to supporting cultural diplomacy efforts by promoting national heritage, such as traditional arts, cultural festivals, and historical heritage. These elements are effective tools for enhancing the country's civilizational attractiveness, especially when they are employed within communication strategies directed at international audiences. Therefore, the importance of integration between cultural and media institutions emerges in order to ensure the presentation of a comprehensive image that reflects the diversity of Algerian identity.

On the other hand, digital communication emerges as one of the modern approaches to strengthening Algeria's civilizational image, as social media platforms have provided new opportunities for direct interaction with audiences and for conveying a real-time and diverse image of Algerian reality. However, the use of these tools still requires further development in terms of content and strategy in order to ensure an effective impact on international perception, particularly in light of increasing competition in the digital space.

Accordingly, it can be said that public communication in Algeria possesses significant potential to contribute to building a positive civilizational image. However, achieving this objective requires the adoption of a comprehensive strategic vision based on coordination among various actors, the

enhancement of credibility, and the effective use of digital and cultural tools, enabling Algeria to strengthen its presence in the international arena within the logic of soft power.

Conclusion

Public communication has become a fundamental pillar in building the image of modern states. It is no longer limited to the transmission of information; rather, it has evolved into a strategic tool for managing international reputation and strengthening the symbolic presence of the state in the global sphere. Its effectiveness is closely linked to its ability to produce a balanced media discourse that reflects the state's values and achievements. In contrast, soft power cannot be achieved independently of public communication; instead, it relies on it as an operational mechanism capable of transforming values, culture, and public policies into effective messages that help attract others and build relationships based on acceptance and non-coercive influence. Therefore, the integration of both concepts constitutes a foundation for building a sustainable civilizational image of the state.

In the Algerian context, the development of an organized and effective public communication system could enhance Algeria's international standing by highlighting its developmental and civilizational efforts and improving its media presence in the global space. Hence, investing in this field is of strategic importance as a means to strengthen the state's soft power in its regional and global environment. To achieve this, the study presents a set of recommendations that could make Algeria more influential and impactful, through the organized and effective use of public communication as an important tool for enhancing the state's soft power:

The need to develop public communication strategies based on transparency in information dissemination, using appropriate modern communication technologies.

Strengthening coordination between media institutions and official bodies to ensure a unified and effective media discourse, in light of increasing information competition on digital platforms and intensified propaganda and disinformation campaigns.

Investing in media and training competencies to improve the quality of public communication, while linking it to national strategies that enhance Algeria's presence beyond local public communication with limited influence directed mainly at the national community.

Expanding the use of digital media to strengthen the state's presence in the international media space.

Supporting academic research on the relationship between public communication and soft power in the Algerian context.

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