

The Influence Of “Soft Power” On Youth In The Youth Policy Of The New Uzbekistan

Turayev Diyorbek Niyatullo o‘g‘li

Uzbekistan University of Journalism and Mass Communications

Student, Faculty of Political Science

alimardonturayev0821@gmail.com | ORCID: [009-0006-9798-7375]

Abstract. This article analyses the impact of external “soft power” factors on the values, worldview, and national identity of youth within the framework of the youth policy of the New Uzbekistan. The study is theoretically grounded in J. Nye's concept of soft power. The empirical part draws on a sociological survey of 133 respondents. The findings show that Uzbek youth intensively consume foreign cultural products - over 84% engage with foreign content daily while the native language, family traditions, and religious values retain a stable position. This indicates the emergence of a “selective globalisation” model that combines global and national elements. The paper concludes by proposing strategic responses based not on isolation but on creating competitive national content.

Keywords: Soft power, youth policy, national identity, globalisation, Hallyu (Korean Wave), value system, glocalisation, cultural diplomacy, New Uzbekistan.

Introduction

The 21st century is a period of rapid development of globalization processes. In today's system of international relations, competition among states is increasingly taking place not through military or economic means, but through cultural and information mechanisms. As a result of the development of global communication technologies, the spread of the internet, and the expansion of transnational media platforms, the opportunities for influencing the consciousness of young people have grown to an unprecedented degree. Today, a state's international prestige is determined not only by its economic or military power, but also by the positive image it is able to create in the minds of citizens of other countries and by its cultural appeal. It is precisely for this reason that the concept of "soft power" has become one of the central categories in contemporary political science, international relations, and youth-policy research. This concept was introduced into scholarly use by the American scholar Joseph Nye in 1990¹, and was subsequently developed into a coherent theoretical framework². Nye distinguishes between two forms of power: "hard power," which relies on military threat and economic pressure, and "soft power," which relies on the attractive influence of culture, ideas, and values. Nye identifies three sources of soft power: culture that is attractive to others; political values that a state lives up to; and a foreign policy that is regarded as legitimate and morally authoritative³. In the contemporary period, culture, education, mass media, cinema, music, and digital platforms have become the most effective instruments of soft power. Youth constitute the most active audience for this influence, since their value system is still in the process of formation.

In the conditions of the New Uzbekistan, youth issues have been recognized as one of the priority directions of state policy⁴. The fact that youth make up a large proportion of the population is increasing their role in political, economic, and cultural life, turning youth policy into a strategic factor of national development. The "Uzbekistan - 2030" development strategy identifies the acquisition of quality education, the mastery of foreign languages, and the strengthening of ideological immunity among youth as one of its principal tasks⁵.

However, globalization brings not only new opportunities but also complex challenges to the consciousness of youth. Foreign mass-culture products and transnational media content have a considerable impact on young people's worldview; at the same time, integration into the global information space also serves to develop their

¹Nye, J. S. (1990). *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. New York: Basic Books.

²Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

³Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

⁴Mirziyoyev, Sh. M. (2021). *Yangi O‘zbekiston strategiyasi [New Uzbekistan Strategy]*. Tashkent: O‘zbekiston.

⁵Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the "Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy. PF-158. Tashkent, 2023.

scientific potential and innovative thinking. It follows that it is not correct to assess external cultural influences as purely negative or purely positive; what matters is determining the degree to which they are compatible with national interests.

The relevance of the study lies in the fact that the question of how external soft-power instruments are received among Uzbek youth, and their impact on national identity, has not yet been sufficiently studied empirically. In most works, soft power is analyzed only from the standpoint of international politics. The purpose of the study is to analyze the impact of external soft-power factors on the values and identity of youth in the context of the youth policy of the New Uzbekistan, and to develop effective strategic response mechanisms. The hypothesis of the study is as follows: although global cultural influences are intensifying, national identity, language, and traditional values retain their stable position; consequently, the priority task of youth policy should not be measures of isolation, but rather the creation of a competitive cultural environment through the promotion of national values in modern forms.

Methodology

The methodological basis of the study is a comprehensive approach relying on the integration of political science, sociology, cultural studies, and international relations. The work employed the methods of systemic analysis, comparative analysis, content analysis, sociological survey, and statistical generalization. The theoretical-methodological core of the study was formed by J. Nye's concept of soft power⁶; from this standpoint, foreign cultural products, mass media, social networks, and film and music culture were examined as the principal instruments of soft power.

The empirical study was carried out on the basis of an online survey conducted via the Google Forms platform, in which a total of 133 respondents took part. The majority of participants were young people between the ages of 17 and 22. Women made up 66.2 percent of respondents and men 32.3 percent; the majority were students studying in social-humanitarian fields.

The survey consisted of five thematic blocks: demographic indicators; the intensity and forms of consumption of foreign cultural products; attitudes toward the national language and culture; the value system and processes of identification; and attitudes toward foreign education and global cultural processes. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were combined in the analysis: responses were summarized in percentage terms on the basis of descriptive statistics, compared by sex, age, and field of education, and the results were then interpreted in relation to theories of soft power and identity.

Results

The empirical data obtained showed that a complex, multilayered relationship exists between global cultural influences and national values among Uzbek youth: processes of globalization and national identification are proceeding in parallel in the consciousness of young people.

In terms of demographic composition, 65.4 percent of participants were between 17 and 19 years old, 27.8 percent between 20 and 22, and 3 percent between 23 and 25. 85.7 percent of respondents were students in social-humanitarian fields, which reflects their reflective attitude toward cultural and social issues. Regarding the consumption of foreign content, 43.6 percent of respondents reported spending less than one hour per day, 40.6 percent one to three hours, and 12 percent three to five hours watching foreign media products. In total, more than 84 percent were found to be in regular daily contact with foreign cultural products - indicating that the information environment of youth is acquiring an increasingly transnational character. In terms of the geography of cultural products, the United States ranked first (31.6%), followed by Turkey (21.8%) and South Korea (15.8%). However, the picture changed with regard to the "strongest source of cultural influence": 43.6 percent of respondents named South Korea, 26.3 percent the United States, and 18 percent Turkey. This discrepancy leads to an important conclusion: although youth consume American products in greater volume, South Korea's influence is felt more strongly in terms of identification and cultural imitation - an effect of the "Hallyu" (Korean Wave) phenomenon.

Regarding the national language, 57.1 percent of respondents reported reading regularly in Uzbek, and 30.1 percent occasionally (more than 87% in total maintaining contact with national literature). 69.2 percent stated that they had no difficulty expressing themselves in their native language. 61.9 percent disagreed with the statement that "perfect knowledge of a foreign language is more important than knowledge of Uzbek,"

⁶Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

while 36.2 percent agreed. This indicates that, while recognizing the importance of foreign languages, young people continue to regard their native language as a core identifying value.

The analysis of the value system produced one of the most significant results: 38.3 percent rated national and family traditions as most important, 26.3 percent religious values, 15 percent personal freedom, 12 percent material well-being, and only 5.3 percent global-citizenship values. This shows the predominance of collective-traditional values, while at the same time indicating that individualistic elements are gradually taking shape. 70.2 percent of respondents believed that Uzbek traditions do not hinder modern development; 57.1 percent do not celebrate foreign holidays at all (Western New Year - 31.1%). In terms of identification, 51.1 percent of respondents said they had no clear role model (historical figures - 18%, religious scholars - 9%, foreign business leaders - 7.5%), indicating a growing identificational pluralism. Pragmatic motives dominate in relation to foreign education: quality education - 38.3%, a diploma - 17.3%, exposure to a new culture - 15.8%, language learning - 10.5%; hence, the primary goal is not migration but the acquisition of knowledge. By sex, the intensity of foreign-content consumption is higher among women (3–5 hours per day: women - 15.9%, men - 4.7%).

Discussion

The results are, first of all, explained through J. Nye's theory of soft power⁷. The fact that respondents regularly consume cultural products from the United States, South Korea, and Turkey shows that these countries are exerting influence on youth through cinema, music, and digital platforms. The recognition of South Korea as the strongest source of influence is of particular significance: a state with relatively limited economic or military power has managed to attract a global audience through the "Hallyu" phenomenon⁸. This confirms that the scope of cultural influence depends not on the size of a state but on the quality and appeal of its cultural output.

The central finding of the study is that, despite the high level of global consumption, no weakening of national identity was observed. This provides grounds for reconsidering certain pessimistic views found in S. Huntington's clash-of-civilizations thesis⁹: globalization does not always lead to the disappearance of national culture, and sometimes even stimulates a renewed awareness of national identity. The strong position of the native language is consonant with B. Anderson's concept of the "imagined community": a shared language is a key factor in shaping national cohesion¹⁰. The analysis of values partly corresponds to R. Inglehart's theory of postmaterialist transformation¹¹: as a society becomes economically more stable, it shifts from an emphasis on material security toward values of self-expression. Uzbek youth currently occupy an intermediate stage combining traditional and modern values. The lack of a clearly defined role model recalls the identity transformations described by M. Castells within the conditions of the "network society"¹²: in digital space, a single ideal image is replaced by multiple, changeable models. This corresponds to S. Hall's interpretation of identity as a process that is never complete but is constantly being formed¹³, and should be understood not as a crisis, but as an adaptive worldview.

Most importantly, the consumption of foreign culture is not leading to full assimilation: young people selectively adopt its elements and combine them with national values. This process corresponds to what R. Robertson has described as "glocalization" — the adoption of global elements adapted to the local environment¹⁴. It represents a tendency running counter to G. Ritzer's thesis of "McDonaldization" (global homogenization)¹⁵. In this sense, a model of "selective globalization" is taking shape among Uzbek youth:

⁷Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

⁸Jin, D. Y. (2016). *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

⁹Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

¹⁰Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

¹¹Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹²Castells, M. (1996). *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

¹³Hall, S. (1990). Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 222–237.

¹⁴Robertson, R. (1995). *Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity*. In *Global Modernities*. London: SAGE, pp. 25–44.

¹⁵Ritzer, G. (1993). *The McDonaldization of Society*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.

certain elements of global culture are being adopted while the core of national identity is preserved. These findings offer an important strategic conclusion for youth policy: the most effective response to external soft power is not prohibition or isolation, but the creation of competitive national content and the promotion of national values through modern communication tools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the study show that a complex balance between globalization and national identity is taking shape in the consciousness of New Uzbekistan's youth. On the one hand, external soft-power instruments - particularly South Korean and American cultural products are actively influencing young people's worldview; on the other hand, the national language, family values, and religious traditions retain their priority position. This testifies to the operation of a "selective globalization" model. The hypothesis has been confirmed.

Maintaining and developing this balance is one of the strategic tasks of youth policy. On the basis of the study, the following recommendations have been developed:

- 1). provide state support for the national film, music, animation, and digital-content industries, and bring them to a competitive level in the global media market;
- 2). increase youth media literacy teaching young people to critically analyze information and evaluate sources;
- 3). promote national values in modern and appealing forms through blogs, video content, and social-media projects;
- 4). expand programs that strengthen the position of the native language and national literature among youth;
- 5). create opportunities for quality education within the country for young people seeking foreign education, and prevent "brain drain."

In conclusion, the future social stability, cultural independence, and intellectual development of the country depend precisely on how successfully this issue is resolved. The strongest response to external cultural influences is not fear or prohibition, but developing one's own culture to meet the demands of the times and making it appealing to young people.

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