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How to Measure Soft Power

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I.   Introduction

This paper provides suggestions on how to properly operationalize soft power and organize the measures into categories that are far more conducive to quantitative analyses. While we mention several existing indexes, analysis concentrates on the best known and most extensively consulted index of soft power: The Soft Power 30 Index (2019). So far, the actually measures used for quantitative analysis based on these most popular data sets have been flawed. This paper attempts to illuminate these flaws and prescribes solutions for improving the measures. In this respect, the paper serves as an important prelude to quantitative studies of soft power.

II.   Principal Existing Measures

As the attention on soft power has grown, so have positivist and quantitative social scientists searched for ways of more accurately ascertaining the nature of soft power. As a result, a number of indices have appeared over the past decade. Before composite indexes of soft power existed,

measures were in the form of public opinion survey data on particular countries such as Pew Global Attitudes Survey (McClory 2012. P. 6). The first known such composite index was produced by Monocle magazine in 2010, and the Institute for Government-Monocle Soft Power Index has appeared every year for a number of nations since that year. The Institute for Government, which co-produces the index, explains the methodology of quantification (McClory 2012, pp. 7,8).

The index is composed of five categories: Government, Culture, Diplomacy, Education, and Business/Innovation. The framework of categories was built on a survey of existing literature on soft power.

The sub-indices are as follow:

Diplomacy sub-index

Foreign aid (proportional to Gross National Income))

Foreign aid (Total)

Visa free travel

Number of cultural missions

Number of embassies

Number of embassies and consulates

The total number of permanent diplomatic missions to multilateral organisations

The total number of international/multi-lateral organisations of which a country is a member

Number of environmental treaties signed

Number of asylum seekers

Government sub-index

UN HDI Score

Government effectiveness

Individual freedom

Democratic institutions

Think-tank presence

Shadow economy

Violence in society

Government
accountability

Capital punishment

Trust in government

Income inequality (GINI)

Culture sub-index

Tourism

Tourism spending

Reach of state
sponsored media outlet

Foreign
correspondents

Language power

Olympic profile

Size of music market

Global Record Sales

Art gallery attendance

Number of UNESCO World Heritage
sites located in country

Status in international
football (FIFA)

Film festival success

Education sub-index

Quality of primary and
secondary education
PISA Scores

Number of top universities

Foreign students

Academic publishing

Business/Innovation sub-index

International patents

Business competitiveness

Level of corruption

Innovation index

Foreign investment

Internet connectedness

Subjective expert panel categories

Cultural output (panel)

Quality of national food and drink

Subjective measure of the relative
appeal of cultural icons, e.g. David
Beckham

National airline/airport

(panel)

Global leadership
(panel)

Design/Architecture

The perceived strength of national commercial brands

The Elenco Global Presence Report (2015) quantifies the power of European Union nations as well as the Union itself on a number of categories of power: economic presence, military presence and soft presence. Soft presence is a synonym for soft power and the indices used for the composite index are listed in the report:

Soft Presence Index Components of the Elenco

Migration   *Estimated number of immigrants from outside the EU*

Tourism   *Thousands of arrivals of tourists from outside the EU*

Sports   *Weighted sum of points in the FIFA world ranking and medals won at summer Olympic Games for each EU member state*

Culture   *Extra-EU exports of audiovisual services (cinematographi productions, radio and television programs, and musical recordings)*

Information state   *Maximum internet bandwidth (Mbps) in the EU installed in a member*

Technology   *Foreign-oriented patents for the total EU member States: number of inter-related patent applications filed in one or more foreign countries to protect the same invention*

Science   *Number of European articles, notes, and reviews published in the fields of the arts and humanities, social sciences, and sciences*

Education   *Number of non-EU foreign students in tertiary education in the EU*

Development cooperation   *Total gross flows of official development aid for all member States*

Another well know index is the *Wu Rubric for Soft Power* (Irene S. Wu 2019) that assesses comparative soft power of Russia and China based on four broad indices. The rubric reads:

Soft power is a country's ability to influence the international community by attracting others, instead of by economic leverage or military force.

Soft power is usually thought of in terms of the projection of power- how many movies India made, or how many public diplomacy programs were organized.

What if we flip this around and think instead about how foreigners see a country? What actions do people take if they are attracted to a foreign country? The Wu Rubric for Soft Power provides a framework for this.

- ***Emigration:** If someone emigrates away from home to a country, that is the ultimate decision to see people in the foreign country as "we", not just "they."*
- ***Study Abroad:** When students go abroad they are expressing a serious interest in the foreign country. It's like "following" someone's social media account.*
- ***Visit:** A visit to a country is also an expression of interest. It's analogous to "liking" that foreign country."*
- ***Movie:** Watching a movie from another country is a brief immersion in another culture.*

Wu operationalizes these variables as follows:

Total change in immigrant stock from different nations

Number of foreign students studying abroad

Number of visitors to these nations

Audiences for Chinese co-produced and Russian led movies

The Nanyang Technical College's Center for Emerging Markets (2019) has published a soft power index for emerging market nations. It is based on a conceptual framework of measurement that features four dimensions of soft power.

Dimension 1: Image and Branding

1. TIME's 100 Most Influential People

2. Exports of Audio-Visual Services (Value)

3. Most Admired Companies

4. Olympic Medals

5. Michelin Starred Restaurants

6. University Rankings

Dimension 2: Attraction and Influence

7. Overseas Development Assistance (Reverse indicator)

8. Think-Tank Presence (Number)

9. International Students (Number)

10. Immigration

11. Digital Adoption/Transformation Index Dimension

3: Diplomacy and Outreach

12. Visa Freedom – Visa Restrictions Index

13. Number of Embassies/Consulates Abroad

14. Tourist Arrivals (Volume)

15. Number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Dimension 4: Integrity and Value System

16. Freedom Index

17. Happiness Index

18. Safety Index (World's Safest Countries Index)

19. Voter Turnout

20. Rule of Law

21. Environmental Performance Ind

The most notable and celebrated index is that of the *The Soft Power 30* (2019) index, which issues rankings of soft power for 25 leading nations which cover al parts of the globe. The

results are based on surveys of over 11,000 people and base the over index on a number of indices. The methodology statement on the website reads:

- *The index contains a digital component, developed in collaboration with Facebook, working with their data-science team to create and collect new metrics on countries' digital diplomacy;*
- *The index contains international polling from 25 different countries that provide coverage of every major region of the world;*
- *More than 75 metrics are normalised into comparable data calculating a single score for each country that allow for an overall ranking of global soft power resources.*

DIGITAL	*A country's digital infrastructure and its capabilities in digital diplomacy*
CULTURE	*The global reach and appeal of a nation's cultural outputs, both pop-culture and high-culture*
ENTERPRISE	*The attractiveness of a country's economic model, business friendliness, and capacity for innovation*
EDUCATION	*The level of human capital in a country, contribution to scholarship, and attractiveness to international students*
ENGAGEMENT	*The strength of a country's diplomatic network and its contribution to global engagement and development*
GOVERNMENT	*Commitment to freedom, human rights, and democracy, and the quality of political institutions*

Operationalization of these variables are stated as follows:

Culture

Total number of tourist arrivals
Average spending per tourist (total tourism receipts divided by number of tourists)
Number of films appearing in major film festivals
Number of foreign correspondents in the country
Number of UNESCO World Heritage sites
Annual museum attendance of global top 100
Size of music market
Number of top 10 albums in foreign countries
Number of top 10 albums in foreign countries
Olympic medals (Summer 2016 / Winter 2014
FIFA Ranking (Men's)

Quality of national air carrier
Michelin starred restaurants
Power Language Index (PLI)

Digital

Facebook followers for heads of state (outside of country)
Facebook engagement score for heads of state or government (outside of country)
Facebook followers for ministry of foreign affairs (outside of country)
Facebook engagement score for ministry of foreign affairs (outside of country)
Number of internet users per 100 inhabitants
Secure internet servers per 1 million people
Mobile phones per 100 people
Internet bandwidth thousands Mpbs
Government Online Services Index
E-participation Index
Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 people

Education

Average of OECD PISA science, maths and reading scores
Gross tertiary educational enrolment rate
Number of top global universities
Number of academic science journal articles published
Number of international students in the country
Spending on education as percentage of GDP

Engagement

Total overseas development aid
Number of embassies abroad
Number of embassies in the country
Number of consulates general abroad
Number of permanent missions to multilateral organizations
Membership of international organizations
Environmental treaty signatures
Asylum seekers per 1,000 people
Number of diplomatic cultural missions
Number of countries a citizen can visit visa-free
Size of Weekly Audience of State Broadcaster
Environmental Performance Index (EPI)

Enterprise

Global patents filed (percentage of GDP)
WEF Competitiveness Index
Foreign direct investment as percentage of GDP
Heritage Economic Freedom Index score

Corruption Perceptions Index score
R&D spending as a percentage of GDP
Global Innovation Index score
Number of SMEs as a percentage of labor force working in SMEs
World Bank Ease of Doing Business Report
Unemployment rate as a percentage of labor force
Hi-tech exports as a percentage of manufactured exports
World BankLog of business start-up costs as a percentage of GNI
per capita

Government

Human Development Index score
Freedom House Index score
Number of think tanks in the country
Gender Equality Index score
Economist Democracy Index score
Size of shadow economy as a percentage of GDP
Homicides per capita
World Bank Voice and Accountability Index score
Capital punishment carried out in 2016
Income inequality - Gini coefficient
World Economic Forum Trust in Government Index score
Press Freedom Index score
World Bank Government Effectiveness score
World Bank Good Governance Regulation Quality score
World Bank Good Governance Rule of Law score

III. *Methodological Issues in Measuring Soft Power: Prescriptions for Operationalizing Soft Power in International Relations*

The leading measures of soft power are principally comprised from what we can call latent power resources.[1] These are resources or assets that passively (e.g., religious centers) exert influence on both the people and leaders of other nations. The measures stay close to the variables defined in the literature on soft power. See Table 1.

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[1] The typology (latent, manifest and effective soft power) used here is adapted from Cerny and Trunkos (2018)

Table 1. Sources of Soft Power[2]

International Sources

*Respect for international laws, norms, and institutions

*Fundamental reliance on multilateralism, and disposition against excessive unilateralism

*Respect international treaties and alliance commitments

*Willingness to sacrifice short-run national interests for the collective good

*Liberal foreign economic policies

Domestic Sources

Culture

   *Pronounced Social Cohesion

   *Elevated Quality of Life

   *Freedom

   *Sufficient Opportunities

   *Tolerance

   *Alluring Lifestyle

   *Cultural Primacy and Influence

Political Institutions

   *Democracy

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[2] From Chatin and Gallarotti (2016).

*Constitutionalism

*Liberalism/Pluralism

*A Well-Functioning Government Bureaucracy

Fundamentally the measures pick up all the characteristics that designate a nation as superior. These characteristics reveal a nation that is revered for a plethora of traits that makes it a desirable location to live, visit, or emulate. In other words, the nation stands out as magnet for attracting contacts from other nations and peoples, a role model for leaders and citizens of other nations to emulate, and a location that draws the greatest possible respect and even adoration from the rest of the world.

An obvious issue of methodology arises in the context of hard versus soft power. In some cases, there are confusions with hard power. Foreign aid flows have a very hard component in that there is an element of generating influence through economic power, which is hard. For example, there is a good will component to the distribution of aid, but it is hard to disentangle from hard purchasing power. Moreover, measures of economic, technological, government-operational, and international presence can also reflect a hard power potential in that actual material resources are available to enhance a nation's influence in world affairs. It is interesting that studies of the activation of soft power on the part of states, such as Kurlantzick's (2007) noted work *Charm Offensive*, do not sufficiently emphasize the co-existence of hard and soft power. Both China and South Korea have undertaking what have been widely cited as soft power development initiatives. This is in fact the case, but the economic strategies have been conceptualized within a framework that essentially "feed the machines" in ways that create access to resources and investment (forward contracts, tied aid).

The measures within numerous categories (sub-indices) that make up the various composites undercount in a number of ways. Transborder flows that signify the desirability of particular locations undercount significantly on migratory flows. Immigration measures do not reflect illegal immigrants, nor do they represent potential migrants, people who would like to move their but for various reasons cannot. True measures of desirability would reflect such actual and potential migrants. Of course, such figures would be hard to obtain outside of well-designed surveys in foreign nations. Similarly, visitor statistics understate the desirability of tourism for the same reason. There is a plethora of reasons that people cannot travel to places they desire (visa difficulties, barriers to exit, income constraints). Again, surveys could reveal more reliable measures of tourist attractiveness. Foreign investment, social media connectivity, and study abroad share similar "potential" measurement deficiencies. It is not how much money is invested or how many students study in a nation, or how many Facebook connections that is the most reliable testament to desirability of contact, but the greater potential of contact that would exist if constraints did not exist on this activity (e.g., internet blockages, student quotas, investment barriers). It is the case with most of these measures of actual activity, that there is a deficiency in reliability as testaments to the attractiveness of nations since there is far more potential activity

(in a world of no constraints) than the actual activity that is counted. The actual attractiveness is manifest in whether actors actually want to undertake such activities rather than in whether they actually are able to. Measuring desire rather than flows is tricky, but the issue can be resolved nonetheless. Surveys within certain nations that block demand for global connections would have to be conducted in environments not conducive to scientific access to populations (China, North Korea). But such surveys can be reliable conducted with scientific samples among ex-patriots. This would be true with every variable that systematically undercounts potential contacts with soft power nations.

With respect to politics the measures are biased in favor of liberal democratic values. While there are measures of government effectiveness that would capture soft power in autocracies, there are no measures of leadership qualities nor of government responses to crises. The lack of measures that would buttress power ranking in autocracies creates an under-counting of soft power outside of liberal democracies. Certainly, the deficiencies in liberal democratic measures in Russia and China would be counter balanced by the respect their leaders have obtained in guiding these countries out of crisis and poverty. Reliable measures would reveal data that captures soft influence in a diversity of political regimes.

Sports measures also undercount national athletic prestige. Focusing on soccer and the Olympics overlooks the great sports achievements in a diversified context. Sports prestige is created by great success across sports. Many nations excel in sports that are different from soccer and Olympic events (baseball, swimming, basketball, tennis, skiing, etc). Being the very best in the world in any mainstream sport garners far more respect than average performances in the Olympics of World Cup soccer. Such measures are quite easy to obtain and could be operationalized under a variable of sports excellence.

A major challenge in the measures of soft power is standardization and weighting. It is impossible to tell precisely what levels of relative influence exist among the measures without weighting the data. This could generate standard measures across the variables that help us determine their relative influence. Is cultural power more influential than digital connections? Does religious influence dominate the impact of ethnic recognition? Hence, how does Saudi Arabia's influence as center of the Muslim world measure up to the influence it generates as the center of the Arab world? The Soft Power 30 runs regression on a dependent variable constructed from surveys of the favorability toward a country. This generates figures for relative impact across variables that help us differentiate relative influence among soft power sub-indices. This is most helpful.

Furthermore, some variables show characteristics of both enhancing and diminishing soft power. Russia's Putin, for example, scores lowly on the liberal-democratic dimension of soft power, but rates highly among measures that rank perceptions of leadership. A net measure on political leadership would factor in all the power dynamics and generate a more reliable leadership score. Such net estimation is the only way to arrive at net soft power measures. Net soft power measures are those measures of soft power that are produced when factoring all of the interaction among relevant variables. This means discounting influence based on characteristics that diminish soft power. In many cases the Soft Power 30 variables pick up these net effects

(e.g., the World Bank Government Effectiveness Index may pick up some of Putin's leadership effect), but there is much missing in terms of net effects. Nothing in the "Government" sub-indices picks up the diminishing power effects of Russian hacking American elections or the invasion of Crimea. Moreover, there is nothing that adequately picks up perceptions of American soft power influenced by Trump's presidency. The deficiencies in net estimation reveals a more general limitation of the Soft Power measures: they are not sufficiently dynamic. Many of the sub-indices measure properties that do not change much from year to year (e.g., government institutions and cultural sites). Hence, more dynamic effects such as school shootings, the short-term actions of leaders, foreign policy shocks, are not sufficiently factored in, but should be.

Another methodological issue with measurement has to do with target of impact, which deals with the issue of classification discussed below. Measures could be disaggregated and organized based on the actors over which the soft power assets have influence. For example, "cultural" assets would strongly affect perceptions on the part of larger populations or civil society directly, but affect political leaders more indirectly. Measures of "government" assets would have an opposite effect in that they would have a greater direct impact on leadership, and somewhat less direct effect on civil society. UNESCO cultural sites would make a nation stand out in the lives of civil society (i.e., encourage tourism to the nation), but be of somewhat less relevance to the day to day functions of national leaders and decisionmakers. Diplomatic presence on the other hand enters into the daily lives of national leaders but has far less direct relevance to civil society. In terms of perceptions, all of the soft power assets have an impact on the human psychology, irrespective of targets, but in terms of direct and indirect effects the measures represent assets that influence different actors in different ways. This suggests possible recategorizations based on targets of impact. You may distinguish soft power assets based on whether they affect perceptions (human psychology) versus whether they have a direct impact on peoples' every day actions. Similarly, as stated, you could distinguish between assets that affect civil society versus those that affect national leaders. You could also disaggregate within categories. For example, you could distinguish which national leaders and officials are affected by soft power assets. Diplomatic resources would directly affect foreign functionaries, while "government effectiveness" might be something that affects high level decisions involving heads of state on questions of forming alliances. Furthermore, the targets could be enlarged to include many other specific groups that are influenced by specific assets. Educators and academics would be more likely affected by assets under the categories of education, the business community would be strongly influenced by economic measures and political corruption. Activist groups would be more tuned into national characteristics involving human rights and political freedoms. Celebrities and performers would be tied into information pertaining to entertainment prowess. The number of possible recategorizations of targets could go far further than these suggestions.

Finally, the measures in the leading indexes of soft power are a mix of the three manifestations of soft power.[3] When doing quantitative studies of the impact of soft power, they must be separated out. They are mostly measures of passive soft power, which could function as

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[3] Here we rely on the tripartite classification introduced by Trunkos and Cerny (2018).

independent variables in quantitative studies (religious centers, landmarks, corruption indexes, freedom indexes, human rights indexes, environmental performance indexes). These represent characteristics that are valued by other nations but are not usually orchestrated by leaders of the soft power nation to generate influence. There are other measures that could also be independent variables in quantitative studies of the influence of soft power. These would be active measures taken by governments to enhance their soft influence: for example, the number of missions that nations place in foreign nations, or the number of international treaties signed.[4] The third type of measure that are prevalent in these indexes are measures that are more representative of the actual impact of soft power assets on other nations. More specifically, these represent measures of the actualization or the influence of soft power. Such variables would serve nicely as dependent variables in quantitative studies of soft power. For example, such measures would be the number of refugees or immigrants, or the size of movie audiences. The measures of the Soft Power 30 Index are reclassified in Table 2 so as to disaggregate measures of soft power across these three functional types. Such a classification is better adapted to quantitative analysis of the causes and effects of soft power in international relations. Since such quantitative analysis keys on inferential statistics about causal relationships involving soft power, a classification which distinguishes between independent variables as passive and active, and that distinguishes between soft power sources as dependent and independent variables, would be most valuable for identifying causal effects involving soft power resources.

Table 2: A Proposed Classification of the Measures of Soft Power

Independent Variables: Passive Soft Power[5]

Culture

Number of UNESCO World Heritage sites
Olympic medals (Summer 2016 / Winter 2014
FIFA Ranking (Men's)
Quality of national air carrier
Michelin starred restaurants
Power Language Index (PLI)

Digital

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[4] Trunkos and Cerny refer to the first type as latent and the second as manifest soft power assets. There are grey areas between these two. For example, governments may invest in environmental policies or anti-corruption policies to enhance their influence in the world community, but the orchestration of these factors may not be intended for this purpose.
[5] Note that measures may be listed in several categories because of grey area properties.

Secure internet servers per 1 million people
Internet bandwidth thousands Mpbs
Government Online Services Index

Education

Average of OECD PISA science, maths and reading scores
Gross tertiary educational enrolment rate
Number of top global universities
Number of academic science journal articles published
Spending on education as percentage of GDP

Engagement

Environmental Performance Index (EPI)

Enterprise

Global patents filed (percentage of GDP)
WEF Competitiveness Index
Heritage Economic Freedom Index score
Corruption Perceptions Index score
R&D spending as a percentage of GDP
Global Innovation Index score
Number of SMEs as a percentage of labor force working in SMEs
World Bank Ease of Doing Business Report
Unemployment rate as a percentage of labor force
Hi-tech exports as a percentage of manufactured exports
World BankLog of business start-up costs as a percentage of GNI
per capita

Government

Human Development Index score
Freedom House Index score
Number of think tanks in the country
Gender Equality Index score
Economist Democracy Index score
Size of shadow economy as a percentage of GDP
Homicides per capita
World Bank Voice and Accountability Index score
Capital punishment carried out in 2016
Income inequality - gini coefficient
World Economic Forum Trust in Government Index score
Press Freedom Index score
World Bank Government Effectiveness score
World Bank Good Governance Regulation Quality score
World Bank Good Governance Rule of Law score

Independent Variables: Active Soft Power

Culture

Olympic medals (Summer 2016 / Winter 2014
Quality of national air carrier

Digital

Number of internet users per 100 inhabitants
Secure internet servers per 1 million people
Internet bandwidth thousands Mpbs
Government Online Services Index
Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 people

Education

Average of OECD PISA science, maths and reading scores
Gross tertiary educational enrolment rate
Number of top global universities
Number of academic science journal articles published
Spending on education as percentage of GDP

Engagement

Total overseas development aid
Number of embassies abroad
Number of embassies in the country
Number of consulates general abroad
Number of permanent missions to multilateral organizations
Membership of international organizations
Environmental treaty signatures
Number of diplomatic cultural missions
Number of countries a citizen can visit visa-free
Environmental Performance Index (EPI)

Enterprise

Global patents filed (percentage of GDP)
R&D spending as a percentage of GDP
Global Innovation Index score

World Bank Ease of Doing Business Report
Unemployment rate as a percentage of labor force
Hi-tech exports as a percentage of manufactured exports

Government

Freedom House Index score
Number of think tanks in the country
Gender Equality Index score
Economist Democracy Index score
Homicides per capita
World Bank Voice and Accountability Index score
Capital punishment carried out in 2016
World Economic Forum Trust in Government Index score
Press Freedom Index score
World Bank Government Effectiveness score
World Bank Good Governance Regulation Quality score
World Bank Good Governance Rule of Law score

Dependent Variables: Impact or Influence of Soft Power

Culture

Total number of tourist arrivals
Average spending per tourist (total tourism receipts divided by number of tourists)
Number of films appearing in major film festivals
Number of foreign correspondents in the country
Annual museum attendance of global top 100
Size of music market
Number of top 10 albums in foreign countries
Number of top 10 albums in foreign countries
Power Language Index (PLI)

Digital

Facebook followers for heads of state (outside of country)
Facebook engagement score for heads of state or government (outside of country)
Facebook followers for ministry of foreign affairs (outside of country)
Facebook engagement score for ministry of foreign affairs (outside of country)
Number of internet users per 100 inhabitants
Mobile phones per 100 people

Government Online Services Index
E-participation Index
Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 people

Education

Number of international students in the country

Engagement

Asylum seekers per 1,000 people
Size of Weekly Audience of State Broadcaster

Enterprise

Foreign direct investment as percentage of GDP

      As we can see, there is some overlap among the two independent variable categories, but little overlap among dependent and independent variable categories. This makes quantitative analysis of the influence of soft power much neater and easier to do.

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