

Tourism as a Soft Power Tool. The Role of Public Diplomacy in Japan's Country and Destination Branding

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ABSTRACT

Tourism plays an important part in soft power as a public diplomacy tool that, alongside destination branding, aims to reinforce the image of a place to attract visitors, with the ensuing multiplier effect on its economy. Both destination branding and public diplomacy seek the common goal of generating a positive reputation and image of the place, although they pursue different interests. On the one hand, destination branding aims at attracting tourists with an eminently economic objective in mind; while, on the other hand, public diplomacy seeks to promote national interests (economic, social, political), and advance foreign policy goals. Destination branding and public diplomacy can be regarded as two faces of the same coin, as together they leverage a country's equity in soft power. Japan has furthered its economic, social, and political goals by projecting the image of a technologically advanced country boasting a rich cultural tradition through skillful management of its soft power and its public diplomacy, that in recent times has revolved around cultural diplomacy with the "Cool Japan" strategy for the promotion of cultural industries, as well as around sports diplomacy, with the celebration of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, which owing to the COVID pandemic became an example of failed destination branding, that nevertheless did not obscure their success in terms of sports diplomacy.

KEYWORDS

Destination branding, Soft power, Japan, Olympic Games, Creative industries.

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1. Introduction

In today's attention economy, tourist destinations compete to attract the public's interest as a preliminary step to transforming that interest into a visit. However, attracting prospective visitors' attention depends to some extent on destination branding (Casado Claro, 2018), a discipline that is so closely related to other interconnected and mutually reinforcing disciplines that their boundaries become fuzzy and, as a result, the terms are used interchangeably sometimes because it is difficult to identify their distinguishing features.

This article contends that destination branding is at the intersection between Marketing and International Relations, and far from being exclusive domains, they are intertwined and pursue common goals; therefore, countries and regions should do their best to align their strategies to generate synergies. As far as Marketing is concerned, destination branding is sometimes confused, others taken as a synonym of place branding, a strategy that takes different names depending on the territories it covers. Hence, terms such as country branding, territory branding, region branding, or location branding. On the other hand, in the realm of International Relations, tourism is regarded as a soft power tool, which can be enhanced through public diplomacy, contributing to reinforcing a country's national reputation and image on the world stage.

A country with a strong global influence is more effective in attracting tourists, garnering investments, exporting products, drawing in talented workers, and achieving its desired foreign policy outcomes (Ooi, 2015). Through its skillful management of soft power and public diplomacy, Japan leverages its economic, social, and political goals rivalling other world powers by projecting the image of a technologically advanced country with a rich cultural heritage. Whereas in the 1950s Japan's public diplomacy efforts focused on changing the militaristic image inherited from the post-war period into that of a peaceful democratic nation integrated into the world order, in the 1970s its economic progress started to be perceived as a kind of economic colonialism, which in the next decade would provoke an anti-Japanese sentiment (known as "Japan bashing" in the United States). To counter this negative image, Japan undertook a cultural promotion and cooperation campaign led by the Japan Foundation and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), created in 1972 and 1974, respectively.

In recent times Japan's public diplomacy has revolved around the promotion of Japanese popular culture and creative industries through the Cool Japan strategy, as well as in the celebration of international events, such as the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, or the G20 and the G7 summits. Furthermore, in terms of values, through its Official Development Aid policies, Japan has prioritized exporting its cutting-edge expertise and sharing the experience acquired over the years in various fields, such as Disaster Risk Reduction (Pastrana-Huguet, Casado-Claro, & Gavari-Starkie, 2021, p. 26), as well as defending the concept of human security. These initiatives seek to foster goodwill, peaceful relations, and prosperous coexistence within the international community, which in turn will contribute to strengthening Japanese exports and attracting foreign direct investment.

In our literature review, we start defining the often misused and confused branding and international relation terms presented in this introduction to make a clear distinction between them, summarizing the main points in a table at the end of the section. Then, we address the case study of Japan as an international referent in destination branding and public diplomacy, which at the turn of the twenty-first century decided to take the plunge to alleviate its stagnant economy by fostering new economic strategies revolving around tourism and the cultural industries.

Despite the close relationship between destination branding and soft power, the literature on the topic is still scarce. Therefore, this article aims to make a contribution to the interdisciplinary debate. Özkan & Boylu (2021) point out that while much is known about the relationship between tourism and international affairs, the literature linking tourism with international relations is still limited. Therefore, this article approaches the field of international relations through the lens of tourism, considering that, as a soft power instrument, tourism is present in destination branding, country branding, and public diplomacy.

The article proceeds in five sections. In this first section, an introduction to the research topic that the article intends to address to fill the gap in the literature has been conducted. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the second section reviews selected academic literature to clarify the conceptual confusion

arising from the use of terms that refer to interlinked concepts, emphasizing the differentiating characteristics of each one in order to delimit the analytical framework that will be used to address the case study of Japan's country and destination branding strategy in the third section. A discussion of the case is carried out in the fourth section. Finally, the fifth section summarizes some of the arguments and identifies lines for future research.

2. Literature Review: Unravelling the Conceptual Confusion

Country brand, nation brand, destination brand, soft power, public diplomacy. Although their limits are fuzzy, their effects are perceptible on a country's ability to convince without imposing its point of view or threatening others, and without resorting to force to achieve its social, political, and economic objectives. These disciplines stand in communicating vessels since successful actions in one field contribute to the objectives of the other and vice versa. Moreover, all of them aim to reinforce the country's good reputation by projecting a positive image abroad, as the reader will observe in the following paragraphs.

As a social, cultural, and economic activity, Tourism is an element that is present in all of them as a shared interest that contributes to reaching their common goals. Since tourism and travel are soft power instruments, this article addresses destination branding through the international relations lens of country branding and public diplomacy. Therefore, this section reviews selected academic literature to clarify interlinked concepts such as destination branding, place branding or country branding in the field of Marketing, and soft power and public diplomacy within International Relations. The goal is to identify the differentiating features of each concept to define an analytical framework to address the case study of Japan's country and destination branding strategy in the next section. A table summarising the main findings is provided at the end of the section.

2.1 Country Branding and Destination Branding: Are they the Same?

Papp-Váry (2018, p. 10) argues that destination branding is the term most often confused with nation branding. Simon Anholt is credited with having coined in 1996 the concept of "nation brand", from which derivations such as country brand, city brand, or destination brand later emerged as related but differentiated concepts.

Authors such as Ryan and Gu (2008) argue that destination branding is a marketing concept that refers to the construction of a destination's intangible value or reputation by promoting its multiple attributes, such as culture, sports, tourism, companies, institutions, etc. Ekinci (2003) argues that a destination brand implies establishing a mutual relationship between destinations and tourists, satisfying the emotional needs of tourists. In particular, destination brands help establish a link between the destination's consumer image and self-image. As in the case of products and services, destination branding is part of a broader strategy that seeks to underline a destination's competitive advantages and differentiate it from others to attract tourism. In contrast, country branding not only seeks to attract tourists but also investors and talent to the country, increasing sales of national products in international markets and generating a positive country image. Kilduff and Tabales, (2017) define country branding as a type of marketing and public diplomacy, a developing field and a tool that governments use to promote their goods and services and increase awareness about their country, promote tourism, increase trade, and attract foreign investment and talent.

Although country branding and nation branding are the same, in countries where "nation" and "country" do not overlap completely, the term country branding is preferred. Nation branding is a broader concept than destination branding, which could be considered part of the former. This point is well represented in Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon, which includes six dimensions: tourism, exports, investment, culture and heritage, people, and governance (Anholt, 2007). Papp-Váry (2018, p. 12) contends that nation branding is also a more complicated discipline because each dimension is usually the competence of a dedicated agency or ministry, which makes coordination burdensome, even without the intervention of other stakeholders such as lobbies, NGOs, special interest groups, companies, and other organizations keen on promoting the specific aspect of the country that is most convenient for them.

2.2 Destination Branding: Building a Positive Image of Destinations

Destination branding aims to develop a unique and attractive identity for the destination that differentiates it from other destinations worldwide, as well as to position the destination by creating a positive perception in the minds of potential visitors. For this purpose, various activities are carried out, such as developing a brand strategy, creating a visual identity that revolves around a logo and a brand message, launching advertising campaigns, and creating content for social media, amongst others. On the other hand, successful destination branding requires multistakeholder support: tourism boards, government agencies, big companies, local businesses, and local communities, all rowing in the same direction to make the boat move forward.

Far from being a simple logo, a slogan, a website, or an advertising campaign, the destination brand is the result of the perceptions of visitors and inhabitants, as well as of the destination's personality and differential attractions. In sum, the destination brand is made up of three elements: (1) Its identity, defined as the way how the destination wishes to be perceived by tourists. (2) Its personality, established by the differentiating features of a tourist destination in comparison to others. (3) Its image, the way tourists perceive the destination (Cardoso, Araújo Vila, Fraiz Brea & de Carlos Villamarín, 2018, pp. 83-85).

The destination image is a fundamental component of branding, as it stimulates the emergence of a series of ideas, impressions, and feelings towards the destination, upon which prospective travelers rely when making the travel decision. Camprubí and Coromina (2016, p. 781) argue that "the tourist image is a highly strategic element in creating, maintaining, or increasing demand for a destination," hence the strategic importance of projecting the right image. Moreover, Töröcsik and Somogyi (2009, in Papp-Vary, 2018, p. 11) contend that establishing an emotional link between the product and its customers is a key aspect of branding and that, in the case of destination branding, that link depends upon factors such as the atmosphere in the place, the behavior of residents, and the personal impression of visitors.

Therefore, the destination image is socially constructed by both the destination's decision-makers and individuals. Cardoso et al. (2018, p. 85) point out that there is an academic consensus built around the works of Gunn (1972) in considering that the process of building a tourist destination's image unfolds at two levels: organic images and induced images. While organic images are shaped by spontaneous exposure to mass media, word of mouth, visits to the destination, and non-commercial sources, induced images are those intentionally generated by tourism organizations.

Tourist destinations face the challenge of promoting their desired image, as well as countering the undesired aspects of the universal image in the minds of potential visitors. The image of a destination is a subjective concept that is created and recreated in people's minds, regardless of whether they will visit it or not. Since this image is made up of preconceived ideas shared by groups of individuals or stereotypes that arise from the opposition of "them" versus "us", destination branding conveys a favorable image aiming to create awareness, influence public perceptions, and ultimately attract visitors (Casado Claro, 2018, p. 102).

2.3 What is Soft Power and what is its Role in Tourism?

At present, the idea that the ability to control the behavior of the "other" in order to obtain desired results, military force, or economic prosperity has been abandoned. Today, international relations are encompassed within a more comprehensive framework that includes innovative aspects such as a state's legitimacy, attractiveness, and moral authority, characteristics that are encompassed within the concept of soft power (Nye, 2004).

The concept of soft power was initially introduced by Joseph Nye in the 1990s to explain the role of the United States in the new era marked by the end of the bipolar world order of the Cold War, as opposed to hard power characterized by coercion instead of cooperation, orders instead of suggestions, and threats instead of persuasion and constructive debate. Soft power is about winning the hearts and minds of people around the world rather than conquering territories. In Nye's (2004) own words, soft power is "the ability of a nation to shape the preferences of other nations through diplomacy and attraction."

Japan is said to be a soft power Superpower. In contrast to hard power (military and economic), which is directly and exclusively controlled by the government, soft power is more complex as it is difficult, if not

impossible, to keep under control owing to the active role that civil society and individuals play in it. Furthermore, the results achieved through soft power take longer to show. A country with a good reputation, attractive culture, and influential ideas can persuade others to do what the country desires, even if it lacks military or other methods of coercion.

Soft power resources include culture, values, political ideals, and policies. Countries spread the word about the values they live by, such as democracy, neoliberalism, the rule of law, and human rights. In terms of culture, cultural assets such as language, history, literature, art, and music, but also popular culture and Tourism contribute to creating a positive country image.

Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution contains the country's explicit renouncement to war and to the use of force, or the threat of the use of force, as a means of settling international disputes. If the country was attacked, it could defend its territory, but the Self-Defence Forces (the Japanese army) are not entitled to fight abroad, even though, after much debate, they have engaged in international peacekeeping operations with the United Nations. This is the reason why Japan¹ has advocated for soft power and soft security concepts such as Human Security. In sum, this limitation to its coercive power has led Japan to find peaceful means to further its national interests, with soft power playing a key role in its foreign policy.

The effects of tourism on soft power can be divided into two parts in terms of host and shipment of functions. One of the priority tasks is to create an attractive image well designed to counteract possible negative impressions of the country as a travel destination for the world tourism market. Second, tourism policies can be used in foreign policy worldwide by influencing the ideas of the target audience and transferring political values, cultural values, beliefs, and agendas. For the sending party, tourism can encourage countries to seek good diplomatic relations and follow some criteria determined by the countries that receive tourists (Yang, 2019, in Özkan & Boylu, 2021).

Ooi (2015) presents several ways in which the interaction between tourism and soft power takes place: (1) when tourists visit a destination, they get a better understanding of its idiosyncrasy, which translates into familiarity and likeability. In turn, visitors become ambassadors of the destinations when returning home. (2) Tourism authorities are tasked with the responsibility of presenting an attractive image of the destination to the world. Destination branding is the preferred soft power tool to stand out in the increasingly crowded destination brandscape. (3) Mega events such as the Olympic Games and sports championships, World Expos and international conferences, amongst others, are also vital in building geopolitical impact since they attract visitors in significant numbers while showcasing the destination globally. (4) Tourism is a social activity; therefore, when people travel, person-to-person exchange happens at various levels. Thus, outbound travelers act as ambassadors of their own countries in their interactions with locals. (5) Finally, tourism is regarded as a force for world peace, as well as a factor of friendship and understanding among the peoples of the world (World Tourism Organization, 2020).

2.4 Public Diplomacy and Country Branding

While traditional diplomacy involves relations between official government representatives such as ambassadors or political leaders, the concept of public diplomacy has gained ground in recent years. It consists in any form of communicative projection carried out by a state through non-traditional means, which would include culture, art, sports, gastronomy, science, and any other communicative display that would allow the country's national identity to be projected abroad (López Aranguren, 2022, p. 155).

López Aranguren (2022, p. 156) points out that the term public diplomacy was coined by Gullion in 1965, in the wake of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, in an attempt to find alternative tools to traditional diplomacy, through which nations could achieve their political objectives without resorting to coercive measures. Public diplomacy is characterized by its versatility and adaptation to the international environment (Gilboa, 2008, in Alastrué Vidal, 2022) since one of its main virtues is to echo and adapt to the changes that occur in the international system (Cull, 2008, in Alastrué Vidal, 2022).

Traditional diplomacy was exclusively exercised by a few government representatives behind closed

¹ Authors such as Clausen (2009) and Funabashi (2017) argue that the Japanese concept of human security differs significantly from traditional conceptions of security in which military force is often incorporated into humanitarian intervention as a means to gain security and rights. On the other hand, although Japan currently has a special legitimacy in the arena of soft power, the country supports historical burdens, such as its participation in World War II and the excesses that occurred in the occupied areas of Northeast Asia (Calder, 2009).

doors with high levels of secrecy. This has been the prevailing model throughout history, and it still is in some countries. In contrast, public diplomacy opens the floor to other agents from the public sector, as well as from the private sector and from civil society. As there are more participants, the number and diversity of messages also increase, whereas communication flows in both directions: from the bottom-up (from society to the government) and from the top-down (from the government to society).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) oversees public diplomacy. According to the MOFA's web page, its objective is to actively communicate "a variety of information on Japanese foreign policy as well as general information on Japan for better understanding of Japan worldwide," resorting to various public relations and cultural exchange actions such as activities to introduce Japanese culture and to promote Japanese language education, as well as to encourage people-to-people exchange, through programs such as the Youth Global Leadership Summit (J8 Summit), Study in Japan, JET Programme, JENESYS Programme, and Sports Exchange, amongst other. Furthermore, the MOFA's public diplomacy initiatives entail "engaging with policymakers, opinion leaders, related experts, and local people." Nevertheless, some researchers, such as Dinnie, (2008), affirm that Japan's country brand takes place in a context of highly critical attention from the Western media, which accuses Japan of being insular and closed. To finish this section, a summary of the defining characteristics of the branding and international relations concepts presented in this literature review can be found in Table 1, in which, without pretending to be a comprehensive account, a list of representative tools and resources has been included to clarify the definitions.

Table 1. Summary Table Comparing Destination Branding with the Related Disciplines Presented

Discipline	Objectives	Interests	Tools	Resources
Destination branding	Creating a positive and distinctive image of the destination in the minds of consumers Arousing the desire of visiting the destination, to attract tourists	Economic interests	Promotion of the destination's attributes Advertising campaigns	Brand elements: communication, image, identity, equity, purpose, positioning, personality, logo
Country/ Nation branding	Attracting tourists, but also investors and talent to the country, increasing sales of national products in international markets, and generating a positive country image	Economic and political interests	Marketing tools Cultural showcasing Broadcasting Trade promotion Tourism promotion	Brand elements: communication, image, identity, equity, purpose, positioning, personality
Soft Power	Strengthening national reputation and image Convince, win hearts and minds	Political and national interests	Bilateral and multilateral diplomacy Official Development Aid Public diplomacy	Values, culture, political ideals, and policies Institutions
Public diplomacy	Establishing relationships with foreign publics to gain support for foreign policy objectives	International Relations Foreign policy Ensuring stable socio-cultural environments Mutual understanding	Cultural exchange Relation building International broadcasting Networking Partnership and links Cultural and sports diplomacy, amongst other Institutions Social networks	Culture Science Technology Language Education Sports, music, food, fashion...
Cultural diplomacy	Strengthening connections and building trust	Mutually beneficial interests between state and non-state actors (civil society, individuals)	Cultural exchange Relation building Networking Partnership and links Scholarships Institutions Social networks	Art and culture Creative industries Language Education Social networks Artists

3. The Role of Public Diplomacy in Japan's Country and Destination Branding

In this section, the efforts of the Japanese government organizations in shaping the image of Japan are presented. As far as tourism is concerned, the main actor is the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO), which is in charge of international tourism promotion. Some aspects of destination branding are analyzed, before addressing cultural diplomacy and sports diplomacy, two subfields of public diplomacy that Japan has resorted to in order to enhance its international appeal. They are not altruistic in nature; their overarching goal is furthering Japan's economic goals by shaping an image that attracts international visitors to the country and facilitates the exports of its cultural products, together with other technology-based products that the country is reputed for.

3.1 Destination Branding. Conveying a Desired Image of Japan

The tourism sector is one of the main beneficiaries of having a strong country brand. Building a successful country brand is a matter of taking advantage of existing features by enhancing the ones that are positive while attenuating the ones that are counterproductive. Sometimes struggling with stereotypes is a lost battle, so it is better to go with the flow and even do so with a certain "geek" pride: castles in Japan are looking for professional ninjas to perform ninjutsu demonstrations, maid cafes have become a must-visit, and well-known video game and anime characters are the ones who represented Japan when Tokyo took over at the closing ceremony of the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016. There is an important lesson to be learned from this: authorities should take advantage of the attraction of those features whose international acceptance has come spontaneously, without trying to impose something different.

Figure 1. Communicating the Country and Destination Image











Source: Japan National Tourism Organization

As in the case of commercial brands, the logo is one of the elements that contributes to consumer recognition. In this line, Japan has been able to design a powerful logo that conveys the essence of the country (rising sun and cherry blossoms) and, together with the accompanying message, generates an emotional connection with an experiential component: "Japan. Endless Discovery" (see Figure 1).

For marketing communication to be effective, it must be integrated, which means conveying a single message and the same message across all channels. However, for practical reasons, it must be adapted to the channel. This is an aspect that Japan has taken care of, consistently conveying the same message, and aligning national, regional, and local strategies and private initiatives, so that everyone is rowing in

the same direction, pushing the boat forward. The image Japan wants to convey to the world is that of a modern (even futuristic) country proud of its rich traditional culture. Figure 2 reproduces several logos, sending consistent messages that convey a unique selling proposition (USP): tradition and innovation; past and future; old and new; today and tomorrow.

Figure 2. Logos and Slogans Aligned to Convey a Unique Selling Proposition

JTA	JNTO	Tokyo Metropolitan Govt.	Comité Organizador JJ.OO.
 ようこそ Visit Japan (2003-2010)	 JAPAN Where tradition meets the future (2017)	 & Tokyo (2015-2016)	 DISCOVER TOMORROW Discover tomorrow TOKYO 2020 CANDIDATE CITY (2012)
 Japan. Endless Discovery. (Abril 2010-actualidad)	 Enjoy my Japan (2018)	 Tokyo-Tokyo Old meets new (2017)	 TOKYO 2020 TOKYO 2020 "Hope Lights Our Way" (2018) Para la antorcha olímpica

Source: Own Elaboration

As can be appreciated from Figure 2, consciously or unconsciously the various administrations have aligned their communication strategies to convey the same idea: a confluence of past and future, tradition and innovation, because it is essential that in all areas the messages of the communication strategy be coherent, revolving around a common idea of strength or narrative that serves as a common thread. The JNTO branding campaign for Europe, also present in the U.S. and Australian markets, emphasizes the contrasts by synthesizing in one phrase the essence of the country: "Where tradition meets the future". In the same line, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government authorities introduced in 2017 a new logo "Tokyo. Tokyo" that reflects the contrast between the traditional (Tokyo in black, written with a brush and Chinese ink) and the present (in an optimistic blue that conveys happiness), accompanied by the phrase "old meets new". On the other hand, the slogan of the logo of Tokyo's bid for the Olympic Games was "Discover tomorrow" and that of the tour operator JTB (Japan Travel Bureau), one of the most important tour operators in the country and official travel provider of the Olympic Games, was: "Bridging the new" under the silhouette of a suspension bridge. This coordination reinforces Japan's image, as communicating something different in each context would blur the message.

The mascots of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games deserve a mention apart. The two mascots were presented together, and their names (Miraitowa and Someity, respectively) are convey a message aligned to the aforementioned logos and slogans. Miraitowa is a combination of the Japanese words for future (*mirai*) and eternity (*towa*), although in this case the linguistic barrier does not allow to appreciate the pun. Someity ("so mighty") refers to *someiyoshino* (*cerasus yedonensis*), the Japanese scientific name for the cherry blossom, popularly known as *sakura*.

Mascots deserve a special mention for their role in building Japan's destination brand, even though they are not exclusive to Japan. Apparently the first official Olympic mascot was a dachshund named Waldi that figured in the Munich 1972 Olympic Games, but unofficially it was preceded by a Mayan jaguar in the Mexico 1968 Olympic Games. Nowadays, many sporting events and teams boasts their own mascots. However, Japan has taken the mascot phenomenon to the extreme of sophistication. Chang (2017)

notes that in the land of Hello Kitty and Doraemon these characters and “employed” to boost local economies by promoting local culture and products, plus they have become so popular that an increasing number of organizations are turning to them to promote tourism, amongst other things.

Known as *yuru-chara* or *yuru-kyara* (a mix between the Japanese word *yurui* whose literal meaning is “lose” or “casual” and *kyarakutā* from the English word “character”), they can be considered an evolution of brand characters (such as Sanrio’s Hello Kitty, by far the most successful exponent), cartoon and anime characters (such as Pikachu and other Pokemon) and *gotōchi* (characters that symbolize a local town, city, prefecture or region). *Yuru-chara* are customized personifications of animals or things, intentionally designed to look cute and stylish (*kawaii*), presented as “real people” with their own personality traits and treated as celebrities, who write their own blogs, run errands, and promote whatever they are created to promote (events, destinations, products), often replacing actual people (Chang, 2017). Sometimes, they even transcend their role as brand ambassadors representing wider interests when deployed by official organizations overseas with an agenda of their own. Thus, Doraemon was appointed Ambassador for Anime Culture, while Kumamon² met his counterpart Paddington Bear in London on a world tour that took him to the United Kingdom, France, Taiwan, and the United States, where he visited Harvard University (Gavari-Starkie, Casado-Claro, & Pastrana-Huguet, 2023).

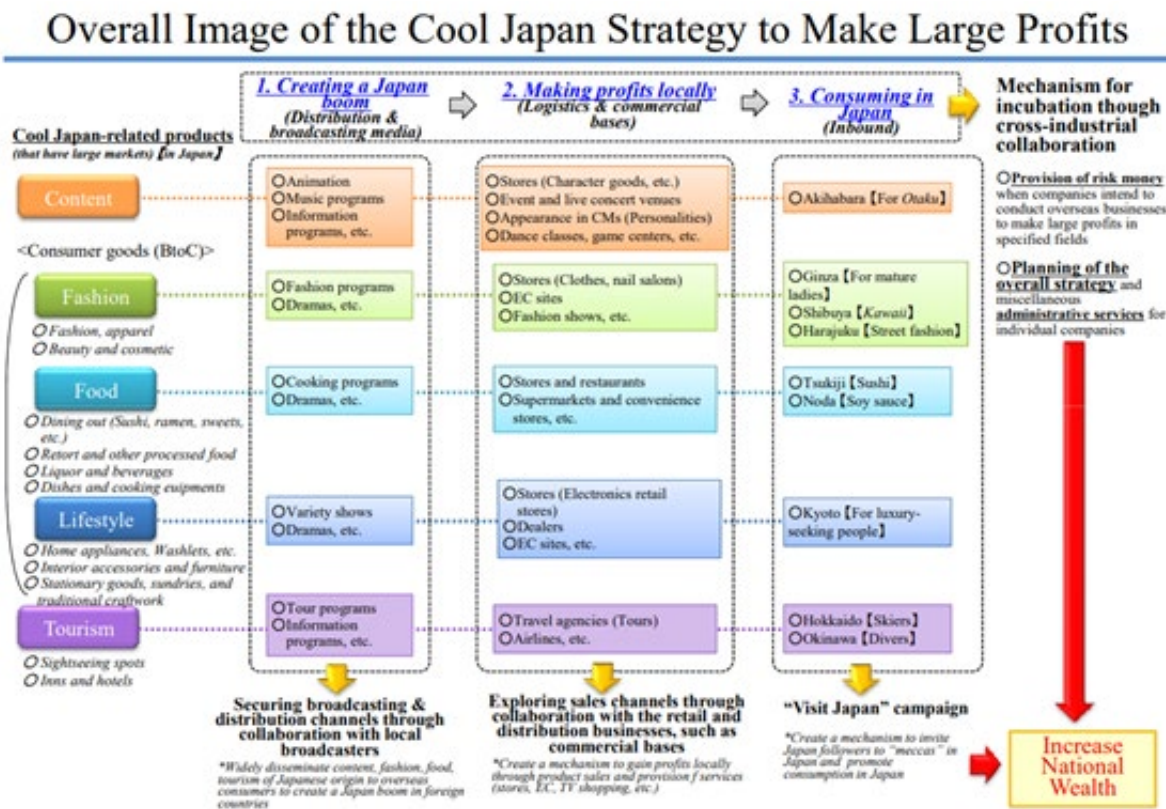
3.2 Cultural Diplomacy. Promoting Japanese Creative Industries Abroad

The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (ICD) defines cultural diplomacy as “a course of actions, which [...] utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond.” Fashion, anime, video games, and food are at the heart of Japanese soft power, consistently promoted through cultural diplomacy.

The Cool Japan strategy is one of the most successful cultural diplomacy initiatives contributing to shaping Japan’s image internationally. The first reference to Cool Japan dates to 2002, with the publication of an article by Douglas McGray celebrating the diversity and strength of “Japan’s Gross National Cool”, making a parallelism with GDP owing to its bad performance. McGray’s article has been cited as playing a key role in encouraging discussions of soft power in Japan.

The Japanese government actively seeks to enhance its soft power by developing creative industries and exporting cultural products. Initially, the Japanese government did not have a clear export-led policy for its cultural industries; therefore, creative industries primarily developed without governmental support. At present, it is promoting the soft power of cultural industries and actively seeking to export its products. Figure 3 shows the roadmap of the Cool Japan Strategy with the Cool Japan-related product categories (Content, Fashion, Food, Lifestyle, and Tourism), the mechanism for incubation through a cross-industrial collaboration whose final goal is “creating a Japan boom.” In the field of tourism, at the bottom right corner is the “Visit Japan” campaign, and the ultimate goal of Cool Japan: “Increase National Wealth,” which makes it clear that this is a battle not only for hearts and minds but also for hard cash.

² Created in 2011 on the occasion of the opening of the bullet train line (Shinkansen) in Kumamoto prefecture (South Japan), Kumamon is a bear (kuma) who work as a civil servant and his main job is to promote the prefecture. As one of the most successful *yuru-chara*, he is present in various merchandising items and features in JNTO’s webpage. Cf., <https://www.japan.travel/en/ca/inspiration/introduction-to-yuru-kyara/>

Figure 3. Cool Japan Strategy Roadmap

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

3.3 Sports Diplomacy. Showcasing Tourism and Technologies

Mega-events have positive short-term and long-term impacts on local economies. As the ultimate sports mega-event, the Summer Olympic Games are a coveted venue that cities and countries look forward to hosting because of their multi-faceted benefits, especially the expected economic ones that do not always materialize. Nevertheless, lasting infrastructures are built that will remain for the local population to enjoy. This boosts investment and creates employment in advance of the direct impact of foreign tourist arrivals and expenditure at the destination. Besides the economic impact, there are other arguments for bidding for the games, such as the social, cultural, and political benefits that they entail. The so-called "Olympic legacy", according to the International Olympic Committee, encompasses all the tangible and intangible long-term benefits for people and cities initiated or accelerated by the hosting of events.

Japan has taken advantage of the experience the country has gained by organizing various events, which the country regards as public diplomacy tools that enshrine the values of peace, respect, and friendship. Therefore, since 1917 the country has organized Asian, International, and World Championships in a wide array of sports: table tennis, archery, athletics, baseball, basketball, hockey, gymnastics, Nordic ski, figure skating, karate, and judo, among other.

As for sports mega-events, the Olympic Games are considered the highest exponent of high-level sporting events. Besides the two Summer Olympic Games that the country is renowned for (Tokyo 1964 and Tokyo 2020, which had to be moved to the summer of 2021 because of the pandemic), Japan has hosted two Winter Olympic Games (Sapporo 1972 and Nagano 1998), as well as Summer Paralympic Games (Tokyo 1964 and Tokyo 2020) and Winter Paralympic Games (Nagano 1998).

Even though for the Japanese government, the organization of the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games was a risky undertaking, the outcome was brilliant and highlighted the economic boom of post-war Japan (Rodao, 2019, p. 82). Japan used the showcase that the Olympic Games provided to reveal its progress at the social, economic, and technological levels. In addition, favourable coverage in the international press contributed to changing the image and reputation of Japan around the world.

In the socio-economic sphere, it was clear that Japan had overcome the belligerent phase that led up to the Second World War and accomplished in record time its economic recovery, not in vain this achievement is known as the *Japanese Economic Miracle*. In 1964, Japan became the third economy in the world (after overtaking Italy, France, and the United Kingdom) and joined the OECD, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, becoming thus a full member of the industrialized democracies club. Moreover, the Olympics were a festival of peace and friendship, which showed the world the friendliest face of the new Japan, a democratic and peaceful country fully integrated into the international community.

On the other hand, the Olympic Games were also an opportunity for Japan to show the world its high levels of technological progress and its capacity for innovation. As a result, 1964 also saw the introduction of the first *shinkansen* (bullet train) line. Capable of reaching 200 km/h and halving the travel time between Tokyo and Osaka, it was branded at the time as the world's fastest train. Even today, the *shinkansen* remains one of the highlights of any trip to Japan because it is fast, comfortable, and reliable.

Audio-visual technologies played a key role in the diffusion of the sporting events, with satellite broadcasting in prime time in the United States and a film about the games, the first-ever entirely recorded in CinemaScope. In the cultural sphere, national pride was exalted with the inclusion of judo as an Olympic sport, the first martial art to achieve that category. Japan ended the games with 16 gold medals in contrast to the four achieved in previous events, which earned it third place in the Olympic medal ranking (Rodao, 2019, p. 83).

In summary, Brand Japan came out of these Olympic Games stronger. The perception of the country changed to that of an industrialized democratic nation, technologically advanced and with a thriving economy (Rodao, 2019, p. 84), in addition to possessing a great capacity for innovation, high-quality standards, and fascinating culture. In contrast, Tokyo 2020 was not as successful as Tokyo 1964. Nevertheless, Japan showed the world its management capacity at a time as adverse as that of a pandemic characterized by unprecedented restrictions amid health and safety measures to counter the spread of the disease.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games were considered a unique opportunity to strengthen Japan's country brand. With the whole world fixing its eyes on the country, the Olympics would be the perfect showcase for what has always distinguished Japan: cutting-edge technology. However, when the pandemic got in the way, the International Olympic Committee had to postpone the Games until 2021 despite Japan's initial reluctance. The celebration was shadowed by the conditions of the moment: borders were closed to international tourists, and restrictions for locals were in place; therefore, the competitions were held without spectators under coronavirus restrictions. This scenario reduced at all levels the expected positive impact; nevertheless, canceling the Games was not an option since the impact on national politics and the international image of Japan could have taken a toll.

Even though when the Olympic Games began, the perceptions changed, 80% of the Japanese were initially against holding the Olympic Games, according to public opinion surveys (Kato, 2021), owing to their dissatisfaction with the cost overruns of the construction of the Olympic infrastructures. As a matter of fact, the costs increased owing to the delay and the celebration in the midst of a pandemic, not to mention the lack of tourist expenditures due to travel bans. A final report of the International Olympic Committee reflected on how 65% of respondents to an international survey rated the Tokyo Games as successful. In addition, a study carried out by Japanese media showed that almost 80% of the Japanese value the Olympic Games positively (International Olympic Committee, 2022).

4. Discussion

It is our contention that destination branding is at the intersection between Marketing and International Relations, and far from being exclusive disciplines operating in silos, they are intertwined and pursue common goals; therefore, countries and regions should do their best to align their strategies in both fields to generate synergies.

This might prove complicated since multiple stakeholders, both from the public and the private sector, as well as from the third sector, are involved in destination branding, country branding, and public diplomacy. As we have seen, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructures, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) has competencies in tourism. In contrast, public diplomacy is promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the

Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Sometimes competencies in a policy are shared between ministries, others within the same ministry, different functions are carried out at different levels. In the case of Japan, as Martínez Maldonado (2016) explains, several Japanese government agencies and institutions, such as JNTO, Japan Foundation, JICA, NHK World, and others, have conceived tourism as a powerful economic and political tool responding to the needs of the moment and playing a central role in promoting Japan's interests and shaping its image around the world.

This could create conflicts of interest and generate contradictory messages. Nye (2008) cites the example of how in the 1990s, two UK government agencies sent contradictory messages that might have created confusion in the audience and undermined the country's image: while the British Council promoted Britain as a modern, multi-ethnic and creative island, the British Tourist Authority was advertising British tradition, ceremony, and history.

On the other hand, a shift in diplomacy's focus has taken place recently, accentuating the increasing importance of non-state actors that went previously overlooked, yielding to a new type of diplomacy in which international relations are established not only through diplomatic exchange between nations but also through other types of exchanges, such as trade between companies, foreign direct investment, tourism, or student exchange, amongst other. Non-state actors are the leading agents in this field: foundations, think tanks, universities, museums, sports teams, NGOs, companies, and individuals (influencers, celebrities, bloggers), amongst others. In this line, destination branding, country branding, and public diplomacy are in dialogue with the international public.

Destination branding and public diplomacy can be used as soft power tools to strengthen and expand the outreach of public efforts. The image of a destination is constructed through press and television news, articles in specialized and generic travel magazines, books, movies, the Internet, and even universally accepted stereotypes. In contrast to these sources, which are largely beyond the control of the destination, tourism information sources are one of the most influential factors in shaping the image of the tourist destination.

The case of South Korea, another country in northwest Asia, is another example of how elements that are not directly related to politics influence soft power. The Korean Wave or Hallyu saw the light in the private sphere with cultural manifestations such as K-pop (who could forget Psy's Gangnam Style and its horse dance?), K-dramas (Korean series, such as *Squid Game*) and films. These cultural industries have increased the international appeal of South Korea as a tourist destination, as well as the desire to visit places related to the scenes of K-dramas and films, such as the Seoul neighborhoods where the Oscar-winning film *Parasites* by director Bong Joon-ho were shot.

As in the case of Japan, ensuing the international acclaim of cultural industries, the South Korean government integrated cultural industries into its public diplomacy. Asian nations invest generously into promoting culture and cultural industries, unlike the European Union and other countries that have been slashing their cultural budgets.

5. Conclusion

Tourism is a soft power tool, contributing to strengthening national reputation and image by winning hearts and minds. Since soft power is conveyed through a country's culture, values, political ideals and foreign policies, it can promote a more effective and competent country positioning, contributing in turn to attract tourism to destinations. Article 9 of Japan's Constitution enshrines the country's pacifist stance. The renunciation of war, the use of force, or the threat of the use of force, to settle international disputes has deprived Japan of the hard power other nations possess. Therefore, to promote its national interests on the international stage, Japan has resorted to soft power and public diplomacy.

As its name suggests, public diplomacy is related to traditional diplomacy, and it is defined in terms of foreign policy and international relations. On the other hand, country or nation branding displays an economic character and aims to attract investment and tourism, as well as to facilitate exports of national products, by improving the perception of the country in the world.

Cultural diplomacy and sports diplomacy are subsets of public diplomacy. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games did not produce the expected economic revenues or international promotion outcomes. Nevertheless, the selection of Japan as a host country is per se a successful example of sports diplomacy, and the celebration of the Games, despite all the complexities, attests to the Japanese savvy planning and organizing of big events. Moreover, even if the short-term effect fell short of the expectations due to travel restrictions, the long-term effects in the post-pandemic is still to be assessed.

As for cultural diplomacy, it is becoming an increasingly popular a soft power tool, as it becomes apparent in the proliferation of national broadcasting channels aimed to an international audience (BBC, NHK, France International, TVE Internacional), as well as official language institutes (such as the Goethe Institut, the British Council, the Confucius Institute, Instituto Cervantes, or The Japan Foundation). Similarly, several nations have seen the export potential of cultural industries, which are presently facing increasing international competition. Thus, with its Cool Japan strategy, Japan competes in Asia and beyond with its neighboring countries: China and South Korea. However, whereas the South Korean Wave (Hallyu) has seen an unprecedented global penetration of its cultural products, focusing on traditional culture, Chinese results have been more discrete.

This article has analyzed Japan's cultural and sports diplomacy. However, if convenient, a specific kind of diplomacy could be articulated around other dimensions, such as science, technology, or music. This opens new lines for research that could be explored in future articles. On the other hand, in terms of mega-event celebrations, most studies focus on their economic short-term impact; therefore, it would be interesting to conduct research on long-term impacts on a broader spectrum of aspects such as the social, cultural, and environmental impacts, as well as on the construction of the place brand owing to increased mass and social media attention.

Destination branding is always about tourism and travel, whereas Anholt defined place branding as "the practice of applying brand strategy and other marketing techniques and disciplines to the economic, social, political, and cultural developments of cities, regions and countries" (Papp-Váry, 2018, pp. 10-11). Thanks to ICTs and the widespread use of the Internet, non-state actors have increased their participation in international relations, and states have become concerned about diplomatic strategies to engage with them. Destination branding should as well engage with these audiences in order to amplify the reach of its message.

Finally, one of Japan's greatest successes has been to involve its citizens. Destination branding and the attraction of international tourists all depend on ordinary citizens, and the government has made them part of the circle by communicating not only outside the country but also inside the importance of tourism for the economy, emphasizing the concept of *Omotenashi* or Japanese hospitality, a value present in society that takes on a new meaning when every Japanese becomes a host to visitors from other countries.


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