

ISSN: 3057-1081 (Online)

Vol. 3, No. 2, pp 13-44

© Faculty of Management Science, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University

May-August 2026

Received 04.05.26/ Revised 26.08.26 / Accepted 27.08.26

Beauty Pageant Business as a Soft Power Instrument: An Integrated Analysis of Marketing Strategies, Image Communication, and Sustainability

Ntapat Worapongpat

Eastern Institute of Technology Suvarnabhumi (EIT)

And Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Maharakham Rajabhat University

E-mail: dr.thiwat@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the integration of marketing strategies, image communication, and sustainability within the beauty pageant industry as a multidimensional platform of Soft Power. The study aims to: (1) analyze marketing strategies at national and international levels, (2) investigate image communication as a mechanism of Soft Power, and (3) explore sustainability practices across social, cultural, and economic dimensions. A qualitative research design was employed using documentary analysis and thematic content analysis. Data were collected from academic literature, media content, and selected case studies of international pageants. The findings revealed three core dynamics: (1) marketing strategies have evolved into integrated global branding systems driven by digital media and storytelling; (2) image communication functions as a mediating mechanism transforming cultural representation into Soft Power outcomes; and (3) sustainability is embedded as a strategic extension of branding and Soft Power rather than a separate dimension. The study proposes the “Sustainable Soft Power Branding Model,” demonstrating how marketing inputs are transformed through communication processes into long-term socio-cultural and economic impacts. This study contributes

to interdisciplinary scholarship by integrating marketing communication, cultural studies, and sustainability into a framework that gives an up-to-date representation of the beauty pageant industry

Keywords: Beauty Pageant, Soft Power, Marketing Strategy, Image Communication, Sustainability

Introduction

In recent years, the beauty pageant industry has undergone a significant transformation from a traditional platform emphasizing physical appearance into a complex global cultural industry that integrates marketing strategies, branding, and symbolic representation. Contemporary beauty pageants operate across both national and international contexts, functioning not only as entertainment events but also as strategic instruments for promoting national identity and enhancing a country's global image (Kaewnet, 2023; Kooha & Parisaya, 2019).

Previous studies have demonstrated that beauty pageants contribute to the construction of social values, gender representation, and cultural narratives. Moreover, they serve as mechanisms of Soft Power through which nations communicate cultural identity and influence international perception. Recent research in communication and cultural studies highlights that the expansion of digital media and the emergence of global audiences have further amplified the influence of pageant platforms, enabling real-time interaction and transnational visibility (Jakkit, 2025; Butphuang & Bupphapan, 2023).

However, despite the increasing scholarly attention, existing literature tends to examine marketing strategies, cultural representation, and sustainability as separate domains. There remains a critical gap in understanding how these dimensions are systematically integrated within the beauty pageant industry, particularly in connecting national-level practices with global dynamics (Kooha & Parisaya, 2019). This limitation restricts the development of a comprehensive framework for analyzing beauty pageants as multidimensional platforms that simultaneously operate within economic, cultural, and communicative spheres.

The beauty pageant industry today is characterized by increasing commercialization, the growing importance of strategic communication in the digital era, and heightened expectations for sustainability within cultural and entertainment sectors (Kumpusiri et al., 2022). While prior research has explored issues such as image construction and cultural identity, there is still limited integration of marketing strategy with sustainability and Soft Power perspectives (Prachanpon, 2025). As a result, a more holistic analytical approach is required to understand the evolving role of beauty pageants in the global context.

Accordingly, this study focuses on developments over the past decade, with particular attention to globalization and digital transformation, and aims to: (1) analyze marketing strategies employed in the beauty pageant business at both national and international levels; (2) examine image communication as a mechanism of Soft Power in shaping national identity and global perception; and (3) explore sustainable development approaches within the industry across social, cultural, and economic dimensions.

To achieve these objectives, the analysis undertaken as part of this study adopts a qualitative approach based on documentary research and thematic content analysis of academic publications, media content, and other relevant case material.

The intent of this study is to propose an integrated analytical framework that links marketing strategies, image communication, Soft Power, and sustainability within a unified model. By doing so, it advances interdisciplinary scholarship in marketing communication, cultural studies, and global media, while also providing practical insights for stakeholders in the beauty pageant industry to develop sustainable and strategically effective practices

Research Objectives

1.To critically analyze the evolution and configuration of marketing strategies in the beauty pageant industry within national and global contexts.

2.To conceptualize the role of image communication as a mediating mechanism of Soft Power in constructing national identity and shaping global perception.

3.To assess how sustainability is embedded within the industry as an integrated strategic dimension across social, cultural, and economic domains.

Literature Review

Soft Power and Cultural Representation in Beauty Pageants

The concept of Soft Power was introduced by Nye (2004) to explain the capacity of states and other actors to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or material inducements. Soft Power is primarily derived from culture, political values, and foreign policies when these are perceived as legitimate or attractive by others. Nye (2008) further emphasized the importance of public diplomacy, communication, and cultural attraction in transforming national resources into international influence. Accordingly, Soft Power should not be understood merely as a country's cultural attractiveness but as a process through which cultural resources are strategically communicated and transformed into influence.

In contemporary global communication, cultural industries provide important platforms through which Soft Power can be produced and circulated. Cultural events, entertainment industries, international media, and symbolic performances enable countries and cultural actors to communicate national identity to audiences beyond their domestic boundaries. In this context, beauty pageants represent a distinctive form of cultural communication because they combine visual representation, performance, personal narratives, national symbols, and social advocacy within highly mediated international events. Contestants may therefore function not only as competitors but also as cultural representatives who communicate values and images associated with their countries.

The cultural representation of contestants is particularly significant because beauty pageants operate within a global media environment in which national identity can be transformed into symbolic and visual narratives. Through national costumes, traditional cultural performances, language, social projects, and personal storytelling, contestants communicate particular interpretations of national culture to international audiences. Such representation may contribute to the construction of national image and cultural

attractiveness. Previous studies in the Thai context have similarly identified beauty pageants as platforms through which cultural identity and symbolic values can be communicated to wider audiences (Kaewnet, 2023).

However, Soft Power should not be considered an automatic consequence of cultural visibility. Cultural representation becomes influential when it is strategically communicated, positively received, and associated with broader narratives of national identity and legitimacy. This suggests that the effectiveness of beauty pageants as Soft Power platforms depends not only on the cultural resources being represented but also on marketing strategies, communication mechanisms, audience engagement, and the management of national and organizational images. The literature therefore indicates the need to examine the strategic processes through which cultural representation is converted into international attraction and influence.

Marketing Strategies, Global Branding, and Nation Branding in the Beauty Pageant Industry

Branding has traditionally been associated with the creation of distinctive identities, associations, and value propositions that differentiate organizations, products, and services from competitors. Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasized the strategic importance of positioning, differentiation, and value creation in marketing management. In contemporary markets, however, branding extends beyond commercial products to include individuals, organizations, places, and nations.

The development of global markets and digital communication has consequently expanded the scope of branding from domestic market positioning to global brand building. Global branding involves the development and management of brand identities that can achieve recognition and meaningful associations across international markets (Steenkamp, 2020). Digital platforms have further accelerated this process by allowing brands and individuals to communicate directly with geographically dispersed audiences. In the beauty pageant industry, these developments have transformed pageants from traditional competitions into highly mediated global communication platforms.

Beauty pageant branding operates at multiple levels. At the organizational level, pageant organizations develop distinctive identities through event design,

communication strategies, partnerships, media exposure, and social initiatives. At the individual level, contestants increasingly function as personal brands whose identities are constructed through social media, public appearances, storytelling, and audience interaction. At the national level, pageants can contribute to the communication of cultural characteristics and national identity. These multiple branding levels interact with one another, creating opportunities for personal, organizational, and national images to reinforce each other.

The concept of Nation Branding provides an important theoretical extension of this discussion. Fan (2006) argued that nation branding concerns the strategic construction and communication of a country's identity and image rather than simply the promotion of a national logo or slogan. Similarly, Anholt (2007) conceptualized national competitiveness and reputation as multidimensional processes involving culture, people, tourism, governance, investment, and national identity. Dinnie (2016) further emphasized that nation branding involves the strategic management of a country's identity and reputation in an increasingly competitive international environment.

From this perspective, international beauty pageants can function as nation-branding platforms because they provide opportunities for countries to communicate distinctive cultural symbols, values, people, traditions, and social narratives to global audiences. Contestants may therefore operate simultaneously as personal brands and informal representatives of national identity. This relationship is particularly important in the digital era, where social media enables contestants to maintain continuous communication with international audiences before, during, and after pageant competitions.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and digital media engagement further strengthen this branding process. Social media platforms allow contestants and pageant organizations to combine visual content, storytelling, public relations, advocacy campaigns, live communication, and audience interaction. Consequently, branding in the beauty pageant industry should not be viewed solely as a commercial or promotional activity. Rather, it constitutes a broader communication process through which personal identity, organizational reputation, cultural representation, and national image can be simultaneously constructed.

Nevertheless, existing studies have frequently examined branding from either a commercial or promotional perspective, while relatively limited attention has been given to the relationship between branding, national image, and Soft Power. This limitation suggests that marketing strategies should be examined as potential structural drivers through which cultural and national resources are transformed into international visibility, attraction, and influence.

Sustainability in Cultural and Beauty Pageant Industries

Sustainability has become an increasingly important concept in contemporary organizational and cultural research. Elkington (1997) introduced the Triple Bottom Line framework, emphasizing the need to consider economic, social, and environmental dimensions simultaneously rather than focusing exclusively on financial performance. This perspective provides a foundation for examining sustainability as a multidimensional process involving organizational value, social responsibility, and environmental considerations.

Within cultural industries, however, sustainability extends beyond economic and environmental concerns. Cultural sustainability also involves the preservation, reproduction, and transformation of cultural identities, traditions, values, and practices across generations. Cultural organizations can therefore contribute to sustainable development by maintaining cultural diversity, strengthening social participation, supporting local communities, and creating long-term cultural value.

In the beauty pageant industry, sustainability can be reflected through several dimensions. First, pageants may support social sustainability through advocacy related to gender equality, education, health, community development, and social inclusion. Second, they may contribute to cultural sustainability through the representation and promotion of traditional dress, local heritage, cultural practices, and national identity. Third, environmental sustainability may be incorporated through campaigns concerning climate change, environmental awareness, responsible consumption, and ecological protection. Finally, organizational sustainability may involve the development of long-term brands, stakeholder relationships, audience communities, and socially responsible organizational practices.

Recent studies have examined beauty pageants as platforms for social advocacy and cultural representation (Kasampolkoon & Somkane, 2022; Kuhalert, 2025). Such studies demonstrate that pageants can extend beyond entertainment by providing opportunities for contestants and organizations to engage with social issues and communicate values to broader audiences. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature remains fragmented, with studies focusing separately on social advocacy, cultural representation, organizational branding, or communication.

This fragmentation indicates the need to conceptualize sustainability as an integrated strategic outcome rather than as a collection of isolated social or environmental activities. In particular, sustainability may be strengthened when marketing strategies are aligned with cultural representation, social advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and long-term brand development. Such integration is especially relevant to beauty pageants because their influence depends heavily on symbolic communication, public visibility, cultural narratives, and sustained audience engagement.

Integration of Soft Power, Global Branding, Nation Branding, and Sustainability

The preceding literature demonstrates that Soft Power, branding, nation branding, and sustainability are interconnected but have generally been examined as separate research domains. Soft Power research emphasizes attraction, culture, values, and international influence (Nye, 2004, 2008). Global branding research focuses on the development and management of distinctive identities and associations across international markets (Steenkamp, 2020). Nation branding research emphasizes the strategic construction of national identity and reputation (Fan, 2006; Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2016). Sustainability research, meanwhile, emphasizes the creation of long-term economic, social, environmental, and cultural value (Elkington, 1997).

The integration of these perspectives provides a stronger theoretical foundation for understanding the contemporary beauty pageant industry. Beauty pageants can be conceptualized as communication and branding systems in which marketing strategies provide strategic inputs, image communication functions as an intermediate mechanism, Soft Power represents an important international outcome, and sustainability represents a longer-term impact.

From this perspective, marketing strategies may influence the way contestants, organizations, and nations construct and communicate their identities. Effective image communication can increase visibility, strengthen positive associations, and enhance cultural attractiveness. These processes may subsequently contribute to Soft Power by increasing the capacity of cultural actors and nations to attract international attention and generate favorable perceptions. When such influence is translated into sustained cultural preservation, social advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and responsible organizational practices, it may contribute to broader sustainability outcomes.

This integrated perspective also addresses an important limitation in previous literature. Existing studies have tended to examine beauty pageants from individual perspectives, such as cultural representation, gender, entertainment, social advocacy, or marketing communication. Although these perspectives provide valuable insights, they do not sufficiently explain the strategic mechanism connecting marketing activities with international influence and long-term sustainability.

Research Gap and Conceptual Implications

The literature review identifies three major research gaps.

First, there is a theoretical integration gap. Although Soft Power, global branding, nation branding, and sustainability have been extensively discussed in international scholarship, limited research has integrated these perspectives into a unified framework for analyzing the beauty pageant industry.

Second, there is a mechanism gap. Previous studies have established that beauty pageants can generate visibility, cultural representation, and social advocacy, but less attention has been given to how marketing strategies are transformed into Soft Power through image communication. In particular, the mediating role of image communication in connecting strategic marketing activities with Soft Power outcomes remains insufficiently explained.

Third, there is an outcome gap. Existing research has often emphasized immediate outcomes such as visibility, audience engagement, reputation, or social advocacy. Comparatively less attention has been given to the longer-term sustainability implications of Soft Power, particularly in relation to cultural preservation, social value, environmental responsibility, and sustainable organizational development.

Based on these gaps, the present study conceptualizes the beauty pageant industry as an interconnected strategic system. Marketing strategies represent the strategic inputs; image communication represents the communication mechanism through which identities and cultural meanings are constructed and transmitted; Soft Power represents the resulting capacity to generate attraction and international influence; and sustainability represents the longer-term multidimensional impact of these processes.

Accordingly, the proposed framework establishes a theoretical linkage among marketing strategies → image communication → Soft Power outcomes → sustainability impacts. Global Branding and Nation Branding provide important theoretical foundations for explaining how marketing and communication strategies shape organizational, personal, and national images, while Nye's Soft Power perspective explains how these images can generate attraction and influence. Elkington's Triple Bottom Line framework subsequently provides a basis for understanding how such influence can contribute to sustainable economic, social, environmental, and cultural outcomes.

This integrated approach advances the existing literature by moving beyond the conventional view of beauty pageants as entertainment or promotional events and positioning them as strategic cultural communication systems that can connect branding, national image, international influence, and sustainability. It therefore provides a more comprehensive theoretical foundation for examining how beauty pageants can contribute to both national and global cultural influence in the contemporary digital environment.

Research Conceptual Framework

This study develops a conceptual framework to explain the relationships among marketing strategies, image communication, Soft Power, and sustainability within the beauty pageant industry. The framework is grounded in three key theoretical perspectives: (1) marketing and branding theory, which explains how strategic communication and identity construction are developed; (2) Soft Power theory, which conceptualizes how cultural representation influences global perception; and (3) the Triple

Bottom Line framework, which defines sustainability across social, cultural, and economic dimensions.

The proposed framework conceptualizes the beauty pageant industry as an integrated system consisting of four interrelated components:

1. Input: Marketing Strategies

This component includes Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), digital media engagement, branding, and event-based marketing. These strategies function as the primary drivers that shape how pageant organizations and contestants communicate with audiences.

2. Process: Image Communication

Marketing strategies are operationalized through image communication processes, including cultural representation, storytelling, symbolic performance, and media interaction. This stage acts as a mediating mechanism that transforms strategic inputs into communicative outputs.

3. Output: Soft Power Outcomes

Through image communication, cultural meanings are transmitted to audiences, resulting in Soft Power outcomes such as national identity construction, global perception, and cultural influence.

4. Impact: Sustainability

Soft Power outcomes extend into broader sustainability impacts across three dimensions:

Social (e.g., gender equality, empowerment)

Cultural (e.g., preservation of identity and heritage)

Economic (e.g., tourism and creative industries)

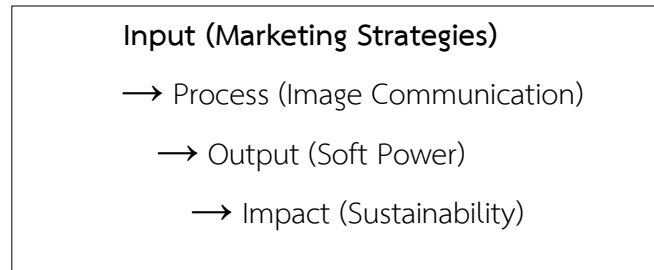
Conceptual Relationships

The framework proposes that marketing strategies (input) influence image communication processes (process), which in turn generate Soft Power outcomes (output). These outcomes subsequently contribute to sustainable development (impact).

Importantly, image communication functions as a mediating variable, linking marketing strategies to Soft Power, while sustainability is conceptualized as a long-term outcome rather than an independent component. This perspective extends existing

literature by integrating marketing, cultural communication, and sustainability into a single analytical model.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using documentary research and thematic content analysis to examine the relationships among marketing strategies, image communication, Soft Power, and sustainability in the beauty pageant industry. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to interpret meanings, communication practices, cultural representations, and strategic processes rather than statistically test causal relationships.

The study used multiple types of secondary data, including academic publications, publicly available social media content, official pageant materials, and selected international beauty pageant case studies. The integration of these sources enabled the researchers to examine the phenomenon from theoretical, communicative, cultural, and industry perspectives.

The study focused on contemporary developments in the beauty pageant industry during the period 2016–2025, representing a ten-year timeframe. This period was selected because it captures the substantial expansion of digital communication, social media engagement, personal branding, and the increasing use of beauty pageants as platforms for cultural and social advocacy.

Data Sources and Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to identify information-rich documents and media materials that were directly relevant to the three research objectives. The sampling

process consisted of three major data categories: academic literature, social media and digital media content, and international beauty pageant case studies.

Academic Literature

Academic literature was collected to establish the theoretical and empirical foundation of the study. The researchers initially identified publications through relevant academic databases and journal repositories. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, academic articles were retained for systematic synthesis.

The inclusion criteria were:

1. Publications directly related to Soft Power, branding, global branding, nation branding, marketing communication, cultural representation, sustainability, or beauty pageants.
2. Publications published between 2016 and 2025, except for foundational theoretical works that were published earlier.
3. Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and relevant academic theses or dissertations.
4. Publications containing sufficient information for theoretical or thematic analysis.
5. Publications written in English or Thai with accessible full-text content.

The exclusion criteria were:

1. Publications unrelated to the research objectives.
2. Duplicate publications.
3. Sources without sufficient full-text information for analysis.
4. Non-academic materials used only for promotional purposes.

Materials that did not provide substantive information concerning marketing, communication, Soft Power, cultural representation, or sustainability.

Foundational works, including Nye's Soft Power theory, Kotler and Keller's marketing and branding concepts, and Elkington's Triple Bottom Line framework, were retained regardless of publication year because they provide the theoretical foundations of the study.

Social Media and Digital Media Content

Social media data were collected from publicly accessible official accounts and platforms associated with selected beauty pageants and contestants, including YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. The dataset comprised social media items, consisting of videos, posts, and other digital content, collected during the period [Month/Year–Month/Year].

The social media materials included:

- official pageant promotional videos;

contestant introduction and presentation videos;

- national costume presentations;

speeches and advocacy videos;

- interviews and live-streaming content;
- Instagram and Facebook posts;
- campaign materials;

cultural storytelling content; and

content related to social, cultural, environmental, and community initiatives. Only publicly accessible content published by official pageant organizations, official pageant accounts, official contestant accounts, or verified organizational accounts was included. User-generated comments were considered only when they were directly relevant to interpreting audience responses and were publicly accessible.

Social media content was included when it met at least one of the following criteria:

1. Materials that did not provide substantive information concerning marketing, communication, Soft Power, cultural representation, or sustainability.

Foundational works, including Nye's Soft Power theory, Kotler and Keller's marketing and branding concepts, and Elkington's Triple Bottom Line framework, were retained regardless of publication year because they provide the theoretical foundations of the study.

Social Media and Digital Media Content

Social media data were collected from publicly accessible official accounts and platforms associated with the selected beauty pageants and contestants, including

YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. The dataset comprised social media items, including videos, posts, and other digital content, collected during the period The social media materials included:

- official pageant promotional videos;
- contestant introduction and presentation videos;
- national costume presentations;
- speeches and advocacy videos;
- interviews and live-streaming content;
- Instagram and Facebook posts;
- campaign materials;
- cultural storytelling content; and
- content related to social, cultural, environmental, and community initiatives.

Only publicly accessible content published by official pageant organizations, official pageant accounts, official contestant accounts, or verified organizational accounts was included. User-generated comments were considered only when they were publicly accessible and directly relevant to interpreting audience responses. Social media content was included when it met at least one of the following criteria:

1. It communicated national or cultural identity.
2. It demonstrated a marketing or branding strategy.
3. It involved image construction or reputation management.
4. It communicated social or environmental advocacy.
5. It demonstrated potential Soft Power outcomes or international audience engagement.
6. It was directly associated with the selected pageant cases.

Duplicate content, unrelated promotional materials, purely commercial advertisements without cultural or strategic relevance, and content that could not be verified as originating from an official source were excluded.

Case Studies

Three major international beauty pageant cases were purposively selected: Miss Universe, Miss Grand International, and MGI All Stars. These cases were selected because

they provide substantial evidence of international branding, cultural representation, digital communication, contestant advocacy, and global audience engagement.

For each case, the researchers examined materials related to marketing strategies, cultural representation, image communication, Soft Power, and sustainability during the specified study period.

The case-study selection criteria included:

International recognition and transnational audience reach.

1. Availability of sufficient public digital and documentary materials.
2. Evidence of cultural and national identity representation.
3. Evidence of strategic marketing and digital communication.
4. Evidence of social, cultural, or economic sustainability initiatives.
5. Relevance to the three research objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted systematically in four stages.

Stage 1: Identification of Academic Literature

Relevant academic publications were identified using academic databases, journal repositories, and university digital repositories. Search terms included combinations of keywords such as Soft Power, beauty pageant, beauty queen, global branding, nation branding, marketing communication, cultural representation, image communication, and sustainability.

Stage 2: Collection of Digital and Social Media Content

Publicly available materials were collected from official YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram accounts associated with the selected pageants and contestants. The researchers recorded the title, publication date, platform, source account, type of content, and relevance to the research objectives for each selected item.

Stage 3: Case Study Documentation

For each selected pageant, relevant official documents, media materials, event presentations, contestant communication, advocacy campaigns, and cultural representations were compiled to develop a case-specific dataset.

Stage 4: Data Organization

All selected materials were organized according to source type, case study, publication date, platform, and analytical theme. A data extraction matrix was used to ensure consistency in recording and comparing information across the three cases.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis consisted of four types of qualitative materials:

1. Academic documents — articles, books, theses, and dissertations relevant to the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the study.
2. Social media content — videos, posts, campaigns, speeches, interviews, and digital storytelling.
3. Pageant performances and presentations — national costumes, cultural performances, contestant introductions, and other symbolic representations.
4. Communication narratives — speeches, advocacy messages, interviews, and narratives concerning social, cultural, environmental, and national identity issues.

The unit of analysis was therefore not limited to individual contestants or individual media posts but included the meanings and communication practices embedded within each selected item.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The researchers followed a systematic three-stage coding process.

Initial Coding

First, the researchers reviewed each selected document and media item and identified meaningful concepts or recurring ideas. Examples of initial codes included *personal branding*, *digital engagement*, *national identity*, *cultural representation*, *social advocacy*, *global visibility*, *cultural attraction*, and *sustainability*.

Category Development

Second, related codes were grouped into broader categories. For example, codes such as social media storytelling, influencer activities, digital campaigns, and audience engagement were grouped under marketing and communication strategies. Similarly,

national costumes, cultural performances, traditional narratives, and national symbols were grouped under cultural representation and image communication.

Theme Development and Interpretation

Third, the broader categories were synthesized into major themes corresponding to the research objectives. The final analytical structure consisted of four interconnected dimensions:

1. Marketing Strategies — strategic activities used to create visibility, engagement, and distinctive identities.
2. Image Communication — processes through which cultural, personal, organizational, and national images were constructed and communicated.
3. Soft Power Outcomes — cultural attraction, positive global perception, international visibility, and influence.
4. Sustainability Outcomes — social, cultural, and economic value generated through beauty pageant activities.

The researchers then compared these themes across academic literature, social media content, and case studies to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns. The analysis focused particularly on the processes through which marketing strategies were connected to image communication, Soft Power, and sustainability.

Importantly, Image Communication was conceptualized as a mediating mechanism rather than a mediating variable. Because this study employed qualitative analysis and did not statistically test mediation effects, the term "mediating mechanism" more accurately describes the process through which marketing strategies may contribute to Soft Power outcomes.

Data Reliability and Trustworthiness

The credibility of the findings was enhanced through methodological triangulation. Evidence was compared across three major data sources: academic literature, social media and digital content, and case-study materials. A finding was considered more robust when similar patterns were identified across multiple sources.

The researchers also used theoretical triangulation by interpreting the data through Soft Power theory, marketing and branding perspectives, nation branding, and sustainability

concepts. This approach reduced dependence on a single theoretical perspective and strengthened the interpretation of relationships among marketing strategies, image communication, Soft Power, and sustainability.

In addition, the researchers maintained a systematic coding and data-extraction procedure. Each selected source was recorded according to its source, date, type of content, case, and analytical relevance. The researchers repeatedly reviewed the coded materials to identify inconsistencies, refine categories, and ensure that the final themes were supported by the collected evidence.

Ethical Considerations

The study used secondary data obtained from publicly accessible academic publications, official websites, and publicly available social media content. No private accounts, confidential documents, or restricted personal information were accessed. Social media materials were analyzed for academic purposes, with appropriate attribution to the original public sources.

The study did not collect personal identifiers or sensitive personal information from individual social media users. Where individual contestant content was analyzed, the analysis focused on publicly communicated messages, representations, and communication practices rather than private personal characteristics.

The dataset was therefore sufficiently structured to enable systematic comparison across theoretical literature, digital communication practices, and international beauty pageant cases. The combination of documentary research and thematic content analysis provided a basis for identifying recurring patterns and explaining the mechanism linking marketing strategies, image communication, Soft Power, and sustainability.

Research Results

Marketing Strategies in the Beauty Pageant Industry (Objective 1) The analysis reveals that marketing strategies in the beauty pageant industry have evolved into an integrated and multi-layered system combining traditional communication, digital media, and global branding practices. Three dominant strategic patterns emerged from the data:

1. National-Level Engagement Strategy

At the national level, marketing strategies primarily focus on audience engagement and domestic visibility. This includes public relations activities, event-based marketing, and localized social media communication aimed at building emotional connections with domestic audiences.

2. International Branding Strategy

At the international level, strategies shift toward global positioning, emphasizing branding, storytelling, and cross-cultural communication. Pageants utilize narratives of national identity, cultural uniqueness, and social advocacy to enhance their global image and competitiveness.

3. Digital Integration Strategy

Digital platforms function as a bridging mechanism that connects national and international strategies. Social media, influencer engagement, and content creation enable real-time interaction, global reach, and audience participation.

In addition, the findings indicate that contestant personal branding and cross-industry collaborations (e.g., fashion, tourism, entertainment) play a critical role in enhancing commercial value and expanding visibility.

Table 1: Analytical Dimensions of Marketing Strategies

Dimension	Strategic Focus	Mechanism	Outcome
National	Audience engagement	PR, Events, Local media	Domestic visibility
International	Global branding	Storytelling, Partnerships	Global positioning
Digital	Platform integration	Social media, Influencers	Global reach

These findings suggest that marketing strategies in beauty pageants are no longer isolated activities but operate as an integrated system in which digital platforms mediate between local engagement and global branding.

Image Communication as a Mechanism of Soft Power (Objective 2)

The analysis demonstrates that image communication functions as a central mediating mechanism through which cultural representation is transformed into Soft Power outcomes. Three key communicative processes were identified:

1. Symbolic Representation

Cultural elements such as national costumes, stage performances, and visual aesthetics encode meanings related to heritage and identity.

2. Narrative Construction

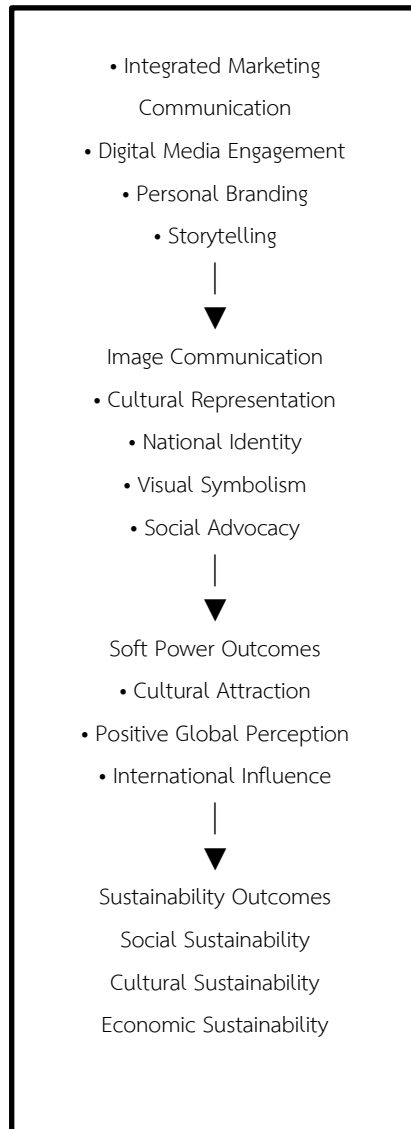
Contestant advocacy, storytelling, and personal narratives communicate social values such as empowerment, diversity, and social responsibility.

3. Media Amplification

Media platforms disseminate these symbolic and narrative elements to global audiences, enabling transnational interpretation and engagement.

These processes collectively contribute to the formation of Soft Power outcomes, including national image construction, global recognition, and cultural influence. Importantly, the findings indicate that image communication operates as a mediating variable, linking cultural representation to audience perception.

Figure 1. Integrated Conceptual Framework of Marketing Strategies, Image Communication, Soft Power, and Sustainability in the Beauty Pageant Industry



The findings further reveal that audience interpretation varies across contexts, suggesting that Soft Power is not a fixed outcome but a dynamic and negotiated process.

Sustainability in the Beauty Pageant Industry (Objective 3)

The findings indicate that sustainability in the beauty pageant industry is embedded as an extension of branding and Soft Power strategies rather than functioning as an independent dimension. Three interconnected dimensions of sustainability were identified: social, cultural, and economic sustainability.

1. Social Sustainability

Beauty pageants contribute to social sustainability by promoting values such as gender equality, diversity, inclusion, empowerment, and social responsibility. Contestants increasingly function as public advocates and digital influencers who use their visibility to communicate social issues and engage audiences in advocacy campaigns. These activities extend the social role of beauty pageants beyond competition and entertainment toward broader social value creation.

2. Cultural Sustainability

Cultural sustainability is reflected in the preservation, representation, and reinterpretation of cultural identity through performances, traditional costumes, cultural narratives, and symbolic representations. The findings indicate that traditional cultural elements are not simply reproduced but are adapted and reinterpreted for contemporary and international audiences. This process enables cultural identity to remain visible and relevant within a globalized media environment while simultaneously supporting the development of national image and cultural attractiveness.

3. Economic Sustainability

The findings also indicate that the beauty pageant industry generates economic value through tourism, sponsorship, media rights, event-related businesses, fashion, entertainment, and other creative industries. International pageants can attract audiences, sponsors, media organizations, and visitors, thereby generating economic opportunities for host destinations and contributing to broader national and local economic activity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that sustainability emerges as a longer-term consequence of the interaction among marketing strategies, image communication, and Soft Power. Social advocacy creates social value, cultural representation contributes to the continuity and adaptation of cultural identity, and economic activities generate financial and industry-related value. Thus, sustainability in the beauty pageant industry should be understood as a multidimensional and interconnected outcome rather than as a separate or isolated organizational activity.

Table 2: Sustainability as an Integrated Outcome

Dimension	Mechanism	Strategic Role	Impact
Social	Advocacy	Brand value	Social change
Cultural	Representation	Identity building	Heritage preservation
Economic	Commercialization	Industry growth	Economic development

The findings suggest that sustainability is closely linked to Soft Power and branding, reinforcing long-term credibility and value. However, tensions remain between commercial objectives and ethical considerations, indicating the need for more balanced strategic approaches.

Discussion of Results

1. Marketing Strategies as Structural Drivers of Cultural Industries. The findings indicate that marketing strategies in the beauty pageant industry function not merely as promotional tools but as structural drivers that shape how cultural content is produced, communicated, and consumed. The integration of public relations, digital media, event marketing, and contestant branding reflects a shift from traditional communication models toward a more complex system of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). At the international level, the emphasis on storytelling and cross-cultural positioning suggests that marketing strategies extend beyond commercial objectives to include symbolic and cultural functions. This finding extends existing marketing literature by demonstrating that branding in cultural industries operates simultaneously at economic and cultural levels, rather than as a purely commercial practice. Furthermore, the role of digital platforms highlights the transformation of audiences from passive receivers into active participants, reinforcing the idea that marketing communication in contemporary cultural industries is increasingly interactive and network-based. This supports and extends previous studies that emphasize audience engagement and media convergence, suggesting that digitalization is not only a tool but a structural condition shaping the industry.

2. Image Communication as a Mediating Mechanism of Soft Power. The findings confirm that image communication plays a central role in transforming cultural

representation into Soft Power outcomes. However, this study advances the existing literature by conceptualizing image communication as a mediating mechanism, rather than merely a representational process. Through symbolic representation, narrative construction, and media dissemination, cultural elements are translated into meanings that can influence global perception. This suggests that Soft Power does not operate directly from cultural content alone but is actively constructed through communication processes. This perspective extends Soft Power theory by emphasizing the importance of communication mechanisms in shaping influence. While traditional approaches focus on attraction and cultural appeal, the findings highlight that such influence is contingent upon how cultural meanings are encoded, transmitted, and interpreted across different contexts. Moreover, the variability in audience interpretation indicates that Soft Power is not a fixed outcome but a dynamic and negotiated process. This aligns with contemporary theories of media and cultural studies, which emphasize audience agency and interpretive diversity.

3. Sustainability as an Embedded Outcome of Soft Power and Branding. The findings reveal that sustainability in the beauty pageant industry is not an independent or externally imposed dimension but is embedded within branding and Soft Power processes. Social advocacy, cultural preservation, and economic value creation are strategically integrated into the industry's communication and branding practices. This finding contributes to sustainability literature by suggesting that in cultural industries, sustainability can function as a strategic outcome of effective communication and branding, rather than as a separate operational goal. In this context, sustainability enhances the legitimacy, credibility, and long-term value of pageant organizations.

4. Theoretical Integration and Contribution. Taken together, the findings support the proposed conceptual framework, which positions marketing strategies as inputs, image communication as a mediating process, and Soft Power as an output that extends into sustainability impacts. This integrated perspective contributes to the literature in three key ways. It reconceptualizes marketing strategies as structural components of cultural production rather than purely promotional tools. It identifies image communication as a mediating mechanism that enables Soft Power to operate. It positions sustainability as an embedded outcome of branding and communication processes within cultural industries.

New Knowledge from Research

From this study on the beauty pageant industry, new knowledge has been synthesized by integrating concepts of marketing strategies, Soft Power, image communication, and sustainability into a unified framework. The findings reveal that beauty pageants are no longer limited to entertainment but function as a strategic platform connecting business, culture, and global communication.

This research proposes a new conceptual structure called: Sustainable Soft Power Branding Model in the Beauty Pageant Industry. The model explains the relationships among three core components: Marketing Strategies (Input), Image Communication & Cultural Representation (Process), Soft Power Outcomes & Sustainable Development (Output). These components are interconnected and operate dynamically through media and global audiences.

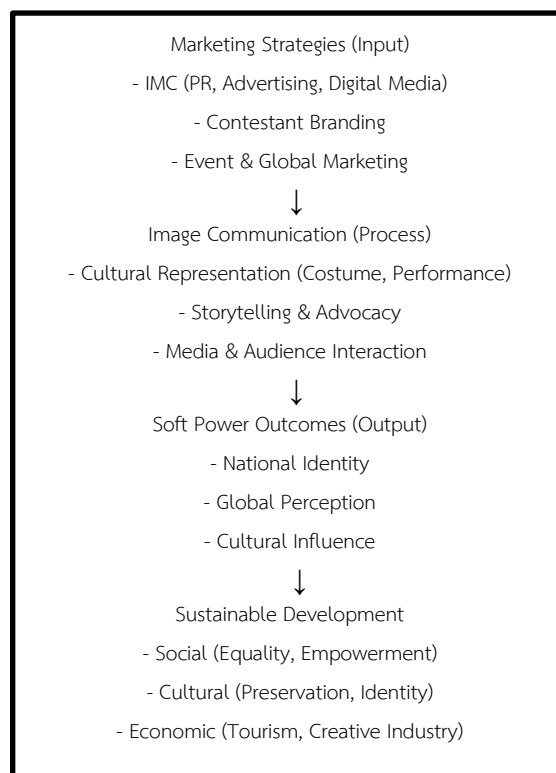


Diagram 2: Sustainable Soft Power Branding Model in Beauty Pageants

From Diagram 2, it is shown that marketing strategies act as the starting point in driving the beauty pageant industry. These strategies are transformed through image communication processes, where cultural elements and symbolic meanings are conveyed

to global audiences. As a result, Soft Power outcomes emerge, influencing national image and international perception. Furthermore, these outcomes contribute to sustainable development across social, cultural, and economic dimensions. The model highlights that sustainability is not a separate component but an extended impact of effective Soft Power and branding strategies. This new knowledge emphasizes that the beauty pageant industry operates as an integrated system, where marketing, communication, and cultural representation collectively create long-term value. It also demonstrates that successful pageants must balance commercial objectives with social responsibility and cultural sustainability.

Summary

This study concludes that the beauty pageant industry has evolved into a multidimensional platform that integrates marketing strategies, Soft Power, and sustainability. Marketing strategies enhance visibility and engagement, while image communication transforms cultural identity into global influence. These processes collectively generate Soft Power, which contributes to national branding and international perception.

At the same time, the industry supports sustainable development by promoting social values, preserving cultural heritage, and generating economic benefits. Therefore, the beauty pageant industry should be recognized not only as an entertainment business but also as a strategic mechanism for sustainable cultural and economic development in the global context.

Suggestions

From the research results, the researcher proposes the following recommendations:

1. Suggestions for applying research results

1.1 Results from research objective 1 found that marketing strategies in the beauty pageant business rely on integrated marketing communication, digital media, and branding at both national and international levels.

Therefore, relevant agencies and pageant organizers should take action as follows:

Develop integrated marketing strategies (IMC) that combine online and offline communication channels

1.2 Results from research objective 2 found that image communication in beauty pageants plays a significant role as a Soft Power tool in shaping national identity and global perception. Therefore, relevant agencies should take action as follows: Design communication strategies that emphasize cultural identity and national uniqueness Support contestants in developing advocacy narratives that reflect social values and global issues

1.3 Results from research objective 3 found that sustainable development in the beauty pageant industry involves social, cultural, and economic dimensions.

Therefore, relevant agencies should take action as follows: Promote social responsibility initiatives, such as gender equality, diversity, and community development Encourage the integration of local culture and traditions into pageant activities to preserve cultural heritage Develop strategies that enhance economic sustainability, including tourism promotion and creative industry collaboration

Establish ethical guidelines and sustainability policies to ensure long-term industry development

2. Suggestions for further research

This research has generated new knowledge in the form of a “Sustainable Soft Power Branding Model in the Beauty Pageant Industry,” which integrates marketing strategies, image communication, and sustainability. The important insight is that beauty pageants function as a multidimensional platform connecting business, culture, and global influence. This knowledge can be applied to industries related to entertainment, tourism, and cultural promotion.

Future research should give importance to deeper analysis of specific components within this model, particularly the impact of digital media and audience perception in different cultural contexts.

For the next research issue, studies should be conducted on topics such as: Comparative analysis of beauty pageant strategies across different countries

The role of digital transformation and social media influencers in shaping Soft Power

Audience perception and reception of cultural representation in global pageants

Long-term impacts of beauty pageants on sustainable economic and social development

Bibliography

- Anholt, S. (2007). *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Boonger, C., & Chairat, P. (2022). Political and social values in beauty pageants. *Journal of Political Science and Public Administration*, 13(1), 35–60. <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/polscicmujournal/article/view/253585>
- Butphuang, C., & Bupphapan, S. (2023). The image of modern Hmong-Lao women: Reflections through beauty pageant contexts. *Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Innovation Kalasin University*, 2(2), 64–73. https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/hsi_01/article/view/264364
- Chaitaisong, S. (2020). Gender identity communication among beauty pageant fans. *Chandrasekhar Rajabhat University Journal*, 26(2), 264–278. <https://li01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/crujournal/article/view/240155>
- Chaitaisong, S., & Hinwiman, S. (2020a). National identity communication among beauty pageant fan communities. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Thaksin University*, 15(2), 33–58. <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/HUSOTSU/article/view/246598>
- Chaitaisong, S., & Hinwiman, S. (2020b). The development of fan communities in Thai beauty pageants. *Connexion: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9(1), 123–148. <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/MFUconnexion/article/view/241495>
- Dinnie, K. (2016). *Nation branding: Concepts, issues, practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Elkington, J. (1997). *Cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st century business*. Capstone.
- Fan, Y. (2006). Branding the nation: What is being branded? *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 12(1), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766706056633>

- Jakkit, S. (2025). Beauty pageant management: Strategic analysis and impacts on entertainment industry development. *Journal of Social Science for Local Development Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University*, 9(2), 715–725. <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/soc-rmu/article/view/277746>
- Jiambooranakul, A. (2019). Beauty discourse and the negotiation of cultural identity in consumer society. *Chiang Mai University Journal of Social Sciences*, 18(1–2), 133–167. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jss/article/view/174663>
- Jutavipat, W. (2018). Thai national costumes on the Miss Universe stage: Past to present. *Journal of Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creative Work*, 5(1).
- Kaewnet, P. (2023). Soft power reflected in the beauty pageant business. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism Development*, 5(2), 75–82. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JSTD/article/view/264740>
- Kasampolkoon, A., & Somkane, P. (2022). Folklore and beauty pageants: Roles and reflections in Thai society. *Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Burapha University*, 30(2), 179–196. <https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/husojournal/article/view/253971>
- Kooha, M., & Parisaya. (2019). *Communicating Thai identity through hosting Miss Universe 2018 in Thailand* [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University]. Chulalongkorn University Digital Collections. <https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/chulaetd/9262/>
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing management* (15th ed.). Pearson.
- Kuhalert, S. (2025). Folklore in beauty pageant contests: Creative cultural capital. *Journal of Human and Society*, 11(2), 74–98. <https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/husocjournal/article/view/286769>
- Kumpusiri, P., Supasetsiri, P., & Nopudomphan, K. (2022). The role of beauty queens in Thai society. *Journal of Buddhist Anthropology*, 7(8), 55–66. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JSBA/article/view/260457>
- Nijrom, N., & Kaewsuwan, J. (2024). Cultural representation through Chinese national costumes on the Miss Universe stage. *Lawarath Social E-Journal*, 6(1), 19–44. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/lawarathjo/article/view/264890>

- Nuamsiri, N. (n.d.). *Marketing communication for promoting Miss Thailand World* [Master's thesis, Bangkok University]. Bangkok University Digital Library.
<http://dspace.bu.ac.th/handle/123456789/3896>
- Phanwirunmat, S., & Chanweroj, T. (2018). Marketing communication affecting the image of Miss Grand Thailand. *Rangsit Graduate Research Conference Proceedings*, 2052–2060. <https://rsujournals.rsu.ac.th/index.php/rgrc/article/view/757>
- Plodmusik, W. (2024). Communicating modern masculinity through Mister Supranational Thailand. *Arts of Management Journal*, 8(2), 1–20. <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jam/article/view/269305>
- Prachanpon, S. (2025). Politics in beauty pageants: The role in promoting human rights and political values in Thai society. *Journal of Political Science and Public Administration Ubon Ratchathani University*, 2(2), 1–30. https://so19.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/polsci_ubu/article/view/2818
- Prommas, C., & Darunaiyathorn, A. (2023). Meaning-making strategies in national costume presentations. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(1), 1–18.
<https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/mrsj/article/view/262254>
- Pruksachattaworn, T. (2021). The image of Thai beauty pageants through Miss Universe Thailand contestants' responses. *Journal of Siam Communication Arts Review*, 20(2), 230–242. <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/commartsreviewsiamu/article/view/255796>
- Romphoree, T., & Sumniengngam, S. (2023). *Language use and speech acts in comments on the Miss Grand International contest* [Doctoral dissertation, Silpakorn University]. Silpakorn University Digital Repository.
<http://202.44.135.157/dspace/handle/123456789/4397>
- Steenkamp, J.-B. E. M. (2020). Global brand building and management in the digital age. *Journal of International Marketing*, 28(1), 13–27.
- Sudcharaya, C., & Thongkaew, A. (2019). Internationalization of Thai higher education institutions. *Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University Journal*, 32(2), 70–87.
<https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/stouj/article/view/232917>

- Sukonthasap, R. (2018). Soft power resource management in Thailand. *Ratthaphirak Journal*, 60(3), 47–55. <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/ratthaphirak/article/view/189521>
- Thammapanichwong, & Boonyakorn. (2017). *The relationship between sports sponsorship and brand recall* [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University]. Chulalongkorn University Digital Collections. <https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/chulaetd/1717>
- Yiamkhanthithawon, S., & Yahakon, S. (2024). The construction of beauty queen nicknames among Thai pageant fans on Facebook fan pages. *Journal of Graduate Studies for Lifelong Learning*, 1(1), 37–49. <https://so15.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/GSLL/article/view/603>
- Nye, J. S., Jr. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Nye, J. S., Jr. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>