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## A Conceptual Model for Leveraging News Media in Cultural Diplomacy for Tourism Branding

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### Abstract

This article presents a systematic conceptual model to elucidate the role of cultural diplomacy and news media in the development and branding of cultural tourism destinations. The proposed model is built on four key components: cultural diplomacy as a strategic foundation, news media as an interactive medium, message framing, and cultural tourism destination branding. Using a documentary research method, the article extracts and explains the model's key components and relationships, emphasizing its unique contribution by treating news media as an independent and equal partner to cultural diplomacy. This approach highlights the active role of media and the critical importance of message framing as a connecting mechanism between cultural policy and brand image. Ultimately, the process leads to the creation and reinforcement of a cultural tourism destination brand, which can enhance a destination's international standing and foster sustainable cultural tourism development. The model provides a scientific and practical framework for policymakers and tourism stakeholders, addressing the existing gap in presenting integrated conceptual models that systematically incorporate the role of news media in this context.

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## Introduction

In today's world, cultural diplomacy is recognized as an effective tool of foreign policy, playing a significant role in strengthening international relations, enhancing national image, and fostering cultural cooperation. As a subset of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy utilizes cultural resources, historical heritage, and arts to create positive and sustainable interactions among nations. Described by Joseph Nye (2004) as a form of soft power, it exerts profound impacts in political, economic, and social spheres. Studies indicate that cultural diplomacy focuses on establishing, developing, and sustaining relationships with other countries through culture, arts, and education, aiming to promote shared universal values and interests while also pursuing national objectives (Woroniecka, 2016).

Cultural tourism, as a vital branch of the tourism industry, offers unique potential for achieving the goals of cultural diplomacy. It not only facilitates cultural exchange and mutual understanding among societies but also serves as an opportunity to promote and preserve a country's cultural and historical heritage (Richards, 2018). The significance of cultural tourism in national development policies is such that many governments use it as a tool to elevate their political and cultural standing on the global stage (Smith, 2016). By doing so, they aim to boost tourism-related revenue while expanding their cultural influence. For instance, Turkey's strategic use of media tools, such as films and TV series, to promote its tourist attractions has significantly increased tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings. In contrast, despite Iran's vast cultural and historical potential, systematic utilization of cultural diplomacy and cultural tourism remains underdeveloped, necessitating scientific research and localized conceptual models. Unlike existing models such as Nye's (2004) soft power framework, which emphasizes cultural exchange, this study introduces a novel model that integrates news media as an equal partner to cultural diplomacy, enhancing branding through dynamic message framing.

News media, as one of the most critical channels for message dissemination and image-building, play a pivotal role in shaping the brand of cultural tourism destinations. By covering cultural events, showcasing attractions, and narrating related stories, media outlets can create a positive and appealing image of a destination, ultimately attracting tourists and enhancing a country's cultural standing (Hall, 2014). This role is particularly crucial in countries aiming to develop cultural tourism and strengthen cultural diplomacy. News media, through their informational and narrative functions, serve as intermediaries for transmitting cultural messages and branding tourism destinations—a topic that has been underexplored in an integrated and model-based manner in tourism and international relations literature (Kim & Jamal, 2007). Examples include international news outlets, such as Euronews, which have been used by countries like Azerbaijan and Bulgaria to promote their tourism potential and attract international visitors.

Undoubtedly, tourism diplomacy, a subset of cultural diplomacy, is recognized as a tool for improving a country's image in the international system and attracting tourists. By fostering cultural interactions and strengthening public diplomacy, it enhances national credibility and promotes social cohesion domestically (Richter & Waugh, 1986). From this perspective, cultural tourism not only contributes to economic development but also serves as a bridge for cultural rapprochement, fostering peace and dialogue among civilizations (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

Given the importance of this topic and the existing gap in presenting conceptual models that systematically address the role of news media within the framework of cultural diplomacy for cultural tourism development, this study aims to propose a comprehensive conceptual model using a documentary and analytical approach. This gap is particularly evident in countries with vast cultural potential, such as Iran, where the systematic utilization of cultural diplomacy and cultural tourism remains underdeveloped, necessitating scientific research and localized conceptual models. The research ultimately seeks to answer the question: How, and through what structure and model, can news media be utilized within the framework of cultural diplomacy to promote branding and development of cultural tourism?

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Cultural Diplomacy**

Cultural diplomacy, as a branch of public diplomacy and a tool of soft power, is defined as the use of a country's cultural resources to achieve foreign policy objectives (Nye, 2004). In other words, it involves narrating a civilization's story to others using tools rooted in that civilization (Khani, 2005, p. 137). Beyond transmitting cultural messages, cultural diplomacy fosters positive and sustainable interactions among nations, promotes shared global values, and enhances a country's international image (Bennett, 2019; Clark, 2020). It is also recognized as a mechanism for strengthening political, economic, and social relations and shaping a country's identity and image on the global stage (Papaioannou, 2018). Through cultural exchange programs, art exhibitions, language education, festivals, and media activities, cultural diplomacy creates platforms for dialogue and mutual understanding, fostering trust and international cooperation (Bennett, 2019).

In academic literature, cultural diplomacy is often viewed as part of a country's broader public policy to enhance soft power and international standing. It emphasizes not only the promotion of culture and arts but also the creation of platforms for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among nations (Clark, 2020). Various conceptual models, such as Nye's soft power model and multilevel cultural interaction frameworks, highlight that cultural diplomacy goes beyond mere propaganda, aiming to build long-term, impactful relationships among cultures, ultimately elevating a country's global

position. It also serves as a tool to address cultural misunderstandings and conflicts, contributing to global peace and stability (Bennett, 2019).

Media play a significant role in cultural diplomacy, as framing and presenting cultural messages can shape domestic and international audience perceptions, promoting a positive national image. The framing theory explains how media select and highlight specific aspects of reality to convey cultural meanings, influencing audience perceptions (Entman, 1993). Thus, cultural diplomacy, in interaction with media, becomes a powerful tool for constructing and managing a country's national image and cultural brand.

Critically, while models like Nye's (2004) soft power framework focus on cultural exchange as a passive tool for influence, this model innovates by positioning cultural diplomacy as a proactive foundation that collaborates equally with news media, integrating Entman's (1993) framing theory to shape tourism branding dynamically.

### **Cultural Tourism**

Cultural tourism, one of the most significant branches of the tourism industry, emphasizes experiencing and understanding culture, arts, historical heritage, and local traditions (Richards, 2018). Recognized as a tool for cultural exchange, fostering mutual understanding, and preserving and promoting a country's cultural and historical heritage, it contributes to sustainable development, national income growth, and cultural identity reinforcement (Smith, 2016; UNWTO, 2008). Research shows that cultural tourism supports economic development in less-developed regions and preserves global cultural diversity.

Additionally, cultural tourism plays a vital role in strengthening intercultural communication and creating economic opportunities for local communities, helping preserve local traditions and arts while raising public awareness of cultural heritage's importance (Richards, 2018). Over the past two decades, cultural tourism has evolved from a niche activity to a mainstream phenomenon with significant economic, social, and political impacts. This growth has prompted policymakers and tourism industry stakeholders to focus on sustainable development and cultural resource management to prevent over-commercialization and degradation. Emerging trends include greater emphasis on intangible heritage, local community participation, and the use of modern technologies to promote and protect cultural heritage (Richards, 2018; Sawagvudcharee, 2024). Digital technologies, such as augmented reality and social media, play a crucial role in attracting tourists and enhancing their cultural experiences, enabling deeper engagement with the host culture.

Unlike UNWTO's (2008) policy-focused approach to cultural tourism, which lacks media integration, this model innovates by linking cultural tourism to news media framing, addressing gaps in sustainable branding strategies.

### **Branding in Cultural Tourism**

Branding, as a strategic process in cultural tourism, refers to developing and establishing a destination's identity and image in the minds of audiences, creating competitive advantages and added value (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). In tourism, a destination brand is not merely a name or logo but a collection of perceptions, emotions, and experiences that tourists associate with a place (Morgan et al., 2011). In other words, cultural tourism destination branding involves creating and managing a cohesive cultural identity using cultural, historical, and social elements to craft a distinctive and appealing image for target audiences (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

Studies indicate that cultural tourism destination branding should be based on a deep understanding of local characteristics, regional needs, and social interactions. Key factors for successful branding include audience attraction, sustainable development, brand knowledge, local support, public trust, and human resource management. These elements collectively contribute to creating a strong and sustainable brand that attracts tourists and enhances the quality of life for local communities (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

Social media and user-generated content play a significant role in strengthening destination brands, improving their image and perceived value (Sánchez-Franco & Rey-Tienda, 2024). Branding strategies should address the diverse needs of stakeholders, including tourists, investors, and local communities, while offering flexible and creative approaches aligned with social and economic trends (Nadi et al., 2022).

Challenges in cultural tourism branding include preserving cultural authenticity while attracting tourists, managing audience expectations, and balancing economic development with cultural heritage preservation. Successful branding models require comprehensive, collaborative, and research-based approaches that consider the cultural, social, and economic dimensions of the destination (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

In contrast to Kotler & Gertner's (2002) branding model, which prioritizes place identity, this model uniquely integrates cultural diplomacy and media framing as equal drivers, enhancing authenticity and stakeholder engagement in tourism branding.

### **Framing Theory and Its Application in Cultural Diplomacy and Tourism**

Framing theory, a key concept in communication and media studies, examines how media structure and present information, shaping audience perceptions by selecting and emphasizing specific aspects of reality (Entman, 1993). Framing involves organizing messages to convey specific meanings, influencing audience perceptions and behaviors (Goffman, 1974).

In cultural diplomacy and tourism, framing theory is particularly significant, as news media can shape a destination's image and influence its brand by selecting and highlighting cultural topics

(Papageorgiou & Papagianni, 2018). Media framing helps articulate how cultural messages are presented, emphasizes unique destination features, and manages audience perceptions (Scheufele, 1999).

Research shows that media framing can contribute to creating a destination's cultural identity and strengthening cultural diplomacy. For example, by highlighting cultural events, history, and local symbols, media can foster a sense of belonging and authenticity among audiences, facilitating destination branding (Bo, 2024). Framing also aids in managing cultural and tourism crises, preserving a destination's image during challenges.

Practically, framing enables policymakers and tourism managers to deliver targeted and cohesive cultural messages through media, creating a favorable destination image (Papageorgiou & Papagianni, 2018). This process requires a deep understanding of audiences, destination culture, and media characteristics to frame messages effectively (Scheufele, 1999).

In academic literature, cultural diplomacy is often viewed as part of a country's broader public policy to enhance soft power and international standing. While various conceptual models, such as Nye's soft power model and the data-driven model by Moghadam et al. (2021) have been proposed, they often treat media as a mere tool or a subset of cultural diplomacy. For instance, the model by Moghadam et al. emphasizes visual identity indicators and local community participation in branding but gives less prominence to the active, communicative role of news media and message framing. Similarly, the participatory model by Seidbeigi et al. (2020) focuses on integrating field data and stakeholder participation, but does not sufficiently elaborate on the intricate, two-way interaction between media and cultural diplomacy.

Our model, in contrast, stands out by treating news media as independent and equal partners with cultural diplomacy, rather than a mere subset, highlighting their active and interactive role in shaping the brand. This approach strengthens the communicative dimension of branding by focusing on the role of news media and cultural diplomacy in message transmission and framing, offering a novel and scientific perspective that underscores the importance of content and message management in successful cultural tourism branding.

## **Research Method**

In line with the study's objective of presenting a conceptual model for utilizing news media in branding cultural tourism destinations within the framework of cultural diplomacy, a documentary (library-based) research method was employed. This method involved reviewing and analyzing scholarly articles, reports, official documents, and related texts retrieved from reputable academic databases, including Scopus and Web of Science. The search was conducted using keywords related to the study's core

concepts and was limited to a timeframe from 2015 to 2024 to ensure the use of current and relevant literature. This approach is particularly suitable for studies aiming to develop conceptual models, theoretical frameworks, or macro-analyses, as it allows for a comprehensive examination of various dimensions using diverse sources. By facilitating a broad review of sources and providing access to reliable, up-to-date data, this method is both time- and cost-efficient, while also enhancing the study's scientific rigor by allowing for comparative analysis of different perspectives. Following the analysis and categorization of the data, the key components and their relationships were extracted, which served as the foundation for developing the proposed conceptual model. Table 2 provides detailed information on the documentary sources related to cultural diplomacy, cultural tourism, destination branding, and the role of news media used in this research.

**Table 1. Comparison of the Proposed Model with Existing Models**

| Model                     | Source                           | Focus                                          | Media Role                         | Innovation in Proposed Model                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Soft Power                | Nye (2004)                       | Cultural exchange for influence                | Passive tool                       | Positions news media as an equal partner to cultural diplomacy, integrating Entman's (1993) framing theory for dynamic tourism branding |
| Cultural Tourism Policy   | UNWTO (2008) branding strategies | Sustainable tourism development                | Minimal media focus                | Links cultural tourism to news media framing, addressing gaps in sustainable branding strategies.                                       |
| Destination Branding      | Kotler & Gertner (2002)          | Place identity creation                        | Marketing-focused, media as a tool | Integrates cultural diplomacy and media framing as equal drivers, enhancing authenticity and stakeholder engagement                     |
| Cultural Tourism Branding | Moghadam et al. (2021)           | Visual identity and community participation    | Limited media role                 | Emphasizes media-diplomacy synergy and centrality of message framing for effective branding                                             |
| Participatory Branding    | Seidbeigi et al. (2020)          | Stakeholder data integration for urban tourism | Secondary media role               | Enhances branding with equal media-diplomacy interaction, focusing on dynamic content creation                                          |

## Research Findings

### Conceptual Model for Utilizing News Media in Branding Cultural Tourism Destinations with a Cultural Diplomacy Approach

Based on scientific literature and documentary evidence, the proposed conceptual model offers a systematic and interactive framework that elucidates the role of each component and their interactions in the process of forming a cultural tourism brand, as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Table 2. Sources Used in the Research for Designing the Model**

| Source Type                               | Title / Subject                                                                                 | Author/<br>Organization   | Publication<br>Year | Application in<br>Research                                                    | Publisher                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Scientific Article (Domestic)</b>      | Resources, Goals, and Tools of Cultural Diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran               | Rajabi & Assari           | 2021                | Examining authentic resources, goals, and tools of Iran's cultural diplomacy  | Journal of Soft Power Studies                                   |
| <b>Scientific Article (Domestic)</b>      | Model of Cultural Diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran                                     | Azhdari et al.            | 2017                | Presenting a conceptual model and framework for Iran's cultural diplomacy     | Journal of Culture-Communication Studies                        |
| <b>Book (Domestic)</b>                    | An Introduction to Cultural Diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran                           | Hajiani & Iranshahi       | 2015                | Analyzing dimensions, tools, and challenges of Iran's cultural diplomacy      | Abrar Contemporary International Studies and Research Institute |
| <b>Global Organization Report</b>         | Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Development                                                    | UNWTO                     | 2008                | Official definitions of cultural tourism and sustainable development policies | UNWTO                                                           |
| <b>Scientific Article (International)</b> | Cultural Tourism: A Review of Recent Research and Trends                                        | Richards                  | 2018                | Review of cultural tourism literature and emerging trends                     | Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management                   |
| <b>Scientific Article (International)</b> | Engaging Brand Awareness for Sustainable Innovations in Cultural Tourism                        | Sawagvudcharee            | 2024                | Modern technologies in cultural tourism                                       | Revista De Gestão Social E Ambiental                            |
| <b>Scientific Article (International)</b> | Cultural Diplomacy and its Contribution to management of tourism destination image and identity | Papageorgiou & Papagianni | 2018                | Role of news media in cultural diplomacy and branding                         | TOURMAN                                                         |
| <b>Scientific Article (International)</b> | Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm                                           | Entman                    | 1993                | Framing theory in media                                                       | Journal of Communication                                        |
| <b>Scientific Article (International)</b> | Country as Brand, Product, and Beyond: A Place Marketing and Brand Management Perspective       | Kotler & Gertner          | 2002                | Concepts of destination branding                                              | Springer                                                        |

| Source Type                                       | Title / Subject                                                                                                        | Author/<br>Organization        | Publication<br>Year | Application in<br>Research                            | Publisher                        |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Book<br/>(International)</b>                   | Destination Brands:<br>Managing Place<br>Reputation                                                                    | Morgan et al.                  | 2011                | Managing destination<br>brand reputation              | Routledge                        |
| <b>Scientific<br/>Article<br/>(International)</b> | Touristic Quest for<br>Existential Authenticity                                                                        | Kim & Jamal                    | 2007                | Role of narrative and<br>media in cultural<br>tourism | Annals of<br>Tourism<br>Research |
| <b>Scientific<br/>Article<br/>(International)</b> | The Role of user-<br>generated Content in<br>Tourism Decision-<br>Making: An Exemplary<br>Study of Andalusia,<br>Spain | Sánchez-Franco<br>& Rey-Tienda | 2024                | Role of user-<br>generated content in<br>branding     | Management<br>Decision           |
| <b>Book<br/>(International)</b>                   | Heritage Tourism                                                                                                       | Timothy &<br>Boyd              | 2003                | Heritage and cultural<br>tourism                      | Pearson                          |

### 1. Strategic Foundation: Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy, as an effective soft power tool, plays a pivotal role in promoting a country's culture, arts, and historical heritage internationally. Beyond formal political relations, it focuses on fostering human connections, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding among nations, serving as a strategic foundation for shaping cultural policies and messages (Bennett, 2019). Numerous studies demonstrate that cultural diplomacy can contribute to tourism development, acting as a catalyst for enhancing national image and increasing the appeal of cultural tourism destinations (Rezaei, 2014). It encompasses activities such as festivals, art exhibitions, academic and educational exchanges, promotion of tangible and intangible heritage, and language and literature advocacy, all of which strengthen a country's soft power. In this model, cultural diplomacy serves as the starting point and strategic foundation, defining the overarching framework for cultural messages and branding goals. It guides media direction and message framing, facilitating the creation of a cultural tourism destination brand. Cultural policymakers, through targeted programs and support for cultural activities, create a foundation for producing effective content that is subsequently disseminated to audiences through news media.

Unlike Clark's (2020) exchange-focused model, which treats media as supplementary, this model positions cultural diplomacy as a proactive driver that collaborates equally with news media to shape tourism branding.

## **2. Interactive and Aligned Mediators: News Media**

News media, both traditional and digital, serve as interactive and aligned mediators with cultural diplomacy. They receive, frame, and transmit cultural messages to a broad audience. Studies indicate that media not only reflect messages but also shape audience perceptions by selecting frames and highlighting specific aspects, influencing the destination brand's image (Salehi & RoshanDel Arbatani, 2024).

In the proposed model, news media interact directly and on equal footing with cultural diplomacy. Both components independently and collaboratively channel cultural messages into “message framing.” This two-way, synergistic interaction enables the production of diverse, targeted, and engaging content designed for domestic and international audiences.

Social media, in particular, have become powerful tools for audience engagement and user-generated content in recent years. Tourists, by sharing their experiences, act as brand ambassadors, enhancing the brand's credibility and appeal (Sánchez-Franco & Rey-Tienda, 2024). Media also contribute to brand identity and public awareness through advertising campaigns, public relations, and producing documentaries and reports.

The success of media in tourism branding requires precise strategies aligned with cultural diplomacy goals. Professional, targeted, and audience-specific content production, coupled with data analysis and feedback is critical to media effectiveness. Coordination among cultural, tourism, and media institutions is essential for managing brand image and addressing potential challenges and crises. Ultimately, media not only transmit messages but also act as active players in the branding process, ensuring the brand's appeal and sustainability through innovative content and communication methods.

In contrast to Hall's (2014) model, where media are secondary to marketing, this model innovates by treating news media as equal partners with cultural diplomacy, enabling dynamic content creation for branding.

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## **3. Shaping and Influencing Mechanism: Message Framing**

Media framing is the process through which media organize and present messages to maximize their impact on audience perceptions and attitudes (Scheufele, 1999). In cultural tourism, framing involves selecting prominent topics, providing meaningful interpretations, emphasizing unique cultural features, and repeating messages to reinforce them (Papageorgiou & Papagianni, 2018). This stage

serves as the critical link between cultural diplomacy, news media, and destination branding. Framed messages ensure that cultural content is presented in an engaging and comprehensible manner, laying the groundwork for creating a positive and lasting image in the minds of potential tourists. Research underscores the importance of this stage in successful branding (Norouzian & Najafi, 2022).

Media frame messages by selecting and highlighting specific cultural and tourism aspects. Framing theory explains how media influence audience perceptions by emphasizing certain dimensions of reality, thereby shaping the destination brand's image. For instance, media can present a destination's historical heritage, local culture, or natural attractions in a positive and appealing manner, encouraging tourist visits.

#### **4. Creating Identity and Image: Cultural Tourism Destination Branding**

Cultural tourism destination branding is the process of cohesively and attractively conveying a destination's identity, image, and cultural values to audiences (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). A destination brand encompasses the perceptions, emotions, and experiences tourists associate with a place, creating competitive advantages and added value (Morgan et al., 2011).

In this model, destination branding is the direct outcome of message framing, built on targeted and framed messages. A strong cultural brand increases a destination's appeal, attracts targeted tourists, and strengthens national identity. It also serves as a tool for sustainable cultural tourism development and cultural heritage preservation. Effective branding should focus on cultural authenticity, compelling storytelling, and establishing emotional connections with audiences (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

A deep understanding of local characteristics, tourist needs, and engagement with local stakeholders is critical to a destination brand's success. Factors such as sustainable development, public trust, local community participation, and human resource management must be integrated into branding strategies. Social media and user-generated content play a significant role in enhancing the brand, improving its image, and increasing its perceived value (Sánchez-Franco & Rey-Tienda, 2024).

Cultural tourism destination branding faces challenges such as preserving cultural authenticity amidst commercialization, managing tourist expectations, and balancing economic development with cultural heritage preservation. Success in this area requires comprehensive, collaborative, and research-based approaches that consider the destination's cultural, social, and economic dimensions.

Unlike Morgan et al.'s (2011) focus on perceptual branding, this model integrates cultural diplomacy and media framing as equal components, enhancing authenticity and sustainable tourism outcomes.

### **5. Final Outcome: Cultural Tourism Development**

Cultural tourism development, as the final stage of the conceptual model, represents the realization of the overarching goals of this interactive and systematic process. It encompasses not only an increase in tourist numbers but also improvements in the quality of tourism experiences, infrastructure development, cultural heritage preservation and promotion, and the enhancement of a destination's international standing. Cultural tourism development is the direct result of effective branding, facilitated by message framing and the two-way interaction between cultural diplomacy and news media.

A key feature of this stage is the balance between economic development and the preservation of cultural values. Successful cultural tourism development should attract tourists and generate economic revenue while preserving the destination's cultural authenticity, local identity, and tangible and intangible heritage. Studies show that culturally rooted branding, supported by local community participation, fosters sustainable tourism development (Yazdanpanah Shahabadi et al., 2019).

In contrast to Richards' (2018) trend-focused approach, this model provides a testable framework by integrating media framing and diplomacy, filling gaps in media-driven sustainable tourism development.

News media, particularly digital and social media, continue to play a significant role at this stage. By disseminating diverse content, documentaries, and tourist experiences, they sustain a positive brand image and relay audience feedback to cultural policymakers and tourism managers. This feedback loop supports continuous improvement in messaging and branding strategies (Salehi & Roshandel Arbatani, 2024).

In this model (Figure 1), the direct link between cultural tourism development and cultural diplomacy is omitted to maintain focus on the mediating and coordinating roles of news media and message framing. This approach, given the complexities of cultural and tourism communications in the era of new media, enables better message management and responses to potential challenges and crises.

Cultural tourism development, as the model's outcome, drives increased investment, job creation, improved quality of life for local communities, and enhanced national pride. These outcomes are strategically significant, particularly for developing countries where cultural tourism plays a vital economic role.

Ultimately, cultural tourism development in this model is not merely an economic goal but a multidimensional process encompassing cultural, social, economic, and environmental dimensions. It requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach, leveraging cooperation among cultural, tourism, media, and local community stakeholders to ensure the sustainable success of the cultural tourism destination brand.

Overall, the proposed conceptual model is built on the two-way and equal interaction between cultural diplomacy and news media. Cultural diplomacy, as the strategic foundation, feeds news media with targeted messages, which, through message framing, facilitate cultural tourism destination branding. This brand ultimately drives cultural tourism development and enhances the destination's international standing. The model, emphasizing the active role of media in branding and the importance of message framing, provides a scientific and practical framework for policymakers and tourism and diplomacy stakeholders.

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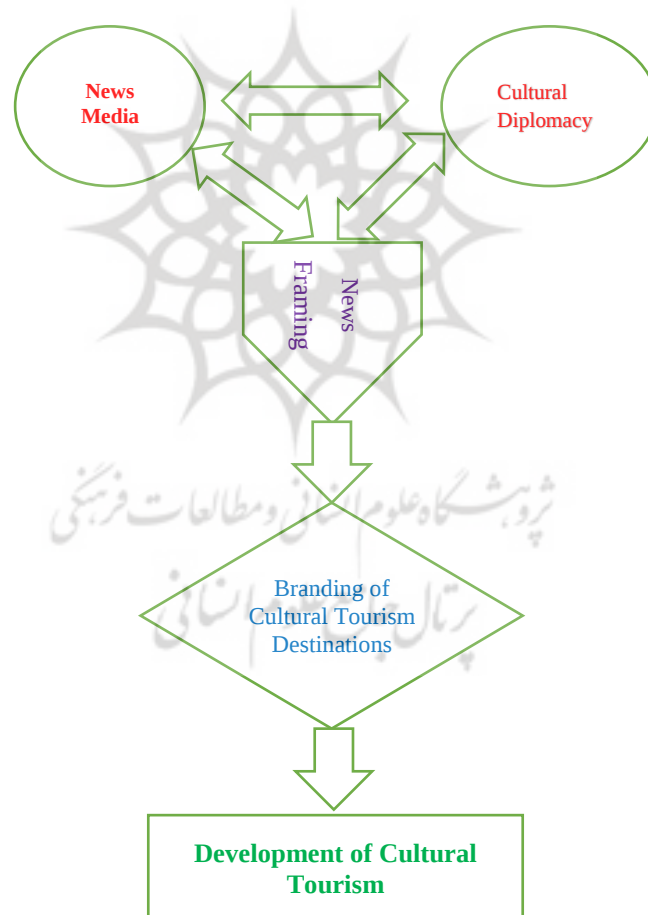


Fig 1. A conceptual Model for Leveraging News Media in Cultural Diplomacy

## Conclusion

The conceptual model for utilizing news media in branding cultural tourism destinations with a cultural diplomacy approach offers a comprehensive and interactive framework that scientifically and systematically elucidates the role of key components and their interactions in forming a cultural tourism brand. Grounded in credible research literature, the model encompasses four main components: cultural diplomacy, news media, message framing, and cultural tourism destination branding, ultimately leading to sustainable cultural tourism development.

Cultural diplomacy, as the model's strategic foundation, plays a pivotal role in shaping overarching cultural policies and messages. As a key tool of soft power in international relations, it transcends formal political ties, focusing on human connections, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding among nations. Research shows that cultural diplomacy, by promoting a country's values, arts, and historical heritage, creates a positive and appealing destination image, guiding branding efforts at a macro level. In this model, cultural diplomacy operates in tandem with news media in an equal and interactive manner. Media not only reflect cultural diplomacy messages but also shape audience perceptions through message selection and framing, influencing the brand's image.

News media, both traditional and digital, serve as active intermediaries in producing news, analytical, and narrative-driven content that solidifies a destination's image in audiences' minds. Modern media, with their interactive and user-generated content capabilities, enable tourist and audience participation in the branding process, enhancing the credibility and reach of cultural messages (Sánchez-Franco & Rey-Tienda, 2024). The two-way, synergistic interaction between cultural diplomacy and news media creates a platform for producing diverse, targeted, and engaging messages for domestic and international audiences.

Message framing, a critical stage in the model, involves media organizing and presenting messages to maximize their impact on audience perceptions and attitudes. This process includes selecting prominent topics, providing meaningful interpretations, emphasizing unique cultural features, and repeating messages to reinforce them (Papageorgiou & Papagianni, 2018). Successful message framing creates a positive and lasting image in the minds of potential tourists, providing a robust foundation for destination branding.

Cultural tourism destination branding, the direct outcome of message framing, is the process of conveying a destination's identity, image, and cultural values in a distinctive and appealing manner. As a collection of tourist perceptions, emotions, and experiences, a strong brand creates competitive advantages and added value, increasing a destination's appeal, attracting targeted tourists, and

reinforcing national identity. It also serves as a tool for sustainable cultural tourism development and cultural heritage preservation.

Finally, cultural tourism development, as the model's ultimate outcome, reflects the realization of cultural diplomacy and destination branding goals. It encompasses increased tourist numbers, improved infrastructure, enhanced service quality, and a strengthened international standing. The model omits a direct link between cultural tourism development and cultural diplomacy to emphasize the mediating role of news media and message framing, ensuring effective management of cultural and marketing communications.

Compared to similar models, this approach stands out by treating news media as independent and equal partners with cultural diplomacy, rather than a mere subset, highlighting their active and interactive role in shaping the brand. The emphasis on message framing as the connecting point between cultural diplomacy, media, and branding offers a novel and scientific perspective, underscoring the importance of content and message management in successful cultural tourism branding. This model aligns with and complements the data-driven and culturally oriented tourism branding model proposed by Moghadam et al. (2021), which emphasizes visual identity indicators and local community participation in branding cultural tourism destinations. It is also compatible with the participatory and data-driven branding approach of Seidbeigi et al. (2020), which focuses on integrating field data and stakeholder participation for developing urban tourism brands.

In summary, the proposed model strengthens the communicative dimension of branding by focusing on the role of news media and cultural diplomacy in message transmission and framing. By integrating theories of cultural diplomacy, media framing, and tourism branding, it offers a scientific and practical framework that can guide policymakers, cultural managers, and tourism stakeholders in designing destination marketing strategies for cultural tourism.

### **Research Limitations and Future Suggestions**

This study employed a documentary (library-based) research method, which, while cost- and time-efficient, presents certain limitations. The findings and the proposed model are based on a synthesis of existing literature and do not incorporate primary data from stakeholders, tourists, or media professionals. Consequently, the model's practical application and effectiveness have not yet been empirically tested in a specific case study. Future research should therefore address these limitations by conducting empirical studies to validate the proposed model in a specific cultural tourism destination. Furthermore, qualitative methods like in-depth interviews with cultural diplomats and tourism managers could provide a deeper understanding of the components, while quantitative methods such as a content

analysis of news media and surveys of tourists could measure the impact of message framing on destination branding and perceptions.

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