

The Attraction of Language: Language, Soft Power and the Narrative Fallacy

1. Introduction

This pilot study examines the English language and English language teaching as soft power resources which can generate 'influence through attraction' for the UK. It focuses specifically on the British Council and explores its strategy for utilising these resources as ways to cultivate soft power influence, paying particular attention to the Middle East and North Africa. The pilot study has two principal aims:

a.) To show that the British Council has constructed and widely disseminated a strategic narrative – here termed 'the attraction of language' – based on the claim that the English language is a soft power tool which can increase trust in the UK and render it attractive abroad, thus inducing others to emulate its political values and engage commercially with the UK.

b.) To show that three difficulties beset this narrative and require further research. First, the narrative is predicated on a simplistic definition of soft power which does not fully take into account differences in value systems between the UK and those whom it is trying to influence. Second, in order to measure the credibility of this narrative, there is a pressing need to analyse quantitative and/or qualitative data on the attitudes of those who have engaged with British Council English language programmes. Part of the difficulty here is that metrics of soft power – which are normally seen in terms of 'trust' or positive sentiment – are too slippery to permit easy quantification. Significant further research is required to develop social media analysis tools which can accurately evaluate the success of the British Council's efforts to create soft power through language programmes. Third, that the British Council's narrative constructs cultural value solely in terms of economic benefit and political power rather than in terms of intrinsic value.

With these two aims in mind, the study begins by describing the methodology taken in this research in the second section, before proceeding to outline the concept of soft power as described by its intellectual 'father', Joseph S. Nye in the third. The fourth section of the study is predominantly analytical and is devoted to examining the British Council's strategic narrative. It begins by arguing that the British Council views language and culture as resources which can be deployed to generate soft power influence by building trust in and

attraction for the UK abroad. This section then proceeds to demonstrate that the British Council views this not only as a way of gaining political influence abroad, but also of creating commercial links between the UK and other countries. The fifth and final section then proceeds to deconstruct this narrative as a way of delineating future research pathways based on the findings of the pilot study.

2. Methodology

The primary sources for this pilot study fall into two categories. The first consists of a series of seven high-profile British Council reports produced between 2012 and 2013.¹ The second comprises a range of internal British Council reports devoted to evaluating the impact of the LearnEnglish Facebook page and the broader effectiveness of the English for the Future project, particularly with reference to social media analytics. The study is predicated on what might be termed 'strategic narrative analysis'. For the purposes of this research, this involved distilling the British Council publications into strategic narratives – which are viewed as 'stories' told about the future describing how particular resources (financial, human, social and cultural) may be converted into desired objectives. These strategic narratives were then subjected to a second stage of analysis in which they are 'trawled' for heuristics, biases and inconsistencies.²

3. What is Soft Power? Nye's Perspective

Governments have long recognised the need to be able to project power abroad. The ability to do so enables states to further their interests – economically, militarily, territorially and politically. And yet it is increasingly recognised by governments that the traditional 'carrot and stick' forms of exerting power – financial aid and military power – are no longer sufficient by themselves. Simply put, the stark reality in an era of austerity is that the economic costs of disbursing financial aid and/or maintaining, let alone deploying, military capabilities, are making these options increasingly unattractive and impractical – indeed, the financial and political costs are sometimes so great that both options are rendered unviable.³ It is therefore not surprising that governments are searching for alternative – yet cheaper – ways to project power, particularly in fragile and hostile regions abroad.

¹ These publications can be found at: www.britishcouncil.org/about/publications.

² In this sense, strategic narrative analysis is heavily indebted to the work of social psychologists such as: Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Penguin); Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky, *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge University Press).

³ The recent decision by British politicians to vote against military action in Syria in the House of Commons is a case in point.

One way to exert influence abroad which has garnered much recent attention is what Joseph S. Nye once described as 'soft power'. Nye's concept has generated considerable interest amongst western governments, not least because 'soft power' is often seen to be 'cheap power'. For Nye, 'soft power' sits in contrast to (but not necessarily in conflict with) 'hard power' and it involves getting what one wants by co-opting other actors rather than by coercing or inducing them to act in a particular way. In a report focusing on American soft power for the Centre for Strategic and International Studies' 'Smart Power Commission', for example, he described soft power as 'the ability to attract people to our side without coercion... If a people or nation believes American objectives to be legitimate, we are more likely to persuade them to follow our lead without using threats and bribes'.⁴ Attraction and attractiveness sit at the very heart of the concept of soft power. Elsewhere, Nye emphasises this, suggesting that soft power is 'more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument ... it is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence. Simply put, in behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power'.⁵

For Nye, then, 'carrots' (inducements) and 'sticks' (punishments) which have long dominated International Relations' theories of power rely too heavily on realist interpretations of power. Under the realist position, 'something is not a power source unless you can drop it on a city or on your foot'.⁶ Rather, he argues that the seductive qualities of 'attractiveness' can be a more effective in getting others to behave as one wishes. From this perspective, he describes soft power as a way of convincing others to do as one wants by encouraging them to 'buy into' a set of values and beliefs and, in so doing, inducing them to emulate one's own political values or, more broadly, to adopt particular forms of attractive or favourable behaviour.

Soft power, then, is a way of shaping the preferences of others through attraction and thus removing the (costly) need for a military or disbursing financial aid. This definition says something about how soft power works, but it says little about the assets on which the extent of this kind of power rests. What does one need to be a great 'soft' power? How do countries like Norway – with small populations, relatively weak military capabilities and comparatively modest financial systems – exert power out of proportion to their hard power resources? Nye argues that, much as a country's hard power derives from a state's military and economic capabilities, so soft power stems from particular assets. He identifies three: '[a country's] culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives

⁴ Armitage and Nye, *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America* (Washington, DC: CSIS Press).

⁵ Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs), 5.

⁶ Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 96.

up to them at home and abroad) and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)'.⁷

Nevertheless, possession of these assets, even in abundance, does not automatically mean that one has the potential to exert soft power on other actors – indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a state *without* these assets. And yet if soft power is held to varying extents by different states, how are these soft power assets converted into soft power? For Nye, this process requires a particular form of diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy (or public diplomacy as Nye refers to it) involves presenting soft power resources in the most attractive way possible. In the first instance, this requires advertising one's culture: this may well take the form of broadcasting (through print media, or the radio, television and, more recently, the internet), cultural and language exchanges, educational programmes, artistic, theatrical or musical exhibitions or, at a more popular level, through the film, music and fashion industries.⁸

But disseminating information about one's culture is not sufficient for the successful projection of soft power – as Nye phrases it, 'preaching at foreigners is not the best way to convert them'. In this sense, cultural diplomacy does not simply require careful advertising of political and cultural values or the strategic communication of these values in a relatively coherent message; it also requires one to behave according to these values – to return to the oft-quoted phrase, it requires one to practice what one preaches. This can be the most taxing aspect of 'soft power': cultural diplomacy is all very well, but if a state says it espouses particular political values – human rights, for example - and then proceeds to contravene those values – through extraordinary rendition, unlawful state invasion of privacy or torture, for example – then cultural diplomatic efforts to create attractiveness will be frustrated, at best, or in vain, at worst.

4. *The 'Attraction of language': Building a Narrative*

In the previous section, we saw that Nye identified three categories of soft power assets: culture, political values and foreign policy. For the British Council, language – and the English language specifically – can be considered a major subset of culture. One recent British Council report, for example, defines culture as encompassing

publicly funded, commercial and individual "homemade" culture. Among its core expressive activities are language, sport, education, food and religion. "Cultural relations" refers to the sharing and communication of

⁷ *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 11.

⁸ Nye refers to this as public diplomacy. "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power."

this culture internationally, typically through education exchanges, language teaching, art performances or museum exhibitions, international broadcasting and a wide variety of other activities.⁹

For the British Council, the English language is a powerful medium in which science, technology, the arts, academia and diplomacy are conducted, in which political values and beliefs are enshrined, in which business and trade is transacted and through which vast global peer-to-peer networks communicate. As the British Council phrases it:

English is spoken at a useful level by some 1.75 billion people worldwide – that’s one in every four. By 2020, we forecast that two billion people will be using it – or learning to use it. And it is the economically active, the thought leaders, the business decision-makers, the young, the movers and shakers present and future who are learning and speaking English. They are talking to each other more and more and English is the ‘operating system’ of that global conversation.¹⁰

From the British Council’s perspective, then, English is not only the *lingua franca* in which the politically, commercially, economically and culturally active converse, but also the tool which links these diverse and distant communities.

In this sense, the British Council views English not only as a facet of culture but as a way of communicating culture. This is an important point, because it allows the British Council to frame both culture and language as political tools through which soft power can be garnered. Their website, to take one example, states that ‘[t]he UK’s language, arts, education system and civil society are the reasons for our international attractiveness... [they] strengthen the UK’s reputation across the world as an open, vibrant country, with a thriving cultural scene and a world-class education sector’.¹¹ A 2013 report entitled *Influence and Attraction*, which explores culture as a soft power tool, to take another example, makes the following recommendation:

UK citizens need to be more globally aware, skilled in languages, comfortable with difference and culturally confident. Culture itself develops through exchange, therefore the UK also needs to stay ahead in ‘the commerce of culture’ – ensuring a continuing interchange of ideas, research, creativity and artistic practice with others around the world,

⁹ British Council, "Influence and Attraction: Culture and the Race for Soft Power in the 21st Century," (British Council), 3.

¹⁰ "The English Effect: The Impact of English, What It's Worth to the UK and Why It Matters to World," (British Council), 2.

¹¹ "Contribution to UK Soft Power," <http://www.britishcouncil.org/about/contribution-uk-soft-power> [Accessed 17th September 2013].

enriching both the UK's and other countries' cultural and educational sectors.¹²

That the English language is a subset of culture and thus a soft power asset which connects billions of people and allows British values to be disseminated, even emulated, is central to the British Council's narrative. Indeed, several British Council publications expand upon the idea that culture and language can be deployed as tools for generating soft power abroad. On their website – a fact demonstrating the importance of the point being made – the British Council states that '[b]y teaching English, changing the way we see each other through the Arts, offering international education opportunities and sharing the UK's ways of living and organising our society we create opportunity, trust, prosperity and security for the people of the UK and the many other countries we work in around the world'.¹³

The same 'story' about language and soft power is re-told in a slightly different format in other publications. Here, the English language and English language teaching are powerful methods for creating *trust* in the UK. Although in this formulation, the emphasis is laid on trust rather than attractiveness, in reality this is simply another way of saying that the UK is attractive to other parties. Language and language training build trust in the UK, allowing it 'to attract and co-opt [others] rather than coerce [them]' (to borrow Nye's phrase). The narrative of a UK which is widely perceived to be 'trustworthy', a 'fair player', 'a dependable place to do business' – and thus an attractive place whose values should be emulated – pervades the British Council's publications. One 2013 report entitled *Trust Pays* asserts that 'those who have had involvement in cultural relations – arts, education and English language activities – with the UK have greater trust in people from the UK'.¹⁴ Another British Council report called *The English Effect*, which was published whilst this pilot study was being conducted, makes numerous statements about the role of the English Language as a soft power tool. It noted, for example, that 'the English language is a critical component of trust building and, in turn, trade and prosperity'.¹⁵ The same report goes on to frame the English language as a *lingua franca* for cultural relationships and exchange:

Soft power is rooted in attraction, exchange and the building of cultural relationships across borders, much of it unmediated by governments. This requires communication, exchange and an interest in different cultures. This in turn is fraught with the dangers of misinterpretation,

¹² "Influence and Attraction: Culture and the Race for Soft Power in the 21st Century," 4.

¹³ "About the British Council," <http://www.britishcouncil.org/about>.

¹⁴ "Trust Pays: How International Cultural Relationships Build Trust in the UK and Underpin the Success of the UK Economy," (British Council), 3.

¹⁵ "The English Effect: The Impact of English, What It's Worth to the UK and Why It Matters to World," 4.

misperception, false assumption and insensitivity. In the building of stronger cultural ties, some shared understanding and mutual respect are key elements, and these are greatly enabled by a common language.¹⁶

In a further formulation, the same report argues that ‘the global power of English has helped the UK to grow and maintain its position as a cultural superpower... with every chance of continuing to grow its soft power influence in today’s highly networked world’.¹⁷

The purpose of the preceding discussion has been to piece together one key element of the British Council’s narrative or ‘story’ about the relationship between language, culture, politics and soft power. At the heart of this narrative is the idea that language promotes feelings of trust, tolerance, admiration and attraction for the UK which are so strong that they can ultimately foster a desire to emulate the political values it espouses. Or, to put it another way, the narrative tells a compelling story in which the English language is a soft power asset which enables global communities to engage commercially, technologically, diplomatically, socially and culturally; the power of the English language to connect distant, even marginalised, communities builds high levels of trust in the UK by framing it as an attractive, tolerant, open, friendly country – as a global ‘cultural superpower’.

A close reading of the British Council publications, however, suggests that the narrative does not end there. Indeed, there is a second element appended to the first which has been discussed in the preceding paragraphs. This second narrational element is essentially commercial and states that increased levels of trust in the UK will effect a related increase in commercial activity with and in the UK. To put it another way, by increasing the UK’s attractiveness abroad, other parties are more likely to trust British citizens, the British government and, ultimately, more likely to engage with the UK commercially. There is significant evidence for this commercial element of the narrative. In the foreword to a 2012 report entitled *Trust Pays*, Sir Roger Carr writes

Sharing the best of our society with others is something which I have always believed is the right thing to do. This research clearly shows us that it also makes sound business sense. As an investment in future international opportunities, trust pays. People who take UK qualifications and develop their English language skills, who experience the UK’s arts, or who learn with and make friends with people in the UK often benefit enormously themselves. But the research shows us that they are also more

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Respectively: *ibid.*, 4; 3; 8.

likely to trust people from the UK and are more likely to want to visit the UK, study in the UK and do business with the UK.¹⁸

The same report later concluded that 'The results are striking. They show that those who have had involvement in cultural relations – arts, education and English language activities – with the UK have greater trust in people from the UK. They also show that a higher level of trust in people from the UK is associated with a higher level of interest in doing business and trading with the UK'.¹⁹ Another report, *The English Effect*, focused more exclusively on language, but similarly concluded that 'English has huge economic value – for the UK it supports trade and exports around the world and thriving ELT [English Language Training] sector at home. It provides a significant competitive advantage in everything from soft power to commerce, to the media, to universities and academia; and delivers a ready and growing global market for the UK's impressive cultural industries. It is a critical component of trust building and, in turn, trade and prosperity'.²⁰ Having cited figures from a company called Brand Finance which estimate that the 'economic benefit of the use of English in both international trade with English-speaking countries and in the domestic UK economy is £405 billion' and pointed out that the Intellectual Property asset value of the English Language is £101 billion, the report concludes that '[s]ustained investment in meeting the world's currently insatiable appetite for English is one of the best investments UK plc can make in our trading, creative and cultural future'.²¹

The same narrative pervades other reports. In *Culture means Business*, the authors conclude that 'involvement in cultural activities [in which they include language training] by young people is associated both with an increase in levels of trust and an increase in levels of interest in doing business'.²² *Culture at Work*, published by the British Council but researched by Booz Allen Hamilton and Ipsos Public Affairs, argues for the importance of intercultural skills (defined as 'the ability to understand different cultural contexts and viewpoints', and amongst which knowledge of a foreign language is featured) for businesses, stating that these skills bring benefits such as 'building trust with clients and developing relationships with new clients... These benefits also carry significant monetary value to employers'.²³ *Influence and Attraction* states that 'Cultural relations are directly related to questions of language. The

¹⁸ "Trust Pays: How International Cultural Relationships Build Trust in the UK and Underpin the Success of the UK Economy," 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰ "The English Effect: The Impact of English, What It's Worth to the UK and Why It Matters to World," 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Council, "Culture Means Business: How International Cultural Relationships Contribute to Increased Trade and Competitiveness for the UK," (British Council), 22.

²³ British Council, "Culture at Work: The Value of Intercultural Skills in the Workplace," (British Council), 9 and 12.

frequent linkage of language teaching with formal cultural relations activity shows how important language is as a gateway to cultural connections and influence', before going on to predict that 'as the Chinese writer Shan Sa says: "Culture is not only a form of entertainment, it is an economic asset, and a political asset." In the West, cultural breadth and depth will provide one way of compensating for waning military, commercial and political influence'.²⁴

Indeed, so pervasive is this narrative thread that this pilot study refers to it as 'the attraction of language' (in an effort to capture Nye's ideas about soft power and attraction, on the one hand, and the attractiveness of language as a soft power tool, on the other). It is worth picking up on two points here. The first is that this narrative is decidedly strategic: it describes the way in which the British Council seeks to convert available means (soft power assets in the form of the English language and British culture more broadly) into desired political ends (security at home and abroad, a UK economy buoyed by international trade, sustainable growth in fragile or weak states, the emulation and adoption of British values in those states and so on). The second point is that this is a conditional narrative which describes the future. If, so the British Council's narrative runs, we teach English abroad, we can disseminate British values in an attractive, seductive form with the consequence that other parties will admire those values and, even, emulate them; this will generate the UK's ability to influence politics in other countries as well as bringing substantial commercial activities – and financial growth – into an increasingly prosperous UK.

5. *The 'Attraction of language' and the Trouble with Stories.*

In his now famous work, *The Trouble with Stories*, sociologist Charles Tilly described the human tendency to think through stories. For Tilly, stories (which he defined as 'sequential, explanatory recounting of connected, self-propelled people and events that we sometimes call tales, fables or narratives') could be useful. He argued, for example, that they 'pop up everywhere. They lend themselves to vivid, compelling accounts of what has happened, what will happen or what should happen. They do essential work in social life, cementing people's commitments to common projects, helping people make sense of what is going on, channelling collective decisions and judgments, spurring people to action they would otherwise be reluctant to pursue'.²⁵ What troubled Tilly was that stories imply causality where it is weak or absent; they might be useful packages for data in terms of making sense

²⁴ "Influence and Attraction: Culture and the Race for Soft Power in the 21st Century," 14 and 34.

²⁵ Tilly, "The Trouble with Stories," in *Stories, Identity and Political Change*, ed. Tilly (New York: Rowman & Littlefield), 257.

of social processes, he argued, but their internal structures invariably mean the data which they convey become linked in terms of cause and effect.²⁶

This concern – which cognitive psychologists refer to as the narrative fallacy – apply to strategic narratives such as the ‘attraction of language’ as well.²⁷ Essentially, as a narrative, the ‘attraction of language’ is little more than a story about the future. But because it is a story it present audiences with a cause-effect framework which not only renders it far more compelling and persuasive but also creates a series of logical flaws. By way of identifying future avenues for research, the remainder of this study is devoted to identifying – and discussing – three such flaws in the British Council’s ‘attraction of language’ narrative.

a.) Is the ‘attraction of language’ a realistic, credible story?

Part of the danger of stories, as cognitive psychologists such as Daniel Kahneman have argued, is that they possess cause-effect structures which render them particularly persuasive and compelling. The difficulty, then, is establishing whether strategic narratives such as the ‘attraction of language’ are merely compelling or whether they are sufficiently credible that, when enacted, the sequence of events they describe has a significant chance of unfolding. One way of establishing the credibility of the ‘attraction of language’ strategic narrative is to collect data on the attitudes of those who have learnt English through the British Council’s LearnEnglish programme. If the English language and language training can increase trust in the UK and render it attractive, then gathering quantitative and qualitative data on the attitudinal dispositions of those who have engaged in such programmes will allow the credibility of the strategic narrative to be established.

Commendably, the British Council have attempted to evaluate the extent of influence garnered by their language training programmes. Most recently, much of this has taken the form of social media analysis of their users on Facebook and Twitter. However, these analyses have been limited in scope and focused heavily on the sentiments users displayed towards the British Council’s LearnEnglish page, rather than their attitudes towards English or, more broadly, the UK. In order for the ‘attraction of language’ narrative to be evaluated in terms of credibility, more complex and insightful forms of social media analysis – including for example, in-built natural language processing tools – need to be deployed.

²⁶ Similar worries are presented in Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbabl* (Penguin); Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

²⁷ *Thinking, Fast and Slow*; Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky, *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*.

b.) Problems with Soft Power

Social media analysis will undoubtedly allow researchers to evaluate the extent to which the British Council's English language programmes can generate soft power. Indeed, with further research, positive sentiments – trust, attraction – may well emerge and lend further credibility to the 'attraction of language' narrative. However, soft power begs certain questions in its own right. In the first place, Nye's original formulation lays great emphasis on the role of values between the nation generating soft power and those audiences to whom it is attempting to influence. For Nye, values are central to soft power:

Soft power rests on some shared values. That is why exchanges are often more effective than mere broadcasting. By definition, soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want, and that requires understanding how they are hearing your messages, and fine-tuning it accordingly. It is crucial to understand the target audience.

Yet the difficulty for the British Council is that it is precisely because there is a significant difference between the political, social and cultural values of 'self' and 'other' that it is seeking to disseminate British values in a positive light. This dilemma is not acknowledged in British Council publications and, one suspects, will provide rich territory for further exploration particularly over questions of the way in which the British Council tailors its messages to multiple audiences with multiple value systems.

Even if this were not the case – that values were broadly similar – there is a second difficulty with soft power: how does one 'cash in' the influence it is meant to produce? The British Council, for example, spends millions of pounds in an effort to generate soft power in the Middle East through the English language and English language training. And yet it is not clear how the British Council or, more broadly, the British Government can effectively use this 'influence' to initiate changes in policy, political behavior or the economic landscape of countries in the Middle East. Egypt is a good example of this. Despite being the most active country on the LearnEnglish programme in the MENA region, is still not governed by a regime with western liberal democratic values, despite UK and US soft power efforts. Indeed, even as the Arab Spring brought about the downfall of Hosni Mubarak, soft power influence was not sufficient to persuade the Egyptian people to elect a liberal leader who espoused western values of democracy, freedom and equality. This is part of the problem for proponents of soft power: in contrast to hard power, which can be cashed in when needed by deploying military forces, soft power influence cannot be suddenly relied upon to change a situation. For those with hard power and ability to deploy forces, the original financial outlay

is readily justified by the highly visible process of war; soft power, by comparison, cannot be deployed in order to influence others when situations change.

The third and final problem with soft power is that even if it does create genuine influence, it is not always clear *for whom* that influence has been created. To return to the 'attraction of language' narrative, English, as the language of the commercial world, can be deployed to create trust in and attraction for the United Kingdom with the consequence that target audiences are more likely to engage with the UK on a commercial or financial footing. But if that genuinely is the case, then it seems likely that English language training is also likely to create business opportunities for other predominantly Anglophone nations: the United States, Ireland, Australia, South Africa or India, where many commercial transactions are conducted in English. This begs the question – again, not addressed by the British Council – about the extent to which the UK actually has 'ownership' of English, and to what extent, English is part of the branding of the UK? These are critical questions for the British Council and, more broadly, for those who see a relationship between soft power and language.

c.) How does the British Council construct cultural value?

The preceding discussion has picked up on two sets of problems in an effort to identify pertinent questions which are ripe for further research. The first set is narrational and centres around internal problems in the British Council's 'language of attraction' concept; the second set focuses, in part, on the British Council's understanding of soft power and, in part, on wider problems for proponents of soft power. The analysis undertaken in this study, however, also brings to light a third point about the way in which the British Council constructs cultural value.

Throughout the reports recently released by the British Council, culture is invariably framed in one of two ways. The first constructs culture as a political tool through which soft power influence can be leveraged, the behaviour of others modified and advantageous control of political landscapes developed. The second and subtler formulation is that culture is rendered in essentially economic and commercial terms. Here, culture (relatively broadly defined) is a tool for generating financial and commercial growth in the UK and abroad. As we saw in the previous section of the study, reports such as *The English Effect* explicitly and repeatedly frame culture in purely economic terms: the English language, for example, is a 'brand' worth £405 billion, or it is a way of generating trust and therefore creating

commercial growth in the UK. Indeed, even the titles of some of the reports overtly construct culture as an economic value.²⁸

It is worth making some broader points on this. In the first place, it is worth noting that there is, perhaps, nothing morally wrong with the commercialization and politicization of culture, particularly if it alleviates poverty at home and abroad. But, in the second place, if the British Council, one of the foremost advocates of British culture, views it in essentially political or economic terms, this is an exceptionally narrow view of culture, at best and a cynical one, at worst – not least because it omits the idea that culture has intrinsic value for those who engage with it, rather than purely political and economic value for those who distribute it. In research terms, this construction of the value of culture which pervades British Council publications of the last 18 months, begs interesting questions: do audiences of the British Council's narrative have alternative understandings of cultural exchanges? Has there been a substantial change in the way in which the British Council constructs cultural value and, if so, what precipitated this change?

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