

Indonesian Cultural Diplomacy: Leveraging National Identity to Build a Positive Global Image

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Abstract. As a country with high cultural diversity, Indonesia has significant potential to strengthen its position and influence in international relations through soft power. This study aims to analyze the strategy, implementation, and effectiveness of Indonesian cultural diplomacy in introducing national values, traditions, and character to the global community. The research employed qualitative methods with a descriptive approach, based on an analysis of literature, policy documents, and various cultural diplomacy activities such as arts festivals, cultural performances, culinary arts, and tourism promotion. The results indicate that Indonesian cultural diplomacy plays a crucial role in building a positive national image globally through the utilization of national identities such as art, culinary arts, education, film, digital media, and UNESCO intangible cultural heritage. These various programs have been effective in increasing global understanding and appreciation of Indonesia, although their implementation still faces obstacles such as lack of inter-agency coordination, budget constraints, suboptimal use of digital technology, low human resource competency, and the absence of an integrated cultural narrative. This study also found that solutions such as strengthening coordination, collaboration with the private sector and the diaspora, optimizing digital technology, increasing human resource capacity, and developing a national cultural narrative can increase the effectiveness of Indonesian cultural diplomacy. Overall, cultural diplomacy has proven to be a relevant and potent strategy for strengthening Indonesia's soft power and global image.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of globalization and increasingly intense interconnectedness between nations, national image has become a strategic aspect that not only reflects a country's identity but also determines its position and influence internationally (Viartasiwi et al., 2020). According to Anholt (2007), a nation's image is shaped not only by government policies but also by global public perception of a country's culture, language, values, and cultural products. A positive national image contributes significantly to strengthening international relations, enhancing bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and expanding diplomatic opportunities. Furthermore, a positive image can encourage foreign investment, increase global trust, and strengthen the attractiveness of a country's tourism and creative industries. Conversely, a negative image can hinder diplomatic relations, undermine the trust of international partners, and impact a country's competitiveness in global competition (Martauli, 2017).

In this context, public diplomacy emerges as a crucial instrument for building and strengthening a nation's image through a softer, more communicative approach oriented toward cultural exchange (Hennida, 2009). Public diplomacy is no longer limited to conveying political messages, but has expanded to include promoting national culture as a form of soft power, known as cultural diplomacy (Khatrunada & Alam, 2019). As a country with a rich and diverse culture, Indonesia has great potential to utilize cultural diplomacy as a key strategy in building a positive image globally. By leveraging its national identity—such as art, traditions, language, and local wisdom—Indonesia can promote its inclusive, creative, and peaceful national character to the global community (Zaman, 2023).

Cultural diplomacy acts as a bridge connecting people across borders through arts, traditions, and cultural exchange (Attahira, 2023). Through this approach, countries can demonstrate their national character without political or economic pressure. Indonesia has utilized various forms of cultural diplomacy, such as organizing international cultural festivals, promoting culinary delights, performing traditional dance and music, and student and artist exchange programs (Leonardo, 2019). These efforts are crucial in promoting national identity and strengthening peaceful and friendly international relations. Through cultural diplomacy, Indonesia strives to promote its national identity while

strengthening international relations through various activities such as cultural festivals, student exchanges, and art exhibitions (Purna, 2019).

Indonesia's national identity, rich in diversity, holds strategic value as a soft power tool (Wikayanto et al., 2023). The uniqueness of Nusantara culture, such as batik, wayang, angklung, and culinary traditions, has received international recognition as a world cultural heritage (Digdoyo, 2018). Utilizing this national identity not only gives Indonesians pride but also serves as an effective diplomatic tool to enhance Indonesia's appeal and image. When national identity is successfully communicated globally, Indonesia's influence in the international arena increases (SD, 2015).

Despite its significant potential, Indonesia's cultural diplomacy still faces a number of challenges. Lack of inter-agency coordination, budget constraints, a lack of modern communication strategies, and the suboptimal use of digital technology are obstacles that need to be addressed. Furthermore, Indonesia's cultural diversity is often not packaged within a strong, unified narrative, resulting in suboptimal communication on the international stage. This situation highlights the importance of strengthening a more focused and integrated cultural diplomacy strategy.

Research on Indonesia's cultural diplomacy is relevant because the international community increasingly judges countries based on the image and reputation they build. By analyzing how national identity is leveraged to build a positive image, this study can provide insight into the effectiveness of implemented cultural diplomacy strategies. Furthermore, the results are expected to provide recommendations for strengthening Indonesia's position in international relations through a cultural approach.

The research questions in this study include: (1) How is national identity utilized in Indonesia's cultural diplomacy? (2) What obstacles are encountered in implementing cultural diplomacy, and how can they be resolved? Based on these questions, the study aims to analyze the forms, strategies, and effectiveness of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy, as well as identify challenges and strategic steps for strengthening cultural diplomacy going forward.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach to explore in depth the strategies and implementation of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy in building a positive image at the global level. Research data were obtained from various secondary sources, such as academic literature, official government reports, policy documents, and publications from national and international institutions focused on cultural diplomacy (Alaslan, 2023). The use of secondary data enables the researcher to trace the dynamics, patterns, and development of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Data analysis refers to the Miles and Huberman model, which includes the stages of data reduction to filter relevant information, data display to organize findings, and systematic, ongoing conclusion drawing. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study applies source and method triangulation, ensuring that each piece of data is verified from multiple perspectives.

The research was conducted across several relevant institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesian cultural organizations, and supporting institutions involved in cultural diplomacy. The selection of these sites aims to provide a comprehensive overview of institutional roles in strengthening Indonesia's cultural diplomacy on the international stage. The research timeline was organized flexibly and adjusted to the stages of data collection, analysis, and final conclusion formulation (Smawan, 2010). With this approach, the study not only maps out the strategies and forms of implementation of cultural diplomacy but also identifies key supporting factors, challenges, and opportunities that can be leveraged to enhance Indonesia's global image. This methodological approach provides a strong foundation for developing a thorough analysis that aligns with the current landscape of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

How National Identity Is Leveraged in Indonesian Cultural Diplomacy

a. Arts and Cultural Exhibitions

Indonesia's national identity is often leveraged in cultural diplomacy through arts and cultural exhibitions in various countries. Indonesia frequently showcases works of art such as batik, woven fabrics, carvings, and traditional dance performances at international events organized by embassies, cultural centers, and global festivals. These exhibitions and performances not only highlight the beauty of Indonesian art but also introduce the values and philosophies inherent in it, such as the symbolism of batik motifs or the meaning of togetherness in the Saman dance. Through these activities, the international public can gain a deeper understanding of Indonesian cultural character.

Furthermore, Indonesian music festivals held abroad contribute to strengthening cultural diplomacy. Traditional music such as gamelan, angklung, and sasando, as well as modern music blended with ethnic elements, attract global attention due to their uniqueness. These arts and cultural activities serve as effective communication channels for promoting Indonesia's diversity and creativity. Therefore, art exhibitions, dance performances, and music festivals play a vital role in building a positive image of Indonesia and strengthening friendly relations with other countries.

b. Gastronomy (Culinary)

Culinary diplomacy is a highly effective form of cultural diplomacy in promoting Indonesia's national identity on the international stage. Through programs like Indonesia Spice Up the World, the government strives to promote the rich flavors of the archipelago through signature dishes like rendang, fried rice, satay, and soto. Rich, spicy flavors are a key characteristic of Indonesian cuisine and provide a powerful sensory experience for the global community. With the increasing presence of Indonesian restaurants abroad, food has become an easy gateway for international audiences to learn more about Indonesia.

Beyond introducing flavors, culinary diplomacy also conveys the stories and historical values imbued in each dish. Many Indonesian dishes represent philosophies of life, togetherness, and the cultural acculturation that has occurred across various regions. For example, rendang is not only known as one of the world's most delicious foods, but also symbolizes the values of deliberation and patience in its preparation. Fried rice reflects the creativity of Indonesians in processing simple ingredients, while satay illustrates regional diversity through a variety of spices and cooking techniques. The cultural narratives that accompany these dishes make Indonesian cuisine more than just food, but also a symbol of national identity.

With the increasingly widespread promotion of Indonesian cuisine abroad, gastronomic diplomacy has proven effective in strengthening the nation's positive image. Food has become a universal means of cultural communication, making it readily accessible to a wide range of audiences. Culinary festivals, cooking demonstrations, and collaborations with international chefs are expanding Indonesia's global reach. Through this approach, culinary arts serve as effective cultural ambassadors, not only increasing Indonesia's visibility but also driving the development of the tourism sector, the creative economy, and international relations.

c. Education and Student Exchange

Education and student exchange have become a key strategy in Indonesia's cultural diplomacy through programs such as the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship (BSBI). Through this program, the government invites foreign students, youth, and artists to study traditional Indonesian arts, such as gamelan, batik, or Balinese dance. Participants not only learn artistic techniques but also understand the values, philosophy, and socio-cultural context behind each artistic practice. This hands-on learning experience in Indonesia provides them with an authentic understanding of the archipelago's cultural diversity, fostering deeper cultural connections between Indonesia and its foreign participants.

After returning to their home countries, BSBI program participants often become unofficial cultural ambassadors, promoting Indonesia through their artistic, academic, and international networking activities. Many go on to teach gamelan, organize Indonesian dance performances, or promote Indonesian culture through social media and arts communities in their respective countries.

The long-term impact of this student exchange program is the creation of stronger international relations, increased cross-cultural understanding, and a positive image of Indonesia globally through personal interactions and the cultural experiences they bring home.

d. Film and Digital Media

Film and digital media are crucial elements of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy, enabling them to reach a global audience more quickly and broadly. The participation of Indonesian films in international festivals such as Cannes, Busan, and Toronto opens up opportunities to introduce Indonesian stories, social values, and culture to the world. Films with strong narratives like *Laskar Pelangi* (Rainbow Troops) and *The Raid* (The Raid), or films by local artists that highlight Indonesia's rich cultural heritage and social realities, can shape positive perceptions and foster interest in Indonesia. Through cinema, Indonesia can showcase its cultural diversity and the character of its people through a medium easily understood by various nations.

Furthermore, the use of digital media such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok further strengthens cultural diplomacy in the modern era. Cultural content, ranging from traditional music and culinary delights to dance and folklore, can be creatively and engagingly disseminated to a global audience, especially the younger generation. Cultural influencers, independent filmmakers, and diaspora communities contribute to the production and sharing of content that highlights Indonesian identity. Digital media enables two-way interaction, broadens the reach of cultural messages, and accelerates the process of building a positive image of Indonesia globally through a more modern, dynamic, and accessible approach.

e. UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO serves as a highly effective instrument of cultural diplomacy for Indonesia in strengthening its national identity internationally. By registering cultural elements such as batik, angklung, noken, Saman dance, and pencak silat on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list, Indonesia not only showcases its cultural richness but also asserts the ownership and authenticity of these traditions on the global stage. UNESCO recognition provides international legitimacy, increasing the visibility of Indonesian culture and encouraging other countries to better recognize, appreciate, and learn about its values. This simultaneously strengthens the narrative of national identity as a multicultural nation rich in cultural heritage.

Beyond recognition, UNESCO status also serves as a diplomatic tool to encourage cross-border cooperation in cultural preservation. The presence of Indonesian culture on UNESCO's list has made other countries more aware of the importance of protecting world cultural heritage, thus opening up opportunities for collaboration in research, education, and cultural promotion. This recognition also impacts the tourism sector, as global tourists tend to be attracted to countries with internationally recognized cultural heritage. Thus, intangible cultural heritage not only strengthens Indonesia's positive image but also contributes to cultural preservation, enhanced diplomacy, and strengthened international relations.

Obstacles and Solutions Faced in the Implementation of Cultural Diplomacy

Obstacles to the Implementation of Cultural Diplomacy

a. Lack of Inter-Agency Coordination

The lack of coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, and local governments makes cultural diplomacy efforts ineffective. Each agency tends to have its own agenda without integration towards a common goal, resulting in programs that often overlap or do not support each other. As a result, Indonesian cultural promotion activities abroad lack a clear strategic direction and produce less than optimal impact. Furthermore, the lack of a permanent coordination platform hinders the planning and evaluation process. Lack of synchronization of data, priorities, and schedules between agencies also hinders long-term program continuity. Without strong synergy, cultural diplomacy struggles to develop into a structured and competitive soft power force at the global level.

b. Budgetary Constraints

Cultural diplomacy requires significant funding, particularly for sending arts delegations, opening cultural exhibitions, or participating in international festivals. However, the government budget for this sector remains relatively small compared to the needs in the field. Limited funding prevents promotional opportunities that could attract global attention from being fully utilized. Furthermore, the lack of financial support impacts the quality of cultural productions presented abroad. Artworks, films, and cultural performances often lose out to those from countries with greater funding and professionalism. Without adequate budget support, Indonesia's cultural diplomacy will continue to be at a disadvantage.

c. Suboptimal utilization of digital technology

The use of digital technology in cultural diplomacy remains underutilized, despite the potential for digital platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram to reach a global audience. Indonesian cultural content has not been packaged in an engaging, modern way, and in line with global digital trends, thus failing to compete with countries like South Korea or Japan, which have already dominated the international creative content market. Lack of training for local creators also leads to inconsistent digital production quality. Limited collaboration with international influencers and global platforms limits promotional reach. Without strengthening digital capabilities, Indonesia risks being left behind in an era where cultural diplomacy is increasingly shifting to the virtual realm.

d. Lack of internationally competent human resources

Indonesia still faces a shortage of experts with a professional understanding of cultural diplomacy. Many cultural actors and officials lack experience in international communication, multicultural negotiations, or cultural representation strategies at the global level. Foreign language proficiency, especially English, remains a significant obstacle to establishing international cooperation. Furthermore, few institutions provide specialized training for cultural diplomacy, resulting in slow human resource development. This shortage of qualified human resources directly impacts the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy programs. Without competent personnel, cultural promotion efforts struggle to achieve their full potential.

e. Unintegrated Cultural Narrative

One significant challenge is the lack of a clear, unified narrative to consistently portray Indonesia's cultural identity. Cultural promotion is often carried out sectorally by various regions or institutions, resulting in a lack of uniformity in the message reaching global audiences. This fragmented image of Indonesian culture makes it less recognizable internationally. Furthermore, the lack of a unified narrative makes it difficult for Indonesia to position itself alongside other countries with strong cultural brands, such as Korea's "Hallyu Wave" or Japan's "Cool Japan." Without a unified cultural identity, Indonesian cultural diplomacy will continue to miss opportunities to build strong and sustainable soft power.

Implementable Solutions

a. Strengthening cross-agency coordination

Strengthening coordination can be achieved by establishing an integrated national strategy that clearly defines the division of tasks between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, and local governments. With a shared strategic framework, each institution has measurable and targeted responsibilities, ensuring that cultural diplomacy programs are not carried out in isolation. This also prevents program duplication and allows for more efficient budget utilization. Furthermore, coordination mechanisms such as regular meetings, data-sharing platforms, and joint monitoring systems can ensure that all programs are on the same track. This integration will strengthen Indonesia's position in cultural diplomacy because each institution supports each other, rather than working in isolation. With good coordination, Indonesia's cultural diplomacy can develop to be more effective and sustainable.

b. Collaboration with the private sector and diaspora

Involving the private sector, such as creative companies, the media industry, and even national brands, can open up more funding opportunities and support for cultural diplomacy activities. Cultural events, international exhibitions, or arts festivals can be run more professionally and attractively with

the participation of the private sector, which has a global network. Furthermore, the presence of the creative industry will strengthen the quality of cultural content promoted internationally. The role of the Indonesian diaspora abroad is also crucial as an agent of informal cultural diplomacy. They understand the local culture of their host countries and are familiar with the uniqueness of Indonesian culture. By involving the diaspora, cultural promotion can be more effective because they are more adaptable and able to build international networks. This collaboration makes cultural diplomacy more inclusive and impactful.

c. Optimizing digital technology and social media

Utilizing digital technology can significantly increase the reach of cultural diplomacy. Cultural campaigns packaged in the form of short videos, creative content, and modern visuals are highly effective in reaching the international youth generation. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram can be key vehicles for introducing Indonesian art, cuisine, language, and traditions in ways that are relevant to global digital culture. Furthermore, collaboration with international influencers and streaming platforms can expand the audience for Indonesian culture online. The development of interactive content such as virtual museums, digital cultural tours, and technology-based art performances can also increase the appeal of promotions. With a creative and professional digital strategy, Indonesia can compete with other countries in modern-day cultural diplomacy.

d. Human Resource Capacity Development

Efforts to improve the quality of human resources can be achieved through comprehensive cultural diplomacy training. This program encompasses an understanding of international relations, global communication strategies, and the ability to build networks between countries. Furthermore, training in foreign languages, especially English, is crucial to help cultural diplomacy practitioners communicate effectively in international forums. Artists, cultural practitioners, and government officials also need cross-cultural communication training to increase their sensitivity to the values of other countries. This is crucial to ensuring that cultural exchanges take place harmoniously and professionally. With skilled and knowledgeable human resources, Indonesian cultural diplomacy will have stronger quality and credibility.

e. Developing a grand narrative of Indonesian culture

Creating a grand narrative is necessary to create a clear, consistent, and easily recognized cultural image for the international community. This narrative can encompass key values of Indonesian culture, such as diversity, tolerance, creativity, and natural harmony. With an integrated narrative, all cultural diplomacy programs—whether art, culinary, film, or tourism—will convey the same message, making it more easily accepted by the world. Furthermore, a grand narrative allows Indonesia to build a strong cultural brand, such as Korea's "Hallyu" or "Cool Japan." This narrative can serve as the basis for international campaigns, promotional media, and public diplomacy. With a strong and consistent cultural identity, Indonesia can strengthen its position in the global soft power arena.

4. CONCLUSION

Cultural diplomacy is a crucial tool for Indonesia in building a positive image globally. By leveraging its national identity, reflected in art, cuisine, education, film, digital media, and UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage, Indonesia is able to showcase its diverse cultural richness while strengthening its soft power position internationally. Various programs, such as cultural exhibitions, culinary diplomacy, student exchanges, and film and performing arts promotions, have contributed to broadening global understanding and appreciation of Indonesia. However, the implementation of cultural diplomacy still faces several obstacles, such as suboptimal inter-agency coordination, budget constraints, weak utilization of digital technology, low human resource competency in the international arena, and an unintegrated cultural narrative. These challenges have prevented cultural promotion efforts from being fully effective and unable to compete with other countries that are more aggressive in utilizing soft power as a diplomatic tool. To overcome these obstacles, a comprehensive strategy is needed through strengthening cross-agency coordination, collaboration with the private sector and the diaspora, optimizing digital technology, increasing human resource capacity, and developing a grand

narrative of Indonesian culture. With this integrated approach, Indonesian cultural diplomacy can be more effective, focused, and sustainable. Synergy between government and non-government actors is also key to expanding the reach and impact of cultural diplomacy at the global level. Overall, Indonesian cultural diplomacy holds great potential for building a positive national image and strengthening international relations. By leveraging a strong national identity and a diplomatic strategy that adapts to global developments, Indonesia can increase its bargaining power and influence internationally. Professionally managed cultural diplomacy will be a crucial foundation for strengthening the nation's reputation while preserving the sustainability of its cultural heritage for future generations.

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