



From Cultural Capital to Global Influence: A Conversion-Chain Framework for Local Wisdom in Indonesian Cultural Diplomacy

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Received : September 8, 2026

Revised : September 10, 2026

Accepted : September 11, 2026

Online : October 07, 2026

Abstract

Indonesia's local wisdom is widely recognized as a marker of cultural identity and a resource for cultural diplomacy, yet existing scholarship largely stops at asserting this potential without explaining, in operational terms, how local values translate into national image. This study proposes a tiered conversion-chain framework—linking cultural capital, diplomatic mechanisms, and global reputation—to analyze how local wisdom is constructed into Indonesia's cultural diplomacy narrative and to assess its coherence with nation branding efforts. The study employs a descriptive qualitative design with library research techniques, drawing on policy documents and official ministerial publications, reports from international organizations, indexed journal articles, and credible media coverage from 2020–2025. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising deductive coding, matrix display, and conclusion drawing, with findings verified through source triangulation. Three findings emerge. First, a systematic gap separates the richness of Indonesia's cultural capital from the depth of its utilization: performing arts, cuisine, and crafts dominate external representation, while social values such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation) and musyawarah (deliberative consensus)—Indonesia's clearest comparative advantage—remain least narrated. Second, depth of audience participation proves more decisive than breadth of reach, so prevailing exposure-based indicators systematically overvalue large-scale, short-duration programs. Third, authenticity is the principal source of attraction and cannot be manufactured through planning; the state is therefore better positioned as an enabler than as a producer of meaning. Together, these findings locate Indonesia's difficulty not in the stock of cultural capital but at the junctures where that capital fails to convert.

Keywords *Cultural diplomacy, Local wisdom, Nation branding, Soft power, Cultural capital, Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country of exceptional cultural diversity, evident in the plurality of its ethnic groups, regional languages, customary practices, artistic traditions, and value systems across the archipelago. Its geography as an island nation has shaped an uneven pattern of cultural distribution across regions, allowing each area to develop distinctive cultural expressions. This diversity is not merely a defining feature of the Indonesian nation; it also constitutes social and cultural capital that strengthens national identity in the eyes of the world (Fachriza, 2025). Cultural diversity thus serves as a vital component of national identity, reflecting not only the richness of Indonesian culture but also the social character underpinning collective life as a nation and a state (Sugianto, 2023). In the context of international relations, this cultural wealth carries strategic value, as it can be positioned as a resource that distinguishes Indonesia from other states in inter-state interaction.

In the contemporary era, globalization has substantially altered how states operate in international relations, particularly in diplomacy. Through diplomatic channels, states compete to

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construct favorable images of themselves on the global stage ([Ramadhan et al., 2026](#)). Globalization has transformed the practice of diplomacy: once the preserve of a limited set of actors, it can now be conducted by virtually anyone, anywhere, and through almost any form of activity. Advances in information technology and digital media have accelerated this shift, enabling non-state actors—communities, creative industry practitioners, and even individuals—to reach cross-national audiences without the mediation of official institutions. A case in point is Indonesian culinary promotion in France, where diaspora restaurant owners and cultural actors have become key agents in introducing national culture abroad, often through independent initiatives rather than government programs ([Adinda et al., 2025](#)). Among the diplomatic practices most frequently employed by states under globalization is cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy operates through a soft power approach, understood as the capacity to obtain preferred outcomes through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment ([Nye, 2004](#)). Because it rests on voluntary alignment rather than compulsion, soft power is widely regarded as more sustainable for long-term relationships and is therefore favored by states seeking to build cooperative ties and establish a distinctive national image ([Ramadhan et al., 2026](#)). South Korea illustrates this logic, having employed cultural diplomacy as a soft power instrument to expand its global connectivity ([Cahyani et al., 2025](#)). The success of cultural diplomacy consequently depends on a state's capacity to manage and communicate its cultural resources consistently to international audiences.

Local wisdom may be understood as a form of national identity that ultimately gives rise to national cultural values. Indonesia's local wisdom is highly varied, encompassing heirloom objects, systems of social value, vernacular architecture, and ethnic and cultural plurality ([Suyatno, 2022](#)). These forms are not static artifacts; rather, they carry values, practices, and meanings that remain alive in the everyday life of the communities that sustain them. Indonesia has frequently drawn on cultural diplomacy to advance its national interests, precisely because its cultural diversity can be mobilized to strengthen the nation's image in international relations ([Dewi, 2025](#)). A concrete example is the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship (BSBI) program, which the government used as a public diplomacy strategy to build a positive image of Indonesia between 2015 and 2018 ([Andre Nuaba, 2024](#)). Local wisdom likewise holds strategic importance in cultivating favorable global perceptions: when authentic cultural values are packaged into a compelling narrative, they not only attract global audiences but also confer social legitimacy on Indonesia as a culturally rich nation ([Purwasito & Kartinawati, 2019](#)).

The problem, however, is that the use of local wisdom in Indonesian cultural diplomacy often stops at ceremonial performance and symbolic display, leaving its substantive values incompletely conveyed to global audiences. Indonesia's participation in international cultural festivals, for instance, typically centers on exhibiting textiles, crafts, culinary offerings, and performances alongside tourism and investment promotion ([CNN Indonesia, 2024](#)). The process of narrative construction requires clarity about which values are foregrounded, through which channels they are communicated, and how they relate to the national interest. Evidence from Indonesia's cultural showcase at the G20 suggests that performances communicate more effectively when supported by explanatory narration and creative audio-visual packaging, which viewers perceived as conveying the richness of Indonesian culture ([Astuti & Mahrid, 2025](#)). Existing studies have largely reaffirmed the potential of local wisdom without adequately explaining the mechanisms that connect it to the practice of cultural diplomacy in operational terms. It is this gap that the present study seeks to address.

This study positions local wisdom as an instrument of soft power and traces how local values are incorporated into the narrative of Indonesian cultural diplomacy. The problem is approached through a qualitative method that employs library research techniques, analyzing policy documents, publications from relevant institutions, and pertinent academic literature. The

objectives are threefold: (1) to identify the forms of local wisdom mobilized in Indonesian cultural diplomacy; (2) to analyze the mechanisms by which local wisdom is packaged as an instrument of soft power to construct the nation's image; and (3) to formulate the implications of these findings for strengthening Indonesia's nation branding in international relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local wisdom comprises ideas originating in local communities that embody prudence, belief, and symbolic traditions passed down through generations (Akashi, 2024). More than a static heritage, local wisdom serves as a filter that absorbs external influences and transforms them into a distinctive expression—a capacity that makes it a valuable diplomatic resource.

Through Bourdieu's (1986) framework of cultural capital, local wisdom can be understood in three forms: embedded in the dispositions of communities (embodied), realized in objects and artifacts (objectified), and formally recognized through heritage designation (institutionalized). This distinction is crucial because it shifts the question from "what local heritage does Indonesia possess" to "how is that local wisdom converted into other forms of capital valuable in the international arena?"

Empirical research shows that such conversion occurs when local wisdom is practiced as a living value system. A study of millennials in North Sumatra found that gotong royong and the Dalihan Na Tolu philosophy serve as genuine capital for developing innovative learning models (Amin & Ritonga, 2024). In the economic sphere, research on Madurese trader networks in Jakarta shows that deeply held ethnic and religious values are a principal source of resilience, challenging the long-standing assumption that migrant groups must abandon their cultural identity to survive (Hidayat et al., 2024). A consistent pattern emerges: local wisdom generates real exchange value when practiced actively, not when merely displayed as a cultural attribute.

Yet difficulties arise when this cultural capital shifts from community space to state representation. A cross-national study of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention implementation found that heritage safeguarding systems do not necessarily improve a tradition's status or the welfare of bearer communities; rather, they expose the state's control over culture and its dissemination (Poplawska, 2025). This structural risk can transform living practice into an administrative object managed from above, weakening the very meanings that constitute its appeal.

Cultural diplomacy emerges as the mechanism for converting this cultural capital. Nye (2004) and Kardinal & Purnama (2024) view cultural diplomacy as the most tangible manifestation of soft power—the capacity to communicate through channels of culture, values, and ideas without coercion. Legitimacy within the soft power framework depends entirely on recipient perception, so culture becomes an instrument of influence only if external audiences judge the values on offer as authentic, relevant, and acceptable (Ayuningtyas, 2024). Recent scholarship reveals a crucial decentralization of cultural diplomacy actors. Research on religious organizations promoting moderate Islam found that non-state actors can conduct soft power diplomacy with credibility that official channels struggle to match, precisely because they are not perceived as government mouthpieces (Nubowo, 2023). This reinforces a critical finding: local wisdom operates most effectively when communicated by the communities that own it, rather than being represented from above.

Nation branding completes this framework as the measure of success. Anholt (2007) maps national reputation across six interrelated dimensions: tourism, export brands, policy, investment, culture, and people. Global reputation forms through sustained actions, not communication campaigns alone. Consistency between the messages presented and the realities enacted determines the credibility of the national image. The Wonderful Indonesia campaign demonstrates that digital platforms can substantially expand audience reach, yet reach alone does not

automatically create deep understanding of the cultural values being promoted (Maulida & Rasyidah, 2024). Within Anholt's framework, such achievements strongly activate the tourism dimension but do not necessarily engage the policy, people, or culture dimensions simultaneously.

These three frameworks form a tiered conversion chain: local wisdom supplies cultural capital, cultural diplomacy supplies the conversion mechanism, and nation branding supplies the measure of success in the form of recognized reputation. The chain functions only when each juncture holds together. The first juncture demands the selection and articulation of values—the greatest risk is reducing value to visual ornament (Poplawska, 2025). The second juncture demands clarity of actors and channels, as communicator credibility becomes decisive when soft power legitimacy depends on recipient perception. The third juncture demands coherence across all national brand dimensions, for a cultural narrative out of step with policy performance will fail to settle into lasting reputation, regardless of campaign reach.

Indonesia possesses substantial cultural wealth yet struggles not from a scarcity of assets but from weak conversion mechanisms. This theoretical synthesis provides the foundation for examining which forms of local wisdom are mobilized, how they are packaged as soft power instruments, and whether they align with Indonesia's nation-branding efforts to strengthen its global reputation.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach and Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach (Sugiyono, 2009), not as a matter of preference but because the research question demands it. The question is not how large the effects of cultural diplomacy are, but how local wisdom is constructed into a cultural diplomacy narrative. Because cultural diplomacy works through persuasion and attraction—both rooted in symbols and language rather than metrics—meaning-making, value selection, and representational choice cannot be reduced to numbers without losing what matters. A descriptive design fits because the goal is to map current practice, including its tensions and limits, and then read that picture critically against theory, rather than to test a hypothesis. Description becomes the foundation for argument, not its endpoint.

Types and Sources of Data

This study draws on secondary data gathered through library research, since its object—cultural diplomacy at the policy and state representation level—leaves its clearest traces in documents and publications rather than in individually accessible experience. Primary sources are official documents from state institutions: strategic documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (particularly the Directorate of Public Diplomacy), the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy; intangible cultural heritage designations; program reports such as the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship; press releases from Indonesian missions abroad; and materials from campaigns like Wonderful Indonesia. These documents record the state's deliberate choices about which local wisdom is displayed, through which channels, and in what narrative frame.

Secondary sources include indexed scholarly articles, reports from bodies such as UNESCO and global reputation indices, and credible media coverage. These sources provide context and counterpoint: official documents tend to foreground success, whereas academic and independent reporting more often expose gaps between narrative and implementation. The analysis yields its most useful insights at the intersection of these two source types. Data are limited to 2020–2025, a period marked by the post-pandemic shift toward digital diplomacy channels and the growing

international recognition of Indonesian cultural heritage.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through systematic documentation: searches of official ministry websites, journal databases, and news archives using keywords derived from the theoretical framework—*kearifan lokal*, *diplomasi budaya*, soft power, nation branding, *warisan budaya takbenda*, *diplomasi publik Indonesia*—and their English equivalents.

Documents were screened against predefined inclusion criteria to keep the collection purposeful rather than exhaustive. Eligible documents had to explicitly address Indonesian cultural diplomacy practice involving local wisdom, originate from a verifiable publisher, and fall within the study period. Opinion pieces lacking evidentiary support, purely commercial promotional material, and untraceable sources were excluded. Every document passing the filter was logged—source, access date, document type, and preliminary notes—to maintain an audit trail linking conclusions to their sources.

Data Analysis Technique

Analysis followed the interactive model of [Miles et al. \(2014\)](#), cycling through three stages rather than a strict sequence. First, data condensation: documents were read in full, and relevant passages were coded using deductive categories from the theoretical framework—forms of local wisdom mobilized, mechanisms of soft power packaging, and coherence with nation branding dimensions—while remaining open to inductive codes the framework might not have anticipated. Second, data display: coded findings were mapped into matrices linking forms of local wisdom, communicating actors, channels, constructed narratives, and reported outcomes. This format reveals not only connections but also where, specifically, the cultural capital conversion chain breaks down. Third, conclusion drawing and verification: patterns were reread against theory to produce an argument rather than a mere restatement, with conclusions repeatedly checked and revised against the data.

Validity and Study Limitations

Validity rests on source triangulation—comparing official documents, academic literature, and independent media on the same events or programs. When these sources diverge, the divergence itself becomes a finding, since the gap between the official narrative and public reception is precisely what this study investigates. The primary limitation: this study analyzes what has been documented rather than what has been experienced. International audience perception—the actual determinant of soft power legitimacy—is accessible only through documents and literature, not through audiences' own voices. The findings therefore explain how Indonesia constructs its local-wisdom narrative but not yet how that narrative is received. This gap points toward future research using audience reception methods or fieldwork in target countries of Indonesian diplomacy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Local Wisdom in Indonesian Cultural Diplomacy

Documentary tracing identifies four clusters of local wisdom forms mobilized by Indonesia in its cultural diplomacy. The first cluster comprises tangible heritage and performing arts, with gamelan occupying the most established position. This Javanese percussion ensemble has been part of community life for over a millennium, with historical traces visible in the reliefs of Borobudur Temple, and has since generated gamelan communities across Europe, the Americas, Australia, and

Asia ([Khatrunada & Alam, 2019](#)). Batik follows, though with different strength: its popularity stems not merely from aesthetics but from the philosophical, social, and spiritual meanings embedded in its motifs ([Saputri et al., 2025](#)), while the Kecak dance conveys the Ramayana narrative and Balinese religious values ([Fachriza, 2025](#)). The most recent international achievement is the UNESCO designation of the kebaya on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2024, through a joint nomination by five Southeast Asian states ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2024](#)), recognizing the transboundary character of regional cultural heritage ([Sargent, 2020](#)).

The second cluster comprises customary traditions and rituals. Grebeg, Ngaben, Ma' nene, and Lompat Batu embody social values alive within their communities while reinforcing Indonesia's image as a nation rooted in local value systems ([Utami, 2023](#)). Rituals such as Ngaben in Bali and Rambu Solo in Toraja express an authentic cultural identity dense with meaning ([Kosmos, 2025](#)).

The third cluster is gastrodiploacy. Gudeg, Yogyakarta's culinary icon since the fifteenth century, combines young jackfruit, coconut milk, and spices through traditional preparation and remains a constant presence in customary rituals. Through exports packaged with modern technology, Javanese identity and philosophy can be conveyed to international audiences without compromising underlying authenticity ([Nadhiroh, 2025](#)).

The fourth cluster comprises social values and collective practices. Gotong royong, musyawarah, tolerance, and solidarity reflect a communal way of life that prizes togetherness and harmony, constituting capital for presenting Indonesia as a civil and concordant nation. This cluster appears least frequently as primary diplomatic material, despite being theoretically the most valuable.

The distribution across clusters is itself the first finding rather than a neutral inventory. The first three clusters share a property the fourth lacks: demonstrability within bounded time and space. A gamelan ensemble can be performed, a batik motif exhibited, or a portion of gudeg served. Gotong royong and musyawarah, by contrast, are dispositional rather than demonstrable—they exist as embodied cultural capital in [Bourdieu's \(1986\)](#) sense, legible only through sustained observation of how a community actually conducts itself. The selection logic operating in Indonesian cultural diplomacy thus appears to favor what is most readily exhibited over what carries the greatest value. This is a structural bias of the medium, not a failure of intent, and recurs across every channel examined below.

Channels and Communicating Actors

Data reveal five parallel channels, each with a different depth of engagement. Festivals and international events—such as the International Gamelan Festival (2017) and the Indonesian Frankfurt Festival (2022)—showcase performing arts; participatory workshops provide direct experience, as when batik training allowed international participants to practice the art while understanding its philosophical meanings ([Fachriza, 2025](#); [Dewi, 2025](#)); bilateral cooperation encompasses a broad thematic scope through cultural exchange programs ([Nurhidayat, 2025](#)); digital channels through #WonderfulIndonesia campaigns attract global audiences, while "aura farming" demonstrates cultural appeal that grows spontaneously outside formal diplomacy ([Hariyanto et al., 2025](#)); and the diaspora serve a strategic role through community activities, culinary festivals, and artistic performances ([Fachriza, 2025](#); [Dewi, 2025](#)).

When these channels are mapped against their communicating actors and the depth of engagement, a critical pattern emerges: the two channels that afford the greatest depth—participatory workshops and diaspora—are also the least dependent on state orchestration, whereas the channel most fully under state control, bilateral cooperation, reaches publics only through institutional mediation. The relationship between the degree of official control and the

depth of audience engagement thus appears inverse rather than proportional. This is the paradox anticipated when legitimacy rests with the recipient: the more visibly a cultural message is managed, the weaker its persuasive force ([Rakhmat & Pashya, 2023](#); [Nubowo, 2023](#)).

Pathways of Image Construction and Indicators of Impact

Four pathways for image construction emerge from the data: establishing distinctiveness through wayang, batik, cuisine, and the performing arts; enhancing appeal by presenting local wisdom as authentic and experientially valuable; correcting misperceptions among global publics; and strengthening national identity through the values of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, gotong royong, and pluralism ([Astuti et al., 2025](#)). The third pathway operates because developing countries are often dominated by simplistic mainstream narratives; direct participation in local cultural practices can attenuate negative stereotypes ([Dewi, 2025](#)).

Five indicators of impact are recorded: awareness increases as international publics move beyond symbol recognition toward meaning comprehension ([Kemala et al., 2025](#)); audience engagement reflects the success of cultural narratives in building emotional proximity, as evidenced by the viral diffusion of *pacu jalur* ([Hariyanto et al., 2025](#)); media coverage shapes international perceptions of Indonesian culture; positive perception develops when culture is promoted attractively and consistently ([Febrian, 2025](#)); and international participation strengthens reputation through global public trust ([Saiman, 2023](#)).

The most recent data come from the Pacu Jalur Festival 2025: approximately 1.5 million spectators, with a pronounced surge in foreign visitors, generating an estimated economic impact of IDR 100 billion ([InfoPublik, 2025](#)). The catalyst was a fifteen-second clip of a child dancer at a boat's prow, subsequently imitated by figures of the stature of Marc Márquez and IShowSpeed. This case reveals a critical feature: the pathways and indicators identified above are not commensurable with one another, nor does the causal chain run in the assumed direction. The sequence did not flow from state planning through a channel to an audience; it ran from local practice, through spontaneous imitation by global figures with no diplomatic mandate, to an outcome no ministry had programmed. The state's contribution was not the production of meaning but the provision of the festival that made meaning available to be captured. This inversion exposes the inadequacy of top-down models of cultural diplomacy and demonstrates why depth of engagement correlates inversely with official control.

The Gap Between Cultural Capital and the Depth of Its Utilization

The first juncture of the conversion chain requires selecting and articulating values, yet the findings show this juncture is only partially realized. Indonesia inventories its cultural capital extensively, yet mobilization concentrates on three exhibitable clusters—performing arts, cuisine, and crafts—while the fourth cluster of social values (gotong royong, *musyawarah*, and tolerance) appears least frequently as primary diplomatic material. This asymmetry is significant when read against the argument: performing arts and cuisine are globally substitutable assets, whereas demonstrated competence in managing pluralism is rare and genuinely differentiating. Indonesia possesses a distinctive record in this regard, yet undersells it. The integrative function of local wisdom ([Mufit, 2025](#)) holds the highest exchange value internationally precisely because it is least substitutable—meaning Indonesia foregrounds its most substitutable assets while under-narrating its least substitutable ones. This constitutes a systematic misallocation of cultural capital rather than a missed opportunity.

However, the explanation is structural rather than volitional. Exhibition-based channels privilege what performs within the event's duration, and dispositional values do not perform. Converting the fourth cluster would require extended time and sustained relationships—

conditions afforded by diaspora and participatory workshops but absent from festivals. The finding is therefore not that Indonesia neglects social values, but that the current channel architecture is constitutionally incapable of carrying them.

Depth of Participation as a Stronger Determinant Than Breadth of Reach

The second juncture requires clarity about actors and channels, and the findings converge on a conclusion with direct implications for program evaluation. When audiences engaged in direct practice—attempting batik in Frankfurt or acquiring language through BIPA—the outcome was comprehension of meaning rather than recognition of form ([Dewi, 2025](#); [Kemala et al., 2025](#)). When audiences remained spectators, the outcome was exposure. This distinction is obscured by current indicators: three of five measure exposure, only two measure comprehension, and the three exposure indicators are most readily quantified. Official planning appears to reflect the same orientation: the Ministry of Culture's 2026 outlook frames its film and music targets in terms of production, audience growth, and international reach, including a target of reaching 17 major international film festivals ([Kusumo, 2026](#)). A large festival reaching substantial audiences for three days registers strongly on media coverage and international participation, while a workshop reaching dozens registers weakly on every exposure indicator despite producing deeper conversion. Large-scale, short-duration programs are thereby structurally overvalued, and small-scale, long-duration programs structurally undervalued.

The conversion chain breaks precisely at this point. The Wonderful Indonesia campaign substantially expanded reach without generating commensurate depth of understanding ([Maulida & Rasyidah, 2024](#)), a pattern the present data reproduce. Reach establishes the conditions for conversion but does not accomplish it. Within [Anholt's \(2007\)](#) framework, exposure without comprehension accumulates in the tourism dimension alone and fails to migrate into the culture or people dimensions—which is why breadth of reach does not translate into lasting reputation.

Authenticity as a Resource That Cannot Be Manufactured

The third juncture requires coherence across national brand dimensions, and the Pacu Jalur case carries the greatest analytical weight. The most substantial impact in the dataset came not from a programmed diplomatic initiative but from a fifteen-second recording of local practice, amplified by actors without any diplomatic mandate. Its persuasive force stemmed from the fact that it was not addressed to an international audience—it documented practice performed for its own community, for its own reasons.

This empirically demonstrates the paradox that authenticity attracts precisely because it is not produced for an audience; the moment it is produced for an audience, it ceases to be what attracted in the first place. Attempting to replicate the Pacu Jalur outcome by designing content intended to go viral would destroy the very property that made the original effective. The aura farming phenomenon ([Hariyanto et al., 2025](#)) exhibits the same logic: cultural attraction emerging from creative expression never goes through formal diplomatic channels.

The implication for the state's role is reconception rather than diminution. If meaning cannot be manufactured through planning, the state's most productive contribution lies upstream: sustaining the conditions under which living practice continues—supporting the festival, the bearer community, the artisan, and the language teacher—and ensuring that what emerges can travel. This directly opposes the centralizing tendency that [Poplawska \(2025\)](#) identifies in heritage safeguarding systems, where formal recognition converts living practice into an administrative object managed centrally, thereby thinning the meanings that constituted its appeal. The state functions better as an enabler of cultural capital than as a producer of cultural meaning.

Synthesis: Where the Conversion Chain Breaks

Taken together, the three findings pinpoint Indonesia's difficulty with precision. It does not lie in cultural capital stock, which the findings confirm is abundant, nor in the absence of channels—five operate in parallel. It lies at the junctures. The first leaks because selection favors exhibitability over value. The second leaks because evaluation rewards exposure over comprehension, directing resources toward channels that convert least effectively. The third leaks because the state's instinct to manage meaning erodes the authenticity on which conversion depends.

These leakages compound rather than merely accumulate. Selecting exhibitable forms channels resources toward exhibition-based programs, which perform well on exposure-based indicators, thereby justifying further investment in them—a self-reinforcing loop that steadily displaces the deeper channels. Breaking the loop requires intervention at the measurement layer, for it is the indicator set that renders the loop rational to those operating within it. Changing how cultural diplomacy is evaluated would reshape which programs receive resources and, consequently, which forms of conversion occur. The findings suggest that measuring depth of engagement rather than breadth of reach would reorient resource allocation toward the channels through which local wisdom most effectively becomes capital for global influence.

CONCLUSIONS

This study began with a simple suspicion: Indonesia's cultural diplomacy difficulty lies not in material shortages but in what comes after. The findings confirm this and sharpen it to precision. Indonesia holds abundant local wisdom—performing arts, cuisine, crafts, and social values—yet the problem is not the stock but the conversion.

Three findings make this concrete. First, a gap separates cultural capital richness from the depth of use. What gets shown most is what's easiest to see, while values like *gotong royong* and *musyawarah*—arguably Indonesia's clearest comparative advantage—rarely serve as primary material. This is a strategic error, not an oversight. Performance and craft are contested globally; evidence that plural societies manage difference without fracturing is genuinely scarce. Competing on exhibitability means fighting in the wrong arena.

Second, depth of participation outperforms breadth of reach. Programs asking audiences to do something produce understanding that observation alone does not—yet evaluation still counts exposure, not comprehension. Transmission requires understanding deep enough to retell. Large, short-duration programs are systematically overvalued; intensive ones undervalued.

Third, authenticity drives attraction and cannot be manufactured. Spontaneous community virality outperforms managed campaigns because the more controlled a message appears, the less persuasive it becomes. The state's role is not producing meaning but sustaining infrastructure, enabling access, and providing context—without claiming ownership. This explains why diaspora succeed as messengers: they are not perceived as delivering an official message at all.

Together, these findings converge on one insight: reputation accumulates through consistent actions, not narratives. Indonesia's story of diversity and tolerance carries real force, but that force makes it vulnerable. Any gap between staged values and reported realities does not merely weaken the message; it becomes a liability. Strengthening cultural diplomacy is therefore not a communications problem alone; it requires policy coherence.

Contribution

Theoretically, this study offers a tiered conversion-chain framework linking local wisdom, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding with three junctures, each demanding distinct prerequisites: value articulation, communicator credibility, and dimensional coherence. This shifts analysis from asset inventory to conversion diagnosis. Practically, it points toward concrete steps:

a shared cross-ministry reference document, programme design prioritizing depth over reach, stronger positioning of diaspora and source communities as principal actors, and evaluation indicators tracking attitude change rather than attention—since indicators quietly determine programmes.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

These conclusions should be read with their limits in mind. Built on document analysis, the study explains narrative construction but not reception, even though soft power legitimacy rests with recipients. This means effectiveness claims are inferential, not directly verified. Official documents also record success while omitting failure, a bias that triangulation cannot fully correct. The qualitative design suits explanation but offers no causal measurement.

The most urgent future need is audience reception research—surveys or interviews in target countries asking not how many watched but what changed in how they see Indonesia. Second, build measurement instruments that separate exposure from attitude change and track them longitudinally. Cross-regional comparison would clarify how cultural proximity shapes narrative legibility. A political-economy lens on who benefits from heritage globalization remains unexplored. And collaborative research with cultural communities as partners, not subjects, would honor the study's own conclusion: credibility lives in the communicator, and so should the work of studying it.

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