

Indonesia's Public Diplomacy Strategy through Instagram @kemlu-ri in Shaping a Positive Image in ASEAN (2020-2024)

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Abstract

Abstract This study examines Indonesia's digital public diplomacy strategy through the official Instagram account @kemlu_ri in shaping a positive image in the ASEAN region during the 2020–2024 period, focusing on the effectiveness of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' communication amid the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical competition, and digital transformation in Southeast Asia. The study uses a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach and applies content analysis (visuals, narratives, and audience engagement) as well as discourse analysis to examine diplomatic messages and framing, drawing data from ASEAN-related Instagram posts, official documents, media coverage, and academic literature through source triangulation. The findings show that @kemlu_ri functions not only as a channel for foreign policy information but also as an instrument for positive image-building that highlights cultural identity, diplomatic contributions, and Indonesia's active role in maintaining ASEAN centrality, which strengthens Indonesia's soft power despite challenges in message consistency and audience reach. Theoretically, this study contributes to digital diplomacy scholarship by advancing the understanding of digital public diplomacy through the integration of visual and discourse analysis of social media as a mechanism for state image construction at the regional level.

Keywords: digital public diplomacy, ASEAN region, shaping a positive image, @kemlu_ri

1. Introduction

Digital public diplomacy represents a significant transformation in contemporary international relations. The development of digital technologies and social media has shifted diplomacy from hierarchical and one way communication toward more open, rapid, and participatory interactions with global audiences (Manor, 2019). Additionally, digital diplomacy is increasingly understood as a form of networked communication in which states engage not only with foreign publics but also with non-state actors, media, and transnational communities, thereby expanding the scope of traditional diplomatic practices (Hocking & Melissen, 2015). In this context, digital public diplomacy enables states to build a positive image, project national values and identity, and influence cross-border public opinion more efficiently (Tribowo, 2023). Amid intensifying narrative competition and evolving global geopolitical dynamics, digital public diplomacy has become a strategic instrument for strengthening a country's reputation and position within the international system. Furthermore, the concept of soft power introduced by Nye emphasizes that attraction and persuasion are central elements in shaping international public opinion, particularly in the digital era where information flows rapidly across borders (Nye, 2008).

Social media has become a primary medium for implementing digital public diplomacy. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook serve not only as channels for disseminating foreign policy but also as spaces for shaping perceptions, symbolic interaction, and strengthening soft power through visual and persuasive narratives (Adesina, 2017). However, the effectiveness of digital public diplomacy depends on message consistency, framing clarity, and alignment with audience characteristics (Bjola et al., 2021). Recent studies also highlight that social media platforms enable governments to conduct real-time diplomacy, allowing for immediate responses

to international events and crises while simultaneously shaping narratives in the global information environment (Seib, 2012). In addition, digital diplomacy practices have evolved to include visual diplomacy, where images, symbols, and visual storytelling play a crucial role in influencing audience perception and emotional engagement (Bleiker, 2018).

In Indonesia's context, the official Instagram account @kemlu_ri reflects the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' strategic adaptation to the digital communication ecosystem. Instagram is particularly relevant due to its visual strength and storytelling capacity, which simplifies complex diplomatic issues into accessible messages (Intentilia, 2022).

ASEAN menjadi konteks regional yang strategis bagi praktik diplomasi publik digital Indonesia. Selain memiliki tingkat penetrasi media sosial yang tinggi, kawasan ini juga merupakan arena penting dalam kontestasi pengaruh politik dan ekonomi global. Bagi Indonesia, ASEAN memiliki makna normatif dan politis yang signifikan, sejalan dengan peran Indonesia sebagai salah satu pendiri dan aktor kunci dalam menjaga sentralitas ASEAN (Auliya & Sulaiman, 2019). As a founding member and key actor, Indonesia's efforts to maintain a positive image in ASEAN are integral to its regional leadership strategy. Moreover, ASEAN as a regional organization has increasingly embraced digital platforms to enhance regional identity and communication among member states, making it a relevant context for studying digital diplomacy practices (Nesadurai, 2017). In the Southeast Asian context, Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN has often been associated with its diplomatic activism and commitment to multilateralism, which are further reinforced through digital communication strategies (Acharya, 2014).

The period 2020–2024 represents a critical phase marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, intensifying geopolitical rivalry, and accelerated digital transformation. At the same time, the acceleration of digital transformation during this period has further strengthened the role of social media as an instrument of communication and cross-border diplomacy (Intentilia, 2023). These dynamics make it a relevant period for examining Indonesia's digital public diplomacy practices.

Previous studies have examined Indonesia's digital public diplomacy across various platforms and specific issue contexts (Indraswari et al., 2022; Samad et al., 2023). However, there remains a lack of comprehensive research that specifically evaluates the long-term effectiveness of Indonesia's digital public diplomacy strategy through the Instagram account @kemlu_ri in shaping a positive national image in ASEAN during the 2020–2024 period. Most existing studies tend to focus on particular moments, different platforms, or predominantly domestic audiences. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the content strategy, diplomatic narratives, and regional outreach of the @kemlu_ri account toward ASEAN audiences.

Based on the aforementioned background, the research problem of this study is formulated as follows: how effective is the strategy implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in building a positive image of Indonesia through the Instagram account @kemlu_ri in the ASEAN region during the period 2020–2024 (Manor *et al.*, 2019). From an academic perspective, this study is expected to contribute to the development of public diplomacy and digital diplomacy studies, particularly in understanding the role of social media as a strategic instrument of soft power and nation branding in Southeast Asia (Rif'an *et al.*, 2025).

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of public diplomacy strategies implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in building a positive national image through the utilization of Instagram @kemlu_ri in the ASEAN region during the period 2020–2024 (Yunita *et al.*, 2024). The focus of the study is directed at examining how the content, narratives, and forms of visual communication delivered through the account represent Indonesia's identity as well as the diplomatic values that are intended to be emphasized to regional audiences (Holmes *et al.*, 2021). In addition, this study also investigates the extent to which the use of Instagram as an instrument of digital public diplomacy is capable of enhancing visibility, credibility, and positive perceptions of Indonesia amidst the dynamics of political developments and digital communication in the ASEAN region (Samad *et al.*, 2023).

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach to understand Indonesia's digital public diplomacy strategy through the official Instagram account @kemlu_ri during the period 2020–2024 (Indraswari *et al.*, 2022).

The research data were obtained from various sources, including Instagram posts from @kemlu_ri that are relevant to ASEAN-related issues, media coverage, official documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and academic literature that supports the analytical framework (Sari *et al.*, 2021;).

The researcher collected data consisting of one official Instagram post from @kemlu_ri for each year from 2020 to 2024 that is related to Indonesia's cooperation with ASEAN member states, the promotion of Indonesian culture at the regional level, Indonesia's foreign policy that emphasizes a positive national image, and other public diplomacy activities (Aditia *et al.*, 2025; Yunita *et al.*, 2024).

The research technique combines content analysis, which includes aspects of visual content, narrative, and audience engagement, with discourse analysis that focuses on diplomatic messages and framing constructed in public communication (Strauss *et al.*, 2015; Holmes *et al.*, 2021). The scope of this study is limited to content that is directly related to ASEAN dynamics and does not encompass all posts from the account (Robertson *et al.*, 2018).

To ensure data validity, this study applies source triangulation by comparing findings from official documents, academic publications, and media coverage, thereby ensuring that the interpretation of the research findings is valid, reliable, and contextual (Bjola *et al.*, 2021; Creswell *et al.*, 2014). Another perspective suggests that digital engagement metrics should be complemented with qualitative indicators such as narrative resonance and audience interpretation to better assess the impact of diplomatic communication (Zaharna, 2010).

3. Result and Discussion

Instagram Content Strategy of @kemlu_ri

The content strategy developed by the official account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, @kemlu_ri, reflects the transformation of public diplomacy toward digital diplomacy (Manor *et al.*, 2019). In the context of digital public diplomacy theory, social media is not merely viewed as a channel for information dissemination, but also as a strategic space for building soft power and nation branding (Perdani *et al.*, 2024). Through Instagram, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeks to present Indonesia's image as an open, competitive, and actively engaged country in global issues (Santoso *et al.*, 2024).

The communication approach applied by @kemlu_ri combines two main orientations, namely informational and persuasive (Bjola *et al.*, 2018). The informational orientation is reflected in the delivery of foreign policy updates, diplomatic achievements, and reports on international activities (Aditia *et al.*, 2025). Meanwhile, the persuasive orientation is evident in content that promotes culture, tourism, and national values that shape a positive narrative about Indonesia (Rif'an *et al.*, 2025). This is consistent with digital public diplomacy practices that emphasize the importance of balancing listening, advocacy, and cultural diplomacy (Holmes *et al.*, 2021). The content strategy of @kemlu_ri is directed toward supporting strategic agenda-setting, projecting a positive image, and fostering digital public engagement (Manor *et al.*, 2019).

The combination of informative, soft diplomacy, and participatory content demonstrates the existence of narrative layering, in which diplomatic messages are conveyed subtly through visual and emotional approaches (Bjola *et al.*, 2018). This strategy is effective in strengthening institutional visual identity and increasing public awareness of Indonesia's diplomatic role (Perdani *et al.*, 2024). However, several studies indicate that public engagement measured through likes, comments, and reach does not always directly correspond to the effectiveness of diplomatic communication (Strauss *et al.*, 2015). This phenomenon highlights the tension between institutional authority and public intimacy, where formal communication styles enhance institutional credibility but limit two-way dialogue, which is a key characteristic of ideal digital diplomacy (Holmes *et al.*, 2021). In contemporary digital diplomacy, effectiveness is no longer measured solely by information dissemination but also by the ability to build interaction,

audience engagement, and participatory dialogue in digital spaces (Manor *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the content strategy of @kemlu_ri still needs to balance institutional formality with openness to global public participation (Bjola et al., 2021).

Tabel 1. Klasifikasi Strategi Konten Instagram @kemlu_ri (2020–2024)

| No | Type | Description | Example Post | Diplomatic Objective |
|----|----------------|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Informative | Delivery of diplomatic activities and foreign policy | ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting | Policy transparency & legitimacy |
| 2 | Soft Diplomacy | Promotion of culture, tourism, and national identity | National Batik Day | Nation branding & soft power |
| 3 | Participatory | Public campaigns, interaction, and commemorative events | ASEAN Anniversary Celebration | Increasing public engagement |

Sumber: Bjola & Manor (2018)

The analysis of posting patterns on @kemlu_ri indicates that there are three main categories of content that are consistently utilized.

- First, informative content, which contains reports on diplomatic activities such as bilateral visits, multilateral meetings, and international economic cooperation. One example of such content is presented in Figure 1.



Gambar 1. Post on ASEAN Foreign Minister's Meeting

Sumber: https://www.instagram.com/kemlu_ri

Figure 1 shows a post from @kemlu_ri informing audiences about Indonesia's chairmanship, particularly the role of the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs in leading a multilateral meeting involving all ASEAN foreign ministers. This demonstrates that the strategy employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in constructing a positive national image fulfills the criteria of informative content.

- Soft diplomacy content, which highlights aspects of culture, cuisine, tourism, and Indonesia's social diversity as a form of promoting national values. Konten soft diplomacy, yang menampilkan aspek budaya, kuliner, pariwisata, serta keberagaman sosial Indonesia sebagai bentuk promosi nilai nasional.

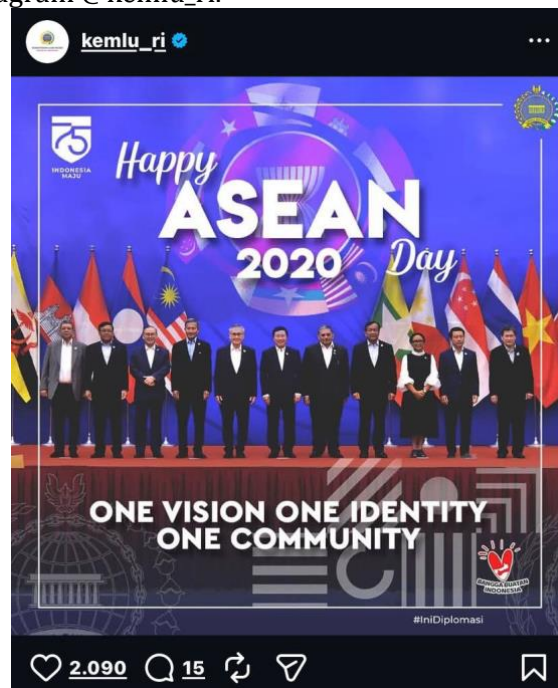


Gambar 2. National Batik Day Post (2021)

Sumber: https://www.instagram.com/kemu_ri

Figure 2 illustrates that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has presented batik as an essential element of Indonesian culture that serves as a medium for promoting national values through the Instagram platform @kemu_ri.

- Third, participatory content, which includes public campaigns, commemorative messages, and collaborative invitations directed at the public. Gambar 2 menunjukkan bahwa Kementerian Luar Negeri telah menampilkan batik sebagai salah satu aspek budaya Indonesia yang dapat menjadi bentuk promosi nilai nasional melalui platform sosial media Instagram @kemu_ri.



Gambar 3. ASEAN Anniversary Post (2020)

Sumber: https://www.instagram.com/kemu_ri

Figure 3 represents an official Instagram post from @kemu_ri displaying a commemorative message for the ASEAN anniversary with the theme "One Vision, One Identity, One Community." This post reflects Indonesia's active participation in major commemorative

events. The combination of these three types of content demonstrates the presence of narrative layering, in which diplomatic messages are subtly conveyed through visual and emotional approaches (Bjola & Manor, 2018). This strategy is effective in strengthening the institution's visual identity and increasing public awareness of Indonesia's diplomatic role. However, several studies suggest that public engagement—measured through likes, comments, and reach—does not always directly correlate with the effectiveness of diplomatic communication (Strauss et al., 2015).

This phenomenon highlights the tension between institutional authority and public intimacy. A predominantly formal communication style enhances institutional credibility but simultaneously limits the space for two-way dialogue, which is a defining feature of ideal digital diplomacy (Holmes, 2021). In the context of contemporary digital diplomacy, communication effectiveness is no longer measured solely by information dissemination but also by the ability of actors to foster two-way interaction, audience engagement, and participatory dialogue within digital spaces (Manor, 2019). Therefore, the content strategy of @kemlu_ri still needs to balance institutional formality with openness to global public participation.

In academic literature, there is an ongoing debate regarding how the effectiveness of digital diplomacy should be measured. Some scholars argue that quantitative indicators such as the number of followers, engagement rates, and reach can represent the success of digital diplomacy strategies. However, this approach has been criticized for its inability to capture the depth and quality of interactions occurring among actors in digital spaces (Robertson, 2018).

An alternative approach emphasizes the importance of qualitative analysis of message content and cross-national sentiment mapping to understand how Indonesia's diplomatic narratives are received by international audiences (Bjola & Jiang, 2021). In this context, the effectiveness of @kemlu_ri's Instagram content should not be assessed solely based on popularity but also on its ability to build positive perceptions and foster dialogue among citizens within ASEAN and globally. Methodologically, future research is recommended to adopt a mixed-method approach by combining quantitative analysis (engagement, reach, and interaction metrics) with qualitative analysis (narrative meaning, visual elements, and symbolic values). Additionally, the concept of networked diplomacy proposed by Manor (2019) can be utilized to map digital collaboration networks among diplomatic actors in the ASEAN region. Through such strategies, @kemlu_ri has the potential to transform from a mere information dissemination channel into an interactive, participatory digital diplomacy space oriented toward shaping Indonesia's positive image in the international arena. Scholars argue that the effectiveness of public diplomacy in the digital age depends not only on message dissemination but also on the ability to foster trust and credibility through consistent and transparent communication (Cull, 2019).

Indonesia's Image in ASEAN

Indonesia's image in the ASEAN region is a constructed outcome shaped by the combination of foreign policy, diplomatic activities, and digital representations carried out by state actors, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Instagram account @kemlu_ri. In the context of regional diplomacy, Indonesia is often perceived as a natural leader in ASEAN due to its contributions to maintaining regional stability, promoting ASEAN centrality, and mediating various regional issues (Triwibowo, 2023). However, this image is not static; it is continuously renegotiated in line with geopolitical dynamics and public communication developments in the digital era. Social media, particularly Instagram, has become a new arena for shaping interstate perceptions, where visual representation plays a crucial role in reinforcing Indonesia's identity as a modern, inclusive, and collaborative actor in Southeast Asia (Perdani et al., 2024).

Analysis of digital content shows that the narrative constructed by @kemlu_ri focuses on strengthening Indonesia's image as a bridge for regional diplomacy and a promoter of regional stability. Through posts related to Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship 2023, regional economic cooperation, and cross-cultural promotion, Indonesia presents itself as an actor emphasizing collective leadership and ASEAN solidarity (Santoso, 2024). Visual representations featuring symbols of unity—such as ASEAN flags, multilateral forums, and inter-ministerial

collaborations—function as instruments of soft power that reinforce Indonesia’s position as a “connector state” in the region.

Tabel 2. Representation of Indonesia’s Image in ASEAN

| No | Image Dimension | Representation Indicator | Content Form |
|----|-----------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | Leadership | Active role in ASEAN forums | ASEAN Chairmanship 2023 |
| 2 | Culture | Promotion of national identity | Batik, cuisine, tourism |
| 3 | Cooperation | Collaboration among ASEAN member states | Multilateral forums |
| 4 | Stability | Role in maintaining regional security | ASEAN geopolitical issues |

Sumber: Triwibowo (2023)

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of this image faces several challenges. Studies indicate that positive perceptions of Indonesia in ASEAN are influenced not only by digital communication but also by the consistency of foreign policy and diplomatic responses to regional issues such as the Myanmar crisis and the South China Sea dispute (Santoso, 2024; Auliya & Sulaiman, 2019). This raises an academic debate regarding the extent to which digital diplomacy can replace conventional diplomacy in shaping a country’s image. Bjola and Manor (2018) argue that while digital diplomacy has strong potential in building symbolic visibility, it still requires policy coherence to ensure the credibility of messages delivered in digital spaces.

Indonesia’s image in ASEAN can be understood as a result of synergy between substantive foreign policy and digital representation. Social media platforms such as Instagram function as catalysts that strengthen Indonesia’s image as a regional leader and trusted partner. However, the sustainability of this image depends heavily on the alignment between digital messaging and concrete diplomatic actions.

Constraints and Challenges

Despite its strategic role, Indonesia’s digital public diplomacy through Instagram faces several constraints and challenges that affect the effectiveness of regional communication. First, limited two-way interaction remains a major challenge. Ideally, digital diplomacy should be dialogical and capable of building reciprocal relationships (Holmes, 2021), yet the communication pattern of @kemlu_ri remains predominantly one-way.

Second, the reach of ASEAN audiences is still limited. Most interactions originate from domestic audiences, influenced by language differences, content preferences, and platform algorithms (Samad & Permatasari, 2023).

Third, maintaining consistency in diplomatic messaging is a challenge. Positive digital representation must be supported by actual diplomatic performance to maintain credibility (Bjola & Jiang, 2021).

Fourth, there are technical and institutional constraints, including limited human resources and the need for adaptation to digital work cultures that demand rapid content production and audience analysis (Triwibowo, 2023).

Tabel 4. Challenges of Indonesia’s Digital Public Diplomacy

| No | Challenge | Description |
|----|--------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Limited interaction | Communication remains predominantly one-way |
| 2 | Dominance of domestic audience | ASEAN reach is not yet optimal |
| 3 | Message consistency | Requires alignment with foreign policy |
| 4 | Human resource limitations | Digital adaptation and slow response |

Sumber: Holmes (2021)

In conclusion, the main challenges include low levels of two-way interaction, limited ASEAN audience reach, inconsistency in diplomatic messaging, and constraints in digital human resources. Therefore, strengthening institutional capacity, developing more interactive communication strategies, and ensuring consistency between digital diplomacy and foreign policy are essential. Enhancing this synergy is crucial for enabling Indonesia to leverage digital diplomacy to strengthen its regional leadership and maintain a positive image within ASEAN. The findings indicate that social media has become a strategic instrument in shaping Indonesia's positive image in ASEAN. Through a combination of informative, soft diplomacy, and participatory content, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has successfully projected Indonesia's cultural identity, diplomatic contributions, and active role in maintaining ASEAN centrality.

Structured visual representations and narratives contribute significantly to strengthening Indonesia's soft power and nation branding. However, their effectiveness is still influenced by factors such as message consistency, regional audience reach, and limited two-way interaction. Theoretically, this study confirms that digital diplomacy cannot be separated from concrete foreign policy performance, as the credibility of digital messages depends on the coherence between online representation and real diplomatic actions. Indonesia's digital public diplomacy through Instagram serves as a catalyst in strengthening positive perceptions in ASEAN, although further optimization is required to enhance responsiveness, participation, and relevance to regional audiences.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should improve two-way interaction with ASEAN audiences through participatory features and more consistent use of English. Content should also be adapted to better suit regional audiences in terms of both narrative and visual elements. Additionally, coherence between digital messaging and actual diplomatic performance must be strengthened to maintain institutional credibility. Capacity building in digital media analysis and rapid response to regional issues is also essential. Cross-institutional collaboration and engagement with non-state actors at the ASEAN level are recommended to expand reach and enhance the effectiveness of Indonesia's digital diplomacy. Finally, the integration of digital tools in diplomacy reflects a broader transformation toward what is often referred to as "public diplomacy 2.0," where interactivity, participation, and user-generated content become central components of international communication (Owen, 2015).

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that Indonesia's digital public diplomacy strategy through the Instagram account @kemlu_ri during the 2020–2024 period has substantively contributed to the construction of a positive national image in the ASEAN region. This is achieved through a combination of informative, soft diplomacy, and participatory content that represents Indonesia's cultural identity, diplomatic contributions, and leadership role in maintaining ASEAN centrality. The findings indicate that digital diplomacy functions as an instrument for strengthening soft power and nation branding. However, its effectiveness remains constrained by limited two-way interaction, the dominance of domestic audiences, and the need for greater consistency between digital representation and substantive foreign policy. Therefore, optimizing digital public diplomacy requires strengthening institutional capacity, developing more dialogical communication strategies, and expanding outreach to regional audiences. Future research is recommended to adopt a mixed-method approach by combining quantitative analysis of cross-country engagement within ASEAN, digital sentiment mapping, and comparative studies with digital diplomacy strategies of other ASEAN member states. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in shaping regional image construction.

5. Acknowledgments

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang and all parties who have supported this research.

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