



Wayang as an Instrument of Indonesia's Nation Branding through Public Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

Wayang is a form of cultural heritage originating from Indonesia and is recognized in various local traditions, including Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese cultures. Initially, Wayang functioned as a medium for communicating with ancestral spirits; however, over time, it has evolved into a medium for conveying messages, providing entertainment, and educating the public. Wayang has been officially acknowledged by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Indonesia's appreciation of Wayang is further institutionalized through National Wayang Day, which is celebrated annually on 7 November. Nevertheless, Indonesia has yet to establish a distinctive "brand" that effectively introduces Wayang to international audiences. This study employs a qualitative approach based on a literature review. It aims to explore the potential of Wayang as Indonesia's national brand. The findings indicate that Wayang has strong potential to serve as Indonesia's brand, as it contributes to cultural preservation, supports economic development through the empowerment of related industries, promotes cultural tourism, and helps enhance Indonesia's international image as a country rich in culture and values. Therefore, this article argues that the development of Wayang as Indonesia's brand requires the synergy of three key pillars: the government, art and cultural organizations, and digitalization. These three pillars must work in tandem to successfully position Wayang as Indonesia's national brand.

Kata Kunci

Diplomasi Publik, Nation Branding, Soft Power, Warisan Budaya, Wayang

ABSTRAK

Wayang merupakan warisan budaya yang berasal dari Indonesia. Wayang sangat familiar di berbagai kebudayaan Indonesia seperti kebudayaan Jawa, Sunda, dan Bali. Awalnya, Wayang digunakan sebagai media untuk berkomunikasi dengan roh nenek moyang namun seiring dengan berjalannya waktu, Wayang digunakan sebagai media untuk menyampaikan pesan, menghibur, dan mengedukasi massa. Wayang telah diakui sebagai warisan budaya tak benda yang luar biasa oleh UNESCO. Apresiasi Indonesia terhadap Wayang telah diperkuat dengan perayaan Hari Wayang Nasional setiap 7 November. Akan tetapi, Indonesia belum memiliki "merek" yang membuat masyarakat asing mengenal Wayang secara lebih baik. Penelitian ini, menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggunakan studi pustaka. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk melakukan eksplorasi mengenai Wayang sebagai merek Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Wayang dapat digunakan sebagai "merek" Indonesia yang bermanfaat karena bisa mendukung proses pelestarian budaya, meningkatkan ekonomi yang bisa memberdayakan industri terkait, mendukung pariwisata budaya, dan memproyeksikan citra yang positif Indonesia sebagai negara dengan kebudayaan dan nilai-nilai yang kaya. Agar Wayang bisa maju sebagai merek Indonesia, terdapat tiga hal fundamental: pemerintah, organisasi seni dan budaya, serta proses digitalisasi. Tiga pilar tersebut perlu berjalan bersamaan untuk mewujudkan Wayang sebagai merek Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Wayang is an integral part of Indonesia's cultural heritage. According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, Wayang is defined as a puppet made of carved leather, wood, or other materials, which is used to portray characters in traditional dramatic performances across various cultures, including Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese traditions, and is typically performed by a puppeteer known as a *dalang*. There are multiple types of Wayang found in Indonesia, such as *Wayang kulit*, *Wayang golek*, *Wayang wong*, *Wayang purwa*, *Wayang gedog*, and *Wayang klitik*, among others. These forms of Wayang can be distinguished based on their materials, regions of origin, performers, and the characters they depict.

Wayang has undergone a long historical development and is believed to have begun evolving in the Indonesian archipelago around 1500 BCE (Wiyono, 2023). Initially, Wayang functioned as a medium for venerating ancestral spirits or *hyang* (Awalin, 2018). Over time, it evolved into a medium for storytelling and entertainment. During the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms period, the epics most commonly performed in Wayang were the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Local narratives were also incorporated into Wayang performances, such as the Panji romances from the Kediri Kingdom, which tell stories of heroism and romance. With the arrival of Islam in the archipelago, Wayang was also used as a medium for disseminating Islamic teachings, particularly by the *Wali Songo*.

Despite its long historical trajectory, the position of Wayang in contemporary Indonesian society raises important questions. In the era of globalization, it is undeniable that foreign cultural influences such as the Korean Wave, Hollywood, and Bollywood have become increasingly dominant in Indonesia. These cultures are widely consumed through various media, including music, films, fashion, culinary trends, and beauty standards. As an indigenous cultural heritage, Wayang continues to maintain a presence, primarily in ceremonial contexts, such as welcoming state guests, traditional theatre performances, educational media, and tourist attractions. Furthermore, Wayang has also been utilized as a medium of political propaganda.

The Indonesian government has undertaken various efforts to preserve Wayang, including registering it with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The process leading to Wayang's designation as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity was based on Resolution No. 29 of 1997, which aimed to: (1) raise global awareness of the value of intangible cultural heritage; (2) evaluate and register sites and intangible cultural heritage; (3) encourage governments to adopt legal measures for protection; and (4) involve local artists in the documentation, preservation, and development of intangible cultural heritage (Solichin, 2010). The nomination of Wayang to UNESCO was intended to safeguard its sustainability from the erosion of time and to support cultural reproduction. Moreover, Indonesia's position as the country of origin of Wayang is strengthened, enabling clearer regulation of its claims and use.

Since Wayang was officially recognized as Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage, domestic appreciation has been further institutionalized through the celebration of National Wayang Day every 7 November, based on Presidential Decree No. 30 of 2018. As a cultural heritage rich in meaning, Wayang holds significant potential to represent Indonesia and to serve as the country's national brand in the international arena. Several previous studies have laid the foundation for research on Indonesia's nation branding, including those by Rahmadana and Prakoso (2022), Satria and Fadillah (2021), and Al Ghafiqi (2023). The novelty of this study lies in the cultural object proposed as the nation brand. Therefore, this research focuses on examining how Wayang can be positioned as Indonesia's brand, how its role can be optimized, and what benefits may be derived from such an endeavor.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is a concept that was formally introduced by Edmund Gullion, a scholar from Tufts University, in 1965 (Snow & Cull, 2020). Before this, the term public diplomacy had already appeared in various newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*, during the 1920s in response to the political situation of the time, when the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, promoted an idealistic vision of a peaceful international order in the aftermath of World War I. The idea of public diplomacy developed rapidly in 1965 due to the United States' interest in disseminating propaganda during the Cold War era.

Accordingly, public diplomacy, as conceptualized by Edmund Gullion, refers to a type of diplomacy aimed at influencing public attitudes toward the formation and implementation of foreign policy. The dimensions of public diplomacy include the shaping of public opinion about governments among foreign publics, interactions between private groups and interests across countries, reporting on international relations and their impact on policy, communication between diplomats and foreign correspondents, and the processes of intercultural communication (Snow & Cull, 2020).

Another International Relations scholar who contributed significantly to the development of the concept of public diplomacy is Joseph Nye. Public diplomacy is closely related to efforts to enhance a country's soft power. Soft power, as defined by Nye (2008), refers to the ability to influence others to obtain desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payment. In addition, soft power aims to shape the preferences of other actors.

According to Nye, A country's soft power is derived from three main sources: (1) culture; (2) political values; and (3) foreign policy. A country's culture functions as a source of attraction for foreign publics by highlighting what makes the country distinctive and unique. Political values can also serve as a source of soft power, as they shape the attitudes and conduct of a government both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, a country's foreign policy reflects and determines its stance in responding to other states, thereby influencing how it is perceived on the international stage.

Who can play a role in public diplomacy? While governments remain the primary actors in conventional diplomacy, public diplomacy opens space for non-state actors to participate in such efforts. Diplomats continue to carry the main responsibility for promoting culture in their host countries; however, their role is increasingly positioned as facilitators and managers of public diplomacy initiatives (Hocking, 2005).

Non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations, art organizations, and individuals can also actively participate in public diplomacy. Initiatives undertaken by non-state actors—such as performances, events, exhibitions, and festivals can facilitate intercultural communication and promote a country's culture abroad.

The primary objective of public diplomacy is to project a positive image of a country to enhance its prospects of achieving its goals (Nye, 2008). The key element of this effort lies in persuasion, as emphasized by Nye (Nye, 2008). Public diplomacy can encourage intercultural exchanges, thereby reducing negative sentiments between countries and fostering tolerance.

Public diplomacy can be regarded as an “umbrella” concept for various forms of diplomacy that aim to promote a positive image of a country. These include gastrodiploamacy (diplomatic efforts that utilize a country's traditional cuisine), cultural diplomacy (diplomatic efforts that highlight a country's culture in various forms to foster mutual understanding), animal diplomacy (diplomatic efforts that employ iconic animals of a country), and celebrity diplomacy (diplomatic efforts that use celebrities to advocate issues).

Nation Branding

The concept of nation branding was systematically introduced by Simon Anholt in 1998 (Anholt, 2013), who views the state as an entity that needs to build a global reputation through integrated strategies to enhance its competitiveness in the political, economic, tourism, and cultural sectors. Anholt (2013) further emphasizes that nation branding is a strategic process aimed at strengthening international perceptions through the utilization of national identity and country image. In line with this, Dinnie (2008) defines nation branding as a planned effort by a country to shape, manage, and communicate its national identity to create a positive image among global publics. The main factors influencing the success of nation branding include the authenticity of national identity, narrative consistency, institutional legitimacy, public participation, and the effectiveness of external communication strategies. Within Dinnie's (2008) framework, nation branding consists of three main instruments: (1) identity values, symbols, cultural characteristics, and national heritage; (2) image representations and international public perceptions of a country; and (3) positioning the strategy of differentiating a country in the global arena.

Based on this framework, Wayang is positioned within the dimension of identity, as it represents an authentic expression of Indonesia's cultural heritage, rich in social values, historical narratives, and national character. The cultural identity conveyed through Wayang subsequently serves as the foundation for constructing Indonesia's image as a country with world-class cultural richness, while simultaneously supporting Indonesia's positioning in international cultural diplomacy. Commodities such as Indomie, which was previously mentioned as an illustration of nation branding, are more appropriately categorized as instruments of positioning, namely, efforts to place products as global representations of a country. Thus, Wayang and Indomie reflect two different dimensions of nation branding: Wayang as identity, and products such as Indomie as part of a positioning strategy.

The relationship between nation branding and public diplomacy is complementary: nation branding provides the identity foundation to be projected, while public diplomacy functions as the communication mechanism to influence international public perceptions. In this context, the utilization of Wayang as a cultural symbol positions it as a strategic instrument of Indonesia's soft power to strengthen the national image and promote cultural identity at the global level.

This framework demonstrates that Wayang does not merely function as a traditional cultural artifact, but fulfills a strategic role within the identity dimension of nation branding by providing symbolic and narrative resources that can be mobilized through public diplomacy. The cultural values, historical narratives, and philosophical meanings embedded in Wayang enable it to operate as a form of symbolic capital that represents Indonesia's cultural distinctiveness. In this sense, Wayang serves not only as a marker of cultural heritage but also as a communicative instrument through which Indonesia can project a coherent, authentic, and recognizable national identity to international audiences. Therefore, the placement of Wayang within the identity dimension of nation branding is not merely conceptual, but reflects its functional capacity to support Indonesia's image-building and positioning efforts in the global arena.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings, values, and roles of Wayang as an instrument of Indonesia's nation branding within the context of public diplomacy (Lamont, 2015). Data collection was conducted through interviews with informants relevant to the research problem, literature review, and online document analysis.

Secondary data were collected from various written sources, including: (1) reputable academic journal articles discussing nation branding, public diplomacy, and cultural heritage; (2) official Indonesian government policy documents, such as laws and regulations related to cultural advancement;

(3) reports and publications from international organizations, particularly UNESCO; and (4) official online sources of cultural institutions and Wayang-related art organizations.

The criteria for source selection were determined based on several considerations, namely: direct relevance to the topics of Wayang, nation branding, and public diplomacy; the academic or institutional credibility of the sources; and the timeliness of publication, particularly for conceptual and policy-related literature. Popular sources or mass media were used in a limited manner as contextual supporting data.

In terms of research design, this study is a qualitative inquiry that integrates cultural policy analysis with discussions of cultural diplomacy cases related to Wayang, such as the process of Wayang's designation as UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage and the role of cultural organizations in promoting Wayang at the international level. These cases are not intended as in-depth field case studies, but rather as empirical illustrations to strengthen the conceptual argument.

To ensure data validity, this study applies source triangulation by comparing information from academic literature, official policy documents, and publications from international organizations. In addition, data type triangulation is also employed by linking conceptual, normative, and empirical-descriptive data, so that the research findings do not rely on a single type of source and maintain argumentative consistency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Process of Wayang's Inscription as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is an institution under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) that is specifically responsible for matters related to education, arts, culture, and science. UNESCO is directly responsible for providing legal protection for the world's cultural heritage that has been registered under its framework. Wayang is an Indonesian cultural heritage that has been registered with UNESCO; however, a long and complex process lies behind this recognition.

The nomination process undergone by Wayang to obtain recognition from UNESCO consists of five stages (Solichin, 2010). (1) Identification, namely the process of identifying masterpieces of intangible cultural heritage. (2) Conservation, which involves activities such as the creation of national cultural archives and databases, the establishment of museums, training for conservation experts, and the duplication of archives and data related to intangible cultural heritage. (3) Preservation, which includes providing materials to integrate heritage studies into school curricula, offering moral and financial support to individuals and institutions in the field of intangible cultural heritage, and supporting scientific research on intangible cultural heritage. (4) Documentation, which is carried out through a series of activities including the organization of exhibitions and festivals, promotion through media, provision of information, the organization of meetings aimed at heritage preservation, and efforts to establish codes of ethics. The documents required for nominating a cultural heritage masterpiece include a written report in accordance with the format provided by UNESCO, as well as additional documentation such as maps, photographs, and audiovisual recordings. Written permission for the use of materials by UNESCO is also required, along with references used in the research. In addition, a documentary film, written proof of consent from the local community confirming that the submitted materials represent accurate information about the nominated heritage, and a list of five other cultural elements to be nominated in the future, are also required. (5) Protection, namely the provision of protection for practitioners and experts of intangible cultural heritage, as well as for related archives and data.

Wayang was granted the status of a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003. In addition to the government, other actors that have contributed to promoting Wayang as an

intangible cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO include the arts organization SENAWANGI (*Sekretariat Nasional Wayang Indonesia*). SENAWANGI has carried out cultural missions to promote Wayang in various countries, such as Austria and Belgium, and also participated in the official ceremony for the awarding of the certificate of the Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in Paris, France, in 2004. As an organization dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Wayang, SENAWANGI also presented the renowned puppeteer Ki Manteb Soedarsono, who performed a Wayang *kulit purwa* performance that successfully elicited admiration and curiosity about Wayang among international audiences.

This designation was granted based on several considerations: (1) the long historical presence of Wayang in Indonesia; (2) its cultural and moral values derived from its functions as both entertainment and a medium for conveying messages; (3) its reflection of Indonesia's cultural diversity through distinctive regional styles; (4) its significance in important ceremonies and cultural rituals; (5) its role in fostering a sense of pride and appreciation for indigenous culture; (6) its educational messages that are closely connected to everyday life and aligned with Eastern cultural values; and (7) its status as a distinctive cultural characteristic of Indonesia (Inspektorat Jenderal Kementerian Pendidikan Kebudayaan Riset dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2023).

Efforts to designate Wayang as an intangible cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO have involved not only the government but also non-governmental organizations engaged in the arts and cultural sectors. National Wayang Day represents one form of appreciation for this cultural heritage. Artists, cultural figures, and representatives of the SENAWANGI community took the initiative to propose the establishment of National Wayang Day to the President, and this proposal was subsequently forwarded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture, and the State Secretariat (Vinta, 2023).

Wayang as Indonesia's Nation Branding Instrument

The legal basis for Indonesia to introduce and promote its culture is stipulated in Law No. 5 of 2017 on Cultural Advancement. This is stated in Article 35 paragraph (1), which reads: "The utilization of Objects of Cultural Advancement to enhance Indonesia's active role and influence in international relations as referred to in Article 32 paragraph (2) letter d shall be carried out through (a) cultural diplomacy; and (b) the enhancement of international cooperation in the field of culture." This law also regulates the authority of the central government in conducting cultural diplomacy, as stipulated in Article 43, which states: "In the advancement of culture, the Central Government is tasked to: (a) guarantee freedom of expression; (b) ensure the protection of cultural expressions; (c) implement cultural advancement; (d) maintain diversity; (e) manage information in the field of culture; (f) provide cultural facilities and infrastructure; (g) provide funding for cultural advancement; (h) encourage active participation and initiatives from the public in cultural advancement; (i) utilize culture as one of the media of international diplomacy; (j) enhance international cooperation in the field of culture; and (k) foster and maintain a sustainable cultural ecosystem" (JDIH BPK, 2017).

Another legal foundation supporting Indonesia's cultural objectives is found in the Draft Law on Culture. Article 16 states that "the objectives of cultural administration include: (a) cultural rights; (b) national identity and character; (c) diversity; (d) history and cultural heritage; (e) cultural industries; (f) cultural diplomacy; (g) cultural institutions and cultural human resources; and (h) cultural infrastructure and facilities." Furthermore, Article 63 specifically addresses cultural diplomacy, which includes: (1) the government, regional governments, and society shall carry out cultural diplomacy; (2) cultural diplomacy as referred to in paragraph (1) shall be conducted to enhance the image of Indonesian culture in the international community; (3) cultural diplomacy aimed at enhancing the image of Indonesian culture as referred to in paragraph (2) shall be realized through: (a) optimizing the representation of

Indonesian culture abroad; (b) increasing both the quantity and quality of promotion and media coverage on Indonesian culture in foreign mass media; (c) increasing both the quantity and quality of the implementation of cultural activities abroad; (d) increasing the participation of Indonesian citizens abroad in Indonesian cultural activities; (e) enhancing cooperation in studies and research on Indonesian culture abroad; (f) utilizing Indonesian culture in efforts to strengthen friendship between Indonesia and other countries; and (g) increasing efforts to repatriate Indonesian cultural assets located abroad; and (4) the provisions concerning cultural diplomacy shall be implemented in accordance with the prevailing laws and regulations (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, 2017).

Wayang constitutes a cultural product with significant potential to represent Indonesia as a whole. It is rich in cultural and educational values. Like other literary works, Wayang narratives convey diverse impressions; however, they consistently reflect the conditions and values of the society in which they emerge. Epic masterpieces symbolize societal ideals regarding heroism and the figures that are revered at a given time, although it cannot be denied that these characters also possess flaws—for instance, Rama in the *Ramayana* epic, who is portrayed as lacking strong trust in his wife, Sinta.

The presence of flaws in a character is not only found in Wayang narratives but also in the Sundanese folktale of *Si Kabayan*. The story of *Si Kabayan*, which originates from West Java, is characterized by humor. It tells the story of a lazy man named Kabayan and his wife, Iteung. In his daily life, Kabayan spends most of his time sleeping and daydreaming; however, when his wife asks him to help with household chores, he refuses and consequently faces the repercussions. The humor of *Si Kabayan* lies in the consequences and misfortunes that befall him. The flaws of this character serve as valuable lessons. The story of *Si Kabayan* also conveys a moral message: one should not be lazy, as it only leads to negative consequences.

In addition to being rich in meaning, the appeal of Wayang also lies in its visual form. Every physical element of Wayang carries symbolic significance, and the materials used give each form its distinctive character. One of the most well-known types is Wayang *kulit*. This form originates from Central Java and is made from buffalo hide. In a Wayang *kulit* performance, the *dalang* serves as the leader of the performance, accompanied by *sinden* and *gamelan* musicians who bring the atmosphere to life. Wayang *kulit* follows specific conventions regarding the appearance of the characters and the meanings of the instruments used in the performance.

One of the most important symbolic elements is the *gunungan*, a figure used to mark transitions between scenes, which carries deep philosophical meaning. The *gunungan* contains four elements of life, symbolized by earth, water, fire, and wind. Its upward-pointing shape represents the ideal course of human life. The higher it rises, the narrower its surface becomes, symbolizing that no matter how intelligent or high one's status is, a virtuous person should remain humble. As humans grow older, they are expected to become wiser. The gate and the guardians depicted in the *gunungan* represent the dual nature of human beings, good and evil, while the guardians also symbolize the protectors of nature. Other elements of the *gunungan* include a large tree symbolizing God, birds symbolizing beauty, a fortress conveying the message that humans must be strong, a monkey symbolizing the choice between good and evil, a tiger symbolizing that humans must be leaders for themselves and others, and a *joglo* house symbolizing calmness and serenity (Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, 2023).

Sundanese Wayang *Golek* is also one of the most popular forms of Wayang in West Java. It is rich in values and meanings, and the colors used in Wayang figures carry their own symbolic significance. One of the characters in Wayang *golek*, Si Cepot, is depicted with red skin and protruding teeth. The red color of Si Cepot's skin symbolizes his brave and rebellious character (Reza, 2022). In the stories, Si Cepot is portrayed as a courageous and critical figure. Despite his critical nature, his criticisms are conveyed through humor, which helps to lighten the atmosphere. His protruding teeth further enhance the comedic aspect of his characterization.

The clothing styles worn by Wayang characters also carry specific meanings, distinguishing between noble characters, deities, virtuous figures, and antagonists. Differences in culture and materials are also reflected in the various types of Wayang, such as Wayang *kulit* and Wayang *golek*. Wayang *kulit*, which is made from animal hide, tends to be two-dimensional and dominated by brownish tones, whereas Wayang *golek* is three-dimensional and made of wood. The costumes worn by Wayang *golek* characters are made of fabric and are adapted to the characters and the narrative context.

One of the objectives of public diplomacy is to expose Indonesian culture to foreign publics and to reduce negative prejudices toward the country. Wayang is an art form that represents Indonesia. Through Wayang performances, foreign audiences can gain an understanding of how Indonesian society functions and of the values upheld within it what is considered normal, good, and ideal in Indonesian society. Wayang can also generate interest among art enthusiasts, academics, and the general foreign public to study it more deeply. This foreign interest in Wayang also creates potential in the tourism sector. Various Wayang studios can be visited, such as Sanggar Wayang Ajen in Bekasi City, West Java Province, and Sanggar Wayang Gogon in Solo City, Central Java Province. This can encourage the development of cultural tourism. Tourism and culture are closely interconnected, as destinations, events, and cultural attractions have long served as motivations for tourists to travel, and travel itself also gives rise to cultural exchange (Richards, 2018).

The richness of symbolic meanings, moral narratives, and visual codes embedded in Wayang demonstrates that it functions not merely as entertainment but as a cultural text that actively constructs and communicates Indonesian values. These narrative and visual elements provide a coherent cultural vocabulary through which Indonesia's identity can be articulated and recognized by external audiences. In the context of nation branding, this confirms that Wayang fulfills the identity function not only in a representational sense, but also in an operational sense: it supplies the symbolic substance that enables Indonesia to differentiate itself culturally from other nations. Thus, the philosophical depth, narrative structures, and aesthetic system of Wayang constitute strategic cultural assets that can be mobilized through public diplomacy to strengthen Indonesia's image and symbolic positioning in the global arena.

According to the consensus of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), cultural tourism refers to a type of tourism activity in which the main motivation of tourists to visit a country is to learn about, explore, consume, and experience tangible and intangible cultural products or attractions within a tourism destination. Cultural attractions or products are associated with distinctive material, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional features, including art and architecture, cultural and historical heritage, cuisine, literature, music, creative industries, lifestyles, value systems, traditions, and beliefs (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2017). Given its rich cultural heritage, Indonesia should optimally utilize cultural tourism.

Cultural tourism centered on Wayang studios falls within the criteria of cultural tourism as defined by the WTO. The curiosity of potential tourists can be stimulated through efforts to promote Wayang abroad in various forms, such as Wayang performances or exhibitions. Potential tourists can be directed to visit studios or regions in Indonesia that are well known for Wayang. They may obtain unique tourism experiences by learning about Wayang directly from its sources, watching Wayang performances at tourist destinations, and visiting centers of culture and knowledge such as museums and Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII). Performances of Wayang *Wong* may also captivate tourists, as this form of Wayang resembles theater in which the characters are portrayed by human actors.

In addition to Wayang as the main attraction, other cultural elements, such as cuisine, can serve as complementary features to provide visitors with a memorable experience when visiting Indonesia. Beyond enhancing Indonesia's reputation and introducing Wayang to a wider audience, this approach can also benefit communities whose livelihoods are connected to cultural tourism and the development of Wayang. People working in the hospitality, transportation, arts, and heritage management sectors

can gain economic benefits. This, in turn, can directly empower local communities and contribute to the sustainability of Wayang as a cultural heritage.

This demonstrates that Wayang-based cultural tourism not only generates economic benefits but also reinforces Indonesia's nation branding strategy by transforming cultural identity into experiential capital. Through direct cultural encounters, international visitors do not merely consume Indonesian culture but also internalize a curated narrative of Indonesia as a culturally rich and meaningful nation.

Efforts Required from Key Stakeholders

The preceding discussion confirms that Wayang possesses strong symbolic, cultural, and economic capital to function as an instrument of Indonesia's nation branding. However, cultural potential alone does not automatically translate into branding power. It requires deliberate governance, institutional mediation, and strategic communication. Therefore, the transformation of Wayang from cultural heritage into a nation branding instrument depends on coordinated actions among key stakeholders.

Efforts to realize Wayang as an instrument of Indonesia's nation branding cannot be achieved without the collaboration of various stakeholders. The main actor in international relations, namely the state, must understand the importance of safeguarding its own cultural heritage. Indonesia has taken appropriate steps by establishing legal frameworks related to cultural governance; however, if their implementation is not carried out optimally, such efforts will be in vain. In the context of public diplomacy, the state plays the role of a facilitator.

Within patterns of government-to-government interaction, Wayang can be presented in various ways. It can be introduced as a cultural symbol during formal state events, offered as souvenirs for visiting heads of state, used to invite state guests to visit Wayang cultural centers, and displayed as a symbol representing Indonesia in cultural events. Through its embassies, the state can also engage in government-to-people interactions by establishing cultural centers, organizing events to introduce Indonesian culture, and holding Wayang exhibitions.

However, the role of the state in promoting Wayang as an instrument of Indonesia's nation branding must be supported by non-state actors such as artistic organizations and relevant academics. The largest Wayang arts organization in Indonesia, the Indonesian National Wayang Secretariat (Sekretariat Nasional Wayang Indonesia, SENAWANGI), has been actively contributing to the preservation of Wayang as cultural heritage. SENAWANGI is an arts organization dedicated to the safeguarding of Wayang and was established on 12 August 1975. It has also received certification from UNESCO (Kedutaan Besar Republik Indonesia Perancis, 2023; Nugraha, 2023).

SENAWANGI has made significant contributions to the preservation of Wayang as Indonesian cultural heritage by actively organizing performances, collaborating with the government in the cultural sector, partnering with other Wayang organizations, working together with academics to develop knowledge related to Wayang through discussion forums, and participating in the formulation of National Wayang Day, which was later officially enacted through Presidential Decree No. 30 of 2018.

In addition to SENAWANGI, another organization that is actively involved in the preservation of Wayang is the *Union Internationale de la Marionnette d'Indonésie* (UNIMA – Indonesian Chapter of the International Puppetry Association). This organization is a national branch of the Union Internationale de la Marionnette, which is headquartered in France. UNIMA was established on 16 December 2009, and its declaration was signed by representatives of SENAWANGI, the Indonesian Puppeteers Association (Persatuan Pedalangan Indonesia, PEPADI), the President of the central Union Internationale de la Marionnette, and the Secretary General of the central Union Internationale de la Marionnette.

UNIMA is a partner organization of SENAWANGI and aims to preserve, develop, promote, and disseminate Wayang (UNIMA, 2022). UNIMA's activities in the development of Wayang in Indonesia

include organizing international-scale festivals and seminars in various countries. UNIMA is affiliated with UNESCO, SENAWANGI, PEPADI, the Jakarta Wayang Museum, and the Wonderful Indonesia program.

In the process of preserving Wayang, professional organizations are essential to ensure that the voices of practitioners are represented. Therefore, the Indonesian Puppeteers Association (Persatuan Pedalangan Indonesia, PEPADI) also plays an important role. PEPADI is an independent organization that brings together art workers in the field of Wayang, including puppeteers (dalang), singers (sinden), puppet makers, gamelan musicians (pengrawit), and other individuals who meet certain criteria. The organization serves as a platform for activities in the art of puppetry, a means of professional dedication, and an instrument for improving the quality of life of artists (PEPADI, 2015).

PEPADI has a large membership spread throughout Indonesia and has organized numerous competitions, festivals, and Wayang performances. In order for Wayang to continue to develop, a strong domestic foundation and continuous capacity building for puppetry practitioners are required. In addition to organizations based at the national level, there are also regional organizations, such as the ASEAN Puppetry Association. Southeast Asian countries share cultural similarities, and each has its own version of Wayang; therefore, in support of ASEAN integration through the arts, the ASEAN Puppetry Association was established. The ASEAN Puppetry Association regularly organizes international-scale festivals, meetings, performances, shows, and annual evaluations (Dinnie, 2008).

The organizations mentioned above are puppetry art organizations that actively promote and develop the art of Wayang both domestically and internationally. However, in today's digital era, new strategies are required to support Wayang as an instrument of nation branding, namely through digitalization. The digitalization of artworks represents an innovative approach. It begins with the transfer of artworks from physical spaces into digital environments. Furthermore, digitalization is defined by the *Business Dictionary* as the process of converting analog information in various forms into digital form using appropriate electronic devices so that the information can be processed, stored, and transmitted through digital networks, equipment, and circuits (Enhuber, 2015). In this era of globalization, the digitalization of artworks can serve as an effective means of promotion and dissemination of artistic works. A successful example of art digitalization can be found in Google Arts and Culture.

The project was launched in 2011 and aims to preserve and bring cultural heritage into the online space in order to enhance accessibility to the arts. Google Arts and Culture collaborates with cultural institutions and artists around the world. The platform initially launched its projects through virtual exhibitions. These virtual exhibitions are conducted by converting artworks into data that can be processed by computers. In addition, Google Arts and Culture employs various technologies to preserve cultural heritage and attract public attention, including games, virtual museum tours, interactive articles, 360-degree VR technology, and many others. The collaboration between Google Arts and Culture, artists, and cultural institutions facilitates the preservation of artworks by providing online-accessible art archives as well as interactive infographics based on information supplied by relevant institutions. For example, UNESCO, through the Google Arts and Culture platform, provides interactive infographics to explore topics such as palm-leaf manuscripts (Google Arts & Culture, 2024).

If we return to the discussion of Wayang, how can digitalization contribute to the preservation and promotion of this cultural heritage? Drawing from best practices such as Google Arts and Culture, the use of digital technology can promote Wayang as an instrument of nation branding in various ways. For instance, people around the world can use 360-degree VR technology to observe Wayang in greater detail and explore different types of Wayang through archives compiled by Wayang scholars. The public can also take virtual tours of Wayang studios and cultural centers online. Moreover, Wayang can be studied in greater depth through infographics, games, and quizzes.

In addition to integrated digital cultural platforms such as Google Arts and Culture, social media can also be utilized to promote Wayang. Wayang performances, which have traditionally been broadcast on

television, can now be streamed on digital platforms such as YouTube and even through live streaming features on Instagram. The online presence of organizations and institutions dedicated to Wayang is crucial to facilitate access to information, especially for younger generations. Furthermore, the incorporation of Wayang into popular culture is also important to broaden its appeal. Wayang can be introduced through fiction books, comics, both in print and digital formats, films, songs, and even games.

The three main pillars in promoting Wayang as an instrument of Indonesia's nation branding, namely the government, cultural institutions, and digitalization, must work in synergy to achieve this objective. The state's role as a facilitator and primary supporter in advancing its own culture can strengthen both cultural institutions and digitalization initiatives, enabling collaboration to improve accessibility and promote Wayang on a broader scale. This is particularly important for reaching global audiences, so that Indonesia's prestige as a country with a rich and noble cultural heritage can be more widely recognized and its soft power further enhanced.

CONCLUSION

Wayang is an Indonesian cultural heritage that possesses high historical, philosophical, and aesthetic value and has received international recognition through UNESCO, as well as national reinforcement through the establishment of National Wayang Day. In the context of International Relations, Wayang holds significant strategic potential as an instrument of Indonesia's nation branding, as it is capable of representing the country's cultural richness, moral values, and national identity within the framework of public diplomacy and soft power.

This study shows that the use of Wayang in nation branding is primarily focused on the identity dimension (Dinnie, 2008), functioning as a representation of Indonesia's character, morality, and national identity. Furthermore, this identity is projected through public diplomacy based on the principles of building positive perceptions (image) and strengthening Indonesia's position in the arena of global symbolism (positioning). In this context, public diplomacy serves as a communication channel that connects local culture with international audiences.

In order for Wayang to function more effectively as an instrument of nation branding, more concrete and coordinated measures are required. First, the digitalization of Wayang should be carried out systematically through the development of an integrated digital archive containing performance documentation, a catalogue of Wayang types, philosophical narratives, and interactive educational materials. This form of digitalization may include virtual exhibitions, online tours of Wayang studios, audiovisual content on social media and video streaming platforms, as well as the use of immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) to expand global access and appeal.

Second, initiatives to digitalize and promote Wayang as part of Indonesia's nation branding require the involvement of multiple stakeholders. The government, particularly ministries responsible for culture and foreign affairs, plays a role as a facilitator in terms of policy, funding, and diplomatic networking. Art organizations and puppetry communities such as SENAWANGI, PEPADI, and UNIMA serve as guardians of authenticity, producers of cultural content, and intermediaries with artists. Academics and research institutions contribute to the strengthening of narratives, knowledge curation, and the evaluation of cultural diplomacy impacts. Meanwhile, the private sector and digital platforms can support technological aspects, distribution, and creative innovation.

Third, the synergy among these stakeholders should be embedded within Indonesia's long-term public diplomacy strategy, so that Wayang is not merely positioned as a cultural symbol, but also as a sustainable strategic asset in projecting Indonesia's positive image globally. With a structured and inclusive approach, Wayang-based nation branding efforts have the potential to generate cultural, economic, and reputational benefits for Indonesia.

STATEMENT OF THE AUTHOR

This research is an output of the MBKM program of BRIN (the National Research and Innovation Agency) conducted in collaboration with Universitas Padjadjaran. The Research Center for Society and Culture at BRIN oversees several research groups, one of which is the Cultural Heritage Governance Studies research group. This group specifically examines various topics related to the governance of Indonesia's cultural heritage to ensure its sustainability, enhance public awareness, and promote its preservation.

The mission of the Cultural Heritage Governance Studies research group consists of four main objectives: (1) to develop knowledge on cultural heritage and its governance in Indonesia, as well as its connections at both regional and global levels; (2) to develop models of socio-cultural transformation through cultural heritage governance approaches; (3) to advance critical studies on policies and practices related to the management of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage; and (4) to develop fair and sustainable cultural heritage governance models. The scope of activities of the Cultural Heritage Governance Studies research group includes: (1) research on cultural heritage and its governance, with an emphasis on the contemporary values and functions of cultural heritage, stakeholder analysis, and political economy; (2) cultural landscape and seascape mapping; and (3) discussions and publications on themes related to cultural heritage and its governance.

Given that International Relations is inherently multidisciplinary, this study employs the concepts of public diplomacy and nation branding in order to position Wayang as a representation of Indonesia in the international arena.

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