



Public Diplomacy Communication by Indonesian Embassy Staff in Amsterdam to the Muslim Community: A Qualitative Study of Interaction and Perception

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This study aims to explore the public diplomacy communication practices carried out by Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam with Muslim communities in Europe, focusing on interactions, perceptions, and engagement-building strategies. The research approach is qualitative, with a constructivist paradigm, emphasizing how actors construct meaning through social interactions, identities, and cultural contexts. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Indonesian Embassy staff and members of Muslim communities in the Netherlands and several other European countries throughout 2024, and validated through data triangulation. Furthermore, recent academic literature on public diplomacy, the diaspora, and Muslim identity in Europe was used to strengthen the analysis. The results of the study indicate that Indonesian Embassy staff employed adaptive communication strategies involving face-to-face dialogue, cultural activities, and social media, thereby building trust, legitimacy, and a sense of belonging among the diaspora community. The Muslim community interpreted public diplomacy practices as a form of identity recognition, support for their aspirations, and a cultural bridge between Indonesia and Europe. This study confirms that public diplomacy is a co-constructive process, in which Indonesian Embassy staff and the community jointly construct meaning, social relations, and a shared identity. In conclusion, Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam acted as strategic cultural mediators and were able to adapt communication to the socio-religious context. Participatory communication strategies proved effective in increasing community engagement, strengthening identity, and strengthening the legitimacy of the Indonesian Embassy in the eyes of the diaspora. The findings of this study provide practical contributions to public diplomacy policy, as well as theoretical contributions to the study of public diplomacy, diaspora, and Muslim transnational identity.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian Muslim community in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands, has experienced significant growth and is active in the social, cultural, and religious spheres. This growth is not solely driven by economic or educational motivations, but also as a process of forming a collective identity within the diaspora. Research mapping Indonesian Muslim organizations in the Netherlands reveals a diversity of actors—from Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah to student communities—who maintain connections with their homeland.

The presence of this community holds strategic value for Indonesian public diplomacy, as it serves as a cultural bridge between Indonesia and Europe. As part of the diaspora, they not only act as recipients of diplomatic messages but also as active narrative agents, bringing the image of Islam Nusantara to life abroad. By strengthening their community identity and participation, they can become important partners in cross-border diplomatic initiatives. The involvement of the Indonesian Embassy in Amsterdam in public diplomacy becomes increasingly relevant in this context, especially considering the Netherlands as a country with a long colonial history and migration ties to Indonesia. A study by Toyibah (2022) shows that the Indonesian Muslim community in the Netherlands responds to issues of citizenship, nationalism, and pluralism in diverse ways. This condition indicates the need for public diplomacy that is sensitive to local contexts and transnational identities.

Formal diplomacy alone is not enough; mission staff must also build personal and cultural relationships with the diaspora. Effective public diplomacy should be a two-way street, with the Indonesian Embassy and the community working together to shape meaning and objectives. Meanwhile, the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the Netherlands poses a serious challenge for the Indonesian Muslim community. Qualitative research by Rofiq, Arifin, and Purwanto (2024) found that the diaspora adopted adaptation strategies through religious organizations to reduce negative stigma.

They partner with the Indonesian Embassy and local actors to organize interfaith dialogues, seminars, and conferences as part of track-two diplomacy. In this effort, the role of Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam is crucial as facilitators and mediators. With institutional support, the Embassy can strengthen community advocacy and expand the space for intergroup dialogue in addressing stigma. Furthermore, the identity formation of the younger generation in the diaspora is a crucial focus. Musahadi and Junaidi (2024) state that Indonesian Muslim millennials in the Netherlands navigate a dynamic identity negotiation between Islam and Western values. They not only carry on traditions but also actively adapt their beliefs and practices to suit their surroundings. Finally, from an institutional perspective, the Indonesian Muslim community in the Netherlands is pluralistic and segmented. Mapping results by Aidulsyah and Gusnelly show that these organizations vary in social structure, mazhab affiliation, and relationships with organizations in Indonesia. This diversity demands an adaptive public diplomacy strategy tailored to the aspirations of each group.

Significance and Contribution of the Research

This research provides significant theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of public diplomacy and diaspora studies. Theoretically, the research findings enrich the literature on public diplomacy, the Muslim diaspora, and intercultural communication, using a constructivist approach that emphasizes meaning as a result of social interaction. This aligns with the notion that modern soft power is expressed not only through state policies but also through the engagement of transnational communities in narratives of identity and religion (Muttaqin, Munandar & Susanti,

2025). Practically, the findings of this research can serve as an important reference base for the Indonesian Embassy and the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in designing communication strategies that are more sensitive to the socio-religious context of the diaspora in Europe. The participatory and adaptive communication approach revealed in this research demonstrates the potential to increase the engagement of the Muslim diaspora community as active partners in public diplomacy. Furthermore, these findings demonstrate how Indonesia's soft power can be strengthened in Europe through dialogue.

authentic and contextual culture and identity (Hasna, 2024). Thus, this research offers not only short-term policy implications but also long-term strategies to strengthen Indonesia's image and influence among religious diaspora communities.

Research Problem Formulation and Objectives

The research problem is formulated as follows: how public diplomacy communication practices are implemented by Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam in building relationships with Muslim communities in Europe, and how these efforts are perceived by the community. The research objective is to explore communication strategies, interactions, and perceptions of both parties within the context of public diplomacy, as well as to identify challenges and success factors.

Research Questions

1. How do Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam develop public diplomacy communication practices for Muslim communities in Europe?
2. How do Muslim communities interpret and respond to public diplomacy communications conducted by Indonesian Embassy staff?
3. What communication strategies are most effective in building trust, identity, and community engagement?
4. What challenges and obstacles are faced in public diplomacy practices for Muslim diaspora communities?

Previous research on the Muslim diaspora and public diplomacy in Europe has emphasized the role of diaspora communities as active social, cultural, and religious actors in building the soft power of their home countries. Musahadi & Junaidi (2024) studied the millennial generation of Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands and found that religious identity is dynamically shaped through cultural adaptation and cross-border interactions. Rofiq, Arifin & Purwanto (2024) outlined the strategies of the Indonesian diaspora community in the Netherlands in responding to Islamophobia, including cooperation with diplomatic institutions. Ghatas (2023) highlighted the challenges of second- and third-generation Muslim diasporas in social integration and identity negotiation in Europe, while Kaya (2022) examined diaspora politics and religious diplomacy in Turkey and Morocco. Research by Akçapar & Aksel (2022) emphasized the importance of the diaspora as a transnational diplomatic actor based on religion and ethnicity. Meanwhile, Abrori (2023) mapped the forms of active involvement of the Indonesian diaspora in cultural diplomacy and soft power. However, most of these studies have not yet examined in depth the public diplomacy communication practices of Indonesian Embassy staff in the Netherlands and the perceptions of the Muslim community towards these practices.

Problem Statement (Revised – explicitly addresses the global research gap)

Global research on public diplomacy and the Muslim diaspora community in Europe generally focuses on issues of integration, identity negotiation, and transnational political dynamics, but has not specifically addressed the diplomatic communication practices undertaken by Indonesian representatives in destination countries. Although international studies have

extensively discussed the role of the diaspora as a transnational actor, a gap remains regarding how embassy staff, as state actors, build two-way interactions with the Indonesian Muslim community in Europe. Global literature also shows that public diplomacy in Western countries is often analyzed through macro approaches such as policy, soft power, and geopolitics without addressing the micro-communication practices that occur at the level of interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the context of Indonesian Muslim identity, distinct from that of Muslim diasporas in the Middle East or Africa, has received little attention in global public diplomacy studies. This situation emphasizes the need for research that in-depth examines the communication practices of Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam as cultural mediators in building relationships with the Muslim diaspora community. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap.

The gap relates to how embassy staff, as state actors, build two-way interactions with the Indonesian Muslim community in Europe. Global literature also shows that public diplomacy in Western countries is more often analyzed through macro approaches—such as policy, soft power, and geopolitics—without examining the micro-communication practices that occur at the level of interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, the context of Indonesian Muslim identity, which differs from that of the Middle Eastern or African Muslim diaspora, has not received much attention in global public diplomacy studies. This condition emphasizes the need for research that examines in-depth the communication practices of Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam as cultural mediators in building relationships with the Muslim diaspora community. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring strategic, interpersonal, and community perceptions, which have not been addressed in global research.

Theme 1: Diaspora

Studies on diaspora emphasize that Indonesian Muslim communities in Europe function as transnational actors who maintain cultural, religious, and emotional ties with their homeland. Abrori (2023) shows that the Indonesian diaspora actively participates in cultural diplomacy and transnational community networks. Akçapar and Aksel (2022) argue that diaspora groups have increasingly become non-state diplomatic actors who influence the relations between the country of origin and host countries through religious and social activities. Gemilang and Windayanto (2020) further highlight that Muslim diaspora groups are heterogeneous, continuously negotiating their identities by blending Islamic teachings with Western cultural contexts. These studies demonstrate that diaspora communities are not passive recipients, but producers of narratives that shape international linkages.

Theme 2: Public Diplomacy

The literature on public diplomacy stresses the importance of two-way communication between state representatives and diaspora communities as part of contemporary soft power. Kaya (2022) describes how countries such as Turkey and Morocco utilize religious diplomacy to strengthen diaspora engagement abroad. Muttaqin, Munandar, and Susanti (2025) reveal that religious organizations can operate as instruments of soft power by promoting cultural values across borders. Hasna (2024) identifies the Indonesian diaspora as a strategic component of the country's public diplomacy, especially in enhancing national image through people-to-people channels. These works collectively illustrate that modern public diplomacy increasingly involves collaborative networks among state institutions, diaspora communities, cultural organizations, and religious leaders.

Theme 3: Identity Negotiation

Research on identity negotiation among Muslim diaspora communities emphasizes the dynamic process through which religious and cultural identities are reconstructed within European contexts. Musahadi and Junaidi (2024) find that Indonesian Muslim millennials in the Netherlands develop a hybrid identity—often described as “Europeanized Muslims”—by integrating Islamic values with local social norms. Ghatas (2023) examines the struggles of second- and third-generation Muslims who face integration challenges, discrimination, and identity fragmentation. Hartini et al. (2024) add that Islamic education in the Netherlands plays a crucial role in shaping identity resilience within a secular and plural society. This body of literature shows that diaspora identity is not static but continuously renegotiated through intercultural encounters.

Theme 4: Islam in Europe

Studies on Islam in Europe generally focus on Muslim experiences with Islamophobia, social stigma, and integration barriers. Rofiq, Arifin, and Purwanto (2024) report that Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands respond to Islamophobia through adaptation strategies, community strengthening, and cooperation with diplomatic institutions. Supardi (2023) highlights the role of Islamic education in forming moderate, socially engaged Muslim identities amid secular pressures. Aidulsyah and Gusnelly (2021) find that multitrack diplomacy, including interfaith dialogue and community engagement, is effective in reducing stigma toward Muslim communities. Overall, this strand of literature demonstrates how Muslims in Europe navigate challenges while building inclusive and resilient identities.

Conceptual Framework

This research's conceptual framework emphasizes the two-way communication interactions between Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam and the Muslim community in Europe, which influence community perceptions, identity, and engagement. The research focuses on:

1. Public diplomacy communication strategies.
2. Muslim community perceptions of public diplomacy practices.
3. Success factors and challenges of cross-cultural communication.
4. This framework integrates the concepts of public diplomacy, soft power, diaspora, and constructivist communication.

Theories Used

1. **Stuart Hall's Representation Theory**
Used to understand how Indonesian Embassy staff construct diplomatic messages that represent Indonesian national identity and how the diaspora community interprets these messages (Hall, 1997; adapted from Ghatas, 2023).
2. **Symbolic Convergence Theory**
Used to analyze interpersonal interactions between Indonesian Embassy staff and the Muslim community, where meaning is formed through a process of symbolic negotiation (Carey, 1989; adapted from Musahadi & Junaidi, 2024).

Theoretical Framework Diagram (Copy-Ready • English Version)

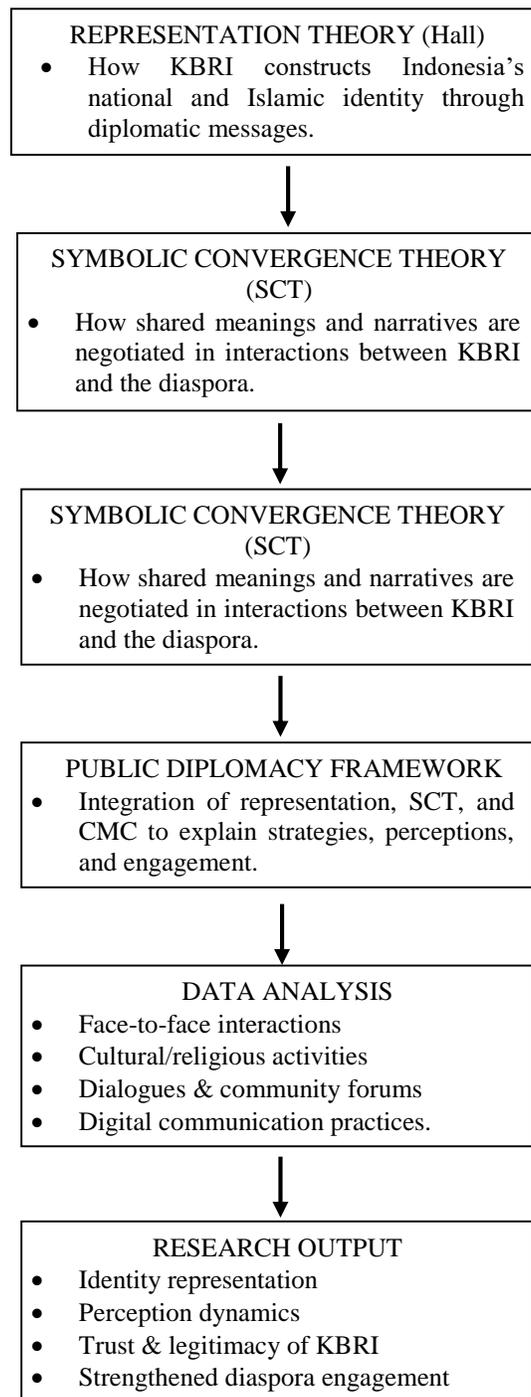


Table 1. Comparison Table of This Research with Previous Research

No	Previous Research	Main Focus	Weaknesses of This Research
1	Musahadi & Junaidi (2024)	Religious identity of the millennial diaspora generation	Does not highlight the public diplomacy communication practices of Indonesian Embassy staff
2	Rofiq, Arifin & Purwanto (2024)	Strategies for dealing with Islamophobia	Focuses on the community, without analyzing interactions with diplomatic representatives
3	Ghatas (2023)	Integration and identity of the second and third generations of the diaspora	Does not discuss Indonesia's soft power through the Indonesian Embassy
4	Kaya (2022)	Diaspora politics and religious diplomacy	Study conducted outside the Western European context
5	Abrori (2023)	Active involvement of the diaspora in cultural diplomacy	Does not link to the practices of Indonesian Embassy staff

Framework

The framework for this research is outlined in the following flow:

- Input: The background of the Muslim diaspora in Europe, the socio-religious context, and the challenges of public diplomacy.
- Process: Interactions between Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam and the community through face-to-face communication, social media, and cultural activities.
- Output: Community perceptions of public diplomacy, strengthening identity, community engagement, and the formation of Indonesian soft power.
- Outcome: Increased legitimacy of the Indonesian Embassy, cohesive cultural relations, and policy recommendations for diaspora-based public diplomacy.
- This framework combines constructivist approaches, representation theory, and symbolic convergence to analyze the process of co-construction of meaning and communication strategies in public diplomacy.

INPUT Background of the Muslim diaspora in Europe, socio-religious context, and public diplomacy challenges.

PROCESS Interaction of the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) Amsterdam staff with the community through face-to-face communication, social media, and cultural activities.

OUTPUT Community perceptions of public diplomacy, strengthening of identity and community engagement, and the formation of Indonesia's soft power.

OUTCOME Increased legitimacy of the Indonesian Embassy, cohesive cultural relations, and policy recommendations for diaspora-based public diplomacy.

METHODOLOGY

This research paradigm utilizes constructivism, which constructs the communication of Indonesian Embassy staff in conveying messages and information to the Muslim community in Europe in 2024 for easy understanding, using their native languages, Indonesian and English, interspersed with Dutch. The Indonesian Embassy staff are proficient in multiple languages to

carry out their duties according to their respective areas of expertise. This research uses a qualitative approach, using observation, survey, and interview methods to obtain information.

Data Analysis Techniques

This study employs **Thematic Analysis** based on the six-phase framework developed by **Braun and Clarke (2006)**, which includes familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This analytic method helps identify key patterns across interviews, observations, and digital communication materials within the context of public diplomacy practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research shows that the Muslim community in Amsterdam and the surrounding area has diverse backgrounds, including students, professionals, and religious organization administrators. Interactions between the community and the Indonesian Embassy in Amsterdam occur through both formal and informal channels, depending on the type of activity being held. In this context, Indonesian Embassy staff serve not only as transmitters of official government information but also as facilitators of social and cultural relations that support community engagement.

The communication strategy implemented by the Indonesian Embassy in Amsterdam staff encompasses several complementary approaches. First, an interpersonal approach emphasizes personal relationships with community leaders through regular meetings, both at mosques and in cultural forums. Second, the use of digital and social media, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and the Indonesian Embassy's official website, to disseminate information about government programs and cultural activities. Third, the organization of cultural and religious activities, including commemorations of Indonesian national days, breaking the fast together, seminars, and community dialogues, aims to strengthen Indonesia's positive image while maintaining ongoing interaction with the diaspora.

The research findings also confirmed the positive response from the Muslim community to communications conducted by Indonesian Embassy staff. Respondents emphasized that Embassy staff were friendly, cooperative, and understanding of the needs and conditions of the community in Europe. Dialogue events held, including in The Hague, were deemed highly effective in maintaining community harmony, monitoring social dynamics, and promoting mutual respect among members. Furthermore, interactions established through formal and informal activities helped community members remain productive in academic, social, and religious activities.

However, the study identified several communication barriers, including differences in language and diplomatic terminology used by Indonesian Embassy staff, limited frequency of interaction that prevented some community members from optimally engaging, and differing expectations regarding the Embassy's role in addressing daily community issues. Despite these obstacles, the public diplomacy conducted by the Indonesian Embassy in Amsterdam succeeded in strengthening community trust, opening up opportunities for participation in various cultural and social programs, and strengthening Indonesia's image in the eyes of the European Muslim diaspora.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the public diplomacy conducted by the Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam was effective in building two-way interactions with the Muslim community. Their interpersonal approach and active involvement through cultural activities align

with the theory of Public Diplomacy (Cull, 2019), which emphasizes the importance of participatory and empathetic communication in shaping positive perceptions of a country. By building personal relationships through regular meetings and dialogue, the Indonesian Embassy staff were able to understand the community's aspirations and adapt their communication strategies to be more relevant to their needs.

The positive response from the community confirms the relevance of Interpersonal Diplomacy (Sharp, 2009), which emphasizes that empathy and cooperation are crucial factors in building trust and sustainable relationships. The presence of friendly, cooperative, and sensitive Indonesian Embassy staff, as well as the dialogue forum in The Hague, serve as social monitoring mechanisms that encourage the community to remain productive and maintain values of mutual respect.

The use of digital media is also a crucial element in modern public diplomacy. This finding supports the theory of Digital Diplomacy (e-diplomacy) (Bjola & Holmes, 2015), which emphasizes the use of communication technology to expand reach and increase community participation. The use of WhatsApp, Instagram, and the Indonesian Embassy's official website allows for rapid information dissemination and more effective coordination of activities, ensuring communication is not only formal but also responsive to community dynamics.

On the other hand, emerging communication barriers, such as language differences, diplomatic terminology, and limited frequency of interaction, confirm previous literature (Snow, 2009) that message adaptation and sensitivity to local context are crucial for successful public diplomacy. This demonstrates the need for a more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable communication approach to ensure optimal engagement of all community members.

Overall, this research shows that integrated public diplomacy with interpersonal approaches, the use of digital media, and cultural activities can strengthen a country's image, build trust in the diaspora, and maintain the productivity of communities abroad.

CONCLUSION

- Indonesian Embassy staff in Amsterdam successfully established effective communication with the Muslim community through interpersonal approaches, digital media, and cultural activities.
- The Muslim community responded positively to the friendly, cooperative, and understanding staff of the Indonesian Embassy, and the dialogue forum held in The Hague proved effective in maintaining community harmony and productivity.
- The Indonesian Embassy's public diplomacy plays a role in strengthening Indonesia's image, building community trust, and encouraging the active involvement of the Muslim diaspora in Europe.
- Communication barriers, including language differences and limited frequency of interaction, still need to be overcome to increase the effectiveness of public diplomacy.

Academic recommendations

- Further research could explore the long-term impact of public diplomacy on the engagement and identity of the Muslim diaspora in Europe.

Practical recommendations

- The Indonesian Embassy in Amsterdam should increase the frequency of dialogue and community activities to reach more members of the diaspora.

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