The Role of Indonesia's Digital Diplomacy in Promoting Social Inclusion: A Case Study of the ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of Indonesia's digital diplomacy in promoting social inclusion through the *ASEAN Digital Literacy Program*. With the main problem of how Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiatives in this program affect the level of social inclusion through improved digital literacy, this study aims to identify the impact of Indonesia's digital diplomacy role on the level of social inclusion achieved through improved digital literacy. Using descriptive qualitative research methods and the main theory of digital diplomacy, this study analyzes the various initiatives taken by Indonesia within the framework of *the ASEAN Digital Literacy Program*, and evaluates how its digital diplomacy policies and practices contribute to reducing the digital divide and increasing the accessibility of information technology in the region. The results show that Indonesia's digital diplomacy has significantly influenced social inclusion by expanding people's access to and understanding of digital technology, which in turn promotes more inclusive participation in ASEAN's digital economy and society. The study concludes that an effective digital diplomacy strategy is instrumental in creating a more inclusive and accessible digital environment for all.

Keywords: Digital Diplomacy, Social inclusion, Digital Literacy, ASEAN

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization and advances in information technology, digital diplomacy has become an important factor in relations between countries. In the increasingly tight digital world competition, Indonesia has succeeded in implementing an innovative and effective digital diplomacy strategy to strengthen its position in Southeast Asia. Through innovation and strong cooperation, Indonesia is able to build a strong network with neighboring countries and secure its national interests. One important innovation in Indonesia's digital diplomacy is the use of social media as an effective communication tool. The Indonesian government has recognized the power of social media in shaping public opinion and using it to support national policies and interests. In the context of digital diplomacy, social media is an important platform for establishing dialogue and exchanging information with Southeast Asian countries (ASEAN, ASEAN Digital Literacy Program Report, 2020-2021).

Digital diplomacy is becoming increasingly relevant in the era of globalization and technological development, where countries utilize digital platforms to establish diplomatic relations, strengthen soft power, and advance foreign interests. Indonesia,

as an influential country in Southeast Asia and a key member of ASEAN, has used digital diplomacy to promote social inclusion, one of which is through the *ASEAN Digital Literacy Program* (ADLP). This program aims to reduce the digital divide and improve digital literacy, especially among underserved groups, such as rural communities and vulnerable groups in the ASEAN region (Martha, 2020). This study proposes the main problem formulation: "How does Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiative in the ASEAN digital literacy program affect the level of social inclusion through digital literacy". This study is important because it focuses on Indonesia's efforts to reduce the digital divide in the ASEAN region, as well as how digital diplomacy can be used as a tool to promote social inclusion. The author emphasizes the novelty in highlighting Indonesia's role as a leader in regional digital diplomacy and how digital literacy programs can contribute to increasing social inclusion in the region. The main argument put forward by the author is that Indonesia's digital diplomacy through ADLP plays a significant role in reducing the digital divide and increasing people's access to technology, which ultimately drives social inclusion in ASEAN. The purpose of this study is to analyze Indonesia's contribution to ADLP, assess its impact on social inclusion, and identify the challenges faced and opportunities that can be utilized in future digital diplomacy.

METHODS

The author uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied through the description and interpretation of the data collected. The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it is relevant in analyzing how Indonesia's digital diplomacy through the *ASEAN Digital Literacy Program* can influence social inclusion in the region. This method is suitable for research that wants to understand the social, political, and cultural contexts surrounding the interaction between digital diplomacy and social inclusion. This study uses secondary data, consisting of official documents, government reports, and academic articles relevant to the topic of digital literacy and digital diplomacy. The main sources of data are reports from the ASEAN Secretariat, publications from the *Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, and international reports such as from the World Bank related to the theme of digital literacy and social inclusion. Data were collected through a literature review. The author collected various sources from official ASEAN reports, Indonesian government publications, and relevant academic studies. This technique allows the author to gain a broader understanding of how digital diplomacy is used by Indonesia, as well as how the *ASEAN Digital Literacy Program* is implemented and its impact on social inclusion. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, in which the author identified key themes that emerged from the data collected. In this study, the focus is on the role of Indonesia's digital diplomacy in improving digital literacy, Indonesia's contribution to the ADLP, and the challenges faced in the process of implementing this program. Thematic analysis allows researchers to connect the concepts of digital diplomacy and social inclusion, thus producing a more comprehensive picture of the influence of this program (Using thematic analysis in psychology, 2006, p. Braun & Clarke).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia's digital diplomacy through the *ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme* (ADLP) has played a significant role in reducing the digital divide and promoting social inclusion in the Southeast Asian region. One of the key findings of the study is that Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiatives have had a significant impact in expanding people's access to digital technology, especially for vulnerable groups, such as rural communities and the underserved. The program is specifically designed to improve digital literacy skills that are essential for full participation in the global digital economy, which is a key element in promoting social inclusion (ASEAN, ASEAN Digital Literacy Program Report, 2020-2021). Indonesia, as the most populous country in ASEAN, plays a leading role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the ADLP. Indonesia's contribution includes the development of digital training modules tailored to the local socio-cultural context of ASEAN member countries. These modules involve aspects of digital education, such as the safe and ethical use of technology, as well as improving basic skills related to accessing information and communication in the digital world. In addition, Indonesia also led various workshops and seminars involving cross-sector actors, including government, private sector, and civil society, to support the dissemination of this program to all levels of ASEAN society (MFA., 2021).

One of the successes of ADLP under Indonesia's leadership is its ability to reach communities most vulnerable to digital disadvantage. The program targets groups such as women, rural youth, and MSMEs that previously had limited access to technology. Indonesia also ensures that ADLP training and workshops include aspects of social inclusion, such as providing free training and access to affordable digital devices (ASEAN, ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme: Framework and Goals, 2020). ADLP has succeeded in improving the digital skills of thousands of participants in ASEAN member countries, who previously did not have adequate access to digital education and technology. One of the biggest impacts is increasing community engagement in the digital economy, which is one of the main indicators of social inclusion. Through this program, participants who were previously digitally marginalized now have the ability to participate in digital platforms, such as e-commerce and online education, which opens up new opportunities for their economic and social development. In this case, it directly answers the problem formulation question of how Indonesia's digital diplomacy through ADLP affects the level of social inclusion. For example, in several rural areas in Indonesia, the implementation of this program has enabled communities to connect to global markets through the internet. Increasing digital literacy among MSMEs has helped them access previously unreachable technologies, enabling business expansion and improving economic well-being. In addition, women in remote areas, who often face social and economic barriers, have also benefited from this program with greater access to digital education and technology skills training. This proves that ADLP is not only closing the digital divide, but also encouraging the active participation of vulnerable groups in the wider digital economy and society (Social Inclusion and the Digital Economy, 2013, p. World Bank).

While ADLP has shown significant impact, there are still challenges to overcome. One of the biggest challenges is the limited digital infrastructure in many ASEAN regions, especially in rural areas. In Indonesia, for example, slow internet connections and unreliable networks in some areas hamper the effectiveness of the program, as training that requires internet access cannot be carried out properly. Furthermore, despite increasing digital literacy, there are still issues related to a deep understanding of how to use technology in a safe and responsible manner. This suggests the need for greater investment in digital infrastructure and continuing education in the technology sector (ASEAN, ASEAN Digital Literacy Program Report, 2020-2021). Human resource readiness is also a challenge, as many participants who were previously unfamiliar with technology require further training to understand more complex aspects of technology. Sustainability of the program is also a major challenge. After the training is completed, there are concerns that participants do not have enough support to continue their learning, especially in areas where access to technology is still minimal. Therefore, the Indonesian government needs to strengthen partnerships with the private sector to ensure that the necessary hardware and software remain accessible to the wider community (Digital Diplomasi: Theory and Practice, 2015, p. Bjola & Holmes). Analysis of the *ASEAN Digital Literacy Program* shows that this Indonesian initiative has been very effective in increasing social inclusion. The program has succeeded in opening doors for communities previously marginalized from the digital world, equipping them with the skills needed to actively participate in the digital economy. Thus, communities that previously felt isolated can now more easily interact and contribute to society. The success of the ADLP underscores the importance of digital diplomacy as a tool to address social and technological inequalities. However, to achieve optimal results, there needs to be ongoing support in the form of adequate digital infrastructure and the development of more comprehensive programs.

CONCLUSION

Through the *ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme* (ADLP), Indonesia has played a significant role in promoting digital diplomacy that has significantly contributed to increasing social inclusion in the Southeast Asian region. Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiative has successfully narrowed the digital divide by providing digital literacy training and education tailored to the local context, enabling underserved communities, such as women, rural youth, and MSMEs, to access technology and participate in the digital economy. The impact of the program is evident in the improvement of digital skills, greater participation in technology-based economic activities, and contributions to the social welfare of previously marginalized communities. However, challenges such as limited digital infrastructure, uneven internet access, and the need for ongoing support after training remain key issues that need to be addressed. While the ADLP has addressed the problem formulation regarding the impact of digital diplomacy on social inclusion, the sustainability and scalability of the program require closer collaboration between the government, private sector, and civil society. Greater investment in technology infrastructure and sustainable digital literacy programs are essential to ensure that the benefits of the ADLP are sustainable and reach more people across

ASEAN. In this regard, Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiative in ADLP has succeeded in promoting social inclusion through digital literacy, but to achieve the full potential of this program, further efforts are needed to address the challenges of digital infrastructure and accessibility in the region. With a strong commitment from all parties involved, ADLP can be a successful model for similar initiatives in the future.

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