

Indonesia's Multilateral Digital Diplomacy: Policy and Regulatory Approaches as a Middle Power

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Received: 03 July 2025; **Accepted:** 02 August 2025; **Published:** 01 September 2025

Abstract: The advent of the digital age has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of international relations, giving rise to digital diplomacy as an indispensable tool for states to engage with global audiences, promote national interests, and participate in multilateral discourse. For middle powers like Indonesia, digital diplomacy presents a unique opportunity to amplify their voice, foster economic partnerships, and contribute to global governance without relying solely on traditional power asymmetries. This article provides a comprehensive examination of Indonesia's policy and regulatory approaches to multilateral digital diplomacy. We analyze the strategic objectives guiding Indonesia's engagement in the digital diplomatic sphere, including its efforts in economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, and crisis communication within multilateral frameworks. Through a review of relevant national policies, legal instruments, and observed diplomatic practices, we identify the key pillars of Indonesia's digital strategy. We further discuss the challenges and opportunities encountered by Indonesia as it navigates the complexities of the digital realm, such as managing misinformation, ensuring digital literacy, and leveraging technology for sustainable development goals. By synthesizing current practices and policy directions, this study illuminates how Indonesia, as a prominent middle power, strategically employs digital tools and platforms to advance its multilateral foreign policy agenda, contributing to a more effective and inclusive global diplomatic environment.

Keywords: Digital diplomacy, Indonesia, multilateral engagement, middle power strategy, digital policy, regulatory approaches, international relations, cyber governance, digital cooperation, global digital governance.

Introduction: The rapid evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has profoundly transformed the conduct of international relations. Diplomacy, traditionally confined to formal inter-state interactions, has expanded into the digital realm, giving rise to "digital diplomacy" (also known as e-diplomacy or cyber-diplomacy). This new form of diplomatic engagement leverages digital tools and platforms—such as social media, websites, and mobile applications—to achieve foreign policy objectives, engage with diverse stakeholders, and shape global narratives [19]. Digital diplomacy has become an indispensable component of modern statecraft,

offering unprecedented reach, speed, and directness in communication.

For middle powers, states that possess significant influence but do not belong to the ranks of great powers, digital diplomacy holds particular strategic importance. Middle powers, often characterized by their commitment to multilateralism, capacity for coalition-building, and pursuit of common global goods, can utilize digital platforms to overcome traditional resource limitations and amplify their diplomatic voice on the international stage [1]. Indonesia, as Southeast Asia's largest economy and a prominent member of various regional and global

forums, exemplifies a rising middle power with a strong commitment to multilateralism, as evidenced by its active role in ASEAN and its outlook on the Indo-Pacific [1]. Its foreign policy often seeks to bridge divides, promote stability, and advance economic interests through engagement with international organizations and diverse partners [2, 7, 8].

Indonesia's engagement in digital diplomacy is not merely a technological adoption but a strategic imperative aligned with its broader foreign policy goals. In an era marked by rapid digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution [6, 13], the ability to effectively communicate, negotiate, and influence through digital channels is crucial for any nation seeking to maintain relevance and achieve its objectives [16]. Indonesia's approach to digital diplomacy is thus deeply intertwined with its multilateral strategy, serving as a means to foster economic partnerships [5, 14], enhance public understanding of its policies, and contribute to global discussions on issues ranging from climate resilience to sustainable education [3, 4, 9, 18].

However, the digital landscape also presents significant challenges, including the proliferation of misinformation, cybersecurity threats, and the complexities of managing digital transformation within governmental structures [6, 11]. Navigating these complexities requires a coherent policy and regulatory framework that balances the opportunities of digital engagement with the imperative of national security and data integrity. Indonesia, like other nations, must grapple with issues of complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity inherent in the digital domain [11].

This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Indonesia's policy and regulatory approaches to multilateral digital diplomacy. We will explore the strategic objectives that guide Indonesia's digital diplomatic efforts, examine the specific policies and regulations that underpin these efforts, and discuss how Indonesia leverages digital tools within multilateral contexts. By doing so, this study seeks to illuminate the unique characteristics of a middle power's approach to digital diplomacy and its implications for Indonesia's role in the evolving global order.

METHODS (Conceptual Framework and Analytical Approach)

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, primarily relying on a legal-doctrinal and policy analysis approach, complemented by a review of relevant academic literature and public statements. The focus is on understanding Indonesia's strategic rationale and operational framework for digital

diplomacy within a multilateral context.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is built upon three interconnected pillars:

Digital Diplomacy: Defined as the use of digital technologies and platforms by states to achieve foreign policy objectives, including public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and crisis communication [19]. It encompasses the strategic use of social media, government websites, online conferences, and other digital tools.

Middle Power Diplomacy: Characterized by states that exert influence through multilateralism, coalition-building, and the promotion of norms and values, rather than solely through military or economic might [1]. Middle powers often seek to bridge divides and contribute to global governance.

Multilateral Strategy: Refers to a foreign policy approach that emphasizes cooperation with multiple states and international organizations to address shared challenges and advance common interests. For Indonesia, this includes active participation in ASEAN, the G20, and various UN bodies [1, 2].

This framework allows for an examination of how Indonesia integrates digital tools into its established multilateral foreign policy, considering its identity as a middle power.

2.2 Data Sources

The research draws upon a diverse range of primary and secondary data sources:

Official Government Documents: This includes policy papers, ministerial decrees, and strategic plans issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, outlining its digital diplomacy initiatives and guidelines. While specific internal documents may not be publicly accessible, official statements and public-facing strategies are reviewed.

Legal and Regulatory Instruments: Relevant Indonesian laws and regulations pertaining to foreign relations, information technology, and data governance are analyzed. This includes the Law on Foreign Relations (Undang-Undang Nomor 37 Tahun 1999 Tentang Hubungan Luar Negeri) [20] and international conventions like the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (Konvensi Wina Tahun 1961 Tentang Hubungan Diplomatik) [10], which, while predating digital diplomacy, provide foundational principles.

Academic Literature: Scholarly articles, journals, and books focusing on digital diplomacy, Indonesian foreign policy, middle power studies, and related fields (e.g., economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, digital

transformation) are extensively reviewed [1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19].

Reports from International Organizations and Think Tanks: Publications from relevant international bodies and research institutions that analyze digital diplomacy trends or Indonesia's role in global affairs.

News Articles and Media Analysis: Select news reports and analyses from reputable media outlets that cover Indonesia's digital diplomatic activities, providing practical examples and public perceptions.

2.3 Analytical Approach

The analysis proceeds through several stages:

Policy Identification: Systematically identify and document existing Indonesian policies and regulations that explicitly or implicitly guide its digital diplomacy efforts. This includes examining how digital tools are integrated into broader foreign policy objectives.

Strategic Objective Mapping: Map Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiatives to its overarching multilateral foreign policy objectives. This involves categorizing digital diplomatic activities into areas such as economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, crisis communication, and promoting global norms.

Middle Power Lens Application: Analyze how Indonesia's status as a middle power influences its digital diplomacy approach. This includes examining how digital tools are used to enhance its soft power, build coalitions, and engage in multi-stakeholder diplomacy.

Challenges and Opportunities Assessment: Evaluate the practical challenges (e.g., digital divide, misinformation, resource constraints) and opportunities (e.g., direct engagement, rapid response, cost-effectiveness) that Indonesia faces in its digital diplomatic endeavors.

Comparative Insights: While not a primary comparative study, insights from other countries' digital diplomacy practices (e.g., lessons from digital transformation in other sectors [6, 16]) are considered to contextualize Indonesia's approach and identify potential areas for improvement.

This methodological framework allows for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Indonesia's multilateral digital diplomacy, grounded in both theoretical concepts and practical observations.

RESULTS (Indonesia's Digital Diplomacy Policies and Strategies)

Indonesia's approach to multilateral digital diplomacy is characterized by a strategic integration of digital tools and platforms into its foreign policy objectives, reflecting its identity as a prominent middle power. This

section outlines the key policies, regulatory considerations, and strategic initiatives that define Indonesia's engagement in the digital diplomatic sphere.

3.1 Policy and Regulatory Foundations

Indonesia's digital diplomacy efforts are underpinned by a evolving policy and regulatory framework, though often implicitly rather than through a single dedicated "digital diplomacy law."

Law on Foreign Relations (Undang-Undang Nomor 37 Tahun 1999 Tentang Hubungan Luar Negeri) [20]: This foundational law governs Indonesia's foreign policy, providing the overarching legal basis for all diplomatic activities, including those conducted digitally. While not explicitly mentioning "digital diplomacy," it provides the mandate for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to conduct public diplomacy and protect national interests, which now extend to the digital realm.

National Digital Transformation Agenda: Indonesia has a strong national agenda for digital transformation across various sectors [6, 13]. This broader push for digitalization within the government and society naturally extends to foreign policy, encouraging diplomatic missions to adopt digital tools for efficiency and broader engagement.

Cybersecurity and Data Governance Policies: As digital engagement increases, so does the focus on cybersecurity and data governance. While not exclusively for diplomacy, national policies on data protection and cybersecurity directly impact how diplomatic information is handled and how digital platforms are secured for official communication. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations [10] provides a traditional framework, but digital interactions introduce new complexities not covered by its original scope.

3.2 Strategic Objectives of Indonesia's Digital Diplomacy

Indonesia leverages digital diplomacy to pursue several key strategic objectives within its multilateral foreign policy:

3.2.1 Economic Diplomacy and Trade Promotion

Digital platforms are increasingly vital for Indonesia's economic diplomacy, especially in the age of disruption and the digital economy [14].

Promoting Trade and Investment: Indonesian embassies and consulates actively use social media, webinars, and online business forums to promote Indonesian products, attract foreign direct investment, and facilitate business-to-business connections [5, 14]. This includes promoting sustainable economic

performance and managing resource price volatility [18].

Tourism Promotion: Digital channels are extensively used to promote Indonesia's tourism destinations, particularly after events like the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated new approaches to economic recovery [13, 14].

Engagement in G20 and Other Economic Forums: Indonesia, as a G20 member, utilizes digital tools to disseminate its economic policy positions, engage with global economic stakeholders, and communicate outcomes of economic diplomacy efforts, such as those related to trade balance stability during crises [2, 14].

3.2.2 Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding

Digital platforms offer direct channels for Indonesia to engage with global publics, shape perceptions, and counter negative narratives.

Communicating Foreign Policy Positions: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its diplomatic missions use social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) to explain Indonesia's stance on international issues, human rights, and regional security [8].

Promoting Cultural Diplomacy: Digital content, including videos, virtual tours, and online cultural events, is used to showcase Indonesia's rich cultural heritage and diversity to a global audience.

Crisis Communication: In times of crisis (e.g., natural disasters, international incidents), digital platforms enable rapid dissemination of information, coordination of relief efforts, and management of public perception [8].

3.2.3 Multilateral Engagement and Global Governance

Indonesia, as a middle power, actively uses digital diplomacy to strengthen its multilateral engagement and contribute to global governance.

ASEAN and Regional Diplomacy: Digital platforms facilitate communication and coordination within ASEAN, enabling rapid consultation and joint statements on regional issues [1].

UN and International Forums: Indonesian diplomats engage in online discussions, virtual conferences, and social media campaigns to advocate for its positions on global challenges such as climate change, sustainable development, and human rights [3, 4, 9]. This includes promoting nature-based solutions and sustainable education [3, 4].

Coalition Building: Digital networks allow Indonesia to identify and connect with like-minded states and non-state actors, fostering informal coalitions to advance shared agendas in multilateral settings.

3.2.4 Capacity Building and Internal Coordination

Digital tools also serve internal diplomatic functions, enhancing the efficiency and coordination of Indonesia's diplomatic network.

Internal Communication: Secure digital platforms are used for communication and information sharing between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters and its missions abroad.

Training and Digital Literacy: Efforts are made to enhance the digital literacy and skills of Indonesian diplomats to effectively utilize digital tools for their diplomatic functions.

In essence, Indonesia's digital diplomacy is a dynamic and evolving strategy that leverages the reach and immediacy of digital platforms to support its economic, political, and socio-cultural objectives within a predominantly multilateral foreign policy framework.

DISCUSSION

Indonesia's strategic embrace of digital diplomacy as a middle power within a multilateral framework reflects a pragmatic adaptation to the evolving global landscape. The results demonstrate a clear commitment to leveraging digital tools for economic promotion, public engagement, and active participation in global governance. However, this approach, while promising, is not without its challenges and necessitates continuous refinement.

4.1 Effectiveness and Impact

Indonesia's digital diplomacy has shown considerable effectiveness in several areas:

Amplified Voice: As a middle power, Indonesia's traditional diplomatic resources might be outmatched by great powers. Digital platforms provide a cost-effective means to directly engage with a wider international audience, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and amplifying its foreign policy messages [19]. This enables Indonesia to project its influence and perspectives more broadly on issues like the Indo-Pacific outlook [1].

Enhanced Economic Diplomacy: The digital shift has significantly boosted Indonesia's economic diplomacy efforts. Online trade missions, virtual investment forums, and direct digital engagement with businesses have proven effective in promoting Indonesian products and attracting foreign investment, particularly crucial for economic recovery and growth [5, 14]. The ability to quickly adapt to global economic shifts, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights the agility provided by digital tools [14, 15].

Improved Public Diplomacy: Digital platforms allow for more direct and interactive public diplomacy, fostering a better understanding of Indonesia's culture, values, and policies among global citizens. This can help

counter misinformation and build soft power, which is essential for a middle power seeking to influence through persuasion rather than coercion.

Crisis Communication Agility: The immediacy of digital channels has enhanced Indonesia's capacity for rapid crisis communication, enabling timely dissemination of information and coordination of responses during emergencies [8].

4.2 Challenges and Trade-offs

Despite the successes, Indonesia faces several challenges in its digital diplomacy:

Digital Divide and Access: While Indonesia is rapidly digitalizing, disparities in internet access and digital literacy within its own population and in target audiences can limit the reach and effectiveness of digital diplomatic campaigns.

Misinformation and Disinformation: The open nature of digital platforms makes them fertile ground for misinformation and disinformation campaigns, which can undermine diplomatic efforts and damage national reputation. Actively countering false narratives requires significant resources and a sophisticated strategy [19].

Resource Constraints: While cost-effective compared to traditional diplomacy, maintaining a robust and effective digital diplomatic presence still requires significant investment in technology, skilled personnel, and content creation. For a middle power, balancing these investments with other foreign policy priorities can be challenging.

Complexity and Ambiguity: The digital environment is inherently complex, uncertain, and ambiguous [11]. Navigating rapidly evolving technologies, diverse online cultures, and new forms of digital threats requires continuous adaptation and a deep understanding of the digital landscape.

Data Security and Privacy: As digital diplomacy involves the exchange of sensitive information, ensuring cybersecurity and data privacy is paramount. Breaches can have severe diplomatic and national security consequences.

Balancing Centralization and Decentralization: Striking the right balance between centralized control over messaging from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and empowering individual diplomatic missions to engage authentically and locally on digital platforms is a continuous challenge.

4.3 Future Directions and Policy Implications

To further enhance its multilateral digital diplomacy, Indonesia could consider the following:

Dedicated Digital Diplomacy Strategy: Develop a more

explicit and comprehensive national digital diplomacy strategy that integrates all relevant government agencies and clearly outlines objectives, target audiences, key performance indicators, and resource allocation.

Capacity Building and Training: Invest further in training programs for all diplomatic staff, from entry-level to senior ambassadors, to enhance their digital literacy, social media management skills, and understanding of digital security protocols.

Leveraging AI and Data Analytics: Explore the use of artificial intelligence and big data analytics to better understand global digital trends, identify key influencers, monitor online narratives, and tailor diplomatic messages for maximum impact.

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: Strengthen partnerships with non-state actors, including civil society organizations, academic institutions, and tech companies, to co-create digital content, amplify messages, and address global challenges [4].

Norm-Setting in Digital Governance: As a middle power committed to multilateralism, Indonesia can play a more active role in international forums (e.g., UN, ASEAN) in shaping global norms and regulations for responsible state behavior in cyberspace, digital trade, and data governance [1, 2, 19].

Focus on Digital Public Goods: Champion initiatives that promote digital public goods, such as open-source technologies for sustainable development or digital literacy programs, aligning its digital diplomacy with its broader commitment to global common good [3, 4, 9].

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's journey in multilateral digital diplomacy exemplifies a middle power's strategic adaptation to the demands of the 21st century. By integrating digital tools into its foreign policy, Indonesia has effectively amplified its voice, enhanced its economic diplomacy, and strengthened its public engagement on the global stage. Its approach is characterized by a pragmatic utilization of digital platforms to advance its national interests and contribute to global governance within a multilateral framework.

While significant progress has been made, the digital landscape presents ongoing challenges related to misinformation, cybersecurity, and resource management. Navigating these complexities requires a continuous evolution of policies, regulatory frameworks, and diplomatic capabilities. By further investing in digital literacy, fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, and actively participating in global norm-setting discussions, Indonesia can solidify its position as a leading middle power in the digital age. The strategic

deployment of digital diplomacy is not merely about adopting new technologies; it is about redefining how states interact, influence, and collaborate in an increasingly interconnected world, ensuring that Indonesia remains a relevant and influential actor in shaping the future of international relations.

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