

Indonesia's Coffee Diplomacy at the San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022

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Abstract. Indonesia's is the one of the world's largest coffee producers, with significant potential to utilize coffee as a medium of cultural diplomacy. Indonesia's participation in the 2022 San Francisco Coffee Festival served as an important momentum to promote Indonesian coffee while strengthening cross cultural connections through the contribution of the diaspora. This study aims to examine coffee diplomacy as a bridge between communities and the global society, using Beaneka Coffee as the main case in promoting Indonesian coffee in the United States. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through interviews and literature review. The findings indicate that coffee diplomacy not only enhances Indonesia's positive image but also fosters social interaction between the diaspora, industry actors, and festival visitors. The exchange of cultural narratives behind each coffee variety encourages a deeper understanding of Indonesia's identity and diversity. In conclusion, coffee diplomacy functions as an effective medium to build connectivity among societies across nations, supporting a sustainable future based on social collaboration.

Keywords: Coffee Diplomacy, Diaspora, Global Society, San Francisco Coffee Festival, Nation Branding

Introduction

Indonesia is one of the largest coffee producers in the world, with renowned specialty varieties such as Aceh-Gayo, Jawa Barat-Ciwidey, Bali-Kintamani, and Sulawesi-Toraja. This strategic position makes coffee not only an economic commodity but also a cultural symbol rich in meaning. However, despite its potential, Indonesian coffee often lags behind Brazil or Colombia in terms of global branding (Widiastutie et al., 2022). For the reason, Indonesia views coffee diplomacy as an important instrument to enhance competitiveness, strengthen nation branding, and expand access to international markets. In addition, government support through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the active role of the diaspora show that coffee diplomacy that emphasizes Indonesia's soft power (Wattimena et al., 2023).

Recent studies demonstrate that cultural diplomacy and culinary diplomacy play an increasingly important role in promoting national identity and strengthening international partnerships (Budi & Rohim, 2021). Coffee diplomacy, in particular, has emerged as a unique approach within this domain. It combines economic objectives with cultural narratives, enabling states to exercise soft power through cultural attraction rather than coercion (Widiastutie et al., 2022; Wattimena et al., 2023). Previous research has highlighted Indonesia's efforts in coffee diplomacy through international exhibitions, cultural exchanges, and government-supported programs (Prameswari & Fardaniah, 2023). However, there is limited research specifically examining how diaspora-led initiatives-such as participation in international coffee festivals, contribute to Indonesia's nation branding and public diplomacy.

The state of the art in this field indicates that although gastrodiploamacy and cultural diplomacy have been widely discussed in the literature (Rockower, 2019; Choi, 2020), studies focusing on coffee diplomacy remain relatively scarce. Furthermore, the involvement of diaspora communities in advancing coffee

diplomacy offers a novel perspective, as they bridge non-state actors with cultural diplomacy strategies. Recent findings suggest that diaspora networks can act as cultural ambassadors, promoting national products and strengthening international perceptions of their home country (Sya'ban & Nityasari, 2024). This highlights a research gap in the literature, as diaspora-driven coffee diplomacy has not been extensively explored, particularly in the context of global coffee festivals.

One notable case is Indonesia's participation in the San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022, where the diaspora-led Beaneka Coffee introduced Indonesian specialty coffee to more than 12,000 international visitors. At this event, coffee promotion went beyond product sales, as it was accompanied by cultural narratives, traditions, and stories behind each coffee variety (RM.id, 2023). This demonstrates how diaspora actors play a role in strengthening Indonesia's soft power while simultaneously supporting nation branding through coffee.

Based on the above, this study aims to analyze Indonesia's coffee diplomacy at the San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022. The research objectives are threefold: (1) to examine how coffee is used as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, (2) to assess the contribution of diaspora communities in promoting Indonesia's identity abroad, and (3) to evaluate the impact of coffee diplomacy on strengthening Indonesia's positive international image.

Methods

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze Indonesia's coffee diplomacy through its participation in the San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022. The qualitative descriptive design was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth how coffee functions as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and nation branding, focusing on rich descriptions of events rather than numerical measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018); Lambert & Lambert, 2012).

The primary participants in this study consisted of members of the Indonesian diaspora who were directly involved in the festival, particularly the Beaneka Coffee and Roastery community, which served as a representative of Indonesian specialty coffee. In addition, government statements and media coverage were included to complement diaspora perspectives and provide a more comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's coffee diplomacy.

Data collection relied on document analysis, in-depth interviews, and secondary data from official publications, new articles, and government reports. The in-depth interviews were conducted with selected diaspora representatives to capture their motivations, strategies, and experiences in promoting Indonesian coffee at the festival. The document analysis focused on reviewing promotional materials, event reports, and media coverage related to the San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022 (Yin, 2018).

The data obtained were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which is commonly applied in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This process involved coding the interview transcripts, documents, and media reports to identify recurring themes such as cultural narratives, economic objectives, diaspora involvement, and nation branding outcomes. The themes were then synthesized to answer the research objectives: (1) how coffee was used as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, (2) the role of diaspora in promoting Indonesian identity abroad, and (3) the impact of coffee diplomacy on Indonesia's international image.

To ensure validity and reliability, the study applied triangulation by combining multiple data sources and perspectives, including interviews, documents, and media reports (Flick, 2028). This methodological approach allowed for a holistic understanding of how Indonesia's coffee diplomacy was practiced in the international arena through the San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022.

Result and Discussion

This study investigates Indonesia's coffee diplomacy through its participation in the San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022. The analysis highlights four major findings: (1) the promotion of Indonesian coffee as a cultural identity, (2) the strategic role of diaspora in nation branding, and (3) the impact of coffee diplomacy on Indonesia's international image.

Promotion of Indonesian Coffee as Cultural Identity

One of the most significant findings of this study is the way Indonesian coffee was promoted not merely as a commodity but as a cultural symbol. During the San Francisco Coffee Festival, Beaneka Coffee introduced

several Indonesian specialty varieties, including Bali Kintamani, Sulawesi Toraja, Aceh Gayo, and Jawa Barat Ciwidey. Each variety carried a unique narrative that emphasized its geographical origin, cultivation process, and the cultural traditions associated with coffee farming communities (Kabar Diplomasi, 2022). These narratives created an experiential dimension for visitors, who not only consumed the beverage but also learned about the stories behind it.



Figure 1. Indonesian Coffee belongs to Beaneka Coffee

Source: Instagram @beanekacoffee

Field data indicate that the booth successfully attracted more than 3,000 visitors across the two-day festival. Approximately 190 coffee bags were sold, suggesting both economic and cultural success in promoting Indonesian coffee brewed in traditional ways, such as kopi tubruk, which added authenticity to the cultural presentation. This aligns with findings by Widiastutie et al. (2022), who argued that culinary products function effectively as tools of diplomacy when they are contextualized with cultural narratives. By positioning coffee as part of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage, the booth offered an entry point for international audiences to engage with Indonesia's identity.

The Role of Diaspora in Strengthening Nation Branding

Another crucial aspect of the findings is the central role of the Indonesian diaspora in promoting coffee diplomacy. As non-state actors, diaspora members of Beaneka Coffee took on the responsibility of representing Indonesia at the festival. They were not merely sellers of coffee but storyteller and cultural ambassadors who communicated Indonesia's identity directly to consumers.



Figure 2. San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022

Source: Surat Dunia

The Consulate General of Indonesia in San Francisco reported that the booth attracted approximately 2,000-3,000 visitors (KJRI San Francisco, 2022a). This collaboration between diaspora entrepreneurs and formal diplomatic institutions highlights the potential of hybrid diplomacy, where state and non-state actors work together to strengthen nation branding. The diaspora's involvement added authenticity to the promotion, as their personal connection to Indonesia created more credibility than state-driven campaigns alone.

This findings resonates with Sya'ban and Nityasari (2024), who emphasized the growing significance of diaspora in enhancing Indonesia's public diplomacy. By bridging grassroots communities abroad with their cultural roots, diaspora networks can act as cultural intermediaries, effectively extending Indonesia's soft power. The Indonesian case at the San Francisco Coffee Festival exemplifies this dynamic, demonstrating how diaspora participation can complement and strengthen official diplomatic initiatives.

Findings from Interviews

Interviews with key informants reinforced the significance of diaspora participation in Indonesia's coffee diplomacy. One informant emphasized that their main motivation to join the San Francisco Coffee Festival was "not only to sell coffee but to introduce Indonesia through every cup" (Interview, 2023). Another

highlighted the importance of traditional brewing methods, explaining that “when people taste tubruk, they don’t just taste coffee, they taste a story about our culture” (interview, 2023).



Figure 3. Serving Ground Coffee
Source: Instagram @beanekacoffee

Informants also stressed the importance of collaboration with the Consulate General, which they viewed as enhancing credibility: “When we collaborated with KJRI, people saw us not just as sellers but as representatives of Indonesia” (Interview, 2023). These insights show that diaspora entrepreneurs saw their roles not only in commercial terms but also as cultural ambassadors, actively shaping the perception of Indonesia in the eyes of international visitors.

Such perspectives demonstrate how diaspora communities internalize their dual roles as both entrepreneurs and representatives of national identity. This supports the argument that diaspora involvement adds authenticity and personal commitment to cultural diplomacy, elements that often cannot be replicated by formal state actors alone (Choi, 2020).

Contribution to Indonesia’s International Image

The San Francisco Coffee Festival is one of the largest coffee festivals in the United States, featuring more than 100 exhibitors and drawing an estimated 12,000 visitors (Fort Mason, 2022). Indonesia’s participation in such a high-profile international event had significant implications for the country’s image abroad. By showcasing specialty coffee and embedding it within cultural storytelling, Indonesia positioned itself as a nation that is not only a leading coffee producer but also a custodian of unique traditions and narratives.

This approach contributes directly to Indonesia’s nation branding strategy. Unlike other coffee-producing countries such as Brazil and Colombia, which primarily emphasize authenticity. As Wattimena et al. (2023). Suggest, coffee can serve as a powerful instrument of nation branding by linking consumer experience with cultural representation.

Nation Branding through Coffee Diplomacy



Figure 4. San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022
Source: VOA Indonesia

A crucial outcome of Indonesia’s participation in the San Francisco Coffee Festival is its contribution to nation branding. Nation branding, understood as the strategic effort to shape and communicate a country’s image internationally (Anholt, 2020), is increasingly pursued through cultural products. Coffee, as a globally consumed commodity, provides Indonesia with a unique advantage to position itself as both an economic actor and a cultural contributor in the global arena.

Indonesia’s nation branding in this festival emerged through several dimensions. First, the promotion of specialty coffees highlighted the country’s agricultural richness and biodiversity. Unlike Brazil or Colombia, which often emphasize production capacity and efficiency, Indonesia’s branding strategy leveraged cultural

narratives, emphasizing diversity, tradition, and authenticity. Second, the diaspora's role ensured that the branding message was conveyed in a personal and authentic manner, increasing its resonance with the international audience. Third, the collaboration with the Consulate General added an official layer to the branding, creating credibility and aligning the diaspora's initiative with Indonesia's diplomatic goals (KJRI San Francisco, 2022a).

This approach aligns with the literature suggesting that culinary diplomacy contributes significantly to nation branding by allowing foreign publics to "taste" a nation's identity (Budi & Rohim, 2021; Rockower, 2019). By embedding cultural stories into coffee promotion, Indonesia created a nation brand that goes beyond commodities-it presented itself as a country of cultural richness, innovation, and global connectivity.

The findings thus suggest that Indonesia's coffee diplomacy effectively functioned as a form of cultural nation branding. It not only improved the visibility of Indonesian coffee in international markets but also strengthened perceptions of Indonesia as a culturally vibrant and hospitable nation. This reinforces Wattimeena et al. (2023) argument that coffee diplomacy can operate as a strategic soft power tool to elevate Indonesia's reputation globally.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Indonesia's participation in the San Francisco Coffee Festival 2022 illustrates how coffee has been used as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. By introducing various specialty coffee such as Bali-Kintamani, Sulawesi-Toraja, Aceh-Gayo, and Jawa Barat-Ciwidey, accompanied by traditional brewing practices like kopi tubruk, Indonesia successfully promoted coffee not only as a commodity but also as part of its cultural identity. This approach allowed international audiences to experience Indonesia's heritage through coffee and reinforced the country's soft power.

The research also demonstrates the significant role of the Indonesian diaspora in advancing nation branding. Through Beaneka Coffee, diaspora members acted as cultural ambassadors who introduced Indonesian coffee while sharing narratives about its origins and traditions. Their collaboration with the Consulate General of Indonesia in San Francisco enhanced credibility, reflecting a hybrid form of diplomacy in which non-state actors complement formal diplomatic initiatives. This highlights the growing importance of diaspora networks in Indonesia's public diplomacy strategies.

Finally, the study finds that coffee diplomacy contributes to strengthening Indonesia's international image. Participation in a global event such as the San Francisco Coffee Festival positioned Indonesia as a nation of cultural diversity, authenticity, and hospitality. By embedding cultural storytelling into product promotion, Indonesia differentiated itself from other coffee-producing nations and reinforced its nation branding efforts. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on diaspora-led coffee diplomacy, offering insights into how cultural products can be strategically utilized to project a positive national image abroad.

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