

Public diplomacy of the Japan Foundation: A case study of the 2023 online lecture series in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The Japan Foundation (JF) plays a central role in strengthening the sociocultural foundation of bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan. To promote mutual understanding, the JF adapted its public diplomacy strategy to an online format when the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges. This study aims to analyze JF's strategy through its 2023 Online Lecture Series on Japanese Culture (OLS) program in Indonesia. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach with interviews and a literature review, and applying Mark Leonard's public diplomacy concept, this study examines how the JF implemented its strategy. The findings show that the JF successfully executed three key dimensions of public diplomacy. News Management was conducted through the rapid dissemination of information on social media and a responsive approach to audience interactions. Strategic Communication was embodied by the well-planned OLS program, a proactive initiative designed to cultivate a rich and profound image of Japan, reinforced by a varied selection of themes and a clear connection to the celebration of diplomatic relations. Finally, Relationship Building was strengthened through long-term collaborations with local institutions and the facilitation of dialogue. Despite facing technical and material challenges, OLS proved effective in reaching a wider audience and contributed to maintaining mutual trust. This research also offers a novel perspective on how digital adaptation and online strategies can effectively engage youth and sustain transnational collaboration, making OLS a reference for future hybrid diplomacy in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: public diplomacy, Japan Foundation, online lecture series, Indonesia-Japan relations, Japanese culture

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Japan and Indonesia has existed since before Indonesia gained independence, although it was disrupted by the Japanese occupation during World War II, which left a deep mark on Indonesian society. After the war ended and Indonesia achieved independence, Japan faced a major challenge in rebuilding relations with countries in the Asian region, particularly Indonesia, which was a former colonized area. To address this, Japan has focused its strategy on improving its image through a collaborative soft power approach, especially in the economic and cultural fields, to rebuild trust and partnerships with these countries (Asnasari et al., 2023). This approach is in line with Joseph Nye's idea of soft power, which is defined as a country's ability to influence others through the appeal of its culture, values, and foreign policies rather than through coercion or pressure (Joseph, 2004).

Formal diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Japan began in 1958 with the signing of a Peace Treaty, which became the basis for cooperation in the economic, political, social, and cultural fields. In managing this bilateral relationship, Japan relies on public diplomacy as a key strategy to improve its image and strengthen its ties with the Indonesian public. According to Mark Leonard (2002), public diplomacy is a strategic effort by a country and non-governmental organizations to shape a positive image and maintain good relations with foreign publics for national interests. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is limited to intergovernmental interactions, public diplomacy has a broader scope, involving various actors and public audiences. Cultural diplomacy, which uses art, language, and traditions to strengthen relations and spread international influence effectively, is a vital element of public diplomacy. As part of this public diplomacy strategy, one of Japan's important initiatives was the establishment of The Japan Foundation in Indonesia in 1979, which plays a central role in introducing Japanese culture and building harmonious relations with the Indonesian public (Embassy of Japan in Indonesia, 2023).

After rebuilding bilateral relations, Japan strengthened its cultural diplomacy efforts by establishing The Japan Foundation (JF) in 1972. The JF is an official institution formed by the Japanese government to carry out cultural and educational exchange programs worldwide, with the goal of fostering mutual understanding and good relations between Japan and other countries. The institution has a broad global network, including its headquarters in Tokyo, an office in Kyoto, two domestic Japanese language institutes, and more than 20 representative offices in various countries (The Japan Foundation, 2019). The JF focuses on three main areas: arts and cultural exchange, Japanese language education abroad, and Japanese studies and intellectual exchanges. Through these activities, the Japan Foundation plays a significant role in promoting Japanese culture, expanding the global understanding of Japan, and supporting international dialogue (Hakim, 2024).

In Indonesia, the JF Jakarta office serves as a manifestation of this network and has been actively conducting various cultural, educational, and international exchange programs to strengthen ties between Indonesian and Japanese people. The presence of the JF in Jakarta helps deepen understanding and strengthen bilateral cooperation through systematic and sustainable cultural diplomacy efforts. JF Jakarta has been active since 1974, with a primary focus on offline activities, including arts and cultural exchanges, such as exhibitions, art performances, film screenings, and courses on traditional ceremonies and arts. The JF also manages Japanese language courses, supports teacher training, and provides cultural visit programs for students. JF Jakarta actively collaborates with various local and international organizations to expand the influence of Japanese culture. These face-to-face activities formed a strong foundation for Japanese cultural diplomacy in Indonesia before adapting to an online format (The Japan Foundation, 2019).

However, this offline approach had to be adapted when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, leading to the cancellation or postponement of many in-person programs. In response, the JF strategically adapted by developing the Online Lecture Series on Japanese Culture (OLS) program. This program was a continuation of existing cultural introduction initiatives, but it was shifted to an online format to overcome face-to-face restrictions. This change significantly expanded the reach of participants, no longer limited to Jakarta but extending throughout Indonesia and beyond. The program was held in two batches in 2023, with the main goal of introducing deep Japanese culture through expert speakers from Japan. In addition to being a form of adaptation, the program leveraged the momentum of the 65th anniversary of Indonesia-

Japan diplomatic relations and the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan relations (The Japan Foundation, 2023).

Several previous studies have examined Japanese public diplomacy, including research on The Japan Foundation's Instagram account (Clarik, 2024) and the Japan Cultural Weeks held online (Rudiawan, 2022). However, there has been limited analysis of how public diplomacy is implemented through online lecture series. This study fills this gap by analyzing the implementation of public diplomacy through a high-stakes and strategic online program, namely the Online Lecture Series on Japanese Culture (OLS) 2023. The novelty of this study lies in its deep analysis of the micro-mechanisms connecting online communication strategies (i.e., News Management via OLS) with audience behavior (*engagement*) and the long-term outcome of trust formation (Relationship Building). This study not only describes JF's strategy but also provides insight into how digital platforms are effectively used to embed a more profound and multi-dimensional image of Japan, transcending mere pop-culture promotion. Furthermore, this research positions OLS as an ideal case study to explore the synergy between cultural diplomacy, *nation branding*, and *strategic narrative* in digital diplomatic practice

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Public diplomacy is a concept that has evolved rapidly, especially with increasing access to information and global interaction. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which focuses on government-to-government relations, public diplomacy targets a broader audience, namely, the public in other countries. Its goal is to promote national interests and achieve foreign policy objectives through attraction and persuasion.

This study utilizes the conceptual framework developed by Mark Leonard in his book *Public Diplomacy* (2002). Leonard divides public diplomacy into three main complementary dimensions: (1) News Management: This dimension focuses on the rapid and reactive dissemination of information about current events or issues to shape public opinion. The goal is to control the narrative and ensure relevant information reaches the audience efficiently, especially in crisis situations or when sensitive issues need to be clarified; (2) Strategic Communication: This is a more proactive and planned approach. Strategic communication involves campaigns consciously designed to promote specific messages that support a country's long-term foreign policy goals. This dimension emphasizes the quality, consistency, and credibility of messages, often using public figures, experts, or major events to spread the narrative; (3) Relationship Building: This dimension is the most focused on long-term outcomes. Relationship building focuses on sustained and intimate interactions with key individuals or groups in other countries, such as opinion leaders, journalists, academics, and the general public. The goal is to create a deep sense of emotional connection and trust that is not easily shaken, even during political tensions.

2.1 OLS within Competing Theoretical Perspectives

The Japan Foundation's program through the OLS can be understood within a broader theoretical framework. This program goes beyond Cultural Diplomacy, which focuses on the exchange of arts and traditions. OLS serves as a tool for Nation Branding, embedding a positive image of Japan as an innovative and relevant country while preserving its cultural heritage. Furthermore, the program also functions as a Strategic Narrative, a coordinated effort to build a coherent narrative about the Indonesia-Japan relationship, especially in the context of the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations. In this regard, the OLS is an example of how public diplomacy is not just about cultural exchange but also about managing narratives and creating strategic images that serve long-term national interests.

2.2 Theoretical Propositions for Future Research

Based on this theoretical analysis, this study proposes a number of propositions for future empirical work: (a) Proposition 1: The higher the quality of strategic content (measured by the credibility

of speakers and the depth of material) in an online public diplomacy program, the greater the potential for fostering audience trust, regardless of the level of likes or comments; and (b) Proposition 2: The combination of reactive news management (e.g., quick responses to audience questions) with proactive strategic communication (planned content) significantly enhances the effectiveness of online public diplomacy.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis method to analyze the public diplomacy strategy implemented by The Japan Foundation (JF) through its 2023 Online Lecture Series on Japanese Culture program in Indonesia. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model: data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verification, ensuring that the research findings are systematically grounded and credible. Primary data for this research was obtained through two in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The informants were representatives from The Japan Foundation Jakarta Office, who were the organizers of the OLS program, namely Puput Setia and Barry Pulungan, both serving as staff in the Cultural Division. The interviews were conducted in September 2023 via an online Zoom invitation sent by email. The interview guide covered questions about (1) the planning and objectives of the OLS program, (2) the mechanisms of online implementation, (3) criteria for evaluating success and challenges faced, and (4) the program's link to the JF's broader diplomatic goals.

All interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using qualitative coding protocols. The data was categorized based on emerging themes, which were then linked to Mark Leonard's public diplomacy concepts. To ensure reliability, the coding process was conducted by the primary researcher and another researcher, with coding comparisons to achieve intercoder reliability. Theoretical saturation was claimed when no new significant information emerged from the interviews, indicating that a deep understanding had been obtained. Secondary data from social media (Instagram) was systematically collected. Audience interactions (likes and comments) on OLS promotional posts on the @jtf_jakarta account were manually extracted from January to September 2023. This data was categorized by theme (traditional vs. popular) to facilitate comparison and normalization.

Triangulation was conducted to validate the findings. The interview results (primary data) were cross-referenced with social media interaction data and official JF annual reports (secondary data) to ensure the consistency and credibility of the conclusions.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Online Lecture Series on Japanese Culture

The 2023 Online Lecture Series on Japanese Culture program is a form of strategic adaptation by the Japan Foundation Jakarta to respond to global challenges, especially the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited face-to-face activities. Based on interviews with a representative from the JF's cultural division, the program was initially a continuation of an existing Japanese culture introduction program, but it was changed to an online format in the 2022 fiscal year. The goal is to disseminate deep knowledge about Japanese culture, whose original information is difficult to obtain widely, by featuring experts from Japan as key speakers. This program is run under the management of the cultural division, which focuses on various Japanese cultural programs. Although the Online Lecture Series is a one-way street from Japan to Indonesian society to introduce culture, the Japan Foundation also manages other programs that are dialogical, bringing together speakers from Japan and Indonesia in events that encourage dialogue and networking between cultural and art practitioners of both countries. Thus, the JF Cultural Division not only unilaterally conveys Japanese culture but also opens up space for interactive and cross-cultural collaboration between Indonesia and Japan, strengthening dynamic and dialogical cooperation (Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025).

For example, the Online Lecture Series offers special sessions explaining various aspects of popular and traditional Japanese culture, such as comics, illustrations, animation, traditional ceremonies, and culinary habits. The program is held online via Zoom and YouTube platforms, enabling it to reach a wider audience from various regions in Indonesia. Through collaboration with local institutions, such as universities and art institutions, this program not only introduces Japanese culture in depth but also opens up space for intellectual exchange and more interactive cultural appreciation. Overall, the Online Lecture Series on Japanese Culture program is an innovative step by the Japan Foundation Jakarta to adapt its public diplomacy to the digital realm. This program not only acts as a one-way tool for disseminating Japanese culture but also becomes an important medium for building networks and dialogue between Indonesian and Japanese cultural actors in the digital age, while also maintaining the continuity of cultural diplomacy activities amidst a global situation full of challenges ([Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025](#)).

The program was conducted in two batches in 2023. The first batch (January-March 2023) focused on traditional culture, with themes like *Gyojishoku* (seasonal event food), *Kimono* (traditional Japanese clothing), *Kumihimo* (traditional Japanese rope weaving technique), *Wagashi* (traditional Japanese sweets), and *Nihon Buyo* (traditional Japanese dance) held on the Zoom platform. This program demonstrates JF's efforts to present a more substantial and academic side of Japanese culture. It invited experienced experts such as Komiya Rimi (head of the *Gyojishoku* Association), Kinoshita Beniko (founder of the *Kinoshita Kimono Lab*), and Fujima Etsuko (traditional dancer) to give live online lectures and tutorials. This program showcased aspects of Japanese culture that might be difficult to access widely, providing participants with a deeper and more substantial understanding. The JF attracted approximately 2,000 participants, showing high public interest in deep cultural topics. In its implementation, this program collaborated with Indonesian universities such as Universitas Sumatera Utara, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, and BINUS University ([The Japan Foundation, 2023](#)).

Meanwhile, the second batch (August-September 2023) shifted to popular culture, such as comics, illustrations, and animation, which used the YouTube and Zoom platforms. This difference in focus demonstrates the JF's flexibility in reaching a wider audience. It presented experts such as Takano Ken (manga editor), Saito Naoki (illustrator and YouTuber), and Muroi Yasuo (animation expert). Through these interactive lectures and workshops, the participants gained a deeper and more substantive understanding of various aspects of Japanese culture. Thus, the program played a significant role as an innovative and responsive digital-based public diplomacy instrument for global changes. Interestingly, despite having different themes, both program batches also served as part of the celebration of the 65th anniversary of Indonesia-Japan diplomatic relations and the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan relations, confirming that every JF activity is aligned with high-level diplomatic agendas. In its implementation, the program collaborated with BINUS University, Institut Kesenian Jakarta and Elex Media Komputindo. The collaborations were also tailored to specific interests, for example with Institut Kesenian Jakarta (IKJ) which has a design specialization and Elex Media Komputindo as a comic publisher ([Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025](#)).

According to a JF representative, the online format allowed the program to reach participants from various regions outside Jakarta, which was difficult to achieve with previous offline activities. In its implementation, the program targeted young people aged 18-35, especially university students. To achieve this goal, the JF collaborated with universities in Indonesia, such as Universitas Sumatera Utara, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Institut Kesenian Jakarta, and BINUS University. This demonstrates the program's effectiveness in significantly expanding the reach of Japanese public diplomacy. The high enthusiasm of the participants was evident from the massive response during the Q&A sessions. A JF representative stated, "the chat column was always full of questions" and the audience "stayed until the end" because it was a "rare opportunity to interact with an expert" ([Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025](#)). This active involvement shows that the program plays a significant role as an innovative and responsive digitally based public diplomacy instrument to global changes.

4.2 JF's Public Diplomacy Strategy Through Mark Leonard's Dimensions

The implementation of the Online Lecture Series program by the JF in Indonesia can be effectively analyzed using Mark Leonard's theory of public diplomacy. In his book, Leonard (2002) defines public diplomacy as a collaborative process between governments and non-governmental organizations that strategically shapes a country's image and reputation. In public diplomacy, the information and messages conveyed must be controlled to align with national interests, because the perception and reputation of a country formed by foreign publics can determine that country's position and influence in international relations. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is more exclusive and limited to inter-governmental interactions, public diplomacy is more inclusive and involves various actors, including The Japan Foundation. This indicates that public diplomacy is not just about conveying a message but also about building a broad and sustainable communication network with foreign publics.

To achieve four main goals: Increasing Knowledge, Fostering Positive Appreciation, Strengthening Relationships, and Influencing the Public, the Japan Foundation's (JF) strategy through its online program shows how the synergy of Leonard's three dimensions of public diplomacy—News Management, Strategic Communication, and Relationship Building—can be implemented effectively, namely:

4.2.1 News Management

News Management is the first dimension, which emphasizes the importance of a country's role in managing and responding to issues that develop in the international public sphere. A country must be able to control the narrative to align with its strategic goals. This management can be reactive, which is a quick response to problems, or proactive by planning a positive agenda. Various media, both conventional and digital, are used as the main means for information to be spread widely, effectively, and credibly (Leonard, 2002). The implementation of the News Management dimension by the JF is seen in how they proactively disseminate information through social media. The use of platforms such as Instagram has proven very effective in attracting audience attention and promoting events (Vania & Anggoro, 2022). JF's Instagram profile (Figure 1) serves as visual proof of their commitment to managing the narrative and disseminating information in real time. Through this platform, the JF actively shares content related to its programs and interacts directly with the audience through the comments section (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The Japan Foundation Jakarta's Instagram profile display

Source: The Japan Foundation Jakarta (@jf_jakarta) Instagram account

Although promotion for popular culture themes showed higher engagement (*e.g.*, 1,517 likes and 35 comments on one post), this finding cannot be directly interpreted as the sole measure of effectiveness. The high numbers for popular content might reflect a larger existing audience base. However, the JF's ability to attract a significant audience (approximately 2,000 participants) to traditional topics demonstrates deeper strategic effectiveness, which is its success in cultivating new interest in less-known cultural aspects. This proves that JF's News Management is not merely reactive but also proactive in substantially shaping public perception ([The Japan Foundation, 2023](#)). See Figure 2 for detail.

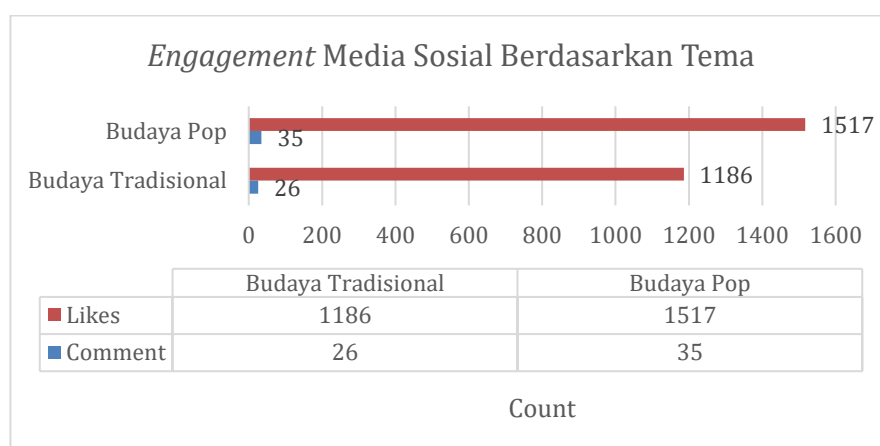


Figure 2. Comparison of Social Media Engagement Based on Theme

Source: The Japan Foundation Jakarta (@jf_jakarta) Instagram account

In the context of the Online Lecture Series (OLS) program, The Japan Foundation (JF) applies this dimension through structured information management. The JF proactively disseminates program information through various digital communication channels, such as its website, Instagram, and Facebook. This strategy is strengthened by leveraging a network of collaborators, including the social media accounts of speakers, universities, and publishers who participate. This effort ensures that registration and event schedule information is spread widely, reaching the audience quickly and effectively.

During the program, the JF effectively applied news management on a micro scale through interactive sessions. Based on interviews, audience enthusiasm was very high, where 'the chat column was actually endless with questions,' especially during the Q&A session. Direct responses from speakers and moderators to this stream of questions are a form of managing audience interaction to ensure a positive perception and provide valuable experience. This real-time interaction creates a proactive two-way dialogue, where the JF not only disseminates information but also actively responds to audience needs to manage the program's image as a responsive platform ([Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025](#)).

However, the application of this dimension is not free from reactive challenges that must be responded to quickly by the JF. The main challenges faced are technical issues, such as unstable Internet connections, and curatorial constraints in finding the right translators. According to the interview data, the JF team realized that they had to "find the right translator who also understood or had a background in those cultures". This reflects the complexity of online cultural diplomacy, where technical and linguistic understanding must go hand-in-hand ([Rudiawan, 2022](#)). For example, translating specific terms from pop culture (such as animation) or traditional arts (*Nihon Buyo*) requires special skills that are difficult to find. These challenges force the JF to respond to issues incidentally and adapt in the planning stage. JF must proactively manage risks by implementing a strict selection process and collaborating with experts. The JF's readiness in dealing with these obstacles shows how the institution strategically manages risks to ensure the quality and smooth running of the program are not disrupted, so that the core message of cultural diplomacy is conveyed effectively ([Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025](#)).

In a broader context, JF's news management is not only reactive but also proactive. By presenting credible and in-depth information from experts through the OLS program, the JF deliberately manages

the narrative of Japanese culture. This effort aims to correct any misconceptions that may exist and strengthen Japan's image as a country that is technologically advanced yet still upholds its traditions and cultural richness. The use of social media and collaboration with the local press, as in the case of Elex Media Komputindo, is also an important part of this proactive strategy to ensure that information is spread widely on various platforms, reaching the audience more effectively and systematically. This shows that the OLS is designed as a strategic tool to actively shape public perception, not just to respond to existing issues.

4.2.2 Strategic Communication

The Strategic Communication dimension is realized in the design of the OLS program itself as a deliberate and proactive initiative to instill a rich cultural and scientific image of Japan. This planning is clearly seen in the selection of varied themes, ranging from deep traditional culture (such as *Gyojishoku*, *Kimono*, and *Nihon Buyo*) to popular culture (such as Manga, Anime, and Illustration). This strategy is intentionally designed to show that Japanese culture has strong traditional roots while also being able to adapt to modern audience interests. This diversity of content can be seen in the following OLS program promotion posters (Leonard, 2002). See Figure 3 & 4 for the example.



Figure 3. Online Lecture Series Batch 1 Program Promotion Poster

Source: The Japan Foundation Jakarta (@jf_jakarta) Instagram account



Figure 4. Online Lecture Series Batch 2 Program Promotion Poster

Source: The Japan Foundation Jakarta (@jf_jakarta) Instagram account

The Strategic Communication dimension is strengthened by the fact that the 2023 OLS was intentionally linked to the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Japan. This shows that every JF activity is a deliberate initiative designed to reinforce the narrative of bilateral partnership. Its effectiveness is evident not only in the high participation data (see Figure 5) but also in its

success in embedding a diverse image—Japan as a modern nation that also upholds its traditions—among young Indonesian audiences. This is an example of how Strategic Communication succeeds in going beyond superficial promotion to achieve more profound diplomatic goals ([The Japan Foundation, 2023](#)).

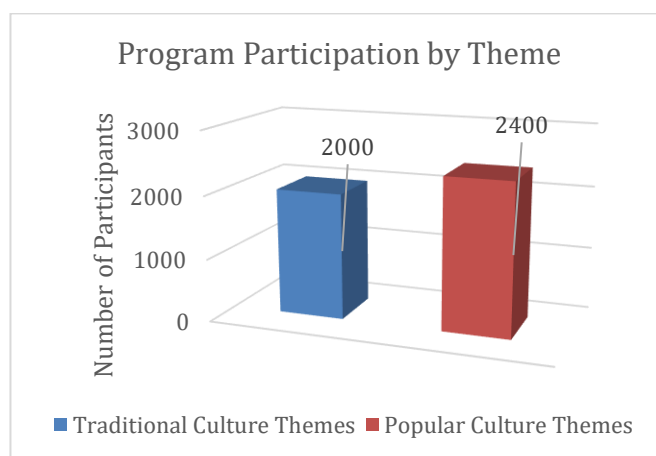


Figure 5. Demographic Proportion of OLS Program Participants.

Source: The Japan Foundation, Jakarta, Instagram, YouTube account

This planning also includes the selection of expert speakers and brainstorming to tailor the material to the interests of the Indonesian audience, especially the target demographic aged 18-35, who are mostly university students. The strategic communication aspect is further strengthened by linking the 2023 OLS to the celebration of the 65th anniversary of Indonesia-Japan diplomatic relations, which is intentionally used as a public reminder of the strong partnership between the two countries. Thus, the OLS functions as a communication tool designed to reinforce the core message and deepen audience understanding in a structured way ([Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025](#)).

4.2.3 Relationship Building

Relationship Building focuses on long-term efforts to create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with various actors in the target country, such as civil society, academics, and professional communities. This dimension positions cultural exchanges, seminars, and conferences as a medium for building trust and deep understanding, not just a one-way dissemination of information ([Leonard, 2002](#)). In the context of The Japan Foundation (JF), this dimension is strongly realized through its collaboration and dialogue facilitation strategy in the Online Lecture Series (OLS) program. The program is designed not only to provide information but also as a strategic platform to foster strong and sustainable networking. The JF uses OLS to strengthen partnerships with important institutions in Indonesia. Interview data show collaborations with various universities, such as Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU), Binus University, and Institut Kesenian Jakarta (IKJ), as well as publishers such as Elex Media Komputindo. This partnership goes beyond a temporary collaboration for a single event; instead, it is a concrete step toward building a network that becomes the foundation for long-term relationships. By working closely with local educational and industrial institutions, the JF demonstrates its commitment to interacting with academic and creative communities in Indonesia. This is a real manifestation of relationship building that goes beyond a single activity and creates sustainable, mutually beneficial synergies ([Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025](#)).

Although it was held online, the OLS effectively facilitated dialogue and created a sense of engagement among the audience. The interactive Q&A session, as revealed in the interview, is proof of the participants' enthusiasm. The JF successfully created a space in which the audience could interact directly with experts (Figure 6 & 7). This interaction built an emotional bond between the audience and

Japanese culture and the JF as a bridge, which ultimately fostered an online community with similar interests. The ultimate goal of Relationship Building is to achieve mutual trust, which is the essence of the JF's mission. The OLS program was designed to be 'enjoyable' and create opportunities for 'dialogue,' which indirectly contributes to a long-term relationship between the two countries.

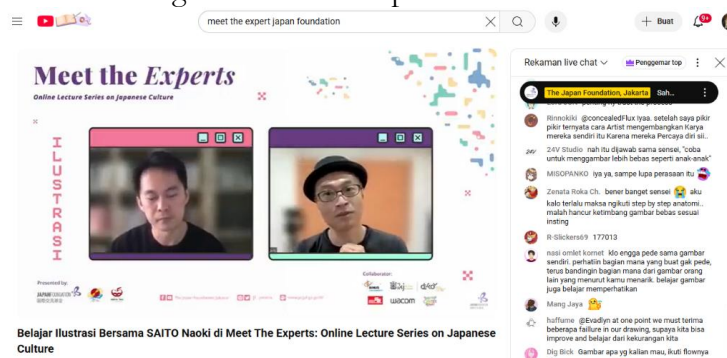


Figure 6. Participant Interaction in the Online Session via YouTube

Source: The Japan Foundation Jakarta YouTube channel

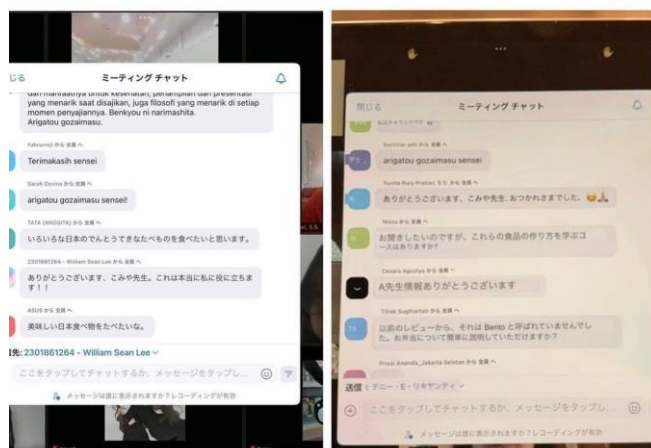


Figure 7. Participant Interaction in the Online Session via Zoom

Source: Komiya Rimi, Gyojishoku Magazine (@gyojishoku) Instagram account Audience Demographic Achievements

The OLS program's success in building relationships is also evident in its ability to reach a specific target audience. Based on the interview findings, although the program is open to the public, the majority of participants are university students aged 18-35. This proves that JF's strategy of collaborating with universities successfully attracts a young audience in line with the program's goals. The source also stated that in addition to students, participants also came from working and student circles (Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025). This demographic composition shows that the JF successfully reached its main target audience, which is a key foundation for effectively spreading Japanese cultural influence in Indonesia.

4.3 Challenges and Significance of the Program in Indonesia-Japan Relations

However, the implementation of the OLS program was not free from challenges. Based on interview data, the main challenges are divided into two aspects: technical and curatorial. Technically, the problem faced was an unstable internet connection, which could disrupt the smooth running of the event, especially when reaching audiences in various regions. This obstacle shows that digital infrastructure

remains an important consideration in online cultural diplomacy. In terms of content, the main challenge is the limitation of the online format itself. Offline programs allow for face-to-face interaction and direct experiences, such as tea ceremonies, which are difficult to replicate in the virtual world. This also creates difficulties in finding translators who not only master the Japanese language but also have a deep understanding of specific terms in each cultural field, such as animation, comics, or traditional dance. These challenges force the JF to react quickly and adapt by finding creative solutions, such as brainstorming with speakers and strict selection of translators, to maintain the quality of the program (Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025).

The Online Lecture Series (OLS) program is important for strengthening the bilateral relationship between Indonesia and Japan from the perspective of Japan's national interests. Strategically, the program aims to maintain and deepen the long-term partnership between the two countries by strengthening mutual trust at the grassroots level through cultural exchange and public diplomacy. OLS's success in building a deeper understanding of Japanese culture contributes significantly to increasing mutual trust between the Indonesian and Japanese people and plays an important role in maintaining Japan's positive image in Indonesia (Asnasari et al., 2023). This consistent and systematic cultural diplomacy effort can minimize the emergence of negative or anti-Japanese sentiments. The cultural diplomacy investment made by the JF makes the relationship between Indonesia and Japan more stable and solid, because it is supported by mutual understanding at the community level, not just at the government level (Interview The Japan Foundation, 2025).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis presented, this study concludes that the Japan Foundation's (JF) 2023 Online Lecture Series on Japanese Culture (OLS) program in Indonesia effectively demonstrates an agile public diplomacy strategy. The program comprehensively integrates the three dimensions of Mark Leonard's theory: News Management, through the rapid and responsive dissemination of information via social media; Strategic Communication, realized in proactive program planning that aligns with diplomatic celebrations; and Relationship Building, strengthened by long-term collaboration with local institutions and dialogue facilitation. This success demonstrates that the JF not only adapted to the challenges of the pandemic but also strategically leveraged digital platforms to achieve its diplomatic goal of fostering mutual understanding. This study has important implications for the future of cultural diplomacy, proving that online platforms are powerful instruments for facilitating more in-depth and inclusive cultural exchanges. Therefore, it is recommended that the Japan Foundation and other cultural diplomacy institutions develop a hybrid model that combines offline activities with online programs, providing wider access and in-depth content to further strengthen the harmonious strategic partnership between the two countries.

Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable

Authors' Contributions

MMVSP and HNR contributed to the conceptualization, writing, review, and editing of the manuscript. HNR collaborate with MFA in doing methodology. Specifically, HND contributed to the formal analysis, MFA to resources, and Mand MMVSP to the original draft preparation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

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