

INDONESIAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic that has hit the world since the outbreak of the coronavirus that started in the city of Wuhan, China at the end of 2019 has ushered in a new chapter in public diplomacy as many countries around the world implement policies on closing borders, lockdowns and physical distancing. Data collection and analysis are carried out by searching literature studies and observations. Public diplomacy is a process of communication between the government and the foreign public in an effort to realize an understanding of the ideas, values, norms, culture, to the goals and national policies of the country. The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a new chapter in public diplomacy as many countries around the world have implemented policies on closing borders, lockdowns and physical distancing.

Keywords: *diplomacy, covid-19, pandemic*

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic that has hit the world since the outbreak of the coronavirus that started in the city of Wuhan, China at the end of 2019 has ushered in a new chapter in public diplomacy as many countries around the world implement policies on closing borders, lockdowns and physical distancing. The rapid spread of the coronavirus and the continuing increase in the number of positive cases globally have made no country in the world free from the threat of a health crisis caused by the virus. Data from the World Health Organization (World Health Organization) has so far recorded 86,749,940 positive cases worldwide with a death rate of 1,890,342 (WHO, 2021). The United States is still the country with the highest number of positive cases in the world. Each government is trying to implement the best policies to control the spread of the coronavirus within the country and provide protection for its citizens who are abroad. In the midst of the struggles of countries to contain the spread of Covid-19, with conditions of uncertainty regarding shifts in economic, social and political power, several countries also view the crisis as a strategic opportunity to improve their nation's image in the eyes of the world.

Public diplomacy during a pandemic provides several countries with the opportunity to benefit from expanding their soft power profile on the international stage. The Covid-19 pandemic is a 'test case of a nation's public diplomacy resolve and capability' (Wang, 2020). Public health is not the only variable at stake, but also the nation's image and the influence of a country in the international community. In this case, the ability of a country to project positive influence and manage its image the nation ultimately depends on how to respond to the global health crisis. Economic assistance, health and digital diplomacy became public diplomacy by several countries during the Covid-19 pandemic, including Indonesia.

METHOD

Data collection and analysis are carried out by searching literature studies and observations. In this case, the theoretical basis for research is obtained through literature searches derived from books, other journals and from other reliable sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic is seen as having fueled or exacerbated diplomatic tensions around the world. Political and Social Science Researcher Sophia Gaston describes it by instead of seeing countries unite because they are facing the same war, the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed countries to prioritize their interests, giving rise to competition rather than cooperation (Duarte, 2020). One example is the dispute that has occurred between the PRC and Brazil since the beginning of the pandemic to the point where PRC diplomats and people in the inner circle of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro are arguing on social media. There was also suspicion among countries in the world, triggered by the lack of sharing of data and information as well as a sense of distrust with other countries.

Public diplomacy is a process of communication between the government and the foreign public in an effort to realize an understanding of the ideas, values, norms, culture, to the goals and national policies of the country (Melissen, 2005). Public diplomacy activities are generally carried out to create positive opinions and images from the foreign public so as to facilitate the achievement of a country's foreign policy. In an abnormal situation such as the Covid-19 pandemic, public diplomacy is a crisis management instrument that can be used to prevent and alleviate ongoing crises. Public diplomacy can be used to: a) promote values that can increase state stability; b) create mutual understanding and correct misunderstandings; and c) building a reputation (Auer, 2016; Martha, 2020). This is of course inseparable from the soft power contained in public diplomacy, where soft power is the ability to influence other parties to obtain the desired result through an attraction (Nye, 2008).

Since recording the findings of its first case on March 2 2020, the number of positive cases of Covid-19 in Indonesia has continued to increase significantly. Various efforts have been made by the Government to contain the spread of Covid-19, starting with contact tracing, setting up referral hospitals, building a special hospital for infectious diseases on Galang Island, making the Athlete's Village and hotels a place for self-isolation for patients who are confirmed positive for Covid-19, until the implementation of the Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) policy. However, the increase in the number of positive confirmed patients in Indonesia has not yet shown a downward trend. The Indonesian Covid-19 Task Force recorded the number of positive confirmed cases as of January 8, 2021, reaching 808,340 cases, with a record addition of 10,617 new cases on that day.

The distrust of other countries in Indonesia's ability to detect the corona virus before the discovery of the first positive case in Indonesia as well as the negative opinion of some parties who believe that the Indonesian government is not fast and effective in dealing with the spread and has failed to provide data transparency and access to information related to Covid-19, has had an impact on creating an image Indonesian negative. For this reason, the Government of Indonesia is utilizing public diplomacy to improve its image in the domestic and international public which is carried out in line with first-track diplomacy to overcome the global covid-19 pandemic.

The Indonesian government has on several occasions invited other countries to build partnerships and work together to suppress the spread of Covid-19. The forms of partnership and cooperation offered include sharing information, developing vaccine research, providing medical equipment, and protecting citizens to ASEAN member countries. Not only that, at the global level in terms of contributing to maintaining world peace and stability, Indonesia along with 5 other countries has also initiated the first UN General Assembly resolution on Covid-19 namely 'Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019'. Indonesia through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also entered into an agreement to make a travel corridor arrangement (TCA) for essential business trips with 4 countries including the United Arab Emirates (PEA), South Korea, China and Singapore.

Utilization of digital technology (digital diplomacy) as public diplomacy in times of crisis such as those caused by the co-19 pandemic is also carried out. Border closures and lockdown policies implemented by various countries in the world are a challenge for the government in providing protection to its citizens. Reaching people is of the utmost importance in times of crisis, and public pressure has paved the way for more effective use of social media as a resource for crisis management (Melissen & Caesar-Gordon, 2016). In the battle against covid-19, citizens need to be informed and participate voluntarily. Sharing information can protect governments and citizens from the risks of misinformation, rumors and fake news.

Although many Indonesian citizens have participated in the repatriation program facilitated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, many Indonesian citizens have chosen to remain abroad. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Indonesian government has formed a Covid-19 Task Force at each foreign representative to carry out assistance protocols and collect data regarding the potential economic impact for Indonesian citizens, as well as create a special hotline for local Indonesian citizens. Apart from ensuring the basic needs of its citizens through providing logistical assistance, the Indonesian government through local representatives also provides assistance in the form of outreach and dissemination of information related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Apart from going through social media and the official website of the representative, this activity was also carried out by introducing a game against Covid-19 called "Dawn of Civilization: Solve Corona" by the Indonesian Embassy in London to the children of Indonesian citizens in the UK and Ireland, virtually (Sinaga, 2020). Throughout 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that it had provided assistance to 1,651 Indonesian citizens who were positively infected with Covid-19 spread across 60 countries/regions and 29 ships, and facilitated the repatriation of 157,758 Indonesian citizens from 62 countries around the world.

The Indonesian government also continues to build a positive narrative regarding the government's handling of Covid-19 through the active participation of national mass media and television such as TVRI and RRI. Positive information is broadcast in the form of maximum efforts made by the government in dealing with Covid-19 which can be ensured that the steps are in accordance with international health standards. According to the Director General of Information and Public Communication of the Ministry of Communication and Informatics, the steps to building this narrative are in accordance with applicable regulations, namely that government broadcasting institutions participate in spreading positive information. One of them, based on Presidential Instruction Number 4 of 2019 concerning Capacity Building in Preventing, Detecting, and Responding to Disease Outbreaks, Global Pandemics, and Nuclear,

Biological and Chemical Emergencies (Kominfo, 2020). In addition, dissemination and dissemination of information regarding various policies taken by the Indonesian government in an effort to restrain the rate of increase in Covid-19 cases are continuously carried out through various social media, online media and television in order to maintain Indonesia's positive image in the domestic and foreign public. In November 2020, the Government of Indonesia was invited by WHO as one of the speakers at a virtual press conference to share experiences and provide information on how Indonesia was able to properly control the co-19 pandemic. Although some epidemiologists criticized it, the Government of Indonesia stated that this was proof of the appreciation given by WHO to Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a new chapter in public diplomacy as many countries around the world have implemented policies on closing borders, lockdowns and physical distancing. A country's ability to project positive influence and manage the nation's image ultimately depends on how it responds to the global health crisis. In "abnormal" situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, public diplomacy is a crisis management instrument that can be used to prevent and alleviate ongoing crises. This is of course inseparable from the soft power contained in public diplomacy.

The Indonesian government utilizes public diplomacy to improve its image in the domestic and international public which is carried out in line with first-track diplomacy to overcome the global covid-19 pandemic. In addition to building partnerships and working with other countries to suppress the spread of Covid-19, the Government of Indonesia has also formed a Covid-19 Task Force at each foreign representative to carry out assistance protocols and collect data regarding the potential economic impact on Indonesian citizens, as well as create a special hotline. for local citizens. Information dissemination and dissemination regarding various policies taken by the Indonesian government in an effort to curb the rate of increase in Covid-19 cases is continuously carried out through various social media, online media and television in order to maintain Indonesia's positive image in the domestic and foreign public. Despite receiving criticism, the public diplomacy carried out by the Indonesian government has succeeded in building a positive image of Indonesia as a country capable of properly controlling the co-19 pandemic.

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