
Islam Nusantara and Local Traditions: Role and Challenges in Indonesia's Cultural Diplomacy and International Relations

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Islam Nusantara, an Indonesian expression of Islam that blends local culture with Islamic teachings, and its role in cultural diplomacy. Using qualitative methods and literature review, the study traces its historical development and core values such as moderation (*wasatiyyah*), tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. The result shows that these values allow Indonesia to employ Islam Nusantara as a soft power tool to promote religious tolerance, dialogue, and peaceful engagement, particularly in Muslim-majority and multicultural societies. However, challenges persist, including debates on its authenticity and tensions between local practices and global Islamic discourses. The paper concludes that the dynamic interaction between local Islamic traditions and international diplomatic strategies strengthens Indonesia's soft power and role in global intercultural cooperation. Islam Nusantara offers a compelling model for how indigenous Islamic practices can support peacebuilding and enhance international relations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islam Nusantara represents a distinctive expression of Islam in Indonesia, shaped by the country's cultural plurality and historical interactions between Islam and local traditions. As the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia has long practiced a contextualized form of Islam that integrates local wisdom, customary norms, and indigenous practices. This syncretic and inclusive nature of Islam in Indonesia has evolved into what is now termed Islam Nusantara, a form of Islam that emphasizes moderation (*wasatiyyah*), tolerance, and peaceful coexistence (Syafri, Asmaret, & Lahmi, 2024). It reflects a cultural-religious synthesis that not only guides domestic religious life but also serves broader societal functions.

In recent years, Islam Nusantara has gained traction beyond religious discourse, emerging as a strategic soft power tool in Indonesia's cultural diplomacy. The government and civil society actors have increasingly invoked Islam Nusantara in international platforms to promote interfaith dialogue, counter radical narratives, and project a peaceful image of Islam. This aligns with Indonesia's broader foreign policy agenda of fostering global harmony and cooperation (Nubowo, 2023).

Several studies have addressed the religious and sociocultural dimensions of Islam Nusantara. Scholars such as Azra (2002), Ricklefs (2012), and Fealy & White (2008) have explored the historical and theological development of Indonesian Islam, particularly its localized expressions. Feillard and Madinier (2011) have also examined Islam's interplay with nationalism and identity. However, these studies tend to focus on domestic implications, offering limited insight into the diplomatic and international functions of Islam Nusantara. There remains a lack of research that critically investigates its role as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy.

This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how Islam Nusantara functions as an instrument of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy in the realm of international relations. Specifically, the paper aims to examine the role of Islam Nusantara in promoting moderation, tolerance, and intercultural understanding, and how it contributes to enhancing Indonesia's soft power globally.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the role of Islam Nusantara in Indonesia's cultural diplomacy, particularly in the realm of international relations. The qualitative method was deemed appropriate for exploring meanings and discourses embedded in texts, rather than quantifying variables or testing hypotheses. In line with Patton's (2002) qualitative inquiry framework, data for this research were gathered through documentary analysis, focusing on secondary sources such as academic literature, historical texts, government policy documents, and relevant media publications that discuss Islam Nusantara and its diplomatic usage.

To understand how Islam Nusantara is framed and mobilized in Indonesia's international engagements, the study analyzed speeches and official statements from key institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and influential civil society organizations, especially Nahdlatul Ulama. These texts were selected purposively to identify recurring narratives that emphasize values of moderation, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence—core characteristics of Islam Nusantara.

The data were analyzed using content analysis, adopting the analytical framework developed by Krippendorff (2013), which allows for systematic interpretation of textual content by identifying themes and patterns. This method enabled the researcher to uncover how Islam Nusantara is represented and operationalized within Indonesia's soft power strategies. To ensure the reliability and validity of findings, triangulation was applied by comparing various types of sources academic writings, policy papers, and public communications produced across a time frame from 2015 to 2024.

The analysis was further guided by constructivist international relations theory, particularly Wendt's (1999) proposition that identity, norms, and ideas play a significant role in shaping foreign policy behavior. Since this research relied exclusively on document-based sources and did not involve human subjects or fieldwork, ethical clearance was not required.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Islam Nusantara in the Context of Indonesian History and Culture

Islam Nusantara is a distinctive expression of Islam that has developed within the cultural and historical context of Indonesia. The roots of this concept can be traced back to the early arrival of Islam in the archipelago, which began in the 13th century through the peaceful efforts of traders, scholars, and Sufi missionaries. Unlike the more confrontational spread of Islam in other parts of the world, the introduction of Islam in Indonesia was characterized by a gradual and largely non-violent process, wherein Islamic teachings were incorporated into existing cultural and social frameworks (Kasdi, 2018). This accommodation and adaptation process allowed Islam to integrate harmoniously with the local traditions, customs, and belief systems that were already deeply embedded in Indonesian society. As a result, Islam in Indonesia developed a unique character, significantly different from its Middle Eastern counterpart.

The historical journey of Islam in Indonesia saw the religion being blended with local cultures, particularly through the efforts of the Wali Songo, the nine revered Islamic saints who played a crucial role in spreading Islam on the island of Java. They introduced Islam in a manner that respected and embraced local customs, including the use of Javanese language and symbols in their teachings. This syncretic approach facilitated the acceptance of Islam by the Indigenous population, which already practised a mixture of Hinduism, Buddhism, and animism. Consequently, Islam in Indonesia evolved into a form that was not only religious but also cultural, embodying a synthesis of Islamic and local elements that eventually came to be known as Islam Nusantara (Nurhisam & Huda, 2016).

Islam Nusantara is characterized by several core principles that distinguish it from other forms of Islam. These principles include a strong emphasis on moderation, tolerance, and the preservation of local culture. The concept of moderation, or *wasatiyyah*, is central to Islam Nusantara, reflecting a balanced approach to religious practice that avoids extremes. This principle has been pivotal in maintaining social harmony in Indonesia's pluralistic society, where diverse religious and cultural groups coexist. Tolerance, another key principle, is deeply ingrained in Islam Nusantara, promoting respect for different beliefs and practices within the broader Islamic framework. This has allowed Islam Nusantara to serve as a bridge between various cultural and religious communities in Indonesia, fostering a spirit of inclusivity and mutual respect (Feillard & Madinier, 2011).

The formation of Islam Nusantara was also shaped by the interaction between Islam and local customs, known as adat. In many parts of Indonesia, Islamic teachings were adapted to fit within the existing adat systems, resulting in a form of Islam that is deeply embedded in the local culture. For instance, in Minangkabau, the adat system of matrilineal inheritance was harmonized with Islamic principles, creating a unique socio-cultural structure that reflects both Islamic and indigenous values. Similarly, in Java, the practice of *slametan*—a communal feast to mark important life events—was integrated into Islamic rituals, symbolizing the blend of religious and cultural practices that define Islam Nusantara (Fikri, 2018).

The concept of Islam Nusantara has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly as it has been promoted by the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization. NU advocates for Islam Nusantara as a model of Islam that is compatible with Indonesia's cultural diversity and democratic values. The organization argues that Islam Nusantara represents an authentic Indonesian Islam that is rooted in the nation's history and traditions, distinguishing it from more rigid interpretations of Islam that have emerged elsewhere (Muhammad & Duderija, 2022). This perspective has been influential in shaping public discourse on Islam in Indonesia, reinforcing the idea that Islam Nusantara is a product of the country's unique historical and cultural context.

One of the significant aspects of Islam Nusantara is its ability to adapt to changing social and cultural dynamics while maintaining its core principles. This adaptability has allowed Islam Nusantara to remain relevant in contemporary Indonesian society, where rapid modernization and globalization pose challenges to traditional values and practices. The flexibility of Islam Nusantara ensures that it can address contemporary issues, such as gender equality, environmental conservation, and social justice, in ways that resonate with the local context. This capacity for renewal and adaptation is one of the strengths of Islam Nusantara, enabling it to contribute to the ongoing development of Indonesian society.

3.2. Local Wisdom in Islam Nusantara: Case Studies from Various Regions in Indonesia

Islam Nusantara, as a unique expression of Islam within Indonesia's cultural and historical context, exemplifies the deep integration of local wisdom into Islamic practices across various regions. One prominent example is the *Maulid* tradition in Aceh, where the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday is marked by a series of communal gatherings, religious recitations, and social activities. In Aceh, *Maulid* is more than a religious event; it is a cultural festivity that strengthens social bonds and community identity (Alfurqan, 2023). The celebration integrates local customs, such as the serving of traditional foods and the performance of local music, with Islamic rituals, demonstrating how Islam has been localized in this region.

Another significant example is the *Sekaten* festival in Java, a tradition that showcases the deep intertwining of local wisdom with Islamic practice. Originating from the Javanese word "*Syahadatain*" (the Islamic creed), *Sekaten* is a week-long celebration held annually in Yogyakarta and Surakarta to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. This event features a variety of cultural activities, including the procession of royal heirlooms, gamelan music performances, and traditional markets. While *Sekaten* is rooted in Islamic teachings, it has been shaped by Javanese culture and traditions, creating a unique synthesis that characterizes

Islam in Java (Karim & Raya, 2022). This festival not only serves as a religious observance but also as a cultural spectacle, reinforcing the cultural pluralism within Islam Nusantara.

In Sumatra, particularly in West Sumatra, the *Tabligh Akbar* tradition provides another illustration of how local wisdom is embedded in Islamic practices. *Tabligh Akbar*, a large-scale Islamic gathering, often features prominent religious scholars who deliver sermons and lead prayers. In West Sumatra, these gatherings are frequently held alongside local cultural events, such as traditional Minangkabau ceremonies. The integration of *Tabligh Akbar* with local traditions reflects the flexibility and adaptability of Islam in the region, where religious teachings are intertwined with cultural practices (Sefriyono, Ashadi & Zulfis, 2024). This has allowed Islam to become deeply embedded in the social fabric of the Minangkabau people, who see no contradiction between their cultural identity and their Islamic faith.

The integration of local wisdom into Islamic practices in Indonesia is not confined to these examples but is a widespread phenomenon across the archipelago. Islamic rituals in many regions are performed alongside traditional ceremonies, creating a distinctive form of religious expression unique to Indonesia. This synthesis of Islam and local culture is a defining characteristic of Islam Nusantara, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining cultural diversity within the framework of Islamic teachings. The ability of Islam Nusantara to incorporate local wisdom into its practices has been crucial in maintaining social cohesion and religious tolerance in Indonesia, a country with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

These examples demonstrate how Islam Nusantara has evolved in a way that is deeply rooted in the local context. The localization of Islamic practices, such as *Maulid* in Aceh, *Sekaten* in Java, and *Tabligh Akbar* in Sumatra, highlights the dynamic interaction between religion and culture in Indonesia. This interaction has resulted in the creation of a form of Islam that is both respectful of local traditions and faithful to Islamic teachings. The integration of local wisdom into Islamic practices has also played a significant role in preserving cultural heritage in Indonesia, as it allows traditional practices to continue within the framework of Islam. Moreover, the incorporation of local wisdom into Islam Nusantara serves as a form of cultural resistance against the homogenizing tendencies of globalization. By maintaining and promoting local traditions within Islamic practices, communities across Indonesia can preserve their unique cultural identities while practicing their faith (Taufik, 2013). This has been particularly important in regions where local customs and traditions are at risk of being eroded by external influences. Islam Nusantara, therefore, represents a form of cultural resilience, where local wisdom is preserved and celebrated within the context of religious practice.

The role of local wisdom in Islam Nusantara also extends to promoting social harmony and conflict resolution. In many parts of Indonesia, local customs and Islamic teachings are used together to mediate disputes and promote peace within communities. For example, in Aceh, traditional conflict resolution practices, known as *peusijek*, are often conducted alongside Islamic rituals, creating a hybrid form of mediation that is both culturally relevant and religiously significant. This approach has been effective in resolving conflicts and maintaining social harmony in the region, demonstrating the practical value of integrating local wisdom into Islamic practices. Furthermore, the ability of Islam Nusantara to adapt and integrate local wisdom has contributed to its resilience and continued relevance in the face of changing social and cultural landscapes. This adaptability has allowed Islam to remain a vital and dynamic force within Indonesian society, capable of addressing contemporary challenges while staying true to its

religious principles (Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023). The flexibility of Islam Nusantara in accommodating local traditions has ensured its continued acceptance and practice across the archipelago, making it a key component of Indonesia's cultural and religious identity.

In conclusion, the integration of local wisdom into Islamic practices in Indonesia is a testament to the adaptability and inclusivity of Islam Nusantara. Through the incorporation of traditions such as *Maulid* in Aceh, *Sekaten* in Java, and *Tabligh Akbar* in Sumatra, Islam Nusantara has developed into a form of Islam that is deeply rooted in the local context and reflective of Indonesia's cultural diversity. This integration has not only preserved local traditions but has also reinforced the social and cultural fabric of Indonesian society, making Islam Nusantara a vital component of the nation's identity.

3.3. Islam Nusantara as a Form of Moderate Islam: Theological and Sociological Perspectives

Islam Nusantara, as a manifestation of moderate Islam, embodies a theological and sociological framework that supports a tolerant, inclusive, and pluralistic understanding of Islam. This approach is rooted in the belief that Islam, as practised in Indonesia, should be in harmony with the nation's cultural diversity and social norms. Theologically, Islam Nusantara draws on the rich traditions of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Sufism, which emphasize the importance of compassion, moderation, and social justice. These principles are seen as essential for fostering a peaceful and harmonious society, where different religious and cultural groups can coexist. This theological stance is crucial in countering the rise of radical ideologies that seek to impose a more rigid and exclusionary interpretation of Islam.

From a sociological perspective, Islam Nusantara is deeply intertwined with the concept of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and *musyawarah* (deliberation), which are central to Indonesian social life. These values promote community cohesion and collective decision-making, reflecting the inclusive nature of Islam Nusantara. The practice of Islam in Indonesia has historically been shaped by these communal values, which encourage dialogue and mutual respect among different religious and ethnic groups (Murfi & Fitriyani, 2018). This sociological foundation has enabled Islam Nusantara to become a bulwark against radicalism, as it fosters a sense of belonging and shared identity among diverse communities, thus reducing the appeal of extremist ideologies.

Islam Nusantara's commitment to moderation is also evident in its approach to religious education. Islamic schools and institutions in Indonesia, particularly those affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, emphasize the teaching of moderate Islamic values. These institutions promote a balanced interpretation of Islamic teachings, rejecting both extremism and liberalism. The curriculum often includes the study of classical Islamic texts alongside modern subjects, reflecting a holistic approach to education. By nurturing a generation of Muslims who are well-versed in both religious and secular knowledge, Islam Nusantara helps to cultivate a moderate and informed Muslim community that is resistant to radicalization (Sumiarti & Azizah, 2024).

The role of religious leaders in promoting Islam Nusantara as a moderate force cannot be overstated. Kyai and Ustadz, who are respected figures within their communities, play a pivotal role in disseminating the values of Islam Nusantara. They often lead by example, demonstrating the importance of tolerance, respect for diversity, and peaceful coexistence. Through sermons,

religious gatherings, and community engagements, these leaders convey the message that Islam is a religion of peace and mercy, not of violence and coercion. Their influence is instrumental in shaping public perceptions of Islam and in preventing the spread of radical ideologies. Moreover, Islam Nusantara actively engages in interfaith dialogue as a means of promoting religious tolerance and understanding. Such dialogues are seen as vital for building bridges between different religious communities and for fostering mutual respect (Saumantri, 2022). By participating in these dialogues, Muslim leaders and scholars contribute to a broader conversation about the role of religion in public life, emphasizing the common values shared by different faiths. This engagement not only strengthens the position of Islam Nusantara as a moderate force but also reinforces Indonesia's reputation as a model of religious pluralism.

Islam Nusantara's inclusive and moderate stance also extends to its interpretation of Islamic law. Rather than adhering to a strict and literalist interpretation, Islam Nusantara advocates for a contextual understanding of Sharia that takes into account local customs and contemporary challenges. This approach allows for greater flexibility in the application of Islamic law, ensuring that it remains relevant and responsive to the needs of the Indonesian people. By prioritizing the principles of *maslahah* (public interest) and *maqasid al-sharia* (objectives of Sharia), Islam Nusantara offers a legal framework that supports social justice, human rights, and the common good (Maimun, 2016).

In addressing the challenge of radicalism, Islam Nusantara employs a multi-faceted strategy that includes education, community engagement, and legal reform. This comprehensive approach is designed to address the root causes of radicalization, such as poverty, social exclusion, and ideological indoctrination. By providing social and economic support to vulnerable communities, promoting a moderate interpretation of Islam, and ensuring that the legal system upholds justice and equality, Islam Nusantara seeks to create an environment where radicalism has little appeal. This proactive stance has been effective in mitigating the spread of extremist ideologies and in promoting a culture of peace and moderation. Furthermore, Islam Nusantara's moderate approach is reflected in its response to global challenges, such as terrorism and religious extremism. Indonesian Muslim scholars and leaders have been active in international forums, advocating for a moderate and peaceful interpretation of Islam. Through their participation in global networks, they contribute to the broader discourse on Islam and its role in promoting peace and security. By presenting Islam Nusantara as a model of moderate Islam, Indonesia has positioned itself as a leading voice in the global fight against extremism.

In essence, Islam Nusantara represents a distinct and dynamic expression of moderate Islam that is deeply rooted in Indonesia's cultural and social context. Through its emphasis on tolerance, inclusivity, and social justice, Islam Nusantara provides a powerful counter-narrative to the radical ideologies that threaten global peace and security. By promoting a moderate interpretation of Islamic teachings, engaging in interfaith dialogue, and addressing the socio-economic factors that contribute to radicalization, Islam Nusantara plays a crucial role in safeguarding Indonesia's religious harmony and in contributing to the global discourse on moderate Islam. This theological and sociological framework not only preserves Indonesia's rich cultural heritage but also reinforces the principles of peace and moderation that are at the heart of Islam.

3.4. Islam Nusantara Cultural Diplomacy: Strategy and Implementation in International Relations

Islam Nusantara, as a unique expression of Indonesian Islam, has been effectively utilized as a tool for cultural diplomacy, reflecting Indonesia's commitment to promoting moderate and inclusive interpretations of Islam on the global stage. This approach is part of a broader strategy to enhance Indonesia's soft power, particularly within international organizations and global religious forums. By emphasizing the distinctive characteristics of Islam Nusantara—such as its adaptability to local cultures, tolerance, and emphasis on social harmony—Indonesia seeks to project an image of a pluralistic and peaceful Muslim-majority nation. This strategy not only strengthens Indonesia's diplomatic relations but also contributes to the global discourse on Islam and its role in fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding.

One of the key platforms where Indonesia has actively promoted Islam Nusantara is through its participation in international organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the United Nations. Indonesia has consistently advocated for the values of moderation and tolerance, positioning Islam Nusantara as a model for other Muslim-majority countries. For instance, during the OIC meetings, Indonesian representatives highlighted the success of Islam Nusantara in maintaining religious harmony and countering radicalism, offering it as a blueprint for other nations facing similar challenges (Jubba, Awang, Qodir, Hannani & Pabbajah, 2022). This advocacy is part of Indonesia's broader effort to contribute to global peace and security by promoting a moderate and inclusive understanding of Islam. In addition to its engagement with international organizations, Indonesia has also been active in organizing and participating in global religious conferences. These events serve as important venues for Indonesia to showcase the principles of Islam Nusantara and to engage with religious leaders and scholars from around the world. For example, the International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS), which Indonesia has hosted several times, has been a key platform for promoting the values of Islam Nusantara. Through these conferences, Indonesia has been able to influence the global discourse on Islam, emphasizing the importance of moderation, interfaith dialogue, and the rejection of extremism (Grzywacz, 2020). This engagement not only enhances Indonesia's soft power but also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Islam in the international arena.

The implementation of Islam Nusantara in cultural diplomacy is also evident in Indonesia's efforts to counter radicalism and promote peace in conflict-affected regions. By leveraging the principles of Islam Nusantara, Indonesia has been able to engage with various stakeholders in conflict zones, offering a model of religious tolerance and social harmony. For instance, Indonesia's involvement in peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan and the Southern Philippines has been informed by the values of Islam Nusantara. In these contexts, Indonesia has emphasized the importance of religious tolerance and the role of moderate Islamic teachings in resolving conflicts and fostering long-term peace. This approach has been well-received by the international community, further enhancing Indonesia's reputation as a leader in promoting moderate Islam. Moreover, Indonesia's cultural diplomacy through Islam Nusantara extends to its educational and cultural exchanges with other countries. Through initiatives such as the Indonesia-Middle East interfaith dialogues and the Muslim World League's cooperation programs, Indonesia has sought to share the principles of Islam Nusantara with a broader audience (Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023).

These exchanges not only help to spread the values of moderation and tolerance but also foster mutual understanding and respect among different cultures and religious traditions. By promoting these exchanges, Indonesia contributes to building a more peaceful and inclusive global community, where differences are celebrated rather than seen as sources of conflict.

Indonesia's strategy of utilizing Islam Nusantara in cultural diplomacy is also reflected in its efforts to engage with the global Muslim diaspora. Through its embassies and consulates around the world, Indonesia has been promoting the values of Islam Nusantara among Muslim communities abroad. This engagement helps to reinforce the image of Indonesia as a model of religious moderation and tolerance, while also strengthening ties with the global Muslim community. By presenting Islam Nusantara as a viable alternative to more rigid interpretations of Islam, Indonesia aims to influence the religious discourse within the diaspora, encouraging a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to Islam. Furthermore, Indonesia's use of Islam Nusantara in cultural diplomacy is part of a broader strategy to position itself as a global leader in the promotion of interfaith dialogue. By actively participating in and hosting international interfaith forums, Indonesia has been able to showcase the principles of Islam Nusantara as a model for peaceful coexistence among different religious groups (Hoesterey, 2018). These forums provide an opportunity for Indonesia to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders, including religious leaders, scholars, and policymakers, and to promote the values of tolerance, moderation, and social harmony. This engagement not only enhances Indonesia's soft power but also contributes to global efforts to promote peace and security.

Thus, Islam Nusantara plays a central role in Indonesia's cultural diplomacy, serving as a key instrument for promoting moderate Islam and enhancing Indonesia's soft power on the global stage. Through its active participation in international organizations, global religious conferences, and educational and cultural exchanges, Indonesia has been able to project the values of Islam Nusantara as a model for other Muslim-majority countries. This strategy not only strengthens Indonesia's diplomatic relations but also contributes to the global discourse on Islam and its role in fostering interfaith dialogue, peace, and social harmony. As Indonesia continues to navigate the complexities of international relations, the principles of Islam Nusantara will remain a cornerstone of its cultural diplomacy efforts, reinforcing its position as a leader in promoting moderate and inclusive Islam.

3.5. Islam Nusantara Challenges and Opportunities in Cultural Diplomacy

The promotion of Islam Nusantara as a cultural diplomacy tool presents both significant challenges and promising opportunities for Indonesia on the global stage. One of the primary challenges lies in the diverse interpretations of Islam worldwide, which can lead to resistance or misunderstanding of the Islam Nusantara concept. As Islam Nusantara is rooted in Indonesian culture and its unique adaptation to local traditions, it may be perceived as overly localized or even heterodox by more conservative or purist Islamic communities. This perception can hinder Indonesia's efforts to present Islam Nusantara as a model of moderate and tolerant Islam (Pratama, Librianti & Agustiningsih, 2023). Moreover, the global discourse on Islam is often dominated by more conservative or radical voices, which may overshadow the more moderate narratives that Islam Nusantara seeks to promote.

Another challenge is the geopolitical context in which Islam Nusantara is promoted. Indonesia's attempts to leverage Islam Nusantara in its cultural diplomacy are sometimes constrained by the geopolitical interests of other Muslim-majority countries that may not share or support Indonesia's approach. Countries in the Middle East, for example, have their interpretations of Islam that may differ significantly from the syncretic and pluralistic nature of Islam Nusantara. This divergence can create friction in diplomatic relations, as Indonesia may find it difficult to reconcile its promotion of Islam Nusantara with the dominant religious narratives in these regions. Additionally, the political instability and sectarian conflicts in some parts of the Muslim world can complicate efforts to promote a moderate version of Islam that is perceived as being influenced by local cultures (Muhammad & Duderija, 2022).

Despite these challenges, there are also substantial opportunities for Indonesia to optimize the promotion of Islam Nusantara in its cultural diplomacy. One significant opportunity is the growing global interest in countering extremism and promoting religious tolerance. As countries and international organizations increasingly recognize the need for moderate voices within the Muslim world, Islam Nusantara's emphasis on inclusivity, tolerance, and coexistence aligns well with these global priorities. Indonesia can position itself as a leader in this movement by highlighting Islam Nusantara as a successful example of how Islam can coexist harmoniously with diverse cultures and traditions. This alignment with global trends presents an opportunity for Indonesia to expand its influence and contribute to the global discourse on Islam and religious moderation. Furthermore, the digital age offers new avenues for promoting Islam Nusantara to a global audience. Social media and digital platforms provide Indonesia with the tools to reach a broader and more diverse audience, transcending traditional diplomatic channels. By effectively utilizing these platforms, Indonesia can engage with global communities, scholars, and religious leaders to foster a deeper understanding of Islam Nusantara. This digital diplomacy allows for a more interactive and participatory approach to cultural diplomacy, where Indonesia can address misconceptions, share experiences, and build networks that support the spread of Islam Nusantara's values (Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023). Moreover, digital platforms enable Indonesia to respond quickly to global events and discussions, ensuring that the voice of Islam Nusantara is heard in real-time.

The academic and intellectual appeal of Islam Nusantara also presents an opportunity for Indonesia to enhance its cultural diplomacy. By collaborating with universities, think tanks, and research institutions, Indonesia can promote scholarly studies and discussions on Islam Nusantara. These academic collaborations can help legitimize and disseminate the concept of Islam Nusantara within the global academic community, providing a robust intellectual foundation for its promotion. Furthermore, Indonesia can organize international conferences and symposiums focused on Islam Nusantara, inviting scholars and religious leaders from around the world to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas. Such initiatives not only strengthen the academic credibility of Islam Nusantara but also foster international partnerships that can amplify its reach and impact (Viartasiwi, Trihartono & Hara, 2020).

Another opportunity lies in Indonesia's strategic position within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). As a leading member of ASEAN, Indonesia can leverage regional platforms to promote Islam Nusantara as a model for religious moderation and cultural diversity in Southeast Asia. Through ASEAN, Indonesia can advocate for the incorporation of Islam Nusantara's values into regional initiatives aimed at promoting peace, stability, and

interfaith dialogue. This regional approach not only strengthens Indonesia's leadership within ASEAN but also serves as a stepping stone for promoting Islam Nusantara on a larger international scale (Wahyudi, 2019). Moreover, ASEAN's engagement with external partners provides additional channels for Indonesia to introduce Islam Nusantara to non-Muslim-majority countries, further broadening its influence.

The promotion of Islam Nusantara also aligns with Indonesia's broader foreign policy objectives of projecting itself as a moderate Muslim-majority democracy. By integrating Islam Nusantara into its diplomatic efforts, Indonesia can enhance its soft power and differentiate itself from other Muslim-majority countries. This unique positioning allows Indonesia to present itself as a role model for other nations grappling with issues of religious extremism and intolerance. Furthermore, by promoting Islam Nusantara, Indonesia can strengthen its relationships with Western countries and other non-Muslim-majority nations, which often view religious moderation as a crucial component of global security and stability (Umar, 2016).

However, the success of promoting Islam Nusantara in cultural diplomacy ultimately depends on Indonesia's ability to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the concept while adapting it to different cultural and geopolitical contexts. This requires a careful balance between preserving the core principles of Islam Nusantara and making it accessible and relevant to diverse global audiences. Indonesia must also invest in training and capacity-building for its diplomats, religious leaders, and cultural ambassadors to ensure that they are equipped to effectively communicate and advocate for Islam Nusantara (Schäfer, 2021). By doing so, Indonesia can overcome the challenges and fully capitalize on the opportunities that Islam Nusantara presents in the realm of cultural diplomacy.

In summary, while the promotion of Islam Nusantara as a tool of cultural diplomacy presents various challenges, including differing interpretations of Islam and geopolitical complexities, it also offers significant opportunities for Indonesia. By aligning with global trends towards moderation and tolerance, leveraging digital platforms, engaging in academic collaborations, and utilizing regional and international diplomatic channels, Indonesia can effectively promote Islam Nusantara on the global stage. This strategic approach not only enhances Indonesia's soft power but also contributes to the broader effort to promote peace, tolerance, and understanding within the Muslim world and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Islam Nusantara serves as a distinctive model of culturally embedded Islam that actively contributes to Indonesia's cultural diplomacy and international relations. By answering the research objectives, the study shows that the integration of Islamic values with local traditions has not only produced a moderate, inclusive, and contextually adaptive expression of Islam, but has also enhanced Indonesia's ability to project soft power globally. The role of Islam Nusantara in fostering intercultural dialogue, promoting religious tolerance, and countering radical narratives confirms its value as both a domestic cultural asset and a strategic diplomatic instrument.

The findings of this research advance current knowledge by situating Islam Nusantara within the framework of international relations, an area often overlooked in existing literature. This highlights the novelty of the study in bridging religious and cultural identity with state-level

diplomatic practices. The study confirms that Islam Nusantara is not only a religious phenomenon but also a diplomatic resource that Indonesia has begun to leverage to enhance its global influence, particularly in multilateral forums and interfaith engagements. Furthermore, this research provides a scientific basis for the use of local Islamic traditions in formulating cultural diplomacy strategies that are both effective and contextually resonant. It suggests that the model of Islam Nusantara could be adapted by other Muslim-majority countries seeking to promote a peaceful and pluralistic of Islam in their foreign policy.

Nonetheless, the study also recognizes the challenges in promoting Islam Nusantara globally, particularly in navigating theological contestations and cultural differences across the Muslim world. As such, future research is encouraged to conduct comparative studies across regions, and explore the reception and adaptability of Islam Nusantara in different international contexts. Field-based case studies and interviews with diplomatic actors and religious leaders may further enrich the empirical foundation of this emerging area of inquiry.

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