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The Role of Public Diplomacy the Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee: A Case Study of Indonesia's Film Submission to the Oscars

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the question: "How does The Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee (IOSC) contribute to public diplomacy?" Public diplomacy is a widely recognized tool in international relations, used to influence foreign audiences. It involves diplomatic actions taken by both government and non-government actors to advance national interests. Numerous mediums can be employed in public diplomacy, including literature, television, brands, festivals, consumer products, and films. In practice, much of the information about a country often comes from non-state actors, such as Indonesia's film industry. Ideal public diplomacy requires a collaborative effort between governmental and non-governmental entities (Leonard, 2002). This study examines how the film industry, through the activities of the Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee (IOSC), serves as an instrument of public diplomacy. Using Mark Leonard's public diplomacy theory, the study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, gathering data through interviews and literature review from both primary and secondary sources. The research offers insights into how IOSC's activities align with Leonard's public diplomacy framework, identifying potential gaps between theoretical concepts and real-world practices. Ultimately, the study argues that IOSC has significant potential to promote effective public diplomacy, and it underscores the importance of enhancing collaboration between IOSC and the Indonesian government to optimize IOSC's role in advancing Indonesia's international image through cinema.

Keywords: Public Diplomacy, Film Industry, Indonesia Film

Introduction

On September 17, 2024, The Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee (IOSC) chose "Women from Rote Island," directed by Jeremias Nyangoen and produced by Bintang Cahaya Sinema and Langit Terang Sinema, as Indonesia's entry for the 97th Academy Awards in the

International Feature Film category (Zulkarnaen, 2024). Led by actor Deddy Mizwar, the committee made this selection after screening and thoroughly discussing several top Indonesian films.

The IOSC, composed of nine film professionals and critics, was established by the Indonesian Film Company Association

(PPFI) and accredited by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

(AMPAS).

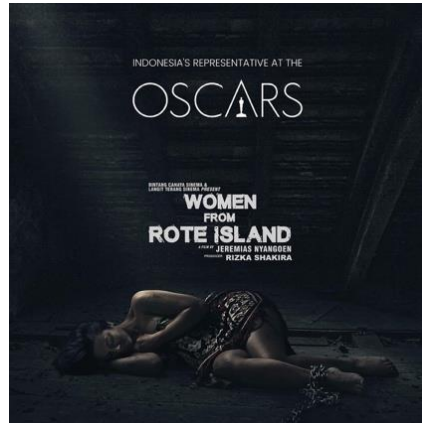


Figure 1. Indonesia's Representative the Academy 2025
Source: Instagram @bintangcahayasinema (2024)

Beyond the competition itself, Indonesia's Oscar submission serves as a platform for public diplomacy, promoting Indonesian culture and cinema to international audiences. In a recent meeting, Deddy Mizwar stressed the need for greater promotional support from the Indonesian government to improve the film's visibility and appeal at the Oscars (Zulkarnaen, 2024). He noted that insufficient promotion has often hindered Indonesia's ability to capture the interest of both the Academy jury and global audiences. Mizwar views this effort not only as an attempt to win an Oscar but also as an essential step in establishing Indonesian films on the global cinematic landscape, aligning with broader public diplomacy goals. The Oscars ceremony, set for March 2, 2025, will be broadcast from Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, reaching viewers in more than 200 regions worldwide.

"*Women from Rote Island*" follows a family in mourning on Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. After her husband Abram's death, Orpa (Merlinda Dessy Adoe) is left to raise their three

daughters alone. She postpones the burial, hoping for the return of her eldest daughter, Martha (Irma Novita Rihi), who works in Malaysia as a migrant labourer. When Martha finally returns after eight days, she is unrecognizable—withdrawn, with visible injuries from sexual assault by her employer. Heartbreakingly, she encounters further violence upon her return, as her community rejects her and her family, treating them with suspicion and prejudice due to Martha's changed demeanor.

This moving film explores issues of trauma, discrimination, and the harsh realities faced by Indonesian migrant workers abroad. By submitting *Women from Rote Island* to the Oscars, Indonesia not only seeks international recognition but also leverages the film as a form of public diplomacy, bringing global attention to the social challenges faced by Indonesian communities.

The film *Women from Rote Island* has received significant recognition, winning four Citra Awards at the 2023 Indonesian Film Festival, including Best Feature Film. This success has propelled the film onto the

international stage, earning accolades at various global film festivals. Directed and written by Jeremias Nyangoen, the film was recently awarded the Special Jury Prize at the 2024 New York Asian Film Festival (NYAFF) (Gandhawangi, 2024). The NYAFF jury praised the film for "its courageous and uncompromising portrayal of women as second-class citizens through the lens of a heinous act that tears a family and community apart, and its incredible use of non-actors to tell a difficult story in a region rarely portrayed on screen." (NYAFF, 2024).

Public diplomacy mobilizes cultural, and political values, and policy as sources of soft power to attract attention and encourage the interaction among government and non-governmental actors such as individuals, NGOs, and private sectors of the target countries and build long-standing relationships through strategic communications and negotiations (Murrow, as cited in Leonard, 2002). In general, information obtained by the foreign public about a country often comes from nongovernmental institutions. For example, books, films, television programs, brands, festivals, and goods and services. If uncontrolled, sources of information originating from non-governmental institutions can cause problems for the national interest of a country (Leonard, Stead & Smewing, 2002).

This phenomenon creates an urgency for the government to cooperate with non-governmental institutions in an effort to control information related to the country. Of course, the chosen institution has been adjusted to the interests of the country and the intended international public target. The activity of controlling or publishing information targeted at foreign publics is known as public diplomacy (Leonard, 2002).

One form of information sources from nongovernmental institutions is through the film industry. Since the beginning of its development, the film industry has been used as an instrument of public diplomacy, especially in the form of propaganda in the context of dealing with international issues or conflicts. In addition, Nicoletti (2021) assesses that film is a tool that has the power to form identity and define intercultural relationships. In the context of public diplomacy, the film industry is often published through international film festival activities. This activity has a function as a forum for film activists to get to know various cultures around the world (Chan, 2011). In addition, various countries have also integrated public diplomacy strategies with international film festival activities.

Indonesia's involvement in the Academy Awards dates back to 1987, when it first began submitting films for consideration in the International Feature Film category. This prestigious award, presented annually by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), is given to feature-length films produced outside the United States whose primary spoken language is not English (IOSC, 2024).

The film "Nagabonar," directed by MT Risyaf and starring Deddy Mizwar and Nurul Arifin, was the first Indonesian film submitted to the Academy Awards (Dwinanda, 2023). The Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee is composed of a diverse group of Indonesian film artists with various backgrounds and skills. Their responsibility is to choose one Indonesian film to represent the country at the Academy Awards in the International Feature Film category. This selection process is a collaborative effort aimed at promoting Indonesian cinema and establishing its presence on the global stage, recognizing the

Oscars as one of the most influential platforms in the film industry. Additionally, in the context of Indonesia, there is research that explores the use of locally produced films, such as *The Raid*, as a tool for cultural diplomacy to promote the traditional martial art of Pencak Silat (Fadli, 2016).

From the prior discussion, it becomes clear that the film industry plays multiple roles as an instrument of public diplomacy in Indonesia. Specifically, this pertains to the IOSC's efforts in leveraging the film industry as a channel to communicate Indonesia's narrative to the international audience through regular submissions to the Oscars. Additionally, the limited existing research and literature on Indonesia's use of the film industry for public diplomacy make this topic compelling to explore. Therefore, this study will focus on examining Indonesia's public diplomacy initiatives through its Oscar submissions as a means to showcase the nation's cultural potential to a global audience.

Based on the background outlined earlier, the main research question is as follows: How does the IOSC conduct public diplomacy through the film industry?

Theoretical Framework

The term public diplomacy was first introduced to academic circles in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, who established the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy. At that time, public diplomacy was understood as the impact of public attitudes on the development and execution of foreign policy. Additionally, its scope included aspects of international relations

beyond traditional diplomacy, such as shaping public opinion by governments in foreign nations, interactions among private interest groups from various countries, engagements between diplomats and foreign journalists, and cross-cultural communication processes (Dizard, 2001).

Griffin Malone expands the concept of public diplomacy by emphasizing the importance of understanding others as essential for its success. Malone highlights that comprehending the motives, culture, history, language, and public psychology of the target audience is key to effective public diplomacy (Gurgu & Cociuban, 2016). Additionally, John Brown describes public diplomacy as a process encompassing three roles: information dissemination, education, and cultural exchange. Philip Taylor uses the term "perception management" to explain the informational role of public diplomacy, differentiating it from public affairs, public interest, psychological operations, media management, and public diplomacy itself (Gurgu & Cociuban, 2016).

Researchers like Kevin Mulcahy and Harv Feigenbaum also contribute to the study of cultural diplomacy, highlighting its distinction from public diplomacy. They note that while public diplomacy focuses on short-term objectives such as spreading information and promoting policies, cultural diplomacy aims to foster long-term relationships (Gurgu & Cociuban, 2016). Mulcahy and Feigenbaum also conducted a comparative analysis between public and traditional diplomacy, with their findings illustrated in the following framework.

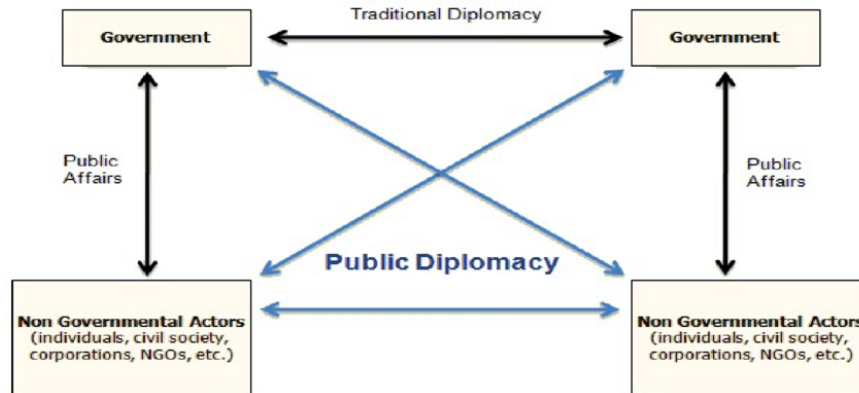


Figure 2. Traditional Diplomacy vs Public Diplomacy
Source: (Gurgu & Cociuban, 2016)

The distinction between public diplomacy and traditional diplomacy lies in the broader range of participants involved in international relations and the more extensive interests it represents beyond those of the government (Leonard, Stead & Smewing, 2002). Leonard (2002) outlines the ongoing process of public diplomacy through three main dimensions: (1) Reactive (News Management): Addressing issues in alignment with a country's strategic objectives, typically conducted within hours to days; (2) Proactive (Strategic Communication): Actively creating a news agenda through planned activities and events designed to strengthen core messages and influence foreign public perception, usually carried out over weeks to months; (3) Relationship Building: Establishing long-term connections with foreign audiences to promote a country's values and interests while understanding those of other nations, a process that takes place over several years.

Different countries, including Indonesia in this study, implement public diplomacy through various institutions, some under government control and others operating independently. Each institution, such as the IOSC, has distinct missions and priorities. To conduct public diplomacy effectively, it is essential to view these institutions as part of a spectrum and

identify any potential gaps that might hinder the achievement of national goals (Leonard, Stead & Smewing, 2002). Leonard's theory of public diplomacy will serve as the primary analytical framework in this study.

Film is one of the most popular forms of mass media today, designed to reach a wide audience. While primarily intended for entertainment, films also have the power to influence viewers' opinions, contribute to education, shape popular culture, and more. As a form of entertainment, which is a key function of mass communication, films combine visuals and audio to create an immersive experience that captivates audiences and prevents monotony (Diputra & Nuraeni, 2022). Though films are produced for commercial gain, they aim to hold viewers' attention through compelling storytelling and well-crafted screenplays. Films that lack engaging narratives, however, are often disregarded by audiences (Intan, 2021).

Sumarno (as cited in Rais, 2017) categorizes films into two main types: fictional and non-fictional. Fictional films follow imaginative storylines that diverge from real-life events and are typically produced for commercial purposes. These films rely on storytelling to build characters and plots that are not based on reality but serve to entertain. Non-fictional films, on

the other hand, are rooted in real stories and draw upon actual events, real individuals, and factual content. Unlike their fictional counterparts, non-fictional films often have an educational purpose (Rais, 2017).

Meanwhile, films extend beyond mere entertainment; they serve as educational and informational tools, frequently embedding moral lessons. This is evidenced by the emergence of films that promote positive values in an engaging and straightforward way. Through narratives and character portrayals, films can shape viewers' perceptions and emotions, offering deep insights into human experiences.

As is known, Indonesia began participating in the Oscars in 1987 in the International Feature Film Award category, previously called the Oscars Foreign Language Film. This award is presented annually by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) for feature-length films produced outside the United States, with the majority of dialogue in a non-English language. The IOSC consists of various Indonesian film artists with diverse backgrounds and expertise. The committee's role is to select one Indonesian film deemed worthy of representing the country at the Academy Awards in the International Feature Film category.

Material and Methodology

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative method, incorporating data analysis through in-depth interviews. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing information relevant to both theoretical and practical problem-solving. As Kriyantono (2014) notes, the purpose of qualitative research is to deeply explain phenomena by collecting extensive data, emphasizing depth and detail. Bungin (2017) further adds that qualitative research aims to describe and summarize various social conditions, situations, and phenomena, bringing these to light as characteristics, models, signs, or representations of specific occurrences.

To collect primary data, the author utilized interview techniques. A total of five informants were interviewed, consisting of two cinema programmers from Indonesian theaters, two social media and public relations professionals from a production house, and one communication expert from a private university in Jakarta. These interviews were digitally recorded with permission. Additionally, secondary data was gathered from various existing sources, such as books, journals, theses, newspapers, magazines, statements from Indonesian film industry figures reported in the media, and the internet. This secondary data serves to strengthen and complement the information obtained from the interview results.

Table 1. *Informant*

Name	Age	Location	Gender	Background
Informant 1	36	Jakarta	Male	Cinema Programming
Informant 2	42	Jakarta	Male	Cinema Programming
Informant 3	30	Jakarta	Female	Social Media & PR Production House
Informant 4	39	Depok	Female	Social Media & PR Production House
Informant 5	40	Bekasi	Male	Communication Expert

In this study, data collection was conducted through interviews, literature reviews, and documentation analysis from multiple sources. The diverse backgrounds of the participants significantly influence their roles and contributions within the Indonesian film industry. This variety of perspectives enhances the research by providing a more comprehensive understanding of audience reception. In the context of International Relations, this approach focuses on understanding the meanings and processes shaping global politics, typically through detailed examinations of particular events, phenomena, countries, organizations, or individuals connected to international relations.

The qualitative approach was chosen for this study due to its ability to uncover abstract meanings and present them through detailed descriptive explanations. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to provide an overview of the phenomena discussed based on collected data. Specifically, it will outline the public diplomacy activities conducted by the IOSC through Indonesia's regular film submissions to the Oscars. The study draws on sources such as journals, news articles, and statements from Indonesian film industry figures reported in the media, thereby validating secondary data.

The stages of data processing and analysis are crucial in addressing the research questions effectively. Raw data is collected and organized systematically to extract relevant insights, aiming to answer research questions and test hypotheses (Khrisna, 2022).

Data Transcription. Interviews in this study were conducted face-to-face and recorded using audio devices. Sessions were structured to enable in-depth exploration of the research topic, where carefully crafted questions were asked, and responses were

recorded. These audio recordings captured entire conversations, facilitating detailed analysis and ensuring the accuracy of the information collected.

Data Reduction. During data reduction, essential data elements were selected, summarized, and focused on to streamline the analysis process. Information that was relevant and substantial was condensed, with interview responses categorized into three interpretive groups: dominant-hegemonic (full agreement with the film's message), negotiated (partial acceptance with some reservations), and oppositional (disagreement with the message).

Data Presentation. Following reduction, the data was clearly and accurately presented using narrative text. This presentation drew from the in-depth interview transcriptions, which provided the primary basis for explaining the research findings. Narrative text illustrated and conveyed the interviewees' diverse experiences and perspectives, offering a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Conclusion Drawing and Data Verification. Finally, after validating the data, conclusions were drawn based on the reduced and presented information. The verification process included cross-checking findings against the research questions to ensure their accuracy and reliability. This thorough analysis, incorporating various perspectives and contextual relevance, allowed the researchers to reach sound conclusions that contribute meaningfully to the field.

Results and Discussion

Indonesian Film as Tools of Soft Power and Diplomacy

Historically, the film industry has been used extensively by many countries as a vehicle for propagating messages, particularly during the First and Second

World Wars (Cook & Sklar, 2021). This use of film illustrates its potential as an instrument for foreign policy, especially in the realm of public diplomacy.

Some informants identified several films that have been used by Indonesia as instruments of public diplomacy. These films, which embody various aspects of Indonesian culture, have become assets for public diplomacy and represent Indonesia's soft power.

"One film that can be considered a successful example of public diplomacy, especially in the realm of cultural diplomacy, is *Laskar Pelangi*, directed by Mira Lesmana. The film not only showcases the natural beauty and cultural richness of the Bangka Belitung Islands in a visually appealing way but also introduces audiences to the unique traditions of Belitung Island" (Interview with informant 1).

"In the case of the film *The Raid*, it serves as a medium to introduce the traditional Indonesian martial art, *pencak silat*, to the world. The global audience became more familiar with *pencak silat* following the film's success, which showcased not only a compelling story but also unique martial

arts movements. Particularly after its premiere at the 2011 Toronto Film Festival, audiences and critics alike were captivated by the distinctive movements of *pencak silat*" (Interview with informant 2).

"We must believe that films can be a valuable asset in popular cultural diplomacy. The film industry has the potential to contribute significantly to a country's brand, image, soft power, and creative economy. Through film, Indonesia can promote its nature, culture, values, history, tourism, products, and economy" (Interview with informant 5).

Diplomacy itself is defined as "the art of building and managing relations between nations, and of negotiating relationships through agreements" (Harvard Law School, 2023). It is now regarded as an essential element of a nation's foreign policy, playing a critical role in achieving national interests in relation to other nations or international organizations. Diplomatic efforts combine negotiation and communication to bridge differences, creating comprehensive national power (Harvard Law School, 2023).

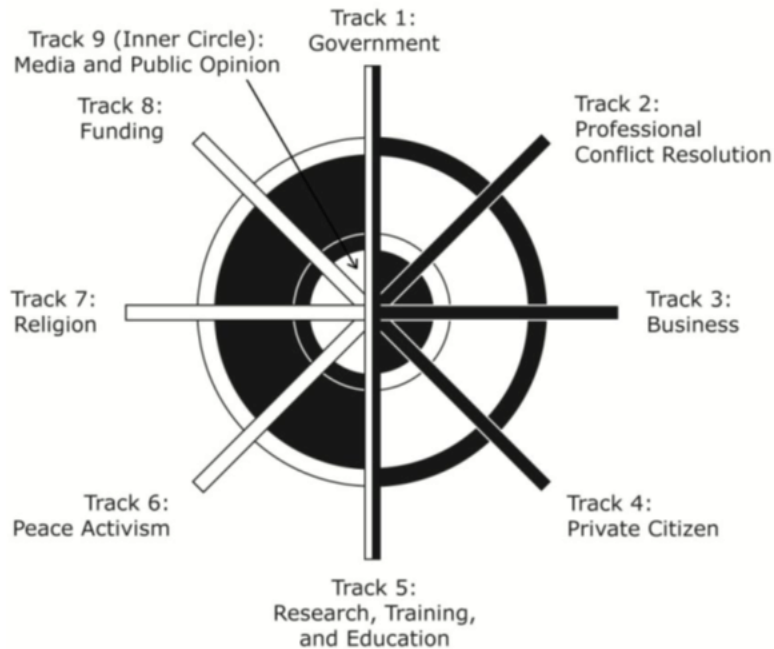


Figure 3. Multi Track Diplomacy
Source (Diamond & McDonald, 1996)

Figure 3 depicts the roles of nine public diplomacy actors, each with a distinct function within the system. While occupying different positions, these actors interact and work together to build synergistic relationships (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). Public diplomacy, which engages a wide range of participants and targets foreign communities, requires that governments not only employ strategies but also initiate domestic reforms. Its success is measured by shifts in public opinion. A country that is appealing to others garners increased attention and visibility, and Indonesia leverages public diplomacy to project its soft power. By promoting understanding and trust in international communities, Indonesia engages in public diplomacy both independently and in collaboration with the government, particularly in cultural, academic, tourism, and policy initiatives.

After interviewing informants from various backgrounds, it was found that the Indonesian film industry is gaining attention

from the global public. There is a growing opinion that, in terms of thematic variety and selection, Indonesian films are no longer lagging behind others. This is evidenced by the fact that Indonesian films have received awards at several prestigious international film festivals.

"We must also remember that many Indonesian films have garnered international public sympathy through their achievements. For instance, the film *Prenjak* (In the Year of Monkey) by Yogyakarta-based director Wregas Bhanuteja was selected as the best short film at the Cannes Film Festival's *Semaine de la Critique* in 2016. It explores the theme of how earning a living can be as trivial as a mere game of matches" (Interview with informant 3).

Film *Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts* achieved international acclaim by winning the NETPAC Jury Award at the Five Flavours Asian Film Festival 2017. I remember reading in the official release

that the director mentioned many viewers were intrigued by the cultural context of Sumba and Indonesia presented in the

film, and it was well-received in Poland" (Interview with informant 4).

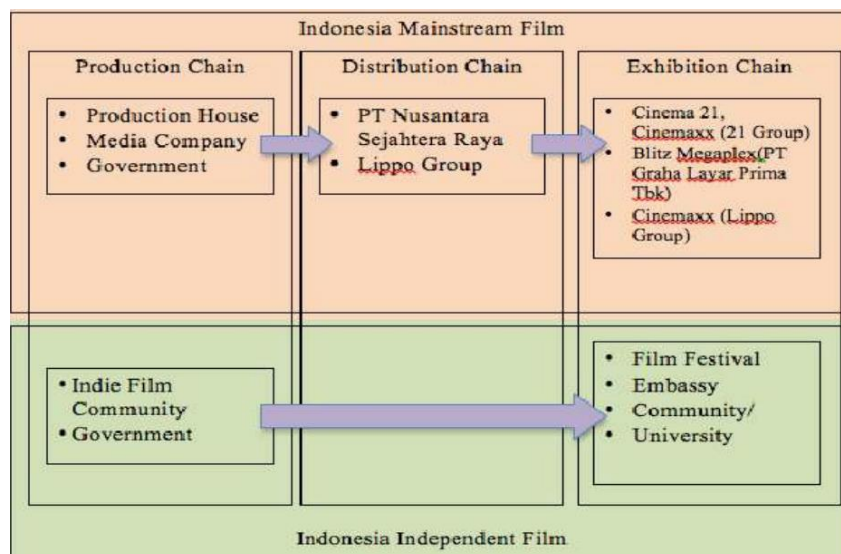


Figure 4. Indonesian Film Industry Scheme
Source: (Putri, Nuraeni, Christin & Sugandi, 2017)

Indonesia's film industry began its journey in 1950 with *Blood and Prayer*, directed by Usmar Ismail (Putri, Nuraeni, Christin, & Sugandi, 2017). For a deeper understanding of the Indonesian film industry's condition and evolution, see Figure 4.

In international relations, Indonesian films are often seen as tools of soft power and diplomacy. In *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Joseph Nye (2004) describes soft power as not merely the capacity to negotiate agreements but the ability to attract others, fostering interest that can lead to emulation. Soft power is often more accessible, economical, and effective in realizing a country's national goals (Ramadhan et al., 2009). Consequently, soft power relies on attraction rather than coercion or financial leverage to achieve desired outcomes (Nye, 2004).

"Indonesian production houses are using films as a tool for cultural diplomacy by

collaborating with international filmmakers. These partnerships often result in co-productions that showcase Indonesian themes and stories, thus promoting Indonesia's national interests and cultural values on a global stage. A prime example of this is the film 'The Man from the Sea,' directed by Japanese filmmaker Koji Fukada, which is a collaborative effort between Japanese and Indonesian filmmakers" (Interview with informant 4).

"Films are a powerful tool of soft power because they communicate values and narratives in a way that resonates emotionally with audiences. By telling compelling stories that reflect Indonesian life and culture, such as *Laskar Pelangi* or *The Raid*, films can influence perceptions and build a positive image of Indonesia internationally, supporting the country's diplomatic goals" (Interview with informant 5).

There has been limited research exploring IOSC's role from a public diplomacy perspective. However, prior studies highlight film's potential as a public diplomacy instrument, embedding elements of soft power tied to national interests. Both public diplomacy and the submission of Indonesian films to the Oscars share a common goal: to build international relationships and a favorable image. Hence, several nations, including Indonesia, utilize

film as a key component in their public diplomacy efforts.

Indonesia's participation in global film competitions and festivals exemplifies its public diplomacy strategy. Since 1987, Indonesia has submitted 22 of its top films for consideration in the Best Foreign Language Film category at the Academy Awards. Between 2019 and 2024, IOSC has submitted five films to represent Indonesia at the Oscars, including:

Table 1. Indonesia's Film Submission To The Oscars

No	Movie Title	Oscars Submissions	Genre
1	Impetigore	93rd Academy Awards (2020)	Horror
2	Yuni	94th Academy Awards (2021)	Coming-of-age story
3	Missing Home	95th Academy Awards (2022)	Comedy drama
4	Autobiography	96th Academy Awards (2023)	Thriller Drama
5	Women from Rote Island	97th Academy Awards (2024)	Thriller Drama

Source: (Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee, 2024)

The role of the Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee (IOSC) in promoting Indonesian films as a means of cultural diplomacy underscores the strategic potential of film in building Indonesia's international image and fostering global relationships. Informants from various backgrounds shared a similar perspective on the significance of IOSC's role in this context.

"I see film as a vital instrument of soft power, especially given today's global connectivity. The Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee's efforts to submit films to the Oscars is crucial for showcasing Indonesian cinema on a prominent global platform. This initiative not only promotes our film industry but also strengthens Indonesia's cultural presence and positive image in the international arena" (Interview with informant 2).

"The submission of Indonesian films to the Oscars serves as an effective tool for

public diplomacy. It shows the world that Indonesia's creative industry is capable of producing high-quality films. Through well-planned PR and social media strategies, we can amplify this effort to engage global audiences and promote a favorable view of Indonesia. The IOSC's role is essential, as it selects films that represent Indonesia's diverse cultural values" (Interview with informant 4).

"IOSC plays an important role in Indonesia's public diplomacy by submitting films to the Oscars, which fosters cultural exchange and highlights Indonesia's creative richness. From a communication standpoint, these films act as cultural symbols that encourage international understanding and interest. By utilizing this soft power approach, Indonesia can strengthen its international relationships and build a positive global image through cinema"(Interview with informant 5).

According to records, films selected by IOSC to represent Indonesia at the

Oscars have also consistently achieved recognition at various festivals and competitions both domestically and internationally. *Impetigore*, directed by Joko Anwar, became the first horror film to represent Indonesia at the Oscars. Even before its submission, *Impetigore* had earned notable international accomplishments, such as its International Premiere at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival in January 2020. It also won the Méliès Award for Best Asian Film at the 2020 Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival in South Korea. Domestically, the film garnered 17 nominations at the Indonesian Film Festival's Citra Awards, setting a record for the most nominations in the event's history. Filmmaker Garin Nugroho, who also serves as the head of Indonesia's Oscar selection committee, acknowledged the "hierarchy" within the film industry and emphasized, "It's time to democratize film genres" (Amindoni, 2020).

Another example is the film *Yuni*, directed by Kamila Andini, which won the Platform Prize at the 2021 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in Canada. At the Indonesian Film Festival, *Yuni* received 14 nominations. Kamila Andini was also nominated for Best Director at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards 2021, alongside notable filmmakers like Asghar Farhadi (Iran) and Ryusuke Hamaguchi (Japan). "The Oscar selection committee recognized that *Yuni* powerfully engages audiences with issues faced by young women during adolescence, capturing the paradoxes of our time — from patriarchy, religion, gender, sexuality, work, and education," said Hanung Bramantyo, the chair of Indonesia's 2021 Oscar Selection Committee. "It's a theme conveyed through daily life, set in schools, homes, and public spaces that mark this critical period of adolescence" (Murdaningsih, 2021).

Indonesian film editor Dewi Alibasah, a key informant in this study, explains that international film festivals play a role in educating foreign audiences about conditions in Indonesia (Alibasah, 2022). This form of education can increase interest among foreign audiences to visit Indonesia. For instance, her film *Tarling is Darling* (2017), which won awards at international festivals, helped shift some foreign perspectives about Indonesian society, which is often perceived as strictly Islamic. The film conveys a message of Indonesia's strong values of diversity and tolerance, challenging common assumptions and showcasing the cultural richness of Indonesian society.

IOSC Public Diplomacy Activities through the Indonesia Film Submission

The Indonesian Oscar Selection Committee (IOSC) comprises various Indonesian filmmakers with diverse backgrounds and expertise. IOSC's responsibility is to select one Indonesian film to represent Indonesia at the Academy Awards in the International Feature Film category. Since 1987, Indonesia has participated in the Oscars for this category, previously known as the Foreign Language Film category. The award is presented annually by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) for feature films produced outside the United States, with the majority of dialogue in a non-English language. This selection process is part of a collaborative effort to foster enthusiasm for showcasing and positioning Indonesian cinema on the global stage, recognizing that the Oscars is one of the most significant platforms in world cinema.

According to Leonard (2002), public diplomacy involves a country's efforts to establish or preserve its reputation to foster relationships with other nations, ultimately

advancing its national interests. In this study, the IOSC serves as a representative of Indonesia, tasked with shaping and upholding the country's image on the international stage.

In interviews conducted with key participants from various sectors of the Indonesian film industry, insights were gathered on the role of the Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee (IOSC) in supporting the nation's public diplomacy efforts. These perspectives highlight the strategic importance of the IOSC in enhancing Indonesia's cultural presence on the international stage through cinema.

"The Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee (IOSC) plays a pivotal role in connecting our national film industry with the global stage. By selecting one film to represent Indonesia each year, the committee highlights the best of our cinema and brings international attention to our cultural identity and storytelling. This is not only significant for the filmmakers but also aligns with Indonesia's public diplomacy goals by creating a cultural exchange through cinema. With the Oscars being such a prestigious platform, it elevates the international reputation of Indonesian cinema" (Interview with informant 1).

"The IOSC's role goes beyond just choosing a film; it's about representing the Indonesian film industry and culture as a whole. By carefully selecting films that reflect Indonesia's unique perspectives and values, the committee directly supports the country's public diplomacy objectives. The presence of Indonesian films at the Oscars fosters a positive image of Indonesia globally and helps demonstrate the creativity and diversity of our local film industry. It's a form of cultural diplomacy that has long-term benefits for international

relationships" (Interview with informant 2).

"The IOSC's selection process is crucial not just from a cultural perspective but also in terms of public diplomacy. By choosing films that represent diverse narratives, they showcase Indonesia's cultural complexity and artistic talent to the world. Public diplomacy, as Leonard (2002) suggests, involves crafting a country's reputation and fostering relationships—an effort that is very much at play in the IOSC's work. By participating in the Oscars, Indonesia demonstrates its creative capabilities and enhances its international relationships. This strategic use of film as soft power can strengthen Indonesia's global standing" (Interview with informant 5).

Before selecting *Women from Rote Island*, 16 Indonesian films submitted applications and underwent a selection process led by a committee organized by the Indonesian Film Producers Association (PPFI) and accredited by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS). The committee included members such as Deddy Mizwar, Cesa David Lukmansyah, Edwin Nazir, Garin Nugroho, Ilham Bintang, Ratna Riantiarno, Slamet Rahardjo, Thoersi Argeswara, and Widyawati. Deddy Mizwar expressed his hope for support and active participation from all stakeholders in the film industry regarding Indonesia's involvement in the Oscars.

"Our evaluation showed that promotional support for films in the Oscars is the weakest link, making it difficult to capture the attention of the jury and the public at such events," said Deddy. "Our mission goes beyond winning an Oscar; it is also about positioning Indonesian cinema on the world map" (CNN, 2024). Reflecting on this, director Garin Nugroho explained why

no Indonesian film has yet secured an Oscar nomination. "There are several factors, primarily the quality and the ability of the film to resonate internationally from the Academy's perspective—this is undoubtedly a primary criterion," he said (Amindoni, 2020). Additionally, effective promotional management is essential to attract both the Academy Awards audience and jury to the submitted film.

This provides an opportunity for the government, through The Indonesian Film Agency (BPI), to play a key role. BPI is a private and independent institution aimed at enhancing the participation of Indonesians in the film industry, established as part of the implementation of Law No. 33 of 2009 on Film (Humas Kemensetneg RI, 2018). Although the idea of creating BPI surfaced in 2010, one of the most significant steps toward its realization was taken by the Director General of Values, Arts, and Culture of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy in 2012 (Dori, 2012). However, the agency was officially established in 2014 under Presidential Decree No. 32 (Pasaribu, 2014). Key BPI functions relevant to this study include participating in international film festivals, organizing film exhibitions abroad, and promoting Indonesia as a filming location for foreign productions (BPI, 2017). BPI's mandate is further supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 30 of 2019, which stipulates that Indonesian films should be prioritized, with a focus on creating more opportunities for local films in order to protect national interests (Kemdikbud RI, 2019).

In interviews with industry professionals, various insights emerged on how a stronger collaboration between the Indonesia Oscar Selection Committee (IOSC) and The Indonesian Film Agency (BPI) could play a pivotal role in enhancing

the impact of Indonesian films as tools for public diplomacy. The informants highlighted the potential of strategic support and alignment with public policy to bolster Indonesia's cinematic presence internationally.

"While IOSC's selection process is essential, its impact could be so much greater if it worked closely with organizations like BPI. A film's quality is, of course, critical, but it also needs the right promotional push, especially at major events like the Oscars. For Indonesian films to truly stand out, the government should recognize that promoting our films abroad serves more than just the film industry—it's a way to share Indonesia's culture with the world. A stronger partnership between IOSC and BPI could give Indonesian films the visibility and resources they need to succeed on the global stage" (Interview with informant 2).

"To me, the collaboration between IOSC and BPI is key to solving our current challenges in international film promotion. Without solid promotional support, it's tough for our films to gain the attention they deserve overseas. Since BPI is involved in international festivals and promotes Indonesia as a filming destination, they're in an ideal position to work with IOSC to boost our films. With social media and PR, we could amplify the impact, showcasing Indonesia's culture and creative talent to a global audience" (Interview with informant 3).

"Film as a tool for public diplomacy needs a unified strategy. IOSC alone cannot shoulder the responsibility of representing Indonesia's image internationally. BPI's role is crucial in ensuring our films reach and resonate with a wider audience, not only through screenings but also with strong promotional campaigns. From a policy

standpoint, there's a need to support this collaboration, viewing films as more than just entertainment—they're cultural ambassadors. A close partnership between IOSC and BPI would not only extend Indonesia's reach but also foster stronger international connections by sharing our unique stories and values through cinema" (Interview with informant 5).

Interviews conducted in this study reveal that the current system is not operating ideally. There remains a gap between the government and those involved in organizing international film festivals in Indonesia (Pagaru, 2022). Effective public diplomacy requires a collaborative effort between the community and the government to achieve optimal outcomes. Furthermore, the Indonesian public's understanding of the film industry as a tool for shaping the nation's image is still relatively low. Interviews with prominent Indonesian filmmakers, such as Eric Gunawan and Ismaili Fahmi Lubis, support this view. According to Gunawan (2022), various film organizations in Indonesia still appear exclusive to industry insiders. This lack of inclusivity limits the impact Indonesian films could have at international film festivals, reducing their potential contribution to public diplomacy efforts.

Conclusions

This study explores the role of the Indonesian Oscar Selection Committee (IOSC) in advancing public diplomacy through Indonesia's film submissions to the Oscars. In alignment with the goals presented in the introduction, the findings suggest that IOSC's activities embody Indonesia's commitment to utilizing cinema as a medium for entertainment, education, and nation branding, positioning films as cultural assets in public diplomacy efforts. The research indicates that IOSC not only

facilitates international exposure for Indonesian films but also establishes valuable connections within the global film industry, thus contributing to Indonesia's image and influence on the world stage.

Discussions between participants, the researcher, and literature studies support the conclusion that IOSC serves as an instrumental channel of Indonesia's public diplomacy, primarily through its network-building efforts, which are consistent with Leonard's model of public diplomacy's third dimension—international collaboration. This collaborative approach enhances cultural exchange between Indonesia and the global audience, fostering mutual understanding and goodwill. To amplify the impact of IOSC's public diplomacy initiatives, it is recommended that future policies focus on strengthening the synergy between IOSC, the Indonesian Film Agency (BPI), and the Indonesian government.

Leonard's framework suggests that effective public diplomacy requires integration between legislative bodies and executive agencies; in this context, the Indonesian government could play a pivotal role in supporting IOSC's objectives, ensuring that public diplomacy strategies are cohesive and aligned with broader national interests. Future research could further explore the dynamics of this collaboration and assess the long-term effects of Indonesian films on international audiences, potentially providing a deeper understanding of how film-driven public diplomacy can contribute to establishing a sustainable global presence for Indonesia's cultural narrative.

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