

THE POTENTIAL OF THE SPICE ROUTE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF NATION BRANDING AND PROMOTION FOR INDONESIA: A SWOT ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Indonesia's Spice Route, historically a vital trade network, is now being strategically leveraged for nation branding, cultural diplomacy, and economic promotion. This study employs a SWOT analysis to evaluate Indonesia's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in revitalizing the Spice Route. Findings highlight Indonesia's rich spice heritage, government initiatives such as Indonesia Spice Up the World, and efforts to gain UNESCO recognition as key strengths. However, challenges include low productivity, inconsistent quality control, and competition from other spice-exporting nations. Opportunities lie in increasing global demand for sustainable spices and enhanced digital trade, while threats include regulatory barriers and fragmented stakeholder coordination. To maximize the Spice Route's potential, Indonesia must integrate cultural diplomacy, sustainable trade, and tourism strategies. This research contributes to discussions on nation branding, public diplomacy, and economic competitiveness, providing insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders.

Keywords: Indonesia, Nation Branding, Spice Route, SWOT Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has long been recognized as a global center for the spice trade, with its rich natural resources and strategic geographical position enabling extensive commercial and cultural exchanges across continents. The Spice Route, which connected Indonesian ports with international markets for centuries, was more than just a commercial network, it facilitated the exchange of ideas, traditions, languages, and technologies between civilizations in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe (Hamid, 2022). Today, the Spice Route is no longer solely a historical relic but is increasingly being leveraged as a strategic tool for nation branding and cultural diplomacy. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), has spearheaded initiatives from 2016 to 2024 to revitalize the Spice Route as a means to promote Indonesia's cultural identity, enhance

international engagement, and strengthen economic opportunities (Kemdikbud, 2024).

Nation branding is a systematic approach through which a country shapes its international image by emphasizing its unique attributes and competitive advantages. In this context, Indonesia's spice heritage serves as a key element in positioning itself as a global center for cultural and culinary diplomacy. The Spice Route Initiative aims to establish the Spice Route as a UNESCO World Heritage reinforcing its significance in global history while simultaneously promoting Indonesia as a hub of cultural and economic exchange (Kemdikbud, 2023). This initiative aligns with broader public diplomacy and soft power strategies that utilize cultural heritage to enhance international relations.

Despite Indonesia's strong historical connection to the spice trade, the global spice market today is highly competitive, with major players such as India, Vietnam, and Madagascar dominating exports (Anggrasari et al., 2021). Indonesian spices including cloves, nutmeg, pepper, and cinnamon continue to be in high demand but face challenges related to price fluctuations, quality control, and low value-added production. As a result, the Indonesian government has sought to integrate the Spice Route into its economic and nation branding strategies, emphasizing cultural tourism, culinary diplomacy, and trade promotion. Programs such as "Indonesia Spice Up The World" (ISUTW), launched in 2021, aim to increase Indonesian spice exports and expand the international presence of Indonesian cuisine, thus strengthening Indonesia's identity as a leading spice-producing nation (GAPMMI, 2021).

To assess the effectiveness and strategic potential of the Spice Route as an instrument of nation branding and promotion, this study employs a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). This framework provides a comprehensive evaluation of Indonesia's competitive position in the global spice trade and cultural diplomacy, helping to identify key advantages and areas requiring improvement.

By conducting a SWOT analysis of the Spice Route's role in nation branding and economic promotion, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how Indonesia can optimize its cultural and economic assets to enhance its global standing. The findings will contribute to discussions on nation branding strategies, public diplomacy, and economic competitiveness, offering insights for policymakers, cultural institutions, and the private sector in formulating sustainable development plans for Indonesia's spice trade and tourism sectors.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the potential of the Spice Route as an instrument of nation branding and promotion for Indonesia. A qualitative approach is particularly relevant for exploring complex socio-political phenomena, as it emphasizes textual analysis over numerical data in both data collection and interpretation (Bryman, 2016, p. 374). As Creswell (2010) notes, qualitative research allows for the development of research questions and sub-questions that guide the inquiry process, helping to capture the nuances of Indonesia's nation branding strategy through the Spice Route (Creswell, 2009). To systematically assess this potential, the study will employ SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), which provides a structured framework to evaluate the effectiveness, challenges, and prospects of the Spice Route as a nation branding tool.

In terms of data collection, this research relies on both primary and secondary sources, including government documents, academic journals, books, policy papers, and online publications. Another data collection technique used in this study is library research, where data is gathered from various materials available in library archives, such as newspapers, books, magazines, manuscripts, documents, and other records relevant to the research theme (Koentjaraningrat, 1984).

Conceptual Framework

Nation Branding

In an era of increasingly intense global competition, every nation is required to build a strong reputation both domestically and internationally. One of the key strategies to achieve this is through the application of the nation branding concept. Nation branding aims to create and manage a positive image of a country, enabling it to compete effectively on the global stage. According to Simon Anholt, nation branding is an effort to influence perceptions of a country by shaping its image, which directly impacts its reputation (Anholt, 2011).

Anholt defines the term 'brand' as comprising three main elements (Anholt, 2011). First, a brand encompasses the overall design or visual identity, including logos, appearances, and other design elements. Second, a brand reflects the values and culture of the entity behind it. Third, a brand is a reputation associated with a product or entity as perceived by the audience. In the context of nation branding, national reputation is the result of a collective assessment formed by public perceptions of a country's foreign policy, culture, tourism, exported products, and economic activities.

Dinnie (2008) elaborates on nation branding as a nation's effort to control the narrative of its own image rather than allowing foreign entities, such as international media or stereotypes, to define it (Dinnie, 2008). He emphasizes the importance of nation branding as a means of cultural differentiation in the international arena and as an instrument to attract attention while fostering positive relations with a global audience. This concept is closely linked to soft power since the effective implementation of nation branding requires support from various stakeholders, not just the government alone.

To ensure the success of nation branding, a strategic long-term plan is essential. This plan should include objectives such as attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), promoting exports, enhancing the tourism sector, and drawing global talent (Dinnie, 2008). Dinnie (2008) proposes three

fundamental questions as the foundation for formulating a nation branding strategy: "Where are we now?", "Where do we want to go?", and "How do we get there?" (Dinnie, 2008). Addressing these questions allows a country to design relevant strategies based on its internal capabilities and external conditions.

Dinnie also outlines seven primary strategies for nation branding. These strategies include nation-brand advertising, customer and citizen relationship management, nation-brand ambassadors, diaspora mobilization, nation days, the naming of nation brands, and nation branding tracking studies (Dinnie, 2008).

Nation-brand advertising serves as a primary tool to communicate nation branding messages to the public, utilizing print and digital media to enhance global awareness of a country's image and national interests. Customer and citizen relationship management highlights the importance of active interaction between the government and its citizens to build trust and public engagement, similar to customer relationship management in the business world. The role of nation-brand ambassadors, such as diplomats, public figures, or globally influential celebrities, is crucial in representing the values and culture of a nation on the international stage.

Additionally, diaspora mobilization leverages the influence of a country's diaspora community to promote its values and culture abroad, thereby expanding the reach of nation branding efforts. National celebrations or nation days also serve as a means to instill national pride while simultaneously promoting the country's culture and tourism to the world. The strategy of naming nation brands underscores the importance of creating a name, slogan, or identity that strongly and consistently reflects the country's image. Lastly, nation brand tracking studies are conducted periodically to evaluate the success of nation branding strategies and to adjust them in response to contemporary developments and dynamics.

This research will apply Dinnie's nation branding framework alongside a SWOT analysis to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and

threats of Indonesia's efforts in leveraging the Spice Route for nation branding. The SWOT analysis will provide a structured approach to identifying Indonesia's competitive advantages in cultural diplomacy while addressing potential challenges that may hinder its effectiveness. The findings will contribute to a broader understanding of how historical and cultural assets can be utilized as instruments of nation branding, reinforcing Indonesia's presence in the global landscape while supporting sustainable economic growth.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

SWOT Analysis, an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, is a strategic tool widely used to evaluate an organization's position in comparison to its competitors (Teoli et al., 2023). Although traditionally applied in business settings, SWOT Analysis can also be utilized at an individual level to assess personal positioning relative to others. The framework incorporates both internal and external factors (Teoli et al., 2023). Internally, "strengths" signify attributes that provide a competitive edge, whereas "weaknesses" represent internal limitations that may place the entity at a disadvantage (Teoli et al., 2023). On the external front, "opportunities" refer to favorable conditions in the broader environment that can be leveraged for growth, while "threats" denote external challenges that could pose risks (Teoli et al., 2023). In the context of this research, SWOT Analysis serves as a valuable method to examine Indonesia's strategic advantages and challenges in utilizing its historical spice trade legacy to strengthen its global image and diplomatic outreach.

DISCUSSION

Strengths Analysis of the Spice Route

Indonesia's Spice Route has significant potential as an instrument of diplomacy and promotion due to its deep historical and cultural relevance. The Spice Route is not only a reflection of Indonesia's historical importance in global trade but also serves as a cultural and economic asset that can enhance the country's nation branding efforts. The Indonesian government

has recognized this potential and has actively promoted the revitalization of the Spice Route through the Program Jalur Rempah Indonesia, which integrates historical documentation, cultural diplomacy, and economic promotion (Kemdikbud, 2024). This initiative has been designed to re-establish Indonesia's historical narrative as a key player in the global spice trade and position the country as a leader in cultural diplomacy.

One of the main strengths of the Spice Route as a diplomatic instrument is its potential to reinforce Indonesia's nation branding. A strong national brand is essential for global competitiveness, and Indonesia has leveraged its spice heritage to enhance its cultural and economic influence. The government has integrated multiple strategies, including nation brand advertising, diaspora mobilization, and cultural diplomacy, into the promotion of the Spice Route. By utilizing historical narratives, Indonesia can establish itself as a country with a rich maritime heritage that has historically connected civilizations across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The *Muhibah Budaya Jalur Rempah*, a maritime expedition using TNI AL's KRI Dewaruci, is one of the flagship initiatives that strengthens Indonesia's international image while engaging young Indonesians in cultural preservation efforts (Kemdikbud, 2024).

In addition to cultural diplomacy, the Spice Route serves as a valuable economic asset for Indonesia. The campaign Indonesia Spice Up the World (ISUTW) highlights the importance of Indonesia's spice exports and the expansion of Indonesian restaurants abroad, reinforcing the country's soft power through gastrodiplomacy (Kemenparekraf/Baparekraf RI, 2021). This program has successfully positioned Indonesia as a global hub for spice-based cuisine, strengthening its culinary diplomacy and increasing demand for Indonesian spices in the international market. With a recorded annual export growth rate of 2.95% and a total export value of USD 1.02 billion in 2020, ISUTW supports Indonesia's branding as a country that produces high-quality, flavorful, and health-benefiting spices (Kemenparekraf/Baparekraf RI, 2021).

Furthermore, Indonesia's efforts to register the Spice Route as a UNESCO World Heritage Site provide long-term benefits in enhancing the country's cultural and tourism appeal marks a significant milestone in recognizing Indonesia's historical contribution to global trade and cultural exchange (Kemdikbud, 2024). If successfully designated as a World Heritage, the Spice Route will gain international recognition, further strengthening Indonesia's global standing as a country with an invaluable historical and cultural legacy. This recognition will also enhance tourism and encourage greater investment in cultural preservation and economic development related to the spice trade.

Overall, Indonesia's strategic promotion of the Spice Route through historical research, cultural diplomacy, nation branding, gastrodiplomacy, and UNESCO recognition demonstrates its effectiveness as a tool for diplomacy and economic promotion. By capitalizing on its rich spice heritage, Indonesia can continue to reinforce its global influence, attract investment in its spice industry, and expand its soft power through cultural exchange and economic diplomacy. Dinnie's nation branding strategies highlight the role of culture, heritage, and tourism in building a strong national brand. The Indonesian government's approach aligns with Dinnie's model by incorporating cultural diplomacy, historical heritage, and soft power to enhance Indonesia's international image.

Weaknesses Analysis of the Spice Route

Despite Indonesia's historical significance in the global spice trade, several challenges hinder the country's ability to maximize the potential of its spice exports as a diplomatic and promotional instrument. One of the primary weaknesses is the low productivity of Indonesian spices. As highlighted by the Ministry of Trade, the productivity of Indonesian pepper, for example, remains significantly lower than that of competitors such as Vietnam (Yuniartha, 2020). While Indonesia's pepper production is only around 400-450 kg per hectare, Vietnam's productivity reaches up to 2 tons per hectare (Yuniartha, 2020). This stark contrast is primarily due to aging spice trees, which limit yield capacity and require revitalization efforts. The low productivity directly

affects Indonesia's competitiveness in the global spice market, making it difficult to position itself as a dominant supplier.

Another critical weakness lies in the quality of Indonesian spice exports. Many local farmers lack adequate knowledge of proper cultivation techniques and post-harvest management. Poor harvesting practices, such as shaking nutmeg trees to collect fallen fruit, result in compromised hygiene standards (Yuniartha, 2020). Moreover, improper drying and storage methods lead to high levels of aflatoxin contamination, which has caused the rejection of Indonesian spice exports in international markets. Such quality control issues undermine Indonesia's reputation as a reliable spice exporter and weaken its potential for diplomatic leverage through the spice trade.

Furthermore, the lack of value addition in Indonesia's spice exports presents a major challenge. A significant portion of Indonesian spices is sold in raw form rather than processed into high-value products, such as essential oils, extracts, or spice-based pharmaceuticals (Yuniartha, 2020). This limits Indonesia's ability to capitalize on the growing global demand for functional and health-related food products. Without stronger investment in spice processing and branding, Indonesia risks being merely a supplier of raw materials rather than a leader in the global spice trade.

Regulatory and trade barriers also pose significant obstacles to Indonesia's spice export potential. Stringent import regulations in key markets, such as the prohibition of certain pesticides like chlorpyrifos and chlorpyrifos-methyl, have created additional hurdles for Indonesian spice exports (Yuniartha, 2020). Compliance with international food safety standards requires better coordination between government agencies, exporters, and farmers. Without addressing these regulatory challenges, Indonesia will struggle to fully integrate its spices into global supply chains and use them as a tool for diplomatic and economic engagement.

Furthermore, Dinnie's nation branding strategies emphasize consistency and reliability as essential factors in building a strong brand identity. The weaknesses in Indonesia's spice production and export quality

pose significant challenges in achieving this consistency. Addressing these issues through agricultural modernization, value-added product development, and compliance with international regulations is necessary to align with Dinnie's framework of nation branding. By ensuring quality control and sustainable production, Indonesia can enhance its reputation as a global spice leader and strengthen its economic diplomacy.

Opportunities Analysis of the Spice Route

The historical Spice Route has long been a symbol of Indonesia's rich cultural and economic legacy, positioning the archipelago as a vital center of global trade for centuries. The data from Bureau of Statistics (*BPS*) on Indonesia's export of medicinal plants, aromatics, and spices from 2012 to 2023 underscores the country's continued relevance in the global spice market, making the revitalization of the Spice Route a strategic opportunity for economic growth and nation branding.

One of Indonesia's key opportunities in leveraging the Spice Route lies in its unparalleled historical and cultural heritage. As the former heart of the global spice trade, Indonesia possesses a compelling and authentic narrative that can be revitalized to attract international recognition and engagement (Kemdikbud, 2024). The historical significance of the Spice Route, which connected Indonesia to major civilizations across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, provides a strong foundation for diplomatic and cultural engagements. By strategically branding itself as a modern "Spice Hub," Indonesia can reinforce its cultural identity while expanding its soft power through heritage diplomacy. The revitalization of the Spice Route aligns with the concept of nation branding, where cultural assets are utilized to enhance a country's global image and influence.

Furthermore, the increasing global demand for natural and organic spices presents a substantial economic opportunity. As consumer preferences shift toward sustainable and ethically sourced products, Indonesia can position itself as a key supplier of high-quality spices while simultaneously promoting its historical significance. The success of initiatives such as

Muhibah Budaya Jalur Rempah further highlight Indonesia's potential to integrate cultural heritage with economic development. Through a well-executed strategy that includes tourism promotion, cultural festivals, and international partnerships, Indonesia can leverage its historical spice trade legacy to strengthen diplomatic ties, boost economic growth, and enhance global recognition as a cultural and economic powerhouse in the spice industry.

In term of economy, the data shows that Indonesia's total spice export volume fluctuated but remained significant, reaching 289,390.3 tons in 2023 (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024). Key markets such as Pakistan exhibited a sharp increase from 4,465.9 tons in 2022 to 22,883.5 tons in 2023, demonstrating the strong demand for Indonesian spices in South Asia (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024). By strategically marketing the historical significance of the Spice Route, Indonesia can reinforce its image as a key player in the global spice industry.

Furthermore, the data reflects diverse and growing markets, which present an opportunity for economic expansion. While traditional markets such as Pakistan and the Netherlands remain strong, emerging markets in Southeast Asia and South Asia indicate potential for increased trade. Thailand, for instance, showed a fluctuating trend, with spice exports reaching 6,395.9 thousand USD in 2023, while Bangladesh saw an increase in FOB value from 114,793.7 thousand USD in 2021 to 127,081.9 thousand USD in 2023, indicating sustained demand (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024). The fluctuations in export volumes and FOB values highlight the need for market diversification to stabilize revenues and enhance trade resilience. Expanding partnerships within ASEAN, as well as strengthening trade agreements with South Asia and Europe, could facilitate increased exports and greater market penetration.

Another key opportunity is the shift towards sustainable and high-value-added products. The increasing consumer preference for organic, fair-trade, and sustainably sourced spices provides Indonesia with a chance to differentiate itself in the global market. The FOB value of Indonesia's spice

exports peaked at 765,818.7 thousand USD in 2021, reflecting the industry's potential to generate substantial revenue (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024). By investing in certification programs and improving the quality of spice exports, Indonesia can target premium markets that are willing to pay a higher price for ethically sourced products. This strategy aligns with the nation's branding goals, positioning Indonesia as not only a spice producer but also a leader in sustainable and responsible trade.

In addition, improvements in trade infrastructure and digitalization can significantly enhance the efficiency of spice exports. The historical Spice Route relied on maritime trade, and by modernizing ports, improving supply chains, and adopting digital trade platforms, Indonesia can revitalize this ancient route with modern efficiency. The export volume of Singapore, a major trade hub, remained relatively stable at 3,112.3 tons in 2023, highlighting the importance of efficient logistics in maintaining trade flow (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024). Leveraging blockchain technology for supply chain transparency and promoting e-commerce platforms dedicated to Indonesian spices could further enhance global market access.

The resilience of Indonesia's spice trade, despite fluctuations due to external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, also demonstrates an opportunity for strategic policy intervention. Government initiatives that support smallholder farmers, provide export incentives, and invest in research for spice-based pharmaceuticals and cosmetics can further solidify Indonesia's standing in the global spice industry. For instance, the overall export value decreased from 605,781.1 thousand USD in 2022 to 465,141.1 thousand USD in 2023, indicating a need for policy-driven measures to stabilize and enhance market performance (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024). Strengthening branding efforts through cultural diplomacy, culinary tourism, and international trade fairs can complement these economic strategies, making the Spice Route an essential component of Indonesia's nation-branding efforts.

Another crucial aspect of the Spice Route is the opportunity to support the role of local governments, which hold a strategic position in

economic and cultural promotion. Local governments in key Spice Route regions, such as North Maluku, Aceh, and Sulawesi, possess unique opportunities to leverage their historical significance for tourism, trade, and cultural diplomacy. Collaborative efforts between the central government and local administrations can enhance the visibility of these regions on the global stage. For instance, just as the Kutai Kartanegara Regency Government strategically integrates economic and cultural interests in organizing the Erau International Folk Art Festival (EIFAF) successfully attracting global attention (Pasan, 2018). This similar approaches can be applied to promote the Spice Route. By organizing international spice festivals, heritage tourism programs, and trade expos, local governments can contribute to the national branding strategy while fostering regional economic growth. Additionally, local policymakers can support small-scale farmers and spice traders through training programs, access to international markets, and sustainable agricultural practices. Strengthening this synergy between central and local governments will not only amplify the impact of Indonesia's nation-branding efforts but also create a more inclusive and sustainable model for economic development through the revitalization of the Spice Route.

Dinnie's nation branding strategies advocate for leveraging cultural assets for economic gain. Indonesia's use of the Spice Route as a branding tool aligns with this approach by integrating history, gastronomy, and trade. By expanding the global reach of its spice-based cuisine and promoting sustainable spice farming, Indonesia can build a compelling narrative that strengthens its brand as a cultural and economic powerhouse. The integration of digital platforms for spice trade and culinary diplomacy further supports Dinnie's framework of modern branding strategies.

Threats Analysis of the Spice Route

Despite the promising potential of the Spice Route as a tool for diplomacy and promotion, several challenges threaten the effectiveness of Indonesia's nation branding strategy. One of the main threats is the intense competition from other countries that have already established strong historical narratives and branding strategies related to maritime trade.

Nations such as China with its Maritime Silk Road initiative and Japan with its Cool Japan campaign have successfully leveraged their historical and cultural assets to enhance global recognition. Indonesia's Spice Route must compete with these well-established initiatives in a saturated global marketplace, where historical trade narratives are increasingly utilized for nation branding and economic diplomacy. Without a more innovative approach, Indonesia risks being overshadowed by these dominant narratives, which could reduce the impact of the Spice Route campaign.

Another significant challenge is the lack of a unified vision among key stakeholders involved in the Spice Route program. As highlighted by Kumoratih (2022), different actors, including the government, the private sector, and civil society have varying interpretations and priorities regarding the Spice Route initiative because there are still no single visual identity made (Kumoratih, 2022). While the government sees it as a tool for cultural diplomacy and international recognition, the private sector focuses on its economic and tourism potential, and local communities emphasize its historical and identity-building aspects. These competing interests create a fragmented approach to branding and hinder the development of a cohesive strategy. Without a clear and coordinated effort, the Spice Route campaign may fail to deliver a compelling and consistent narrative to global audiences.

The effectiveness of nation branding through the Spice Route also faces threats from logistical and economic constraints. While the Indonesia Spice Up The World (ISUTW) campaign aims to promote Indonesian spices and cuisine internationally, its ambitious target of expanding to 4,000 Indonesian restaurants worldwide by 2024 remains a significant challenge (Rahman H, 2021). Data from 2021 indicated that there were only 1,177 Indonesian restaurants across 48 countries, highlighting the gap between goals and actual implementation (Widiastutie, 2021). The lack of clear and updated data regarding the campaign's impact further complicates efforts to assess its success and make necessary adjustments. If these logistical and economic hurdles are not addressed, the ISUTW campaign may struggle to achieve its objectives, limiting Indonesia's ability to enhance its global culinary presence.

In summary, while the Spice Route holds significant potential for Indonesia's nation branding and cultural diplomacy, the presence of strong international competitors, internal coordination issues, logistical and economic constraints, weak diaspora mobilization, and global uncertainties represent substantial threats. Addressing these challenges will be essential for Indonesia to fully realize the strategic benefits of its historical spice trade legacy in the modern era.

CONCLUSION

Spice Route presents a unique and strategic opportunity for Indonesia to enhance its nation branding, strengthen cultural diplomacy, and boost its economic position in the global spice trade. By leveraging its rich historical legacy and cultural assets, Indonesia can establish itself as a global hub for spice-based culinary diplomacy, tourism, and trade. The SWOT analysis conducted in this study highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with this initiative, providing insights into how Indonesia can optimize the Spice Route for nation branding and economic promotion.

Indonesia's historical connection to the global spice trade serves as a powerful foundation for cultural diplomacy, with initiatives such as *Muhibah Budaya Jalur Rempah* and *Indonesia Spice Up The World* demonstrating the government's commitment to integrating historical narratives into economic and soft power strategies. The pursuit of UNESCO World Heritage recognition for the Spice Route further enhances its global visibility, positioning Indonesia as a key actor in preserving and promoting maritime heritage.

Despite these strengths, several challenges remain. Low spice productivity, inconsistent quality control, limited value-added production, and regulatory barriers hinder Indonesia's competitiveness in the international spice market. Additionally, fragmented coordination among stakeholders and intense competition from other nation-branding initiatives, such as China's Maritime Silk Road and Japan's Cool Japan campaign, pose significant threats to the effectiveness of Indonesia's Spice Route branding

efforts. Addressing these challenges will require strategic policy interventions, investment in sustainable agricultural practices, and stronger stakeholder collaboration.

The opportunities presented by growing global demand for organic and ethically sourced spices, advancements in digital trade infrastructure, and increased emphasis on cultural heritage in international diplomacy offer promising pathways for Indonesia to strengthen its global positioning. By aligning its nation branding strategy with sustainable trade practices, tourism development, and cultural heritage preservation, Indonesia can maximize the economic and diplomatic potential of the Spice Route.

In conclusion, the Spice Route serves as more than just a historical remnant; it is a strategic tool for reinforcing Indonesia's global influence and economic resilience. However, realizing its full potential requires a cohesive and adaptive approach that integrates cultural diplomacy, trade expansion, and sustainable development. Future research should explore policy recommendations, stakeholder engagement models, and the long-term impact of Indonesia's Spice Route initiatives on global perceptions of the country. By addressing its challenges and capitalizing on opportunities, Indonesia can successfully position itself as a leading cultural and economic power, using its spice heritage as a powerful instrument of nation branding.

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