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Nov 04, 2016 by [Gadis Ranty](#)

The Java Project: A Case Study in Place Branding ^[1]

Note from the CPD Blog Manager: *This piece originally appeared in the [Jakarta Post](#).*

After gaining a big name in the coding world, “Java” has become a generic term for coffee of any type and origin.

In April, Washington state finally declared coffee the official state drink. The bill followed a grassroots campaign called #WA4JAVA built since 2011.

During the U.S. primary election season, Java Joe's in Des Moines and Bongo Java's Fido in Nashville were thrust into the U.S. media limelight when Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton reached out to voters by visiting the coffee shops. Many other coffee shops and roasting companies throughout the U.S. are named after "Java".

But does such labeling increase "Java" exports from Indonesia to the U.S. as a prominent market for Indonesian coffee? Not necessarily. There is a weak causal relation between the labeling and export volume, if any. What's missing here is knowledge and acknowledgement.

Most coffee consumers in the U.S. do not necessarily know that Java is an island in Indonesia. U.S. coffee businesses, importers, roasters, retailers and experts, are hesitant to mention Indonesia in their product descriptions or labels. They only identify the specific region, farmer or cooperative of farms, for instance, Java Kayumas, Sumatra Mandheling, Wahana Rasuna, Sulawesi Tana Toraja, Bali Kintamani.

Even Erna Knutsen, a legend of specialty coffee in the U.S., only gave credit to Sumatra Mandheling: "Well, it was the beginning of my love affair with Mandheling, Sumatra. Oh God, it's still my favorite coffee."

The coffee connoisseur simply appreciates a specific Indonesian coffee without understanding the diverse flavors and characters or the complexity of Indonesian coffee. They are barely aware that Sumatra is in Indonesia, but they know perfectly the earthy taste and body they're looking for in a cup of Sumatra.

Nevertheless, Indonesia's coffee export volume is projected to rise this year — which is timely given rising global demand amid volatility of supply. But such ignorance in the U.S. market could eventually undermine Indonesia's integrity and credibility as one of the largest coffee exporters to the U.S. and the world's fourth-largest coffee producer.

It is a serious wake-up call for all of us to solidify Indonesia's brand in the world coffee industry.

Indonesia needs to ramp up its place branding project as a major exporting country for various rich-flavored coffees. The “Java” project entails policies in sustainable farming management, local farmers’ empowerment, farming technology, export marketing, etc. These policies must be coupled with strategies and symbolic actions — remarkable and newsworthy representation of the national story — to enhance Indonesia’s reputation abroad.

The great news is that Indonesia is already on the list of the top 50 countries in the Anholt-GfK Roper Nations Brand IndexSM 2015. Consistency among these policies, strategies and symbolic actions will level up its rank or at least sustain it.

Not every country in the world grows coffee. The world’s second-largest traded commodity is only produced by countries within the equatorial zone called the bean belt. Green bean production is really a privilege. The place branding project is an embodiment of our appreciation as a nation.

In February, at the National Coffee Development meeting, Vice President Jusuf Kalla called for the revitalization of the entire process of Indonesian green bean production, in order to bring about better quality.

Apart from making October 1 National Coffee Day, signing up as the 2016 “portrait country” of the Specialty Coffee Association of America — the world’s largest coffee trade association — from April 14-17 in Atlanta was a crucial symbolic action. The measures signified Indonesia’s readiness to tap into the U.S. specialty coffee market.

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A projection of U.S. coffee trends by the National Coffee Association of the USA shows a soaring 70 percent rise in consumption of gourmet coffee among the 18-39 age group. The U.S. emerging market is dominated by millennials who are willing to pay the premium costs and are loyal to brands that support causes they care about.

Coffee sustainability and direct trade with farmers are among major concerns. They want to know the stories of their coffees, from the seed to the cup, and be emotionally engaged with the brand.

How can we tap into such a huge potential market? First, given that these millennials are social media savvy, we need to engage them online: start the conversation on topics relevant to them. For instance, ask them what they really know of Indonesian coffee; share the information about the wide-ranging variety of Indonesian coffees — types of flavor they barely

imagine can be stored in coffee beans, the intersections between coffee businesses in the U.S. and Indonesia, coffee processing methods across Indonesia, local community empowerment, probiotic luwak coffee, etc.

A social media account under @R1coffee or Remarkable Indonesian Coffee managed by the representative offices of the Indonesian government in the U.S. has been a hub for such engaging conversations.

Second, these millennials must get a first-hand experience. Invite them to visit the coffee farms, to see the whole process and interact with farmers. Seeing is believing! Cultural exchange as part of public diplomacy enhances brand credibility.

Third, cross-promotion among marketing platforms for an ever-present network of millennials is reinforcing Indonesia's place branding strategies.

As roasting and brewing techniques play a pivotal role in unlocking the real flavors of the beans, along with the thriving Indonesian coffee roasting companies and coffee shops throughout the country, millennials could learn about coffee and channel creativity and entrepreneurship sense through the small coffee business, a big propellant of Indonesia's creative economy.

In the U.S., we have, among others, Michael Widjaja, a California-based Indonesian roaster called "Blue Flame Coffee" and Nico, Sam, Sean and Winny, Ohio-based young Indonesians who started up an artisanal Indonesian coffee micro-roasting company specialized in single-origin cold brew, "Lokal Cold Brew".

Now, who wants to follow suit? The sky is your limit. Don't forget to send your success stories viral on social media with the hashtag #CoffeelsIndonesia.

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