

Digital diplomacy of the BRICS in the sphere of culture

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Abstract — Digital diplomacy is a new and important part of public diplomacy nowadays. The influence of the Internet is growing very fast. And the more country or any entity is appeared in this space the more power it has in the world. This research is devoted to the usage of Internet by BRICS member states to overspread its ideas, values and influence in the world by means of cultural projects.

Keywords— digital diplomacy, BRICS, culture, public diplomacy, internet diplomacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the last several decades the main instrument of promoting ones' political interests is "soft power" that is the opposite to "hard power" or weapons. This phenomenon was mentioned in 1871 for the first time [1]. Today it has a lot of definitions and aspects, included into it. Some specialists define it as a cultural diplomacy under the control of society, others call it propaganda, the third ones name it "soft power" and etc. In spite of different views there are several characteristics that can be general for all the definitions namely public diplomacy serves for forming and transforming of international public opinion in the political interests of the producer.

Public diplomacy is based on the project approach and embraces such spheres as culture, education, informational activities, everyday communications and promoting of state's brand. [2]. N. Cull includes "listening" along with project activities. [3]. It implies monitoring of different international opinions and working with them. Cultural Studies specialists include into public diplomacy such activities as exhibitions, sport events, promoting of language and other actions in the cultural sphere. [4]. With the development of digital technologies as a whole and the Internet in particular, the last one has become an important resource for promoting public diplomacy activities. The presence of cultural projects of BRICS countries on the Internet is a subject of this research.

Public diplomacy projects of any group must be grounded on the definite cultural policy. Cultural policy is a management category and there are many definitions of the term. As it follows from the term there are two components in this notion namely culture and policy. The first component of the term is "policy". We define it here as a system of principles for decision-making and achieving the definite results on national and international level of any organization.

Culture is what can unite and disassociate the participants of any group. According to the axiological approach culture is a system of values, norms, traditions shared by people. In the context of the BRICS it is one of the main points that must be solved. If we look at the similar union like EU, for instance, we will see that cultural values and norms are the same for the European countries, and we call them European values, but the process of their development took several decades. "... the European union was created first of all as an economical organization. As it evolves the priority of integrational processes has been expanded towards the regulation of social, political and at last cultural matters. As soon as there has been a need to form the single European identity on the single space the Agenda of the unified cultural policy gained significance and took the leading place in discussing of further development of the union. Culture will have to become one of the instruments contributing to unite peoples not only on political and socio-economical levels, but on the level of self-consciousness and self-identification, citizens of different countries-EU members would have to perceive themselves as a union, as representatives of the same territory with common cultural values". [5]. The unified cultural European values help to form EU identity.

The BRICS organization is a unique one and is a new form of contemporary international cooperation in the polycentric world because of the main principles of interaction. Namely this union implies the idea of equality of the member states without domination of any of them. This is really new idea for international diplomacy, because in a classical approach "stronger states from a power perspective will have the advantage in a bargaining situation, whereas weaker states will typically be in a position where they must compromise". [7]. The BRICS member states are approximately equal to each other in some points, that is why the idea to unite different cultural bodies based on inclusion and equal excess for every members of the organization is important experiment in the international diplomacy.

II. BRICS'S VALUES, IDEAS AND GOALS IN THE SPHERE OF CULTURE

The uniqueness of the BRICS in cultural sense is that its countries belong to the oldest cultures of the world. Russia has the oldest wood sculpture in the world – Shigir Idol (11 000 y.o.), South Africa is "cradle of humankind", and there is a unique Maropeng museum and Sterkfontein caves with "the

world-famous fossils of Mrs Ples and Little Foot, the latter being an almost complete *Australopithecus* skeleton dating back more than three million years". [8]. China and India are the earliest ancient civilizations in the world which influence we feel everywhere today. Culture of Brazil was badly destroyed by the colonial system and it took it some efforts to raise this unique cultural conglomerate.

To save their uniqueness and to build new international cultural policy based on diversity and inclusion is the main idea of the BRICS. The process of the development of the BRICS cultural policy is at the very beginning but it has already achieved significant results. It was started in 2015 in Ufa (Russia) during the 7th Summit of the BRICS member states. The agreement in cultural cooperation was signed there. On the 31st of October 2018 there was the third meeting on the BRICS Ministers of Culture in Maropeng where they signed the Maropeng Declaration of developing of cultural partnership among the BRICS cities (second one was in 2017 in China). [6]. According to it the member states reached the agreement to develop cultural net and a special working group of experts will be created to promote cooperation among the BRICS countries in such spheres as cinema, fashion, and cultural heritage and to build up a policy in the sphere of culture.

For now, the main idea of all cultural events is equal opportunities for the participants for the sake of inclusion and sustainable development, it is stressed that the joining forces in usage of culture is a guarantee of stability on the planet. According to Sergey Ryabkov, the Deputy Foreign Minister of RF, the BRICS is a contemporary structure where no one forces or imposes anything to each other.

Since the BRICS was found there were a lot of cultural events to promote their cultures and to involve citizens into these activities. There were several cultural festivals of BRICS countries, those are Xiamen Festival of BRICS Cultures in 2017 (China). It was opened by the Ballet Night where the leading ballet schools of this entity presented their performances. Then, the BRICS Film Festivals (India 2016, China 2017 and South Africa 2018), BRICS International Theatre Festivals (2017 and 2018, Moscow), ECHO Film Festival BRICS (14-16.12.2017, Moscow). There were several art exhibitions (photo and paintings), concerts where national music was presented. All these events and activities have a single goal to demonstrate the diversity of the BRICS cultures and their strong traditions. Cultural inclusion of such different traditions helps both participants and beholders to realize the cultural richness of the BRICS. All member states of this union are the oldest cultures in the world with very strong values, traditions and history of resistance to cultural transformation from outside. The BRICS structure gives the possibility to keep one's cultural originality.

III. THE DIGITAL DIPLOMACY OF THE BRICS TODAY

The cultural activities mentioned above were supported by the Internet advertisements. In this part we will analyze the general idea of Digital diplomacy and then will look at the Internet activities of the BRICS.

A. *Digital diplomacy as a means of information and change management*

The main issue of diplomacy from the theoretical point of view is to uphold the international status quo. "As Headley Bull pointed out, diplomacy is one of the five major institutions of international society, the main role of which is to maintain international order". [7]. Contemporary world situation is characterized by permanent changes and instability in every sphere. We live in the epoch of acceleration of social time. So, the role of diplomacy now is not only to support the status quo but to manage changes as well. The Internet has changed the information management of organizations, the way of individual communication and the practices of diplomacy. "Governments and international organizations are now realizing that social media is also a potential game changer for how international relations can be pursued. In particular, the adoption of digital diplomacy, which we broadly define in this volume as the use of social media for diplomatic purposes, could change practices of how diplomats engage in information management, public diplomacy, strategy planning, international negotiations or even crisis management". [7]. Traditional practices of diplomacy took hours and days to react to this or that event. But today thanks to the digital instruments it takes minutes.

Some theorists of digital diplomacy look at it as at the cost-effective form of diplomacy that is much more cheap than traditional ones. But Marcus Holmes argues that the delineating of "two types of change in the international system – top-down structural exogenous shocks and bottom-up incremental endogenous shifting" and managing them by means of digital diplomacy is the main goal of nowadays diplomacy [7]. On the other hand, the application of digital instruments in diplomacy are able to transcend the hierarchal structure of diplomatic communication and make the voice of ordinary people or professional coalitions heard, and diplomats can communicate with the audience and promote definite views and ideas to enlightening them.

It should be stressed that the BRICS activities, especially in the cultural realm, are not so known for a wide audience and ordinary people in other regions of the world except places where most of them took place. In this situation digital diplomacy can be indispensable.

B. *The BRICS digital diplomacy resources.*

We will examine digital diplomacy of the BRICS which exists in Russian Internet space. As it has already been stressed the BRICS is a new form of international cooperation created to support and promote the coalition and mutual interests in all international spheres with the main role of UN legislation.

As the BRICS developments during the 7th summit its member states signed the agreement of opening the joint website (www.infobrics.org). It is a joined site of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the BRICS member states. So every ministry place there some posts devoted to the activities in the frame of the international organization. Its information is given on five languages of the BRICS member states. All aspects of the organization activities are presented there: information about summits, economy, political cooperation, society and education. The information is not duplicated, every country adds original posts there. It has its FB account

with 1770 followers. Twitter with just 23 followers, VK page with 33 ones, and Telegram account with.

If you are interested in reading information about the BRICS there is a BRICS Journal (<http://bricsjournal.com/>). It is about the main topics of BRICS – politics, economy, culture, society and etc. It has FB profile with just 388 subscribers and 529 in Instagram.

One more Internet resource is BRICS Business magazine (<https://bricsmagazine.com>). It works in the frame of BRICS Media Initiative. Ruben Wardanyan is a leader of it. Representatives of this project work in the USA, Russia, GB, China and India. They plan to develop other projects based on this one: web-portal BRICS Online and BRICS Business Award.

Another digital diplomacy resource is TVBRICS (www.tvbrics.com). It is an international net that was created in 2017 to spotlight history, culture, traditions and contemporary life of the BRICS member states. Its programs demonstrate cultural diversity of the member states and simultaneously find mutual understanding in cultural, historical, economic and political realms of Brazil, Russia, China, South Africa. and India. The mission of the channel is by using the public diplomacy instruments to facilitate mutual cooperation among the BRICS countries. According to the YouTube statistics since 30th May 2017 it has 340712 browsing and 3143 followers. Its VK page has 2889 followers, and Instagram account has 518 ones.

Two BRICS International Theatre Festivals in Moscow published a lot of releases in the frame of advertising campaigns. But it doesn't have an organized managed communication with its followers on the Internet.

A lot of attention the BRICS countries pay to education and scientific spheres. And there are two scientific journals. The first one is the Internet journal that is devoted to law - BRICS Law Journal (<https://www.bricslawjournal.com>). It is edited by the University of Tyumen. One more discussion place is the BRICS Journal of Educational Research (<http://www.bricsjer.com>). In 2011 the BRICS National Research Committee of Russia was found. Its main goal is to organize and carry out the research in the sphere of role of the BRICS member states in the world politics and economy. It called to form a united information environment in the realm of Russian BRICS investigations and to promote Russian position and expert views on the international stage. It coordinates the activities of scientific organizations and experts which research the BRICS. This Committee has its website (www.nkibrics.ru) that exists only in Russian. It has pages in such social media as FB, VK, YouTube and Twitter. On FB its page has 6059 followers, its VK page has only 527 ones, as for Twitter it has 1318 readers, and the YouTube channel has just 16 followers. All these resources are in Russian. And the focus is scientists. That is why the Committee activities are interesting for rather narrow circle of people, but they are the intellectual elite of our society.

And Facebook has a page BRICSblock (<https://www.facebook.com/bricsblock/>) with 3509 followers. This page is not official one, it is made by two anti-war activists from Russia and India. All materials there are about politics and economy, or reposts from other BRICS resources.

Along with the all Russians digital diplomacy resources there is a regional Agency for Cultural Diplomacy of BRICS too. Its website is <https://culturaldiplomacy.bitrix24.site/>. This Agency focuses its activities on different topics of regional cooperation with BRICS member states in the sphere of culture. Its twitter account has 17 followers, VK page – 34 ones.

C. The BRICS digital diplomacy findings.

As we see the most popular BRICS digital diplomacy tools are Facebook, You Tube, VK, Twitter. Telegram, and Instagram. Facebook gives the largest numbers of followers, cumulatively there are 8217 subscribers for all projects mentioned above. Then VK has 3483 followers. The third place goes to You Tube. It has 3159 followers cumulatively for these projects. And the last place is for Instagram, there are 1047 followers.

The most popular digital diplomacy instrument in Russian Internet is VK, four projects use it. Then FB, You Tube and Twitter three projects each. And Instagram takes the last place there are just two projects that use this instrument.

TABLE I. BRICS DIGITAL DIPLOMACY TOOLS

BRICS project	BRICS Digital Diplomacy Tools					
	Faceb ook	You Tube	Twitter	VK	Telegra m	Instagr am
infobrics	1770	-	23	33	-	-
bricsjourn al	388	-	-	-	-	529
bricsmaga zine	-	-	-	-	-	-
TVBRICS	6059	16	1318	527	-	-
Agency for Cultural Diplomacy	-	-	17	34	-	-
Total	8217	3159	1358	3483	0	1047

In fact, these figures demonstrate, that there is no joined digital diplomacy management of the BRICS in the Russian Internet. If we take into account that the BRICS joins 42% of the whole humankind that is about 3 billion of people the cumulatively number of followers of all instruments mentioned (17 264 followers as a whole) is extremely small. It is about 5,75 % of the BRICS people. And of course, these people are not the unique users. We don't have the data, but we suppose that some of them can follow several digital diplomacy resources. And if we take the whole humankind we will see that the influence of the BRICS in the Internet is its perspective and growing point.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the XXI century digital diplomacy is an important part of diplomacy as a whole. It is used to develop nation branding talking in a context of country diplomacy and it plays significant role in branding of organization or any other entity on international level too. Thanks to J. Nye we have a notion of *smart power* that is a combination of hard and soft powers. But here in the context of the article we applied to the soft power concept alone. Public diplomacy gives people an opportunity for understanding and networking with each other and with diplomats using digital tools. On the other hand, public diplomacy should be a part of a single concept and just

add it to helping “old school” diplomats to reach ordinary citizens all over the world to translate them conceptual information to manage and shape their opinions and behavior. Digital tools ties peoples of the world. They open societies or any other entities. Some scientists say that “the communications objectives of international diplomats have arguably not changed, despite the fact that the medium has” [7]. We will examine this sentence in the context of the BRICS and polycentric world order. It will be the perspective of our research.

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