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**THE DIGITAL PARADIGM OF "SOFT POWER" IN TRANSNATIONAL
POLITICAL COMMUNICATION OF THE BRICS COUNTRIES IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD ORDER**

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ABSTRACT

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Relevance of the Dissertation Research. The transformation of the world order in the 21st century is accompanied by a shift in the center of political competition, where digital platforms are becoming a key factor in the reconfiguration of political institutions. While in previous decades, political processes relied primarily on traditional diplomatic institutions, military structures, and economic mechanisms, the modern era is characterized by the rapid shift of competition to the digital space, where fundamentally new institutional forms of influence and technologies of political influence are emerging.

The relevance of the study is determined by several key factors:

First, the increasing digital transformation of political institutions and processes, where artificial intelligence, big data, social media, and other technologies are radically altering the institutional architecture of political influence. Traditional concepts of "soft power," developed in the pre-digital era, are proving insufficient to explain contemporary institutions and technologies of cross-border political influence.

Secondly, the geopolitical standoff between the Western bloc and the BRICS countries in the digital sphere is escalating. Sanctions pressure, information operations, attempts to establish control over global digital infrastructure, and the imposition of universal regulatory institutions pose threats to the national sovereignty of states outside the Western orbit of influence. Under these circumstances, the development of digital political communication processes and technologies is acquiring strategic importance.

Third, there is insufficient theoretical development of the issues surrounding digital institutions and soft power technologies as they apply to the BRICS countries. Existing concepts of soft power were developed primarily by American researchers and reflect the specifics of the liberal institutional order. They poorly account for institutional models of political influence, which are based on different value and organizational foundations.

Fourth, there is a practical need to create institutions and technologies for assessing digital political influence. Current institutionalized systems for measuring

"soft power" demonstrate a systemic bias in favor of Western countries and an inability to adequately assess the specific institutions and influence technologies characteristic of the BRICS countries.

The object of the study is the political institutions, processes and technologies of cross-border political communication of the BRICS countries in the context of the digital transformation of the world order.

The subject of the study is the institutional mechanisms, political processes and technologies for the implementation of the digital paradigm of "soft power" by the BRICS states.

The aim of this dissertation is to develop and substantiate the concept of a digital paradigm of institutions, processes and technologies of "soft power" of the BRICS countries as an institutional model of political influence in the context of the transformation of the world order.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been defined:

1) To conduct a theoretical and methodological analysis of the conceptual evolution of "soft power" from classical approaches to the digital paradigm.

2) To critically analyze existing soft power ratings as instruments of political technology, identifying their methodological limitations and ideological foundations.

3) To explore the ethical aspects of using soft power technologies in the digital age.

4) To conduct a comparative analysis of the mechanisms and technologies for implementing the digital paradigm of "soft power" by the BRICS states.

5) To identify the specifics of the implementation of the digital paradigm of "soft power" in the Russian Federation.

6) To analyze the mechanisms and technologies for implementing the digital paradigm of "soft power" in other BRICS member countries, identifying regional characteristics.

7) To analyze normative battles in the field of digital communications and soft power, identifying contradictions between UNESCO/OECD approaches and the BRICS normative framework.

8) To substantiate a theoretical model of cognitive ethics and neuroethics as a normative institutional basis for protection against cognitive threats in the context of the BRICS approach.

9) Develop the concept of “counter-force” as an institutional instrument for protecting digital sovereignty, defining its legal, technological, and cultural contours.

The main hypothesis of the study is that the BRICS countries are forming a qualitatively new paradigm of institutions, processes, and technologies of digital political influence, which is based on the principles of state sovereignty, cultural diversity, and resistance to technological dominance, and requires the creation of original theoretical concepts, institutional frameworks, and assessment technologies that differ from Western-centric models of "soft power."

The methodological basis of the study is a complex of general scientific and special methods of political science: a systems approach, the comparative method, institutional analysis, discourse analysis, the case study.

The theoretical basis of the study is:

- the theory of “soft power” by J. Nye and its critical rethinking in the works of modern researchers;
- concepts of digital transformation of political institutions and processes;
- theories of political communication and mediatization of politics;
- research on digital sovereignty and cognitive security;
- works devoted to the ethics of artificial intelligence and digital rights;
- the theory of institutionalism and the neo-institutional approach in political science.

The empirical basis of the study consists of:

1) Official documents and statements of the BRICS countries: summit declarations, joint statements, strategic digital development programs, founding documents of BRICS institutions.

2) Regulatory legal acts: laws and regulations of the BRICS countries governing the digital space, data protection, cybersecurity, and institutional framework for managing the digital sphere.

3) International documents: UNESCO and OECD recommendations on the ethics of artificial intelligence, EU regulations (AI Act), documents of global governance institutions.

4) Statistical data on the development of digital infrastructure, digital governance institutions, and the spread of the Internet and social media in the BRICS countries.

5) Materials from expert reports and analytical centers: RIAC reports, MGIMO analytics, materials from international conferences on digital political technologies.

6) Results of the author's sociological survey conducted to study public perceptions about the regulation of artificial intelligence and the functioning of digital institutions.

The scientific novelty of the dissertation research is as follows:

1) The author proposes the concept of "digital communication capital" as an institutional and technological aggregate of political assets that generates sustained attention and trust among political audiences. A DCC structure has been developed, comprising four components: audience capital, infrastructural capital, normative capital, and narrative capital, each representing a set of institutions, processes, and technologies.

2) The concept of "counterpower" has been introduced into scientific discourse as a reactive-projective institutional strategy for protecting digital sovereignty, combining defensive mechanisms with the active proposal of institutional frameworks and technological solutions. The legal, technological, and

cultural contours of the institutionalization of "counterpower" by BRICS countries are defined.

3) The author proposes a concept of neuroethics, which, as an innovative political technology, is based on an understanding of the cognitive mechanisms of perception of political information and the psychological processes of formation of political preferences, taking into account the socio-cultural characteristics of political perception of various audiences and the use of modern digital technologies to create effective strategies of political influence.

4) The concept of an "ethical core" for BRICS has been developed as the normative and institutional foundation of the digital paradigm, embodied in the author's code of neuroethics, "Kant 3.0 Global: International Principles of Neuroethics for Sustainable Development." This code represents a living, evolving system of principles and mechanisms designed to ensure the harmonious development of neurotechnologies on a global scale. Three key principles of institutionalization are substantiated: cognitive sovereignty, protection from neuromanipulation, and the cultural adaptability of algorithms.

5) The author proposes the concept of a "Trust Infrastructure" as a multi-level institutional ecosystem for measuring, standardizing, and implementing ethical norms in the field of artificial intelligence. A system of three interconnected institutional indices has been developed as a three-tiered model: the Trust Index, the Cultural Responsibility Index, and the Dynamic Ethics Index.

6) A comprehensive comparative institutional analysis of the digital strategies of all BRICS countries was conducted, identifying two basic institutional models: infrastructure-integration (China) and sovereign-regulatory (Russia), as well as the specific institutional approaches of India, Brazil, South Africa, and new members of the association.

7) The methodological basis for creating the author's institutional rating of BRICS "soft power" is substantiated, based on the principles of equality, cooperation and multipolarity, with the replacement of competitive ranking with a classification system according to the levels of institutional development.

8) An online survey was conducted on the topic "Analysis of the perception of the concept of neuroethics and digital ethics as a tool of "soft power"" with a representative sample (N = 153) of respondents, including various age, educational and professional groups, aimed at identifying public attitudes, expectations and risks of the implementation of AI in the context of neuroethics and digital ethics as tools of "soft power".

9) The author proposes a concept of a digital paradigm as a methodological framework for analyzing soft power in the digital environment. It encompasses a set of concepts, principles, and practices that define the ways in which political meanings and influence are formed, disseminated, and reproduced through digital platforms, algorithms, and global media technology chains. The concept of a digital paradigm integrates institutional, technological, and narrative components, providing a systemic understanding of the transformation of traditional public diplomacy channels and the competition of narratives in the digital environment.

Provisions submitted for defense:

1) Digital communication capital (DCC) is a set of cumulative and convertible resources that provide political actors with the ability to create, control, and direct communication flows in the digital environment to shape political influence by managing the attention, trust, and behavioral patterns of global audiences. The proposed DCC framework includes four interconnected components – audience, infrastructural, normative, and narrative capital – each reflecting a specific type of institutional and technological tools.

2) The concept of "counterpower" reveals a strategy for protecting digital sovereignty in the context of a transforming world order. "Counterpower" is an evolution of political communication that represents a response to the challenges of the digital age through the establishment of a new normative paradigm. This paradigm is formed around an ethical code for artificial intelligence, which is becoming the structural and ethical core of modern "soft power."

3) The author proposes a concept of neuroetiquette. Neuroetiquette as an innovative political technology is based on an understanding of the cognitive

mechanisms of political information perception and the psychological processes that shape political preferences, taking into account the sociocultural characteristics of political perceptions among various audiences, and the use of modern digital technologies to create effective strategies for political influence.

4) The ethical core of the BRICS digital paradigm, embodied in the "Kant 3.0 Global" code of neuroethics, represents a comprehensive normative and institutional framework that ensures the harmonious development of digital and neurotechnologies. The code is based on three principles: cognitive sovereignty (ensuring the autonomy of thought and protection from algorithmic manipulation), prohibition of neuromanipulation (regulating the hidden influence of AI on citizens' behavior), and cultural adaptability (accounting for civilizational differences in the development and application of algorithmic systems).

5) The Trust Infrastructure is viewed as a multi-level institutional ecosystem that integrates mechanisms for measuring, standardizing, and implementing ethical norms in AI. It is based on three interconnected institutional indices – the Trust Index, the Cultural Responsibility Index, and the Dynamic Ethics Index – which enable the standardization and implementation of ethical norms in artificial intelligence. The Trust Index assesses the level of human control over AI systems. This index focuses on the degree of autonomy in human decision-making and their ability to oversee the operation of algorithms. The Cultural Responsibility Index (CRI) takes into account the norms of all SCO countries and other cultural models. This component of the system ensures respect for cultural diversity and the prevention of discrimination based on civilizational differences. The Dynamic Ethics Index (DEI) reflects the ability of ethical norms to be updated in real time, adapting to the rapid development of technology.

6) The author conducted a comparative institutional analysis of the digital strategies of the BRICS countries, identifying two basic models of influence: infrastructure-integration (China) and sovereign-regulatory (Russia), as well as the specific approaches of India, Brazil, South Africa, and the new members of the group. China's infrastructure-integration model is characterized by the creation of

digital infrastructure through the Digital Silk Road initiative, the export of technological solutions, and the formation of alternative centers of gravity in the digital space. Russia's sovereign-regulatory model focuses on protecting information sovereignty, creating national digital ecosystems, and countering the information dominance of Western powers. India is implementing an inclusive-scale model focused on the use of digital technologies. Brazil is developing a cultural-commercial model based on the export of digital content to the Portuguese-speaking world and beyond. South Africa is developing an ethical-regional model, positioning itself as a leader in the development of ethical standards for the use of artificial intelligence for the African continent.

7) The article substantiates the methodological principles for creating an institutional soft power ranking of BRICS countries based on a classification by levels of institutional development, replacing competitive ranking with a multi-tiered assessment system. A critical analysis of existing soft power rankings reveals a systemic bias in favor of Western countries and an inability to adequately reflect the specific digital influence of BRICS countries.

8) The key areas for implementing the "Kant 3.0" code of ethics in digital spheres were substantiated using a survey conducted with 153 respondents. The key risks identified by respondents included algorithmic errors, opaque decision-making, lack of accountability, and the potential reduction of human autonomy. The study's results suggest that implementing the "Kant 3.0" code of ethics will increase user trust in AI and foster a safe, fair, and human-centered digital environment.

9) This paper substantiates the digital paradigm as an integrating methodological framework for analyzing soft power in the digital environment. It allows for the consideration of all tools and practices (including digital diplomacy, counter-power, and BRICS countries' strategies) as part of a unified digital regime of influence production and management. The theoretical analysis demonstrates that digital platforms, algorithms, and media technology chains are shaping new parameters for narrative competition and altering the balance between state and non-state actors.

The theoretical significance of this work lies in its development of a conceptual framework for political science in the study of political institutions by introducing new concepts ("digital communication capital," "counterforce," "BRICS ethical core," and "Trust Infrastructure") that allow for a more adequate description and analysis of contemporary institutions and processes of cross-border political communication. The proposed theoretical framework can be used for further research on the digital transformation of political institutions in international relations, comparative institutional analysis of political systems in the digital age, and the study of institutional models of global governance.

The practical significance of the study is determined by the possibility of applying the obtained results:

- in the activities of government institutions responsible for developing strategies for digital development and international cooperation;
- in the development of regulatory legal acts governing the institutions of digital space, the ethics of artificial intelligence and the protection of digital sovereignty;
- in the work of BRICS institutions involved in coordinating the association's digital policy;
- in the educational process when teaching the disciplines "Political institutions and processes", "Political technologies", "World politics", "Digital diplomacy", "International relations".

The dissertation materials can be used in the development of training courses and special courses, the preparation of teaching aids on the problems of institutions and technologies of digital political communication and the transformation of the world order.

Validation of research results. The main provisions and conclusions of the dissertation research have been validated in the author's publications, including articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission (HAC), as well as in presentations at scientific conferences and seminars.

The concept of "counter-force" was developed and tested within the framework of:

- publication of the article "Anti-soft power" in international information security: institutional mechanisms of protection on the SCO and BRICS platforms" in the collection of reports of the XVIII International Forum of the National Institute of Information Security "Partnership of the state, business and civil society in ensuring international information security";

- an analysis of global cybersecurity ratings and information influence assessment systems, which revealed the methodological limitations of existing soft power assessment tools and the need to develop an original conceptual framework;

- presentation on the topic "Anti-soft power" in international information security and solutions at the SCO and BRICS venues" at the XVIII International Forum of the National Institute of Information Security (NAMIB) "Partnership of the state, business and civil society in ensuring international information security."

The concept of neuroethics was introduced within the framework of:

- publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals devoted to the development of theoretical foundations of neuroetiquette;

- presentations at international scientific conferences;

- the international industrial exhibition INNOPROM-2025 (July 2025), where the concept was presented to the international expert community and covered in materials from the Sputnik Arabic agency;

- XIX International Forum of the National Institute of Information Security (NAMIB) "Partnership between the State, Business and Civil Society in Ensuring International Information Security" (September 2025);

- educational program of the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, where the module "Neuroetiquette" was integrated into the course "International Business Protocol and Etiquette."

- the term "neuroetiquette" was coined into Chinese by神经伦理与数字交往规范.

Dissertation Structure. The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters comprising nine paragraphs, a conclusion, and a list of references. The structure of the work is determined by the logic of a sequential approach to the objectives: from a theoretical and methodological analysis of the concept of "soft power" in the digital age, through an examination of the mechanisms and technologies for implementing the digital paradigm of "soft power" by BRICS countries, to a justification of the institutions and technologies of "counterpower" and cognitive security.