

Issues in the Development of the BRICS' Strategic Narrative¹

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Abstract

During the last decade the BRICS group of developing countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) became a noticeable phenomenon in international relations. Discussion continues among politicians and experts about the group's perspective, its sustainability and its potential both for further institutionalization and to become a more integrated community. Many experts are pessimistic about the prospect that BRICS will gain more influence, taking account of slowing economic growth, economic asymmetry, different political goals and the distinct strategic cultures of the group's members.

Under such circumstances elaboration of a BRICS communication strategy becomes an issue of vital importance. The first step might be the design of a strategic BRICS narrative which could act as an interpretative platform framing the perception of key issues, establish the connection between the past and a vision of future, and designate the group's identity. Such a narrative could serve as the basis for strategic positioning, which is the key component of a communication strategy. It enables the formation of a basic discourse and key messages which can be transmitted through diversified channels of communication.

This article outlines the strategic narrative of BRICS, drawing from the model of strategic narrative and the concept of national biography. The narrative of the international system, the identity narrative and issue narratives are considered as key components of its strategic narrative. Similarly, parameters of national biography are exposed: myths about the birth of community, significant experiences in the past, images of the future, the spatial facet and relationships with other countries and communities. This analysis identifies those components of the strategic narrative that are sufficiently developed and describes ways to further elaborate others.

A constructivist approach is used, according to which a "strategic narrative" is considered to be social construct elaborated to achieve particular strategic goals, in combination with a holistic analysis which views the different tracks of BRICS activities as intertwined. Content analysis of documents from BRICS summits (primarily of the summits in Xiamen, China in 2017 and Johannesburg, South Africa) and public speeches by the leaders of BRICS countries is undertaken.

Key words: BRICS; strategic narratives; strategic communication; international relations

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The concept of "strategic narratives" has become the subject of growing interest in political and international communication research. In general, strategic narratives are "a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors" [Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, 2017a]. A strategic narrative creates a framework for people to understand the meaning of events taking place in the world

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[Roselle, 2010]. If the communicator is the state, strategic narratives include stories told on behalf of the state aimed at achieving certain aims, having an impact on the perception of the state's interest and shaping the representation of how the state functions, and how it must function [Antoniades, O'Loughlin, Miskimmon, 2010].

Consequently, strategic narratives can be defined as the set of interrelated stories forming certain images of past, present and future, designed to manage the perception of a key audience and aimed at achieving strategic goals.

The important hallmark of a strategic narrative is that it represents a cognitive product purposefully constructed to achieve strategic goals. In doing so, strategic narratives address not rational thinking per se but rather emotions, values, cultural archetypes, myths and historical analogies. Thus, an indispensable part of strategic narrative is storytelling – a more natural and effective form of communication than tedious, logically coherent and empirically grounded constructions [Salmon, 2017]. Emphasis on emotional perception is one of the important reasons for the spread of “fake news,” which in fact is the “distillation of narrative” aimed at the maintenance of already-constructed messages rather than the provision of information about events [Khaldarova, Pantti, 2016, p. 893]. However, an important difference between strategic narrative and storytelling is that the former, to a large extent, is focused on the future rather than the past and thus represents a conceptual framework for explaining and interpreting events that will occur [Douglas, 2008]. The strength of strategic narratives is that they have the potential to mobilize key audiences even when there is a lack of financial, material or military resources [Archetti, 2010]. An effective strategic narrative is a good way for a weak actor to gain advantage over a stronger one: “less muscle but better stories” [Freedman, 2013, p. XI].

The influence of strategic narratives on the balance of power and nature of relations between actors of the world order is determined by the following factor: the way that the world system is understood has a direct impact on its functioning [Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, 2017a]. The system is nothing less than an idea evolving in the course of time, acquiring new forms and including different actors who implementing this idea. T. Risse's description of the international system in 2010 remains relevant today: “the world of 2010 still resembles the cold war and its end. The main structuring forces are still ideas and discourses. The only difference is that the world is no longer structured along only two competing discourses, Western liberalism and Eastern communism. Many more ideas now fight for attention and compete for persuasive power” [2011, p. 603]. Thus, the concept of strategic narrative can reveal the process by which ideas are formed, spread and projected in international policy.

Strategic narratives play a particular role in the contemporary world, which is characterized by the widespread dissemination of digital technologies and global hyper-connectivity. In this new world the capabilities of traditional mass media are shrinking and the new media are growing. The number of communicators capable of reaching key audiences instantaneously is being increased exponentially. The actors in communication processes are not only states and non-governmental organizations but also individuals and their communities. The rapid development of technologies and the methods of big data analysis provide an opportunity to simultaneously pursue wide coverage and to personalize key messages for audiences totaling millions of people. For their part, key audiences may be segmented to the level of individuals who can organize themselves into communities in accordance with different aims and interests. Political actors now operate in an environment filled with an endless multiplicity of information flows. Strategic narrative is a much more flexible instrument than, for instance, ideological doctrine, and accordingly it may become an effective instrument to promote the interests of political actors in a diverse and dynamic information environment.

Despite the fact that the concept of strategic narrative was developed by western researchers, it is actively used in the study of non-western states such as China [Hartig, 2015; Zeng, 2017]

and India [Natarajan, 2014]. In this regard, the question arises regarding the extent to which the concept of strategic narrative, having a western origin, may be applicable to the BRICS grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – countries that are not part of the West and which have distinctive cultural and historical features. For example, in China, the study of the processes described in western political science using the concept of strategic narrative has a certain specificity. Among Chinese researchers the point of view is that China should develop its own theories based on the ancient Chinese canons of strategic thinking rather than imported western concepts. In addition, in cases where western concepts are used, they are subject to certain adjustments. This is manifested, in particular, in the wide use of the “Chinese-specific” clarifying addition to adapt western discourse, as well as in the reliance on Mao Zedong’s legacy, and in particular his “theory of the three worlds” [Zeng, Breslin, Xiao, 2015].

At the same time, it seems that the concept of strategic narrative can be quite productive for studying BRICS countries for at least two reasons. First, all BRICS countries are integrated into the world economy and the main international organizations, and to one degree or another they have institutions typical of western societies. Second, precisely because of the distinctive features of each of the BRICS countries, the concept of strategic narrative for BRICS may provide an opportunity to develop a common algorithm for positioning the BRICS group in the international arena, despite significant differences between the five countries.

Such an algorithm is currently at the formative stage. Meanwhile, despite its incompleteness, a BRICS narrative has already become performative. Political actors interpreting world politics through that narrative operate as though the narrative exactly represents reality and, as a result, they facilitate its implementation [Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, 2017b]. This analysis highlights three levels of strategic narratives: narratives of the international system, identity narratives and issue narratives [Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, 2017a].

Narrative of the International System

Narratives of the international system depict the structure of the system, its main actors, key developments, significant conflicts and crises in world politics.

C. van Noort identifies a strategic narrative based on an image of global recovery. It addresses implementation of the principles of good governance on the global scale by a revival of economic growth and by restructuring multilateral institutions on the basis of “common but differentiated responsibilities” [van Noort, 2017, p. 124].

Developing the idea proposed by van Noort, it can be supposed that principles of multilateralism constitute the key component of the international system narrative suggested by BRICS. In anticipation of the BRICS summit in Ufa in 2015, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov characterized BRICS as an “innovative approach for building multilateral partnership between large states representing different cultures and civilizations based on such fundamental principles as equal rights, taking into account mutual interests, solidarity, mutual understanding, openness to the world” [Lavrov, 2015]. The declaration adopted at the end of the BRICS summit in Johannesburg in 2018 emphasizes the principle of multilateralism and the central role in international affairs of the United Nations (UN), which is viewed as a universal multilateral organization with a mandate to maintain international peace and security, promote global development and protect human rights. In the development of the principle of multilateralism, the BRICS members declare their commitment to multilateral institutions of global governance – including the Group of 20 (G20), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) – as well as their readiness to assist regional initiatives in support of the multilateral system [BRICS, 2018].

Identity Narrative

An identity narrative describes the fundamental values and key properties specifying the uniqueness of a communication subject and constitutes the structure of meanings to explain its positioning in the world order. Identity narratives reveal the content of the policy, technologies and methods of achieving strategic goals.

Identity narratives include several components, some of which characterize the functioning of the communication subject in the moment. Others describe images of the past and future and emphasize the communication effect induced by the territorial location of the community. They may be considered through the concept of a biographical narrative [Berenskoetter, 2014] which includes a myth about the “birth” of the community, significant experience in the past, a vision of the future, a spatial facet and relationships with other communities.

Narrative of Inclusive Participation

Considering the identity narrative of BRICS, van Noort describes it as a narrative of inclusive participation. In doing so she assumes that the narrative of the international system and the identity narrative of BRICS are closely linked, since members of BRICS consider inclusive participation to be essential for sustainable development and global recovery. The core element of the BRICS identity narrative is the equality which “encourages fair play instead of positive affirmation” [van Noort, 2017, p. 124].

The idea of equality is definitely fundamental for BRICS countries. In the declarations of BRICS summits and speeches, terms such as “BRICS spirit” and “the philosophy of BRICS” are used, both of which imply ideas of mutual respect and mutual understanding, solidarity, openness, inclusiveness and mutually advantageous cooperation.

Further, several additional elements may be included in the structure of the narrative of inclusive participation. First, is the idea of joint actions. Russia’s President Vladimir Putin, in his speech at the BRICS summit in Xiamen on 4 September 2017, stressed: “We have been working together to find answers to the biggest threats and challenges to peace and stability. Our countries come together to address vital socioeconomic issues, or more precisely, to modernise national industries, develop high technologies, promote competition and improve the living standards of our people” [President of Russia, 2017]. Second is the concept of “soft ascendance” proposed by the chair of the BRICS National Research Committee, Vyacheslav Nikonov. In his view the paradigm of “soft ascendance” is unprecedented in world history since it “is not associated with violence, wars and hegemonic ambitions of the new contenders for the world influence” [Nikonov, 2012].

Third is the image of BRICS as platform for flexible interaction. The BRICS community is different from the vertically integrated structures of the western world in that it is not hierarchical [Vinogradov, 2013]. Experts define BRICS not as a power centre but as a centre of “aggregated influence of regional leaders of three continents,” as a “Global Non-West project” [Ilyin, Leonova, 2017] and as “the largest platform whereby countries declare common political interests...aimed against unfair financial, economic and political domination of the developed countries” [Kolomeytseva, Kolomeytsev, 2017]. A.V. Vinogradov notes that in BRICS there is no single leader, nor can there be. In contrast to Group of 7 (G7) states representing globalization according to western standards, BRICS seeks to preserve diversity since homogeneity does not correspond to its very nature. The effectiveness of BRICS resides not so much in its influence as in its capacity to propose different, forward-looking projects [Vinogradov, 2013].

Thus, the blurry characteristics of BRICS institutions noted by many experts may be interpreted not as a weakness but rather as the capability to implement advanced forms of inter-

action. Such a frame can be used to position this distinctive feature of BRICS as an important component of its identity narrative. In so doing it makes sense to avoid forms of identification based on being a “non-western” project since definition of a BRICS identity through juxtaposition to another actor in international relations assigns a derivative character to the narrative and consequently reduces its effectiveness.

The fourth element relates to the network form of interaction between BRICS countries. Different organizations and fora are created to discuss various issues (Parliamentary, Civil, Youth Academic Forums, Forum of Young Diplomats, Forum on Healthy Lifestyle, BRICS Trade Fair, Conclave of BRICS Friendly Cities, Council of Expert Centers) and sports and cultural events are held. In the framework of BRICS, there are more than 70 tracks through ministries, departments, and public and non-governmental organizations in the most diverse areas of cooperation [Toloraya, 2017].

The Story of the Formation and Development of BRICS

“BRIC” as an abbreviation appeared in 2001 in a report by Goldman Sachs chief economist Jim O’Neill to refer to the group dynamic and investment-attractive states which in the future should outrun the G7 countries in their main economic indicators. With the addition of South Africa, the BRICS community subsequently became a real and viable project, and the history (and story) of BRICS is gradually being filled with vivid and interesting details. For example, Vladimir Putin recently admitted that the idea of creating a BRIC community arose during conversations with Hu Jintao, the president of China, at the Konstantinovsky Palace in St. Petersburg in 2006 [Toloraya, 2017]. There is no doubt that such details will continue to emerge.

An effective component of the BRICS formation story is the contrasting of the new project to the reality which existed before, which BRICS intends to change for the better. The communicative technique of “actualization of the image of the antagonist” makes it possible to frame BRICS as a “hero” called upon to defeat the forces of “evil” that dominated the former reality. For BRICS, this antagonist is a unipolar world in which one superpower seeks to have a monopoly over world politics. BRICS is a progressive force seeking to make the world order more fair. Colourful imagery was attached to the unipolar world by its comparison with the “law of the jungle” in the speech of China’s President Xi Jinping at the BRICS Business Forum on 3 September 2017 [Xinhua, 2017].

Significant Experiences in the Past

The trend among BRICS countries has been toward increased interaction, beginning with consultations on individual issues and maturing to full-scale cooperation in different areas including the annual summits of the leaders of BRICS countries. The history of BRICS since its inception has been characterized as the “golden decade.” The Xiamen Declaration proclaims the beginning of the “second golden decade of cooperation and solidarity” among BRICS countries [BRICS, 2017b].

It is also important that BRICS countries tend to demonstrate a common approach to the turning points in history. At the meeting of the foreign ministers of BRICS countries on 18–19 June 2017 in Beijing, a “commitment to resolutely reject the continued attempts to misrepresent the results of World War II” was declared [BRICS, 2017a].

Another effective communication technique is the association with an image of a great person having a generally recognized moral authority. The 2018 BRICS summit in Johannesburg was held under the auspices of the centennial of the birth of Nelson Mandela. In his speech at

the opening of the summit, Vladimir Putin noted of Mandela that “during his entire life, he has been upholding and protecting the principles of equality, openness and fairness.” According to Putin, “it is on these principles that the cooperation of the BRICS states is built,” which “has already acquired the character of a truly strategic partnership” [President of Russia, 2018].

Image of the Future

Proceeding from the speeches of the heads of state at the BRICS summits in Xiamen in 2017 and Johannesburg in 2018, it is possible to highlight the tasks which must be completed in order to increase the effectiveness of interaction between the five countries and facilitate the achievement of the strategic goals of the community:

- employ the potential of the new industrial revolution;
- focus on human capital development in accordance with the view of India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the continuous development of professional skills and the availability of quality education to all sections of society is crucially important [India Today, 2018];
- enhance the complementarity of development strategies;
- improve strategic communication and mutual trust, given that decisions in the group are elaborated on the basis of respect for the ways and models of development of each country through mutual consultation rather than by the imposition of a single approach by any particular country;
- focus on innovation projects in areas including economy, trade, finance, science, education, technology, culture and health care;
- elaborate the “measures of BRICS” and the “actions of BRICS” on key international and regional issues which, above all, will contribute to the spread of the “discourse of BRICS.”

The future depicted in summit declarations and the speeches of BRICS leaders is envisioned as a fair international order in which developing countries will play a more active role in global governance; which is open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial to all; and in which economic globalization is built on a multilateral trade regime countering protectionism, supporting global growth and facilitating efforts to overcome the disparities in development between the global North and South.

The hope that these goals can be achieved is inspired by the fact that BRICS institutions are quite effective. E. Kokotsis provides evidence which demonstrates in general that BRICS shows a slightly higher level of decision implementation than the G20 (+0.48 and 0.41 respectively, on a scale from 0 to 1)² [2017].

Spatial Facet

The fact that BRICS members are located on different continents, and that as a result it does not constitute a geographical unity, could be considered a factor hampering interaction. However in a speech at the Xiamen summit, Xi Jinping quoted an ancient Chinese proverb: “A partnership forged with the right approach defies geographical distance; it is thicker than glue and stronger than metal and stone” [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2017].

It is also important to take into consideration that, in conditions of all-encompassing globalization and the development of digital society, geographical distance ceases to be a significant

² Decision implementation was assessed according to the following scale: “+1” for the full or close to full performance in decision implementation; “-1” for failure to implement a decision; “0” for partial performance or work in progress to implement a decision, as well as for the impossibility to implement it [p. 198].

obstacle to cooperation. Narendra Modi, in his speech at the BRICS summit in Johannesburg, emphasized that digital platforms, automation and data flows would reduce the importance of geographical distances [India Today, 2018]. Moreover, the successful interaction of countries located in different regions of the world proves in practice the effectiveness of the principles of flexibility, openness and inclusiveness that underlie the BRICS narrative.

Also in the context of the spatial dimension, new mechanisms to increase the influence of BRICS are of interest.

First is the outreach format which was first implemented at the BRICS summit in Durban in 2013, and which requires the country hosting the summit to invite the states of the region to participate. In 2018 the BRICS summit was hosted by South Africa. Therefore, the leaders of nine African countries – Rwanda, Senegal, Gabon, Uganda, Ethiopia, Togo, Zambia, Namibia and Angola, as well as the chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, were invited to participate in the Johannesburg summit.

In 2017 China proposed to extend the outreach format and launched the BRICS+ initiative, within which not only states adjacent to the host country could potentially become BRICS regular partners, but so too could those located in different regions. As part of the BRICS+ initiative leaders of Egypt, Mexico, Thailand, Tajikistan and Guinea attended the summit in Xiamen. Given that in 2018 the main topic of discussion in the BRICS+ format was the problem of sustainable and inclusive growth for the prosperity of the global South, South Africa invited the participation of the leaders of countries representing the regional economic communities of the global South: Argentina (a member of the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) and chair of the G20), Indonesia (an influential member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and co-chair of the New African-Asian Partnership with South Africa), Egypt (Group of 77 (G77) chair), Jamaica (future Caribbean Community (CARICOM) president) and Turkey (chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation).

Thus, the outreach and BRICS+ formats operate as tools for the soft involvement of geographically distant countries, located in different regions of the world, in joint activities on issues of mutual interest.

Relationships With Other Communities

As for attitudes toward other countries, experts whose point of view reflects the position of the coordinating bodies of the BRICS group emphasize that the community in no way opposes itself to any country or group of countries, including the United States and the EU. As G. Toloraya notes, BRICS cannot be an “anti-Western alliance” due to the fact that most of the economic and cultural ties of BRICS countries are with western countries rather than with each other. BRICS views the West as a partner with which it is possible and necessary to build close, mutually beneficial and equal relations [Toloraya, 2017].

Issue Narratives

Issue narratives describe the validity of, and principles for, implementing a certain course of action concerning an important issue on the agenda. The issue narrative determines what the problem or conflict is and provides an answer to the question of how it can be resolved. Van Noort considers a key issue narrative of BRICS to be that of infrastructural development, including mobilization of infrastructure investments and the promotion of physical infrastructure [van Noort, 2017].

In 2018 the narrative of the development of the African continent came to the forefront with issues of infrastructural development at the core. The BRICS summit in Johannesburg

was held under the theme “BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution.” BRICS participants drew attention to the need for the development of the African continent, the industrialization of African countries and the unleashing of the potential of intra-African trade, which in the Johannesburg Declaration was called “tremendous” [BRICS, 2018].

Indeed, the fourth industrial revolution is becoming a key issue narrative of BRICS. In order to unleash its potential the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR) was created. The mission of the partnership is to promote the economic transformation of BRICS countries, to create a network of science parks and technology business incubators, and to support small- and medium-size enterprises in technology-intensive areas. The central element of this narrative is the principle of inclusiveness, which implies the need to solve two inter-related tasks: the adoption of measures aimed at bridging digital divides between developed and developing countries (including the creation of mechanisms for the transfer of technologies), and the training of personnel and development of professional skills according to the requirements of the technology- and knowledge-driven economy (through, among other things, the development of high-quality apprenticeships) [Ibid.].

Mainstream Narrative and Counter-Narratives

The mainstream narrative, unlike any other narrative, provides the community with its basic discourse, contributes to the legitimacy of the strategic course and guarantees self-awareness of community members. According to F. Berenskoetter it provides “societal security” – answers to existential questions related to the meaning and goals of community existence [Berenskoetter, 2014].

In order to maintain the integrity of the community, the mainstream narrative must be somewhat abstract so that it is not inconsistent with various derivative, more specialized narratives that can be used for strategic purposes without damaging the coherence of the main discourse. The mainstream narrative and the set of special narratives represent a network of narratives. Its maintenance is an important function of the community management system.

At the same time it is important to take into consideration that the elaboration and maintenance of a narrative involves the interpretation of events and developments and, accordingly, this process is open to the competition of various concepts and points of view. In any community there are alternative images of the past, present and future. Frequently the mainstream narrative faces the task of smoothing out contradictions, inconsistencies and gaps in the trajectory of community development. Despite the best efforts of the politicians and experts responsible for the development and maintenance of the narrative, the “seams” in the narrative may be noticeable, appearing as a result of combining separate, poorly matching parts of the narrative.

The mainstream BRICS narrative is reflected primarily in the speeches of state leaders, summit declarations and ministerial statements. As for counter-narratives, they are manifested primarily in news reports and analytical papers. Disagreements between countries can be framed by particular media in such a way that they look significant enough to damage cooperation [Dimitriu, de Graaf, 2016]. For example, the comments published in influential newspapers regarding the BRICS summit in Goa referred to tensions between India and China as a factor disrupting the cooperation between the five countries [Sibal, 2016; Strokan, 2016]. This tension was caused by territorial disputes, the activities of Pakistan-supported terrorist groups (India’s desire to mention these groups in the declaration of the Goa summit was blocked by China) and the alleged tendency of the Indian leaders to seek closer relations with the United States. These problems do exist, but at the same time it should be taken into account that as early as the following year China and India managed to resolve a number of controversial is-

sues [Vesti.Ekonomika, 2017] and Delhi's wish to publicly qualify the activities of Pakistan-supported groups as terrorist was satisfied: these groups were mentioned in the declaration of the BRICS summit in Xiamen along with ISIS and Al-Qaeda [BRICS, 2017a].

BRICS counter-narratives are quite noticeable in the media space. A number of academic and analytical papers draw attention to the asymmetric balance of power among BRICS countries [Abdenur, Folly, 2015; Brutch, Papa, 2013; Degaut, 2015; van Noort, 2017]. The division of the community into IBSA countries (India, Brazil, South Africa) on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other [van Noort, 2017], could damage the BRICS narrative. The economic recession has damaged the coherence of the narrative positioning BRICS as a union of growing economies.

In addition it is important to pay attention to a potential "breaking point" in the coherence of the mainstream narrative of BRICS posed by the role of non-state actors and civil society in community development. On the one hand, their active role is a clear implementation of the principle of inclusive participation which is an important component of the BRICS identity narrative. On the other hand, sovereign states and communities of sovereign states (and not institutions of civil society) occupy a central place in the BRICS narrative. It seems that their involvement in the interaction of BRICS states (starting from mentioning their role in the speeches of the heads of state and ministers and in the summit declarations) will provide an opportunity to increase the sustainability and effectiveness of the mainstream narrative.

Strategic Narratives and Strategic Culture

M. Degaut, in a report entitled "Do the BRICS Still Matter?" uses the notion of "strategic culture" to refer to a fundamental cultural predisposition to a certain type of strategic thinking and behaviour. Strategic culture determines the setting of foreign policy objectives reflecting the identity and fundamental interests of the state and is influenced by the country's history, geographical location, national myths and symbols, political traditions and institutions. An understanding of strategic culture makes it possible to identify the causes of persistent patterns of a state's behaviour and thus to understand its actions in the future. Degaut analyzes in detail the strategic cultures of BRICS countries and comes to the conclusion that they are incompatible, which makes it difficult to form a sustainable community with a clear institutional structure and a single strategic course [Degaut, 2015].

At the same time it is essential to note that differences in strategic cultures may be an obstacle only if BRICS strives to become a tightly structured, closed and strictly hierarchical organization. However, BRICS positions itself as a community based mainly on horizontal links, in which there is no hierarchy and in which all members have equal rights. Under these conditions differences in the cultures of the five countries are an advantage rather than an obstacle to the development of cooperation. Kokotsis rightly notes that political, economic, cultural and religious diversity creates additional incentives for a critical analysis of proposed solutions, contributes to the development of innovative approaches, creates mechanisms for sharing best practices, helps build more effective interaction strategies and can lead to a better understanding of the political positions of partner countries. This in turn contributes to the creation of an effective mechanism for collective decision-making [Kokotsis, 2017].

Despite the fact that each of the BRICS countries in one way or another has significant political and economic ambitions, all of them are peaceful states striving to achieve their goals while avoiding wars and armed conflicts and respecting the sovereignty of other countries. This feature is not situational, but rather has deep historical roots, representing an important component of the strategic culture of each of the five members. This common feature enables the formation of an extremely flexible community capable of maintaining stability in the long term.

Regarding the relationship between strategic culture and strategic narrative, it can be assumed that, on a national scale, a strategic narrative is derivative in relation to strategic culture. To a large extent strategic culture is the foundation on which new strategic narratives of a state are developed. Strategic culture is formed and manifests itself for centuries, while strategic narratives operate over years or decades. Owing to the fact that the BRICS community appeared only 10 years ago, its own strategic culture could not yet be formed. Currently, we can only talk about the strategic cultures of the particular states that constitute the BRICS community.

Furthermore it is important to keep in mind that a strategic culture is an important, but not only, factor in the formation of the strategic narrative of the state. As noted above, a strategic narrative is not formed spontaneously but rather is developed on the basis of urgent strategic objectives, taking into account the current domestic and international agenda. And although the basic imperatives of a strategic culture seem to be permanent, foreign policy practice and the development of strategic narratives can enrich the strategic culture of the state with new experiences. This can make it more adaptable to changes in the world and to participation in international associations.

Thus, strategic narratives are not only derivatives in relation to the strategic culture, but they also have an impact on its development. While in states with a long history strategic culture is the basis for developing strategic narratives, in newly emerged communities the consistent development and implementation of strategic narratives can lead to the gradual emergence of a strategic culture.

In conclusion, it can be noted that the process of BRICS development – the elaboration of positions on key issues on the global agenda, the development of new projects and initiatives, the presence of a certain vision of the past and the outlines of the image of the future, articulation of a clear understanding of the shortcomings of the existing world order, and active promotion of values and principles of interaction – provides the opportunity to develop a full-scale strategic BRICS narrative. Moreover, the emerging strategic narrative explicitly contains the outlines of the core of community identity based on a “spirit of BRICS” and a “BRICS philosophy” which implies multilateralism, equality, inclusiveness, the idea of joint actions in solving the most important strategic tasks, an understanding of development and the growth of influence in terms of “soft climbing,” flexibility and network-based patterns of interaction. The leaders of the BRICS countries recognize the need to develop and disseminate the discourse of BRICS not only through the use of existing communication channels, but also through “BRICS acts” and “BRICS actions.” In the strategic narrative of BRICS there are noticeable elements of storytelling manifested in the account of how the idea to form an interstate association appeared – an account that uses emotionally coloured characteristics, metaphors and proverbs that imaginatively describe the actions and goals of the community. The use of the communication technique “actualization of the image of the antagonist” strengthens the image of BRICS as a real progressive force, advocating a fair, multilateral and inclusive world of the future as opposed to the conflictual, unilateral, polarized world of the past.

Further work on the strategic narrative of BRICS should solve the following tasks:

- develop a concept that reflects the structure and key provisions of the strategic narrative of BRICS which at the same time offers a convincing and attractive key message; such a concept could be expressed, for example, with the phrase “BRICS as a platform” or “BRICS as a global network,” continuing a series of already-existing and popular concepts (“state as a platform,” “smart city,” etc.);
- smooth the inconsistencies of the narrative such as the insignificant role of non-state actors and civil society, the asymmetry in the ratio of Russia and China (which are the largest geopolitical actors, and China also significantly outruns other BRICS countries in

terms of gross domestic product) and other members of BRICS, the decline in economic growth and the issue of the vague institutional structure of BRICS;

- increase the emotional impact of a strategic narrative through tools such as visualization and storytelling;
- promote the mainstream narrative of BRICS in influential media in opposition to the existing counter-narratives, as well as in reports and papers of the leading analytical centres;
- hold press events on as many issues on the world agenda as possible to disseminate BRICS discourse and increase the diversity of the strategic narrative as a whole;
- form and promote the semantic core of the community and the cloud of (hash) tags reflecting the values and keywords of the “BRICS spirit” and “BRICS philosophy,” such as “multilateralism,” “inclusiveness,” “flexibility,” “soft ascendance,” “openness,” “justice,” “equality,” “diversity,” “development through cooperation,” “outreach,” “BRICS+ ,” etc .;
- actively promote BRICS projects implemented across various tracks of interaction, as well as BRICS discourse, in social media (Facebook, Instagram, VKontakte);
- develop and promote high-quality video content (primarily on the YouTube platform) including promotional videos, news programmes, interviews, expert speeches and debates on the most topical issues of interaction in the framework of BRICS;
- engage opinion leaders (politicians, actors, celebrities, TV and radio broadcasters, popular bloggers and YouTube channel authors) to promote the BRICS agenda and discourse;
- further use the “actualization of the image of antagonist” communication technique for positioning BRICS as a progressive association of the future, which should imply its implicit juxtaposition to the existing vertically integrated western alliances as outdated structures of the past.

These tasks could be entrusted to a specially created intergovernmental communication partnership (or agency), whose functions would include not only informational support of BRICS activities, but first and foremost, the development and implementation of a full-fledged communication strategy that would facilitate achievement of BRICS’s strategic goals in the international arena. The formation of a diversified and flexible BRICS strategic narrative could become the basis for the development of such a communication strategy. In the long run the creation and maintenance of an effective strategic narrative may be one of the factors for the formation of a common strategic culture, which (if it is formed) will become a solid foundation for sustainable interaction among the members of the community.

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Проблемы формирования стратегического нарратива БРИКС¹

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В течение последнего десятилетия БРИКС как объединение развивающихся стран стало заметным явлением на международной арене. В политических и экспертных кругах продолжают дискуссии о перспективах БРИКС, его жизнеспособности, о том, насколько реальны возможности его дальнейшей институционализации и превращения в более интегрированный союз. Многие эксперты скептически относятся к перспективам БРИКС как влиятельного международного объединения вследствие замедления темпов экономического роста, асимметрии в экономическом потенциале, значительных различий в политических целях и стратегических культурах стран – членов «пятерки».

В этих условиях для повышения доверия и усиления влияния необходима разработка коммуникационной стратегии БРИКС. Первым шагом может стать формирование стратегического нарратива, который является смысловой платформой для выработки отношения к ключевым вопросам повестки дня, определяет отношение к прошлому и образ будущего, описывает идентичность субъекта коммуникации. Фактически стратегический нарратив представляет собой идеальную платформу для разработки концепции позиционирования – важного компонента коммуникационной стратегии. Стратегический нарратив дает возможность сформировать базовый дискурс и ключевые сообщения, которые могут транслироваться по разным каналам коммуникации.

В статье определены контуры стратегического нарратива БРИКС на основе моделей стратегического нарратива [Miskimton, O'Loughlin, 2017a; 2017b] и биографического нарратива [Berenskoetter, 2014]. Применительно к БРИКС рассмотрены основные компоненты стратегического нарратива (нарратив международной системы, нарратив идентичности, проблемные нарративы) и биографического нарратива (история (миф) о создании, видение прошлого, образ будущего, пространственное измерение, отношения с другими странами и сообществами). Содержится анализ соотношения и взаимовлияния стратегического нарратива и стратегической культуры. Показано, какие компоненты стратегического нарратива уже разработаны, а также определены направления дальнейшей работы по формированию стратегического нарратива.

В исследовании использовался конструктивистский подход, в соответствии с которым стратегический нарратив рассматривался в качестве социального конструкта, разработанного для достижения стратегических целей, и холистический подход, в рамках которого различные сферы деятельности БРИКС изучались как взаимосвязанные. Кроме того, в работе использованы методы контент-анализа документов саммитов БРИКС в Сямэне в 2017 г. и в Йоханнесбурге в 2018 г., а также текстов выступлений руководителей стран БРИКС.

Ключевые слова: БРИКС; стратегические нарративы; стратегические коммуникации; международные отношения

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