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Digital Diplomacy of Russia and India in the Context of Adaptive Soft Power Approaches

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of the activities of Russia and India in the context of the digitalization of international relations. These countries are examples of states that are dynamically transforming their foreign policy tools to meet the demands of the digital era, and the systematization of their experience has significant heuristic potential. It is noted that the systematization of the analysis of the state's activities in the field of digital diplomacy as a key element of soft power strategies can be carried out in three main areas: 1) forming horizontal communications, 2) using instruments and technologies, and 3) creating regulations. Through these areas, the adaptive potential and competitiveness of Russia and India in using and regulating digital technologies can be explored using comparative methodology. The review of the Russian digital diplomacy model covers both significant achievements (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' well-developed social media digital network, media activity in the online space, countering disinformation, digital cooperation with friendly states, and a proactive agenda in the areas of cybercrime and the regulation of artificial intelligence technologies), as well as the associated challenges, primarily caused by restrictions and sanctions pressure. India's digital diplomacy has been successful in using online tools to engage with the diaspora and modernize consular services. The article also examines not only the Ministry of External Affairs of India's activities on social media but also the impact of the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's accounts on shaping the global agenda. It also highlights the promotion of Indian digital technologies such as India Stack and UPI. In conclusion, it is noted that the cyber diplomacy of Russia and India is primarily aimed at countering the militarization of the digital space.

Key words: digitalization of international relations, foreign policy, soft power, public diplomacy, AI regulation, cyber diplomacy, social media, international competitiveness

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Цифровая дипломатия России и Индии в контексте адаптивности «мягкосиловых» подходов

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Аннотация. Исследование посвящено анализу активности России и Индии в контексте цифровизации международных отношений. Россия и Индия являются примерами государств, динамично трансформирующих свой внешнеполитический инструментарий в соответствии с требованиями цифровой эпохи, поэтому систематизация их опыта имеет значимый эвристический потенциал. Отмечено, что систематизация анализа деятельности государства в области цифровой дипломатии как ключевого элемента стратегий «мягкой силы» может быть проведена по трем основным направлениям: 1) формирование горизонтальных коммуникаций; 2) инструментально-технологическое и 3) регуляторное. Через эти направления с помощью сравнительной методологии раскрыты адаптивный потенциал и конкурентоспособность России и Индии в области использования и регулирования цифровых технологий. Обзор российской модели цифровой дипломатии охватывает как значимые достижения (развитая цифровая сеть МИД России в социальных сетях, медийная активность в онлайн-пространстве, противодействие дезинформации, цифровое сопряжение с дружественными государствами, проактивная повестка в области киберпреступности и регулирования технологий искусственного интеллекта), так и сопутствующие вызовы, обусловленные в первую очередь рестрикциями и санкционным давлением. Цифровая дипломатия Индии успешно проявляется в использовании онлайн-инструментов для взаимодействия с диаспорой и модернизации консульских услуг. Также рассмотрена не только активность Министерства иностранных дел Индии в социальных сетях, но и влияние популярности аккаунтов премьер-министра Нарендры Моди на формирование глобальной повестки. Также освещено продвижение индийских цифровых технологий, таких как *India Stack* и UPI. В заключении отмечено, что кибердипломатия России и Индии направлена в первую очередь на противодействие милитаризации цифрового пространства.

Ключевые слова: цифровизация международных отношений, внешняя политика, мягкая сила, публичная дипломатия, регулирование ИИ, кибердипломатия, социальные сети, международная конкурентоспособность

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Introduction

Digital technologies are increasingly shaping and strengthening the global mediatized space, that is, the socio-information space, which is significantly influenced by media technologies, traditional and new media (Gureeva & Kireeva, 2022, p. 35; Volodenkov, 2016). The role of digital technologies in foreign policy has been growing rapidly since the 1990s. By the beginning of the 21st century, most states

recognized digital technologies as a strategic tool for implementing foreign policy and solving diplomatic problems (Zaemsky & Karpovich, 2021, p. 265).

Since 2009, the term “digital diplomacy” has been used in US strategic documents as part of public diplomacy (Zinovieva, 2013, p. 214). It is noteworthy that one of the initial goals of the development of American digital diplomacy was to limit Russia’s influence and presence in the post-Soviet media space.

Digital diplomacy has been transforming the way diplomatic services operate for the past 10 years, not only in terms of routine tasks but also in the structure and methods of foreign policy agencies (Zonova, 2015). By the early 2020s, experimental practices finally gave way to the systematic use of digital platforms (Tsvetkova, 2020). Currently, in the context of the hybridization of international relations, digital diplomacy represents a significant component of the implementation of a state's soft power strategy. Through the use of digital technologies, information networks, and online platforms, diplomats can conduct their foreign policy activities more effectively.

To systematize the analysis of state activities in the field of digital diplomacy, as a

key element of soft power, three main areas can be identified:

- 1) the development of horizontal communications,
- 2) the instrumental and technological area,
- 3) the regulatory area in the field of digital technologies.

A general overview of these areas is provided in Table 1.

Russia and India are examples of countries adapting their foreign policy tools to the demands of the digital age (Burlinova et al., 2020; Dasgupta & Vora, 2024). The evolution of both countries' digital diplomacy and the adaptation of their soft power approaches can be examined comparatively through the prism of the three main areas of state activity in digital diplomacy.

Table 1. Main Areas of State Activity in the Field of Digital Diplomacy

No.	Direction	Description
1	Formation of horizontal communications	This approach focuses on developing horizontal connections with target groups through direct clarification and promotion of a specific agenda or position. In terms of content, this means democratizing information flows: facilitating access to information, providing prompt feedback, and employing less formal, visually oriented communication practices, including infotainment (Zeng et al., 2010). Special attention is paid to identifying and neutralizing deliberately false, negative, and provocative information disseminated to a wide audience (Kreps, 2020; Sinchuk, Vlasov & Ogurtsov, 2022)
2	Instrumental and technological direction	The approach relies on modern technological advances in digitalization to improve the state's external relations. This includes both the optimization of consular services, such as visa documentation, and the rapidly developing "data diplomacy" (Pavlyuchenko, 2024; Tsvetkova & Kuznetsov, 2020). The latter involves working with big data and intelligent systems (including chatbots) to quickly filter information by various criteria (topics, sources, requests, reactions). This helps identify key opinion leaders and the selection of the most effective communication channels to reach the target audience. Furthermore, the instrumental and technological approach includes the promotion of successful developments in the field of information and communication technologies
3	Regulatory direction in the field of digital technologies	This approach involves active engagement of states in creating norms and standards for the digital sphere and ensuring cybersecurity. The goal of such cyber diplomacy is to establish interstate cooperation to develop effective regulatory mechanisms capable of countering aggressive external actions. Such actions include network and hacker attacks, as well as any forms of politically motivated digital interference aimed at discrediting a state or weakening its sovereignty. Issues related to the use of artificial intelligence technologies (Grishanina, 2021) and its regulation in interstate interactions also play an important role in this context

Source: compiled by N.N. Emelianova.

Digitalization of Horizontal Communications as an Element of the Soft Power Approaches of Russia and India

Russia

The task of working with “soft power” and new technologies was publicly outlined to the Russian diplomatic corps on July 8, 2012, during Russian President Vladimir Putin’s speech at a meeting of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives. He emphasized the need to more actively utilize these tools to improve the work of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).¹ Later, in 2013, the readiness to develop methods and technologies alternative to classical diplomacy was reflected in the Foreign Policy Concept (paragraphs 20, 41).²

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs began developing its social media accounts in 2011 (Table 2).

The Russian Foreign Ministry is actively fighting against disinformation and fake news that is directed against the country and distorts its foreign policy. Since 2017, a special “Antifake” section has been operating on the Ministry’s website, publishing refutations and debunking false information from foreign media. This initiative has expanded to social media, with materials particularly popular on the Ministry’s *Telegram* channels (#Antifake).

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Information and Press Department, responsible for information support for the Ministry and its missions abroad, plays a key role in developing diplomacy on social media. The Digital Diplomacy Department, founded in 2014 within

this department, is responsible for public relations in the online space.

As of 2024, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had an official presence on 12 digital platforms, using Russian, as well as English, Spanish, French, and Arabic (Zinovieva, 2024, p. 5). Overall, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ digital network includes over 1,200 accounts. Currently, all Russian missions abroad maintain social media accounts. Additionally, 23 Russian diplomats holding senior and mid-level positions (ambassadors, plenipotentiaries, permanent representatives, etc.) also maintain social media accounts through their personal accounts.³

However, in addition to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ efforts, in the 2010s a model was successfully implemented that relied on promoting information and meaningful narratives through the support of social media accounts of leading domestic media outlets broadcasting information to foreign audiences.

In digital diplomacy, Russian media initially relied on audience segmentation approaches, striving to create personalized stories (narratives) tailored to the interests, needs, and characteristics of various groups of information consumers. Big data analysis using intelligent systems enabled the development of more effective interaction models, uniting users with diverse social, intellectual, and ideological views into communities.

By the mid-2010s, Russian media had significantly strengthened its position on the international stage, actively using social media to expand its audience. At the same time, after 2014, against the backdrop of growing Russian media influence, restrictions and information campaigns targeting Russia were gradually introduced.

¹ Latukhina K. Vladimir Putin Called on Russian Ambassadors to Master New Technologies // Rossiyskaya Gazeta. July 9, 2012. (In Russian). URL: <https://rg.ru/2012/07/10/putin.html> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

² Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (February 12, 2013) // Information and Legal Portal Garant.ru. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/70218094/> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

³ Social Media Accounts // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (In Russian). URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/social_accounts/ (accessed: 01.11.2025).

**Table 2. Online Activity of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs:
Chronology of Official Social Media Account Launches**

Year of launch	Platform	Account / channel	Languages	Activity and main thematic content plots
2011	<i>Twitter*</i>	MID_RF	Russian	– Publication of official statements and comments by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Promptly informing Russian-speaking audiences about foreign policy activities – Interaction with the media and the public
2011	<i>Twitter*</i>	MFA Russia	English	– Informing international audiences about Russia's position on key issues – Publishing translations of key statements – Dialogue with foreign media and diplomats
2012	<i>YouTube</i>	midrftube	Russian, English	– Posting official video materials (press conferences, briefings) – Publishing recordings of official speeches – Closed due to copyright claims
2012	<i>YouTube</i>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia	Russian, English	– Resumption of video activities after the closure of the previous channel – Posting official video documents, interviews, and ceremonies – Subtitles and translations for international audiences
2013	<i>Facebook**</i>	MIDRussia	Russian, English	– Dissemination of MFA news – Publishing analytical materials and commentary – Interacting with users through comments and reposts
2014	<i>Flickr</i>	MFA Russia	English	– Publishing photographs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' activities – Coverage of visits, negotiations, and events – Visual documentation of diplomatic work
2016	<i>Instagram**</i>	MIDRussia	Russian, English	– A visual narrative about the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – The first post is about peregrine falcons on the roof of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building (an informal approach) – Photo reports from international events, behind-the-scenes footage
2016	<i>Telegram</i>	t.me/MID_Russia (рус.) t.me/MFARussia (англ.)	Russian, English	– Instant dissemination of official statements – Brief commentary on current events
2024	<i>Telegram</i>	t.me/MAERusia (исп.) t.me/MAErusse (фр.) t.me/Russia_ar (ар.)	Spanish, French, Arabic	– Duplication of key messages in multiple languages for a global audience – Prompt responses to pressing questions
2015	<i>Vkontakte</i>	vk.com/mid	Russian	– Informing Russian audiences about foreign policy – Publishing news, articles, and videos – Conducting online events and surveys – Engaging with young audiences
2021	<i>Odnoklassniki</i>	https://ok.ru/group/62089256763599	Russian	– Reaching a wider age audience – Reposting key news from other MFA social media – Interacting with users, answering questions
2023	<i>Zen</i>	dzen.ru/mid_russia	Russian	– Publishing longreads and analytical materials – Multimedia content (videos, infographics) – Blogs and columns by officials – Integration with the platform's search and recommendation systems

Notes. * — The social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*) is blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation.

** — The social networks *Facebook* and *Instagram* (part of the *Meta* group of companies) are banned in the Russian Federation. *Meta* is recognized as an extremist organization in the Russian Federation.

Source: compiled by N.N. Emelianova.

Table 3. Chronology of the Main Restrictions on Russian Media Activity in Social Networks*

Date	Platform	Action	Description / Affected resources
February 2022	Facebook**	Account restrictions	Restrictions have begun to be introduced against official accounts of Russian media outlets: <i>RIA Novosti</i> , <i>Lenta.ru</i> , <i>Gazeta.ru</i> , <i>RT</i> , <i>Sputnik</i>
February 28, 2022	Spotify	Content blocking	Content from media outlets associated with Russia is completely hidden
March 1, 2022	Twitter (X)***	Account labeling	<i>Sputnik</i> has launched a system for labeling its employee accounts as “Media affiliated with the Russian state”
March 8, 2022	Instagram**	Demotion in search results	Publications with links to state-backed Russian media have been demoted and marked
March 11, 2022	YouTube	Channel blocking	Russian state-linked channels are blocked worldwide
March 13, 2022	YouTube	Channel blocking	The following channels of the Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Fund (GTBRF) have been blocked: “Soviet Television. Gosteleradiofond” and “Soviet Radio. Gosteleradiofond”
August 4, 2022	Twitter (X)***	Account blocking	<i>RIA Novosti</i> ’s account has been blocked in the UK and EU countries
September 17, 2024	Meta (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp)**	Account blocking	The accounts of <i>Russia Today</i> and the <i>Rossiya Segodnya</i> media group (including its subsidiaries <i>RIA Novosti</i> , <i>Ruptly</i> , and <i>Sputnik</i>) have been blocked

Notes. * — Information on all restrictions imposed by internet platforms is regularly updated in a special section of the official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See: Repressions against Russian Media and Journalists Abroad // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (In Russian). URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/journalist_help/repressions/ (accessed: 01.11.2025).

** — The social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*) is blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation.

*** — *Meta* has been designated an extremist organization in the Russian Federation. The social networks *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *WhatsApp*, which are part of the *Meta* group of companies, are banned in the Russian Federation.

Source: compiled by N.N. Emelianova.

After 2022, the information war against Russia led to restrictions that forced the Russian leadership to transform this model. In addition to blocking numerous news portals and suspending the operations and broadcasts of key Russian media outlets, the dissemination of Russian media content on social media was significantly limited (Table 3).

It’s also worth noting that the *App Store* has launched a direct attack on the Russian social network *Vkontakte* and its apps: on September 26, 2022, *Vkontakte*, “VK Music,” “VK Clips,” “VK Messenger,” “VK Play,” “VK Admin,” and *Mail.ru* were removed. This has limited the ability to deliver content to foreign audiences through this social network.

At the same time, all these actions have clearly demonstrated that the global digital space, and social media as an important part of it, is still largely under US control. American activity in developing the global Internet is seen

as a strategic advantage: control of network code, protocols, the English language, and software gives Washington the ability to evaluate and predict the actions of all participants in international relations—both friendly and hostile (Sitkazieva, 2023, p. 96).

In the context of the restrictions on the activities of Russian media outlets through their activity on social networks, an illustrative case can be given from February 2025, when the English-language account of *RT India* was suspended on the social network *X*.⁴ The blocking occurred in the wake of a report by RT correspondent Runjun Sharma, who was the first to photograph a Russian Su-57 fighter jet up close at the Aero India aerospace exhibition in Bangalore. The report, published on the social network just hours before the blocking, garnered

⁴ The social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*) has been blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation (*Editor’s note*).

hundreds of thousands of views and reactions. When the blocking occurred, the page owners were cited as violating the platform's rules for "impersonation."⁵ The account suspension, however, was short-lived, lasting several days (from February 11 to 15, 2025). Notably, the suspension occurred during the Aero India air show, where the Su-57 was competing against American F-35A and F-16 fighter jets. Thus, the technological competition between countries was projected onto the information space of one of the world's leading social networks.

Despite information restrictions, the Concept of Russia's Humanitarian Policy Abroad (dated September 5, 2022) specifically emphasizes that, in the era of globalization, it is the Internet that promotes cultural integration and mutual understanding (paragraph 70). At the same time, Russian media, in particular television channels and new media (social networks, instant messengers, blogs), are recognized as the most effective tool of "soft power" (paragraph 72). Thus, the Concept recognizes the need to enhance the effectiveness of Russian digital diplomacy tools through the promotion of domestic digital platforms and social networks (paragraph 75): special attention is and will be given to the development of online platforms such as *RUTUBE*, *Vkontakte*, *OK* (*Odnoklassniki*), and *Zen*.⁶

However, there are both opportunities and limitations here. On the one hand, developing our own platforms allows us not only to ensure digital sovereignty but also to participate in constructive regulation of interactions with content and target audiences. On the other hand,

the number of users of Russian social media is quite limited, and quickly attracting large foreign audiences to them in the face of intense competition among social media platforms globally is quite challenging.

The foundation of current media outreach to foreign audiences lies in the institutional development of social media platforms at diplomatic missions, Russian Houses abroad, and non-profit organizations (NPOs) within the Rossotrudnichestvo partner network. Diplomatic missions and Russian Houses abroad are striving to refocus on social media, acting as media centers and unified information channels that not only transmit information flows but also generate information, although this is not always possible due to resource constraints.

India

Early Indian studies on the use of digital technologies in foreign policy emphasized the need to build unified narratives in the media and digital space of social media and the importance of more coordinated interagency work to achieve this (Natarajan, 2014). Recent Indian research often emphasizes the dual nature of digital diplomacy, which is important to consider in the development of various social media diplomacy initiatives: on the one hand, it can advance national interests through agenda-setting, while on the other, it requires a more nuanced understanding of the audience (Joshi et al., 2025).

The start of the Indian Foreign Ministry's systematic work on digitalizing horizontal ties as a key element of the country's soft power approach can be considered to be 2010 (Table 4), when the first *Twitter*⁷ account of the Directorate of Public Diplomacy of the Ministry of External Affairs of India was created.

⁵ RT India's Account Blocked in X after a Report on the Su-57 // RT in Russian. February 11, 2025. (In Russian). URL: <https://russian.rt.com/world/news/1433347-akkaunt-rt-india-zablokirovali-v-x> (accessed: 14.02.2025).

⁶ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of September 5, 2022 No. 611 "On Approval of the Concept of the Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad" // President of Russia. (In Russian). URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/48280> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

⁷ The social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*) has been blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation (*Editor's note*).

Table 4. Online Activity of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs: Chronology of Official Social Media Accounts

Year of launch	Platform	Account / channel	Activity and main thematic content plots
2010	<i>Twitter*</i>	@IndianDiplomacy	Raising awareness of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, covering foreign policy objectives, introducing the audience to Indian culture, traditions, history, and modern achievements, news about diplomatic personnel changes, official statements
2011	<i>Twitter*</i>	@MEAIndia	Official account of the Foreign Ministry's press secretary, publication of official statements with multimedia materials (photos, audio, video), releases on visits, meetings, and negotiations of the country's top leadership
2011	<i>YouTube</i>	@MEAIndia	Video recordings of events, press conferences and briefings
2013	<i>YouTube</i>	@IndianDiplomacy	Video recordings of events, press conferences, and briefings, documentaries commissioned by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (including footage from the 1990s)
2012	<i>Facebook**</i>	MEAINDIA	More detailed content delivery (compared to <i>Twitter*</i>), high popularity (one of the leading positions among the pages of foreign ministries of other countries), by April 2025, the number of subscribers reached more than 2.1 million people.
2014	<i>Instagram**</i>	@MEAIndia	Visual representation of the MFA's activities, active engagement with the audience.
2015	<i>LinkedIn</i>	URL: https://ru.linkedin.com/company/ministry-of-external-affairs-india	Working with professional communities, information and updates on official visits, meetings, and events, materials describing the specifics of bilateral relations with other countries and participation in international organizations, publications highlighting the specifics of India's role in the world and the country's position on global issues, real-time dissemination of information is often accompanied not only by photos and videos, but also by high-quality graphics.

Notes. * — The social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*) is blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation.

** — The social networks *Facebook* and *Instagram* (part of the *Meta* group of companies) are banned in the Russian Federation. *Meta* is recognized as an extremist organization in the Russian Federation.

Source: compiled by N.N. Emelianova.

Among the Indian Ministry of External Affairs' (MEA) popular initiatives to enhance dialogue with young audiences is the launch of the popular *#AsktheSpokesperson Twitter*⁸ campaign in the late 2010s and early 2020s. Since 2017, this platform has allowed users to ask questions of the ministry's official

spokesperson, who responds in real time. Q&A sessions have been held every two months.⁹

Indian missions abroad also maintain an extensive social media presence. Diplomatic missions actively share infographics showcasing India's achievements in various fields, dynamic

⁸ The social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*) has been blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation (*Editor's note*).

⁹ Singh S. Digital Diplomacy: India's Increasing Digital Footprint // SSPC Research Paper. 2018. (December). P. 13. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331772911_Digital_Diplomacy_India's_Increasing_Digital_Footprint (accessed: 18.09.2025).

videos of delegation visits, visual materials about tourist destinations and cultural events, and infotainment content designed to both inform and entertain audiences. The online quiz “Know India Quiz” (*Bharat Ko Janiye*) exemplifies the use of infotainment. Developed by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, the quiz aims to disseminate knowledge about Indian history and culture among members of the Indian diaspora abroad and foreign citizens aged 14 to 50. Winners receive the opportunity to undertake a two-week fact-finding trip across India.

Special attention is also paid to Narendra Modi’s social media presence, which is reflected online. The Prime Minister Modi’s account on the social media platform *X*¹⁰ (@narendramodi) holds a record for the largest number of followers (over 100 million).¹¹ In addition to his active presence on *X*¹² Narendra Modi’s team is also dynamically developing his YouTube channel, which has over 30 million subscribers.¹³ You can also follow the Indian Prime Minister on his official pages on Facebook¹⁴, Instagram¹⁵, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Pinterest, StumbleUpon, and the Chinese microblog Weibo.

Almost immediately after Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, his social media underwent a significant overhaul and trans-

formation in terms of information generation and delivery. For example, the Indian Prime Minister’s accounts began using a mix of “positive” messages, celebrity appeals, and ritualistic responses, which contributed to his growing audience. Particular attention was paid to “feel-good” messages, which created the image of a positive and caring leader. The Indian Prime Minister’s accounts also adopted a strategy of selectively replying to messages and maintaining an active followers (followbacks), which strengthened audience loyalty. Modi’s social media quickly enabled him to shape the agenda and manage perceptions of his actions. This distinguished the Prime Minister’s team’s approach from traditional methods of political communication (Pal, 2015; Rankawat, 2023).

The widespread popularity of Narendra Modi’s image is evident even when the content is not sourced by the Prime Minister himself, but rather by artificial intelligence (AI) technologies or visual substitutions. Here it is worth dwelling on several interesting recent examples.

In 2023, a deepfake created by user @ai_whizwires using AI technology went viral on *Instagram*¹⁶: the audio deepfake, superimposed on a photo, played a popular Bollywood song with a synthesized voice of Narendra Modi. This deepfake quickly garnered over 3 million views. Another interesting example is the case of Modi allegedly dancing garba, a dynamic folk dance from the Indian state of Gujarat. The video also gained widespread popularity and recognition on social media after an *Instagram*¹⁷ user shared it.

¹⁰ The social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*) has been blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation (*Editor’s note*).

¹¹ JagaJam is a service for collecting statistics and analyzing communities and accounts on social networks. See: JagaJam. URL: <https://jagajam.com/search/twitter/narendramodi/TW:18839785> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

¹² The social network *X* (formerly *Twitter*) has been blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation (*Editor’s note*).

¹³ Narendra Modi // YouTube. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/user/narendramodi> (accessed: 30.03.2026).

¹⁴ The social network *Facebook* (part of the *Meta* group of companies) is banned in the Russian Federation. *Meta* is recognized as an extremist organization in the Russian Federation (*Editor’s note*).

¹⁵ The social network *Instagram* (part of the *Meta* group of companies) is banned in the Russian Federation. *Meta* is recognized as an extremist organization in the Russian Federation (*Editor’s note*).

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¹⁷ The social network *Instagram* (part of the *Meta* group of companies) is banned in the Russian Federation. *Meta* is recognized as an extremist organization in the Russian Federation (*Editor’s note*).

While the video initially raised serious concerns about the use of deepfake technology, in November 2023, it was revealed that it had been a case of mistaken identity: the dancer in the garba was actually entrepreneur and actor Vikas Mahante, who bears a striking resemblance to the Indian Prime Minister.¹⁸

Were these cases the result of spontaneous creativity or carefully planned political tactics as part of the escalating election campaign for the Indian parliament's lower house, the Lok Sabha? Official public information on this matter is, of course, lacking. The fact is that these cases nonetheless allowed the Indian perspective on several topics to be revealed in the global public sphere: namely, the issue of regulating deepfakes by applying special watermarks to corresponding AI-generated content as part of the modern digital agenda,¹⁹ and drawing attention to the special significance of garba dance in global culture and the Hindu festival of Navaratri, during which this rhythmic ritual dance of devotion to the goddess Durga is performed.

Instrumental and Technological Direction of Digital Diplomacy between Russia and India

The automation of consular services in Russia began with the introduction of an automated system for passport and visa processing in 1993. Initially, until 2012, efforts focused on optimizing internal administrative processes. However, the digital transformation of consular services subsequently became

a strategic tool of digital diplomacy, designed to strengthen Russia's foreign policy influence and improve communications with citizens abroad.

In addition to the key strategic goal of developing the information technology aspect of Russia's digital diplomacy (namely, optimizing consular services in terms of accessibility, speed, and convenience for all applicants, while simultaneously strengthening control and security mechanisms), it is also worth noting the increased communications value of these solutions, as they facilitate direct communication with Russian citizens abroad and with foreigners who consider Russia an attractive tourist destination or who seek to study, work, or develop a business here.

The most significant initiatives and decisions in Russia's consular services as part of its strategic digital transformations since 2012 are presented in Table 5.

In its interstate relations, Russia seeks to pursue a policy of digital integration with friendly countries and key trading partners, i.e., to collaborate on the digital economy and synchronize digital transformations. Russia and China are discussing the possibility of building a joint digital ecosystem to exchange technological solutions, develop cross-border platforms, and scale up the successful experience of joint digital campaigns to promote and strengthen their positions in the global market. Some successful cases and solutions could be further leveraged within the BRICS+ framework.

India, for its part, places particular emphasis on the use of digital technologies in its diaspora policy, which is an important part of its soft power strategy. Some examples include digital solutions such as the e-Migrate system (an integrated online platform providing information and assistance to stranded Indian emigrants, including rescue and repatriation), the Students

¹⁸ Deodia A. Fact Check: Not PM Modi Dancing to Garba Beats, This Video Shows His Lookalike! // India Today. November 10, 2023. URL: <https://www.indiatoday.in/fact-check/story/not-pm-modi-dancing-to-garba-beats-viral-video-shows-his-lookalike-vikas-mahante-2461512-2023-11-10> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

¹⁹ Narendra Modi Discussed AI Regulation with Bill Gates // Big Asia. March 29, 2024. (In Russian). URL: <https://bigasia.ru/narendra-modi-obsudil-s-billom-gejtsom-regulirovanie-v-sfere-ii/> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

Table 5. Digital Solutions in Russian Consular Services

Type of consular services	Name of the solution (product)	Brief description and functionality
Electronic visas	Electronic visa system (since 2017)	Allows foreigners to apply for a Russian visa remotely. Initially a pilot project for select regions, it will be rolled out nationwide in 2021
Mobile applications	Foreign Assistant (Russian Foreign Ministry)	The official app for Russians abroad
	RuID (launched in 2025)	Multilingual application for foreign citizens
Online services	Website of the Consular Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Consular Information Portal, https://www.kdmid.ru/)	Preparation of documents for consular procedures
	<i>Consul Online</i>	A service for processing documents at Russian embassies and consulates
Additional (including integrated) initiatives	Electronic pre-registration system for consular offices of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Online registration for visits to consular offices
	Integration with the Unified Biometric System (UBS)	Data verification in digital services

Source: compiled by N.N. Emelianova.

Registration Portal (a portal for registering and monitoring Indian students studying abroad), and others.

The Ministry of External Affairs of India's mobile app (MEAIndia), launched in 2013 for Android and iOS, has become an innovative digital solution. In addition to information on consular matters and the country's foreign policy, the app offers a unique "Follow Your Prime Minister" feature, allowing users to track Modi's foreign travels. With this app, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs has become the first ministry in the world to consolidate all its government services on a single digital platform.²⁰

The MADAD (MEA in Aid of Diaspora in Distress) system, launched by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in 2015, is a successful example of integrating web technologies and social media to improve consular services. It was created to streamline the application and complaint process for Indian

citizens abroad. Through active interaction with X²¹ and Facebook²² platforms, MADAD significantly expedites the resolution of problems. The system is particularly popular among Indian students studying abroad.²³

Starting with IT outsourcing in the technological sphere as an element of promoting its foreign policy image (Mullen, 2015, pp. 431–433), India is currently among the world leaders in the development of the IT sector, including the use of 5G (Batkaev, 2023, p. 8). The key digital solution offered by India to the world is *India Stack*—5G technology and application program interface (a digitalization project that includes four technological layers: providing individuals with digital identity cards; an interoperable

²¹ The social network X (formerly *Twitter*) has been blocked in the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation (*Editor's note*).

²² The social network *Facebook* (part of the *Meta* group of companies) is banned in the Russian Federation. *Meta* is recognized as an extremist organization in the Russian Federation (*Editor's note*).

²³ Mohilay A. Social Media and India's Digital Diplomacy: Lessons from Recent International Events // Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA). December 28, 2023. URL: https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=10333&lid=6588 (accessed: 01.11.2025).

²⁰ Chand M. Thinking Smart: A Giant Digital Leap for India's Foreign Office // India Writes Network. July 30, 2013. URL: <https://www.indiawrites.org/diplomacy/thinking-smart-indias-foreign-office-giant-digital-leap/> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

payment system; virtual documents and their verification; and personal data management).²⁴ Agreements on the mutual use of the India Stack have, however, received little development so far: relevant documents have been signed with Trinidad and Tobago (2023), Armenia, Sierra Leone, Suriname and Antigua and Barbuda (2024).

As part of New Delhi's ambition to achieve global technological leadership in digital technologies, the work of the Technology Innovation Group (TIG-6G) is important, aiming for India to hold at least 10% of the world's 6G patents.²⁵

Other Indian digital solutions are also gaining global recognition thanks to their systematic promotion. The country has become the world's largest digital payments market, primarily thanks to the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), developed in 2016 by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), which unifies multiple bank accounts into a single mobile app. UPI is being promoted internationally to reduce geopolitical risks and dependence on Western infrastructure. UPI's global reach is gradually expanding. By 2024, the system had connections with the payment systems of countries such as Sri Lanka, Mauritius, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Bhutan, Nepal, and others. In February 2024, France also became the first European country to accept UPI from India.²⁶

Russia and India's Approaches to Protecting Digital Sovereignty in the Context of Digital Diplomacy

When building digital diplomacy, states perceive the situation differently when they are the target rather than the source of influence. In the digital communications space, this typically stems from a concern about one's own vulnerability, which translates into special measures to protect digital sovereignty. This approach is also directly intertwined with the values of a multipolar world, which values the sovereign right of states to manage their own digital space, excluding external interference that could be destructive.

For Russia, the development and application of national technologies, infrastructure, and standards is crucial, as they are seen as the foundation for ensuring control over the country's digital assets and protecting against external threats. The strategic goal is to establish a completely independent digital ecosystem, free from external influences (Kochetkov & Maslov, 2022).

India, in turn, aiming to achieve a balance between government regulation of the digital sphere and the stimulation of innovative activity, in parallel with the development of its own digital platforms, strives for openness in international cooperation, which in practice is not so easy to agree on.²⁷ However, discussions are currently underway regarding the possibility of requesting the source code of foreign digital products for security checks. Specifically, in January 2026, *Reuters*, citing sources and confidential documents, reported that India plans to introduce new rules for smartphone

²⁴ IndiaStack. URL: <https://www.indiastack.org/> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

²⁵ 6G Technology // Ministry of Communications of India. December 21, 2021. URL: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1885360> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

²⁶ Digital Diplomacy: India's UPI System Gets Another Global Push with Launch in France // India News Network. February 5, 2024. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.indianewsnetwork.com/ru/20240205/digital-diplomacy-india-s-upi-system-gets-another-global-push-with-launch-in-france> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

²⁷ Purushottam S., Singh P. J. What Has Been Missed is India's Digital Sovereignty // *The Hindu*. August 2, 2025. URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/what-has-been-missed-is-indias-digital-sovereignty/article69884151.ece> (accessed: 01.12.2025).

manufacturers, requiring them to provide access to the source code of their devices and to make software changes to improve security. This package of measures, which includes 83 security standards, also requires notification to authorities of any significant software updates. This initiative is part of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to strengthen user data protection amid rising cases of online fraud and data breaches in India, the second-largest smartphone market with nearly 750 million devices.²⁸

Thus, despite the shared goal of minimizing dependence on foreign technological solutions and strengthening control over the digital sphere, Russia and India have different priorities in their digital sovereignty strategies, although India's approach is evolving.

Russia and India's Positions on the Global Digital Agenda and Prospective Regulation of Digital Technologies

On the global stage, Russia is considered a country with a proactive digital agenda, working in the field of cyber diplomacy as part of its digital diplomacy.

Some of Russia's significant initiatives for fostering productive expert and public debate on cybercrime include the following:

- the preparation and adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution No. 74/247 of December 27, 2019, "Countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes,"
- the establishment of the UN Working Group on International Information Security to combat cybercrime (in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution No. 75/240 of December 31, 2020),

– the development of the Convention against Cybercrime (endorsed by UN General Assembly Resolution No. 79/243 of December 24, 2024).

In particular, the Convention contains such important provisions as:

- establishing criminal liability for illegal access to, interception of, and interference with electronic data,
- granting law enforcement agencies the procedural powers to collect and store electronic evidence,
- developing state programs for the protection and rehabilitation of victims, as well as the prevention of related offenses.²⁹

In addition, to facilitate the investigation of cybercrimes, the Convention provides for the creation of a dedicated operational assistance network accessible to all States Parties.³⁰ Moreover, the Convention is the first global agreement aimed at protecting children from sexual abuse using information technology.

New Delhi, with its human-centered approach to technology and commitment to the global community,³¹ in building digital leadership in the Global South, is committed to developing communications infrastructure, innovative healthcare solutions, digital finance, and financial assets.

Regulating the military aspects of the use of artificial intelligence technologies is understandably a special focus of various global discussions, in which Russia is also directly

²⁸ Pletneva S. Reuters: India Proposed to Oblige Smartphone Manufacturers to Disclose Source Code // *Forbes*. January 12, 2025. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.forbes.ru/tekhnologii/553379-reuters-india-predlozila-obazat-proizvoditelej-smartfonov-raskryvat-ishodnyj-kod> (accessed: 01.02.2026).

²⁹ United Nations Convention against Cybercrime; Strengthening International Cooperation to Combat Certain Offences Committed through Information and Communications Systems and in the Exchange of Evidence in Electronic Form Relating to Serious Crimes, adopted by resolution 79/243 of 24 December 2024 // The United Nations. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.un.org/ru/documents/treaty/A-RES-79-243> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Jagtiani S.L., Hageböling D. India's G20 Presidency: Decoding the Digital Technology Agenda // *The Diplomat*. January 30, 2023. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/indias-g20-presidency-decoding-the-digital-technology-agenda/> (accessed: 01.11.2025).

involved. The main venues for such consultations are the UN Disarmament Commission and the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. The latter was established in 2016 by states party to the Convention on Inhumane Weapons to study the ethical, legal, moral, and social aspects of using autonomous robots to carry weapons and program them for participation in actual combat. Russia and India, along with the United States, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Israel, are among the countries with significant experience and groundwork in this area and do not support a ban on the use of such weapons. Japan and the Republic of Korea also oppose radical restrictive measures. However, consultations on developing regulations for a preventive moratorium on the use of autonomous systems have been ongoing at UN venues since 2018 (Lektorsky et al., 2022, p. 27). Currently, there is no UN mandate to develop an international treaty in this area.

Conclusion

Thus, since the 2010s, Russia and India have been actively working in all key areas of digital diplomacy.

As part of *developing horizontal communications*, ties with audiences abroad are expanding: both countries are developing social media diplomacy, possessing a highly diversified network of accounts and striving to employ less formal communication practices.

However, the content generated by both countries' foreign missions shares some common weaknesses, including the duplication of news stories and related materials with identical presentations over similar timeframes, without taking into account the specifics of the social media platforms on which the work is conducted (including the needs of young audiences). A lack

of personalized stories (stories of impressions, successes, etc.) in the first person, in a storytelling format, reduces the interactivity and viral potential of posts.

Unlike India, Russia in the 2010s demonstrated an effective model for transmitting information and messages through the social media accounts, with leading domestic media outlets focused on reaching foreign audiences. This was also due to differences in the system of interaction between the state and the media: in Russia, state-media cooperation is more clearly structured than in India, where the media landscape remains fragmented, complicating the development of unified campaigns for external image positioning across various thematic areas. However, after 2014, amid a clear expansion of Russia's media capabilities, restrictions began to emerge, reaching their peak between 2022 and 2024, when Russian media outlets' social media came under intense sanctions pressure. Thus, with the start of the special military operation (SMO) in 2022, Russia's social media diplomacy model began to transform toward the social media operations of diplomatic missions of "Russian Houses" abroad as independent media centers. These practices are only just beginning to emerge.

Through their efforts in the *instrumental and technological arena*, Russia and India are promoting their own applied technologies in information and communications technology and artificial intelligence, as well as big data management projects in various fields. For example, Russia has expressed its willingness to build joint digital ecosystems with friendly countries (both bilaterally and multilaterally) to exchange technological solutions and develop cross-border platforms, and to work on joint assessments of the conformity of artificial intelligence technologies in various areas of economic development. India, for its part, is

promoting the *India Stack* project (5G technology and application program interface) and the UPI system.

The *regulatory cyber diplomacy* of both countries is primarily focused on addressing the challenges posed by the potential of internet resources and social media to become platforms for hybrid warfare, cyberwarfare, cyberterrorism, and cybercrime. Moscow and New Delhi recognize that the fight must be divided into neutralizing dangerous infrastructure (protecting computer systems, networks, programs, and data; identifying actual attackers, etc.) and countering disinformation and the dissemination of destructive messages.

Russia is a country with a proactive digital agenda. In particular, since 2019, Russia has

initiated important steps at the UN to combat cybercrime, culminating in the development and adoption of the Convention against Cybercrime.

Russia and India, as countries with significant developments and groundwork in the field of smart weapons, are also actively participating in UN discussions regarding the regulatory framework for the military use of artificial intelligence technologies. While recognizing the importance of a responsible approach to the use of relevant technologies, both countries, along with the United States and China, are currently unwilling to support a legally binding international treaty in this area, preferring instead to pursue national regulations.

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