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# HOW ARE PLATFORMS RESPONDING TO UKRAINE'S INFORMATION WAR?

Tracking Platform Responses to  
Networked Disinformation in Ukraine



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## Background

From the start of Russia's current invasion of Ukraine, Public Knowledge monitored and reported on the efforts of digital technology companies to respond to it. Our goal is to gain insights that may guide the development of policy positions regarding platform accountability.

## General Updates & Commentary

On May 18, Neiman Lab speculated that Western support for the war in Ukraine is due in large part to the Ukrainian government's ability to provide information about the war in a way that appeals to Western sensibilities. "Information warfare entails one party denying, exploiting or corrupting the delivery and function of an enemy's information. It is used both to protect oneself against the enemy's information and to create a favorable environment for one's own information." Ukraine's weapons include its charismatic, media trained President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, savvy use of traditional and social media, and direct appeals to the U.S. Congress, European Parliament and the court of world opinion that provided a clear and compelling framing of the war. That frame is structured around five affecting themes: the inherently just cause of Ukrainian self-defense; the tenacity of Ukrainian resistance; the barbarity of Russian conduct; Russia's flawed military strategy and general ineptitude; and Ukraine's desperate need for more, and more sophisticated, military hardware.<sup>1</sup>

On May 17, members of the U.S. House intelligence committee sent a letter to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg asking Facebook to address what it called pro-Russian disinformation on the company's platforms in Slovakia.<sup>2</sup>

On May 12, Reps. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., chair of the Oversight Committee; Gregory Meeks, D-N.Y., chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee; Stephen Lynch, D-Mass., chair of the Oversight and Reform subcommittee on national security; and William Keating, D-Mass, chair of the Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Europe, energy, the environment and cyber, sent formal requests to the CEOs of YouTube, TikTok, Twitter and Facebook's parent company, Meta asking them to archive content that could be used as evidence of Russian war crimes in Ukraine. "We write to encourage Meta to take steps to preserve and archive content shared on its platforms that could potentially be used as evidence as the U.S. government and international human rights and accountability monitors investigate Russian war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other atrocities in Ukraine," the letter sent to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg stated. They specifically request the social media companies "to flag or mark content as containing potential evidence of war crimes and other atrocities."<sup>3</sup>

On April 28, coda reported that independent newsrooms in eastern Ukraine say they're being restricted under the same rules designed to counter Russian state disinformation on digital

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.niemanlab.org/2022/05/ukraines-information-war-is-winning-hearts-and-minds-in-the-west/>

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-house-members-ask-meta-address-pro-russian-disinformation-facebook-slovakia-2022-05-17/>

<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/democrats-ask-facebook-youtube-archive-evidence-war-crimes-rcna28563>

platforms. Ukrainian newsrooms are being flooded by graphic images from the frontlines of the war. It's newsworthy, at times vital content that is in public interest but it is impossible for editors to know what they are allowed to publish on Facebook and Instagram because Meta, "never made attempts to identify key controversial topics and provide additional guidance to publishers on how to treat these topics on their platform." And even where there are rules, they are confusing and inconsistent.<sup>4</sup>

That same day, a Russian court fined Twitter for failing to remove content that the country considers illegal. The 3 million ruble, or \$40,000 fine, comes after Twitter allegedly failed to remove content that included instructions for how to make Molotov cocktails and offending Russia's national anthem and flag.<sup>5</sup>

On April 27, Electronic Frontier Foundation criticized digital platforms for taking down content that may be valuable to the public and used as evidence in future trials for war crimes. They pointed out that while social media is not the ideal place for sharing such content, the fact is that for those living in conflict zones, these platforms are often the easiest place to quickly upload such content. They asserted that platforms must work with journalists, human rights activists, and their users to establish clear content moderation policies that respect freedom of expression and the right to access information.<sup>6</sup>

On April 26, many news outlets reported that a court in Moscow had fined Meta and TikTok for failing to delete content the government deems illegal. The Magistrate Court of the Taganka district ruled that Meta must pay 4 million rubles (\$52,800) for failing to take down from its Facebook and Instagram networks materials "propagating the LGBT community," and "insulting Russia's national flag and coat of arms."<sup>7</sup>

That same day, news outlets reported that a court in Moscow had impounded property and frozen bank accounts of Google's Russian arm as a guarantee against a possible court decision regarding a lawsuit filed by a subsidiary of Gazprom-Media holding. The suit was against Google for its refusal to restore access to its YouTube channel. It is demanding financial compensation for the damages and wants access to its channel restored.<sup>8</sup>

On April 26, Media Matters reported on how Tucker Carlson's segments on Fox News continue to promote pro-Russia talking points, which then spread across Facebook.<sup>9</sup> The New York Times also ran a series of articles describing the rise of Carlson's show and its role in amplifying disinformation from far right and fringe sites.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/ukraine-facebook-battle/>

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.newsweek.com/twitter-latest-social-media-platform-russia-fines-over-illegal-content-1701812>

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2022/04/amidst-invasion-ukraine-platforms-continue-erase-critical-war-crime-s-documentation>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-fines-meta-facebook-instagram/31821728.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-google-property-seized-youtube/31821891.html>

<sup>9</sup>

<https://www.mediamatters.org/tucker-carlson/tucker-carlsons-segments-promoting-pro-russia-talking-points-are-spreading-across>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/04/30/us/tucker-carlson-tonight.html>

On April 22, Politico's Morning Tech newsletter (paywall content) reported that the Russian government announced entry bans on 29 American citizens Thursday in retaliation for the Biden administration's own sanctions against Russian nationals, including Mark Zuckerberg of Meta and Ryan Roslansky, the CEO of Microsoft-owned social media platform LinkedIn.

On April 21, a court in Moscow ordered Google to pay an 11 million ruble (\$134,500) fine over materials about Russia's ongoing unprovoked invasion of Ukraine on YouTube. A court in the Russian capital ruled that Google must pay a 4 million ruble (\$50,000) fine for failing to delete as instructed what authorities had determined was banned content. The judge also ruled in a separate case that Google must pay 7 million rubles (\$87,000) for distributing materials produced by Ukraine's Azov military group and the Ukrainian far-right group Right Sector. The court's rulings come two weeks after media regulator Roskomnadzor accused Google of violating Russian law, saying its YouTube video-sharing platform "turned into one of the key platforms spreading fake news" about the war Moscow launched against Ukraine. The agency said that it will take punitive measures, including an advertising ban on the platform and its information resources<sup>11</sup>.

On April 20, Washington Post published an article on how Yandex, the Russian-language search engine that draws 4 billion visits a month and remains the most visited website in Russia, has had to bend to Kremlin demands that it block search results for opposition leader Alexei Navalny or censor news about the war in Ukraine. Yandex's slow collapse, detailed in the Post for the first time, shows how even the most advanced companies couldn't be safe with their core operations in Russia, underscoring why entrepreneurs and investors predict that it will be years, if not decades, before they'll be willing to reengage there again.<sup>12</sup>

On April 20, Reuters reported that a group of 21 U.S. lawmakers sent a letter to Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg voicing concern about what they called disinformation on the platform aimed at Spanish speakers about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The disinformation is spread by Moscow-backed outlets like RT en Espanol, among others, said the letter, joined by Senators Amy Klobuchar and Ben Ray Lujan and Representative Tony Cardenas and 18 others.<sup>13</sup>

On April 19 (and throughout mid-April), one of the most widely-distributed stories from the Associated Press was about the idea that "disinformation is part of the job" for Russian diplomats. Russian embassies and consulates around the world are prolifically using Facebook, Twitter and other platforms to deflect blame for atrocities while seeking to undermine the international coalition supporting Ukraine. Tech companies have responded by adding more labels to Russia's diplomatic accounts and by removing the accounts from its recommendations and search results. But the accounts are still active and are disseminating disinformation and propaganda in nearly every nation, in part because their diplomatic status gives them an added

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-google-fines-ukraine-war/31814512.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/04/20/yandex-vk-russian-internet/>

<sup>13</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-lawmakers-urge-facebook-do-more-fight-russia-propaganda-spainish-2022-04-20/>

layer of protection from moderation.<sup>14</sup>

On April 19, NPR reported on “the latest weapon in the disinformation war: Fake fact checkers”. Some channels on the app Telegram look like independent fact checkers, but are pro-Russian propaganda outlets spreading falsities.<sup>15</sup>

On April 15, New York Times reported [again] on how narratives advanced by the Kremlin have converged with those of conservative American media in recent months. Russian media has increasingly seized on Fox News’s prime-time segments, its opinion pieces and even the network’s active online comments section — all of which often find fault with the Biden administration — to paint a critical portrait of the United States and depict America’s foreign policy as a threat to Russia’s interests. Tucker Carlson is the main, but not the only reference for Russian media.<sup>16</sup>

On April 14, Bloomberg reported that “a Kremlin-backed Twitter campaign claiming the Bucha massacre was a hoax orchestrated by the U.K and U.S. has become Russia’s most aggressive disinformation campaign of the Ukraine war yet.” The article relied on reporting from the Alliance for Securing Democracy for its data.<sup>17</sup>

On April 14, Politico Pro reported that the spread of Russian propaganda is being deterred in part due to Western control of much of the internet’s underlying infrastructure. Mostly American firms dominate the complex world of third-party services — everything from security plug-ins to online marketing tools — that power the world’s websites and apps outside of China”. Many of those services (e.g., Google Analytics, Facebook Domain Insights) have “pulled the plug” on RT, Sputnik, Ruptly, as well as Ria Novosti and Tass, two Russian state news agencies. While the sites can still operate, they have been stripped of their use of a complex web of almost-exclusively Western interconnected advertising, marketing and security services that have become a mainstay for how websites and apps function.<sup>18</sup>

On April 13, Washington Post profiled some of the Ukrainian fact-checkers working with Facebook. Before the war, there were no groups assigned to fact-check posts in Russia, and only two examining content in Ukraine: VoxUkraine and StopFake. Now, there are eight additional groups policing misinformation in the region. In a model mirroring PK’s proposal for a “superfund for the internet”, Facebook started adding organizations like VoxUkraine and StopFake to its fact-checking effort following the 2016 election, paying independent news outlets and small media organizations to debunk misinformation. Those organizations are members of the International Fact-Checking Network, which sets editorial standards for fact-checking organizations and is run by the Poynter Institute, a nonprofit research organization. Facebook is

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.seattletimes.com/business/for-russian-diplomats-disinformation-is-part-of-the-job/> (one of many places the story was syndicated)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/19/1093620448/whos-checking-the-fact-checkers>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/15/technology/russia-media-fox-news.html>

<sup>17</sup>

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-14/russia-wages-social-media-campaign-to-label-bucha-massacre-hoax>

<sup>18</sup> Paywall protected content.

also frequently their member organizations' largest source of revenue.<sup>19</sup>

The same day, Washington Post reported on how TikTok is “creating an alternative universe just for Russia”. TikTok suspended new video uploads and live streams from Russia, ostensibly to protect Russian users from the country’s new laws criminalizing criticism of its military. But TikTok also barred Russian users from seeing any posts at all from outside the country, including from Ukraine — effectively creating a second, censored version of its platform. But according to a report by European nonprofit Tracking Exposed, it is letting pro-government propaganda slip through.<sup>20</sup>

Also that same day, New York Times reported on how Ukrainian activists and Western institutions are using a mix of high-tech and Cold War tactics to “pierce the propaganda bubble in Russia”, circulating information about the Ukraine war among Russian citizens to sow doubt about the Kremlin’s accounts.<sup>21</sup>

On April 13, The Hill reported on a letter from civil society groups including Electronic Frontier Foundation, Access Now and Digital Security Lab Ukraine to Twitter, Facebook parent company Meta, Google, Telegram and TikTok, which asked for more consistency on content moderation policies and enforcement during crises. The letter claims that platforms are only willing to engage in due diligence efforts such as human rights impact assessments when under pressure from media and outside organizations. They asked the platforms “to invest more time and effort in improving their operations now, not when unfolding violence gets into the media spotlight and it is often already too late to act.”<sup>22</sup>

An opinion commentary in the Boston Globe contended that Facebook is willing to “break glass” on content moderation in circumstances of extraordinary political pressure, but should be willing to “protect democracy worldwide, and every day.”<sup>23</sup>

On April 12, Slate reported a story from the perspective of different *audiences*, and what they are seeing in social media: “...what does feel new is the preponderance of *true* information available—and perhaps equally importantly, the speed at which it spreads. Social media, satellite imagery, and 24/7 reporting are directly refuting Russian disinformation in real time.” Russia’s disinformation campaigns are not working in Ukraine and the West. But they are in

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<sup>19</sup>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/04/12/facebook-fact-checkers-misinformation-ukraine-war/>

<sup>20</sup>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/04/13/tiktok-russia-censorship-propaganda-tracking-exposed/>

<sup>21</sup>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/us/politics/russia-propaganda-ukraine-war.html?referringSource=articleShare>

<sup>22</sup>

<https://thehill.com/policy/technology/3266455-civil-society-groups-call-for-social-media-consistency-in-crisis-zones/>

<sup>23</sup>

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/04/12/opinion/facebook-ought-be-protecting-democracy-worldwide-every-day/>

Russia, China, and the world beyond NATO, the EU, and their allies.<sup>24</sup>

On April 12, TechCrunch reported that TikTok doesn't appear to be effectively implementing its existing policies around the war. The social network cut off new content originating in Russia in early March in response to a harsh new law in the country criminalizing "fake news" about the invasion, an offense now punishable with lengthy prison sentences. But even with all new content in Russia ostensibly suspended on TikTok, some prominent Russian state media accounts are filling the information gap. TikTok says that it has now added labels to identify content from 49 Russian state-controlled media accounts. Those labels appear as unobtrusive semi-translucent gray boxes at the bottom of the screen and are not visible from account pages on the mobile app. But in spite of carrying labels that identify them as "Russia state-controlled media," some of those accounts continue to post ample new content.<sup>25</sup>

On April 11, Reuters reported that Meta content moderators were complaining about the adequacy of policies designed to slow misinformation. Their primary example was a case involving a Russian beauty influencer; they claimed Meta's content policies and enforcement mechanisms have enabled pro-Russian propaganda during the Ukraine invasion.<sup>26</sup>

On April 10, Foreign Policy emphasized the importance of "safeguarding the digital proof" of Russian war crimes, and described the work being done by journalists, military officials, the open-source intelligence community, cyber sleuths and civilians on social media as "beyond precedent."<sup>27</sup>

On April 10, a report by the Digital Forensics Research Lab (DFRLab) accused Yandex of succumbing to Russia's domestic regulations by suppressing Ukraine war information for its users in Russia. The report noted that the search engine has promoted state media and narratives in its search results, de-ranked and removed contents critical of the Russian government on its platform. Yandex is the most popular search engine in Russia.<sup>28</sup>

Several outlets reported on how Russian embassies in various countries – most notably Canada - are pumping out information on their social channels to support Russian themes of misinformation, most often under the guise of "fact-checking." Twitter, in particular, came under criticism for not removing these accounts or posts.<sup>29</sup>

April 8 report:

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<sup>24</sup> <https://slate.com/technology/2022/04/russia-disinformation-china-africa-latin-america.html>

<sup>25</sup> <https://techcrunch.com/2022/04/12/tiktok-russian-state-media-propaganda/>

<sup>26</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/how-meta-fumbled-propaganda-moderation-during-russias-invasion-ukraine-2022-04-11/>

<sup>27</sup>

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/10/prosecute-putin-war-crimes-evidence-bucha-safeguard-digital-proof/>

<sup>28</sup>

<https://factcheckhub.com/ukraine-crisis-how-yandex-suppresses-information-for-russian-internet-users-report/>

<sup>29</sup>

<https://theconversation.com/russian-embassy-in-canada-weaponizes-social-media-to-fuel-support-for-ukraine-invasion-180109>



On April 7, Russian media regulator Roskomnadzor accused Google of violating Russian law and said it will take punitive measures against the giant tech company, including an advertising ban on the platform and its information resources. Roskomnadzor said Google's YouTube video-sharing platform "turned into one of the key platforms spreading fake news" about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and said that the measures against Google, which include a warning on search engines saying it is violating Russian law, would remain in place until it complied with legislation.<sup>30</sup> See other stories this week about Roskomnadzor and Wikipedia and Facebook.

In an April 6 interview at "Disinformation and the Erosion of Democracy", a conference hosted by The Atlantic and the University of Chicago's Institute of Politics, former President Barack Obama acknowledged that he under-estimated "...the degree to which information, disinformation, misinformation was being weaponized" and "...the degree to which democracies were as vulnerable to it as they were, including ours". He noted that "...after World War II, you had enough of a consensus that we built both a set of standards within journalism and we built a set of regulatory guidelines that industries had to follow, and it was possible then to have a debate between the left and the right in which we differed strongly on substance but we agreed on process. And what we've seen is a breakdown of that consensus, and what we've seen is a shift in technology and who controls these platforms in ways that are not transparent, and that has contributed to, aggravated, a sense in which we are no longer operating by the same rules or on the same facts". He describes a range of solutions including Section 230 reform focused on targeted ads, civic education, transparency on algorithmic product design, and exercises in virtual democracy.<sup>31</sup>

On April 5, Russia launched proceedings to send bailiffs to collect a fine from Facebook for failing to remove "prohibited information." Russia-run news agency RIA Novosti reported that the Federal Bailiffs Service (FSSP) officials are seeking fines from the social media site for publishing what the country referred to as "fake" information about its invasion of Ukraine and "unauthorized" anti-Kremlin protests. According to the FSSP, Meta—the parent company of Facebook—has been fined nearly 2 billion rubles (\$23.8 million), which they have not paid.<sup>32</sup>

Through this week, multiple news outlets reported that Russia's communications regulator Roskomnadzor announced it notified Wikipedia to remove a page titled "Russia's Invasion in Ukraine (2022)." Roskomnadzor described the information as "unreliable" and "illegal," and accused Wikipedia of intentionally misinforming Russian users. The group threatened Wikipedia with a fine of 4 million rubles, or about £36,900/\$48,300, for failing to remove the section on its Russian version of the site. Russia's threats also demanded that words such as war, aggression, and invasion be removed from the section.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-google-fake-news-youtube/31791205.html>

<sup>31</sup>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/barack-obama-interview-disinformation-ukraine/629496/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-facebook-fine-meta-bailiffs-ukraine-war-1695095>

<sup>33</sup>

<https://www.trillmag.com/94567/read/news/russia-threatens-wikipedia-with-50k-fine-over-ukrainian-war-misinformation/>

Another popular theme this week was the role of TikTok and TikTok influencers in the war. For example, one report positioned TikTok as “the number one source of misinformation thanks to its gigantic number of users and minimal filtering of content, experts say”. One of the most troubling and somewhat unique forms of content are fake live-streams in which users pretended to be on the ground in Ukraine but were actually using footage from other conflicts or even video games — and then asking for money to support their "reporting".<sup>34</sup>

On April 2 Business Insider posited that “...Russia's war on Ukraine may present one of the more straightforward moderation decisions that Facebook has been faced with — and one that seemingly unites party lines — thanks to the universal condemnation levied against the unprovoked attack led by Russian President Vladimir Putin”. They saw content moderation in regard to Russia and Ukraine as being far more black-and-white than COVID-19 or national elections (which we thought of as pretty straightforward at the time).<sup>35</sup>

New research from Avaaz using the CrowdTangle tool showed that after restrictions on access to Russia state-sponsored communications channels in Europe were enforced, interactions on select RT and Sputnik Facebook pages actually increased, especially those reaching Arabic and Spanish-speaking users. In Avaaz’ view this demonstrates that territorial restrictions “fail to outrun the sheer amplification of content by the social media company’s algorithms, and fail to protect all users globally”. The research organization said, “Algorithmic reform is the most urgent and effective long-term solution to solving the real threat of information warfare and disinformation...[such] reform must end the amplification and monetization of disinformation while providing full transparency for researchers and analysts investigating the platforms”.<sup>36</sup>

On April 1 the AP reported that Russia is launching falsehoods into the feeds of Spanish-speaking social media users in nations that already have long records of distrusting the U.S. The aim is to gain support in those countries for the Kremlin’s war and stoke opposition against America’s response. The strategy also leverages the chronic under-investment in non-English content moderation by major platforms.<sup>37</sup>

There was very wide coverage of a report that Canada’s Communications Security Establishment (CSE) observed “numerous Russia-backed disinformation campaigns” that were meant to support Moscow’s actions in Ukraine. Among the observations noted in its classified reporting were allegations that Russia coordinated efforts to spread the idea that organs of dead soldiers, women and children were being harvested by Ukraine, while using “mobile cremators

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.todayonline.com/world/tiktok-having-bad-war-say-disinformation-experts-1866026>

<sup>35</sup> But Russia's war on Ukraine may present one of the more straightforward moderation decisions that Facebook has been faced with — and one that seemingly unites party lines — thanks to the universal condemnation levied against the unprovoked attack led by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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<https://techpolicy.press/facebooks-measures-against-rt-and-sputnik-fail-to-address-root-problem-of-information-warfare/>

<sup>37</sup>

<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-media-social-media-facebook-144598113c8d911f3ea5dc7c8c4aa09d>

to dispose of the evidence.”<sup>38</sup>

April 1 report:

A March 31 analysis from the Washington Post contends that the war offers “a chance for both sides [which have politicized themes of disinformation in the past] to step back and look at the role disinformation is playing in an actual conflict.” The greater use of misinformation versus cyberattacks, the clumsiness of some Russian efforts, and the opportunity to divert or co-opt themes of disinformation are all discussed.<sup>39</sup>

On March 30, New York Times reported that Meta suspended some of the quality controls that ensure that posts from users in Russia, Ukraine and other Eastern European countries meet its rules. Under the change, Meta temporarily stopped tracking whether its workers who monitor Facebook and Instagram posts from those areas were accurately enforcing its content guidelines, because the workers could not keep up with shifting rules about what kinds of posts were allowed about the war in Ukraine. Meta has made more than half a dozen content policy revisions since Russia invaded Ukraine last month.<sup>40</sup>

On March 30, The Guardian reported that Yandex, considered Russia’s equivalent to Google, is helping websites pushing false claims about the war in Ukraine to make thousands of dollars every day through digital advertising. Yandex runs both a search engine and an extensive digital advertising business. The Bureau for Investigative Journalism discovered Yandex-delivered ads appearing alongside misinformation and propaganda produced by more than half a dozen Russian-language news sites. Any ad revenue would be channeled through a business owned by some of the world’s largest investment firms, most of which are based in the US (this one is for Alex, who asked about Yandex last week!)<sup>41</sup>

On March 30, Brookings Institution published a blog post about “...three areas where private industry has been most busy in the technological arena—social media, internet infrastructure, and content moderation—and propose questions on how the laissez faire approach to technology during war or serious global confrontations can impact future diplomatic efforts”. They describe two potential pathways going forward: one would embolden closed internet architecture and communications systems that contribute to global turmoil; the other would enable information exchanges that condone acts of aggression both passive and explicit, while engaging the outside world audience as observers.<sup>42</sup>

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<https://thehill.com/policy/international/3256220-%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8Bcanadian-agency-says-its-observed-numerous-russia-backed-disinformation-campaigns/>

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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/31/ukraine-war-is-more-about-disinformation-than-cyberattacks/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/technology/ukraine-russia-facebook-instagram.html>

41

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/30/western-owned-russian-firm-helps-sites-pushing-false-news-profit-from-ads-yandex>

42

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2022/03/30/is-there-too-little-oversight-of-private-tech-companies-in-the-russia-ukraine-conflict/>

A March 30 opinion in *The Conversation* recounted the history of Russia's use of "unanswered" misinformation and propaganda both inside and outside the country before the invasion, and made the case that "the war could have been avoided altogether if the West had taken more decisive action much earlier [especially after Russia's involvement in the 2016 election was understood]."<sup>43</sup>

A March 29 opinion in *Politico* called for US regulators to update the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which requires "that propaganda from hostile foreign governments be labeled as such so that Americans know who's feeding them the news." The law was created in the 1930s to counter Nazi propaganda by requiring distributors in the U.S. to disclose the nature of the source, and the U.S. continued to enforce the labeling requirement through the Cold War. The writer asserts that digital platforms should "...make amends [for their role in dissemination of disinformation] by providing their users with clear warnings about the nature of these websites and channels."<sup>44</sup> The piece also pointed out how the FCC, early in March, communicated new requirements mandating broadcasters disclose when foreign governments or their representatives lease time on their airwaves.<sup>45</sup>

On March 29, *Neiman Lab* published an assessment of why Telegram has surfaced as one of the most important channels for "information warfare" regarding the war in Ukraine. Key factors: created by a Russian-born tech entrepreneur who had already butted heads with the Russian government, Telegram was one of the most popular social apps in Ukraine and Russia before the invasion. It facilitates public and private groups of up to 200,000 users (to send messages and interact), and channels (for one-way broadcasting to channel subscribers), allowing organizations to reach hundreds of thousands of people with messages and audio/video live streaming — all of which is encrypted and stored on the Telegram "cloud." Importantly, while both public and private communications on Telegram are encrypted, the default encryption setting is not end-to-end encryption, and instead happens on a client/server basis. Telegram does offer another layer of security through its "secret chat" feature. When this is enabled, the communication between two users becomes end-to-end encrypted, and this data isn't stored anywhere apart from the sender's and receiver's device. Users can also set a "self-destruct" timer on secret chats: once the timer ends, the communication disappears forever. Anonymous forwarding, when enabled, means any message forwarded by a user is no longer traceable back to them. The message includes their display name in plain, unlinked text, but this display name can easily be changed or deleted. Also, while users need a phone number to create a Telegram account, unlike WhatsApp the number doesn't have to remain linked to the account. The article also describes the unique challenges of moderating content on the platform, and how its privacy features allow for criminality and violence. This and the article from *Washington Post*, below were just a few of many about Telegram.<sup>46</sup>

On March 28, *Tech Policy Press* published an essay on the effort to collect and preserve digital

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<sup>43</sup> <https://theconversation.com/how-russias-unanswered-propaganda-led-to-the-war-in-ukraine-180202>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/03/29/law-counter-putins-propaganda-unused-00020805>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-broadcasting-foreign-idCAKCN2LC1QL>

<sup>46</sup>

<https://www.niemanlab.org/2022/03/why-telegram-despite-being-rife-with-russian-disinformation-became-the-go-to-app-for-ukrainians/>

media and other evidentiary material to support investigations of war crimes committed in Ukraine. Ukrainian officials, local civil society groups, and an international coalition of human rights, open source intelligence and digital forensics researchers are applying what they learned from investigating past conflicts, including in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar and elsewhere. Just a few of their challenges are: the reliance on volunteers working in the midst of a conflict; security threats and coordination problems flowing from the over-collection of material; and the centrality of social media platforms that were never designed with atrocity documentation in mind: “there is a sense the firms still have not fully grasped the nature of the responsibility they have in these conflict scenarios.” Platforms are still setting their own rules and policies, and changing them as they see fit; lack working relationships with civil society groups, particularly local ones; allow the loss of content taken down by content moderation algorithms or human moderators; and don’t allow sufficient access to researchers.<sup>47</sup>

On March 28, Washington Post ran an article about Telegram, the one global publishing platform remaining in operation in Russia. The app continues to run without any apparent interference from Russian President Vladimir Putin, mostly likely because Telegram does absolutely nothing about fake news. The app bans spam, scams, violence and porn in its terms of service, and has hundreds of content moderators compared with Facebook’s more than 15,000. But it has no rules at all against misinformation, meaning Telegram can remain a valuable channel for Putin to reach out to the app’s more than 50 million Russian users (and as John pointed out in Platform Team meeting, comments in Telegram groups and channels don’t have the same kind of strong encryption found in messaging apps like WhatsApp and Signal).<sup>48</sup>

On March 27, The Atlantic published an article placing misinformation about the war in a historical context, describing how this wartime communications effort may use novel digital tools, but the strategy has roots in World War II, when the United States used multiple forms of communication (including new ones: radio and motion pictures!) to inspire, inform, and instruct soldiers and civilians alike. There were concerns about commercialism and manipulation and the motives of the relevant industries then, too: “It tethered democracy to both advertising and entertainment and gave political leaders new tools with which to manipulate their message.”<sup>49</sup>

On March 25, Washington Post published a Technology column highlighting the impossibility of social media platform sustaining content moderation “neutrality” in a wartime context: “each of the largest social media platforms has taken ad hoc actions in recent weeks that go beyond or contradict its previous policies.” The platforms came under criticism for ad hoc, reactive, unannounced, isolated, or inconsistent approaches in response to this conflict vs. past elections, COVID-19, and terrorist events. Instead, platforms should 1) have a framework of underlying principles to guide how platforms approach wars around the world, with a process and protocols for wartime that can be applied flexibly and contextually when fighting breaks out; and 2) consult with experts on human rights, Internet access and cybersecurity, as well as experts on the region in question and perhaps even officials from relevant governments. The column also pointed out that “it isn’t only tech companies that have paid closer attention to —

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<sup>47</sup> <https://techpolicy.press/ukraine-may-mark-a-turning-point-in-documenting-war-crimes/>

<sup>48</sup>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/on-telegram-ignoring-liescould-protect-the-truth-in-russia/2022/03/28/cc4a25e0-ae64-11ec-9dbd-0d4609d44c1c\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/on-telegram-ignoring-liescould-protect-the-truth-in-russia/2022/03/28/cc4a25e0-ae64-11ec-9dbd-0d4609d44c1c_story.html)

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/03/zelensky-speech-russia-propaganda-history/629381/>

and taken a stronger stand on — Ukraine than other human rights crises around the world”.<sup>50</sup>

A March 27 article in Lawfare described chat and encrypted messaging apps (EMAs) as “the new battlefield” in the propaganda war.” While how both Ukraine and Russia use these new technologies will likely change over the course of the conflict, “what is clear so far is that EMAs will be an important medium for actors fighting for control of narratives about the war”. Ukraine and Russia are taking different approaches, with Ukraine adapting its state-supported infrastructure on the apps for public messaging and Russia using the apps to source or spread new disinformation in support of its messaging campaign. The companies that run EMAs are aware that their platforms are being used in both these ways, but their responses have been inconsistent. As a result, combating propaganda is largely falling to journalists and open-source analysts.<sup>51</sup>

On March 25, Check My Ads Institute, an ad tech watchdog, warned advertisers, “if you’re running a Google ad campaign, you can assume your budget is funding pro-Kremlin propaganda against your consent,” because Google is still monetizing dozens of Russian disinformation operations despite telling advertisers otherwise. Google also withholds the one critical piece of data that advertisers need to protect their ad spend from pro-Kremlin operatives: seller information.<sup>52</sup>

On March 25, Media Matters reported that some alternative tech platforms are flouting EU restrictions against Russian state-funded broadcaster RT, enabling RT to continue spreading misinformation and propaganda to the EU. Alt-tech platforms, particularly those favored by conservatives and far-right extremists like Rumble and Gab, have not respected these restrictions, and in many cases they have openly opposed them. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok have geo-restricted access to RT in EU countries, while “alt-platforms continue to allow RT’s accounts to be accessible to users from those regions.”<sup>53</sup>

On March 25, Boston Globe reported how Spanish-language misinformation - now about the war in Ukraine - remains a challenge for all the major digital platforms due in part to under-investment in non-English content moderation.<sup>54</sup>

Human Rights Watch issued a report that examines what social media and messaging companies have done during the crisis and whether that meets their responsibility to respect human rights. It explains what the companies failed to do in Ukraine prior to this war, and what they have frequently failed to do, or done poorly, in other crises around the world (such as chronic under-investment and failing to provide transparency). However, its key conclusion is that “It is too early to assess the adequacy of steps by tech companies since February 24

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/25/social-media-ukraine-rules-war-policy/>

<sup>51</sup>

<https://www.lawfareblog.com/chat-and-encrypted-messaging-apps-are-new-battlefields-propaganda-war>

<sup>52</sup> <https://checkmyads.org/branded/google-is-forcing-everyone-to-fund-kremlin-propaganda-right-now/>

<sup>53</sup>

<https://www.mediamatters.org/russias-invasion-ukraine/alt-tech-continues-host-russian-state-media-accounts-despite-eu-sanctions>

<sup>54</sup>

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/03/25/opinion/social-media-platforms-must-address-russias-spanish-language-misinformation/>

against their human rights responsibilities.” What Human Rights Watch will be looking for:

- Companies need to address their chronic underinvestment in user safety outside of North America and Western Europe.
- Companies should align their policies with international human rights standards, carry out rigorous human rights impact assessments for product and policy development, and engage in ongoing assessment and reassessment and consult with civil society in a meaningful way.
- Companies should radically increase transparency and accountability in their content moderation practices, as outlined by the Santa Clara Principles (which PK did not support).
- Companies should strengthen their policies and their enforcement.
- Social media platforms that choose to actively remove content should take care to preserve and archive removed content that may have evidentiary value of human rights abuses.
- More fundamentally, it is crucial to address the underlying business model upon which dominant platforms are based.<sup>55</sup>

According to AdWeek’s March 24 online edition, a group of Ukrainian media professionals has partnered with its Ministry of Culture and Information Policy to create and distribute informative content on the continued invasion of the country. Named “WAW: War Against War,” the campaign was established by around 300 Ukrainians with media backgrounds to counter Russian propaganda and distribute content that would support the stand against invading forces. The “WAW” campaign has a dedicated website and is also running across several social media platforms such as Instagram, Telegram and most recently Twitter.<sup>56</sup>

NewsGuard’s report about how quickly misinformation is served to users on TikTok (reported on March 21, below) generated a flurry of articles about TikTok’s relationship to China and possible unique motivations for spreading misinformation about the war. This one is just an example, from New Statesman in the UK.<sup>57</sup> Wired also provided warnings and suggestions to TikTok on how it moderates information related to the war.<sup>58</sup>

March 25 Report:

On March 23, New York Times reported that “the Kremlin’s talking points and some right-wing discourse in the United States...have coalesced”. Prominent Americans like Tucker Carlson and Candace Owen are amplifying propaganda and messaging from the Kremlin and then are broadcast in Russia. “Together, they have created an alternate reality, recasting the Western bloc of allies as provokers, blunderers and liars, which has bolstered Mr. Putin.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/16/russia-ukraine-and-social-media-and-messaging-apps#>

<sup>56</sup>

<https://www.adweek.com/social-marketing/300-ukrainian-media-pros-have-joined-forces-to-combat-russian-disinformation/>

<sup>57</sup>

<https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/big-tech/2022/03/its-no-shock-that-tiktok-serves-users-ukraine-misinformation>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.wired.com/story/tiktok-must-not-fail-ukrainians/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/23/technology/russia-american-far-right-ukraine.html>

On March 22, Columbia Journalism Review noted that “Ukraine has been called a TikTok war because of the way its images have been shared on social media. But for journalists it’s all about WhatsApp, Signal, and Telegram”. These platforms are used due to the “scale and severity” of the Ukraine conflict to monitor journalists, verify information, and collaborate on reporting<sup>60</sup>.

An article dated March 22 from the Associated Press described “breaking through Putin’s propaganda bubble” as a “key strategic goal for Ukraine and its Western allies”. They have tried a series of actions, overt and subtle, to reach ordinary Russians, from encouraging the use of software that circumvents internet blocks (VPNs) to having government briefings for TikTok influencers. The hope is independent voices still operating in Russia, those from the West, and direct pleas from Ukrainians can convince the masses that they’re being lied to about the war next door. The question is no longer “what we do to stop disinformation,” former U.S. ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul said, it’s how to promote information inside Russia.<sup>61</sup>

On March 22, an intriguing opinion commentary in Politico warned that the real goal of misinformation from the Kremlin is not confusion but benign indifference to their invasion of Ukraine: “For years Russian President Vladimir Putin and his propagandists have mocked the West as weak, decadent and self-involved. The massive outpouring of global support for Ukraine today must seem to them little more than ephemeral virtue signaling. In their view, especially as gas and food prices increase, we’ll look for the first excuse to fall back into a familiar position: sympathetic indifference.” It described three strategies: 1) The “you too” fallacy tries to deflect from Putin’s crimes by gesturing to those of Western “partners”; 2) Retconning, or “retroactive continuity,” involves rewriting the past to suit the present; and 3) Predictive projection is a preemptive flying of a false flag. If you want to understand what the Kremlin will do next, pay attention to what it says others will do first.<sup>62</sup>

On March 21, Wired pointed out that Russia’s decision to block Meta’s platforms as “extremist organizations” does not apply to the activities of WhatsApp “due to its lack of functionality for the public dissemination of information.” It appears to be a sign that the Kremlin is worried that ordinary Russians, who are already wrestling with sanctions and shortages, will only tolerate so much disruption to their daily lives. WhatsApp is hugely popular in Russia, with 84 million monthly users in January 2022.<sup>63</sup>

In his Platformer column on March 21, Casey Newton talked about Telegram, which as of now still has only barely 30 employees, and most decisions about whether to remove content on the platform require the personal sign-off of CEO Pavel Durov. The app has been allowed to continue operating in Russia. One theory on why is that Telegram is seen as a valuable channel for Kremlin propaganda to reach Russian citizens.<sup>64</sup>

On March 21, NewsGuard published a report showing that TikTok is feeding false and misleading content about the war in Ukraine to users within 40 minutes of their signing up to the

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<sup>60</sup> [https://www.cjr.org/business\\_of\\_news/for-journalists-ukraine-is-a-whatsapp-war.php](https://www.cjr.org/business_of_news/for-journalists-ukraine-is-a-whatsapp-war.php)

<sup>61</sup> <https://siliconeer.com/current/us-ukraine-quietly-try-to-pierce-putins-propaganda-bubble/>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/03/22/putin-disinformation-apaty-00018974>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.wired.com/story/whatsapp-russia-meta-ban/>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.platformer.news/p/telegrams-dangerous-game?s=r>



app, regardless of whether they run any searches on the platform. Searching for generic terms related to the conflict, like “Ukraine” or “Donbas,” led to TikTok suggesting multiple videos that contained disinformation in its top 20 results. It is consistent with similar findings about TikTok and COVID-19 disinformation: lack of effective content labeling and moderation, coupled with its skill at pushing users to content that keeps them on the app, have made the platform fertile ground for the spread of disinformation.<sup>65</sup>

Several articles have pointed out the important role of open source intelligence, or OSINT, in mitigating aspects of the “infowar.” OSINT refers to publicly accessible information, from mobile phone footage to images made available by Maxar, a commercial satellite company, which are then scrutinized by organizations like investigative journalism site Bellingcat.<sup>66</sup>

On March 17, a Technology column in the Washington Post pointed out that official Kremlin accounts continue to post freely on Twitter and other U.S.-based social platforms, aggravating some political leaders in the United States and Europe. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok have largely treated Russian government accounts like any other user, taking enforcement actions only when their posts violate specific rules, such as prohibitions on inciting real-world violence.<sup>67</sup>

According to CNN, misinformation experts say there are key differences between the war in Ukraine and other misinformation events that make false claims about the conflict especially insidious and difficult to counter. Ukraine-related misinformation has been highly visual (making it harder and more time consuming for both automated systems and human fact checkers to evaluate and debunk); it is spreading faster across borders (partly since visual images are less reliant on language); the direct involvement of Russia — which is known for spreading misinformation online aimed at sowing discord and confusion — adds an extra layer of complexity; and the emotional and visceral nature of the content also makes social media users quick to hit the share button.<sup>68</sup> Other experts in the Globe & Mail noted the misinformation dynamics around Ukraine are “entirely new, largely because of the algorithms at play in newer apps such as TikTok and Instagram” and the sheer volume of visual information from average citizens.<sup>69</sup>

TikTok’s decision to block Russian users from seeing non-Russian content and to ban new uploads in Russia (described in chart below) came under attack in several news outlets. TikTok, the only global platform still available in Russia, is accused of becoming an propaganda arm for the Kremlin: a new report from Tracking Exposed, a European nonprofit that analyzes TikTok’s recommendation algorithm, highlighted how international content has been blocked entirely while pro-Putin content can still be uploaded. Although Russian users are supposed to be banned from posting new content, pro-Kremlin content from Russian influencers continues to be posted on the platform.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> <https://www.newsguardtech.com/misinformation-monitor/march-2022/>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/19/russia-ukraine-infowar-deepfakes>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/17/russia-twitter-ukraine-accounts/>

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/15/tech/ukraine-russia-misinformation-challenges/index.html>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-tiktok-instagram-ukraine-war-misinformation/>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.vice.com/en/article/epx8bw/russia-tiktok-censorship>

An article in FP foreshadowed some of the policy implications of Russia's crackdown on foreign media and social media channels: "Policymakers in the United States and Europe must grapple with the possibility that Putin chases Big Tech out of Russia—and the damage that could do to Russian civil society and the internet's open, global character." Putin may see tech companies' responses to the war as an opportunity to advance a broader goal: denting the appeal of the open internet. Moscow has justified its draconian internet monitoring regime and strict data localization rules in part by painting the Western web as a threat to Russia. Putin can cynically use recent developments to advance those arguments.<sup>71</sup>

Politico also reported on how Western anti-vaccine groups and conspiracy theorists have shifted quickly from parroting falsehoods about the global pandemic to peddling misinformation about the war, often from Moscow's viewpoint. Well-organized and large online communities that had previously pushed back against COVID-19 restrictions are now framing Russia's invasion as being between good-guy Moscow and Kyiv and its Western allies. Social networks like Telegram and alternative video-sharing platform Odysee — one of the remaining platforms that still supports Kremlin-backed broadcaster RT are playing a key role.<sup>72</sup>

On March 18, Senator Joe Manchin, in his role as Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Cybersecurity Subcommittee, wrote to Mark Zuckerberg: "I urge you to remove Russia Today, Sputnik News, and other Russian-controlled media outlets from your platforms immediately to prevent the further spread of disinformation".<sup>73</sup>

That same day, former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger made an impassioned appeal to the Russian people in a video posted on social media, asking them to resist their country's disinformation as the devastating invasion of Ukraine continues. The video posted on Twitter has over 15 million views (though access to Twitter in Russia is heavily restricted).<sup>74</sup>

March 18 Report:

On March 14, The Tech Oversight Project introduced a new ad slamming major tech companies over their handling of Russian disinformation amid the war in Ukraine. A 30-second TV ad will run in the Washington, D.C., market starting March 15 and accuses tech giants of helping spread Russian disinformation despite their public pledges to crack down on the state-controlled media (I was not able to find the commercial).<sup>75</sup>

As reported last month, Telegram has become "ground zero" in the Russia/Ukraine information war. On March 14, the New York Times announced it would now provide live, paywall-free coverage of the war on the messaging platform. The move is seen as a means of letting Russians who can't access their website get information. Telegram is one of the few remaining

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<sup>71</sup>

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/15/russia-ukraine-war-facebook-meta-twitter-youtube-block-censorship/>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/antivax-conspiracy-lean-pro-kremlin-propaganda-ukraine/>

<sup>73</sup>

<https://www.wdtv.com/2022/03/18/senator-manchin-urges-zuckerberg-ban-russian-media-outlets-facebook/>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/17/world/arnold-schwarzenegger-message-russian-people/index.html>

<sup>75</sup> <https://thehill.com/policy/technology/598129-new-ad-slams-tech-giants-over-russian-disinformation>

platforms still operating in Russia.<sup>76</sup>

On March 12, the Washington Post published an article recreating the path Putin took to dismantle democratic information systems and suppress free expression before the invasion in Ukraine. Key actions were dismantling independent media, requiring technology companies to keep employees in Russia so they could be threatened with arrest or other punishment for their employers' actions, knocking platforms offline, and undermining credibility and ultimately outlawing outlets that share "fake news" (news contrary to the government's messages). The result is a "fractured reality" between Russians (most of whom still support the war) and Ukraine.

<sup>77</sup>

An opinion commentary in the Post on March 12 described how "...tech companies are facing pressure to take explicit stands against Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. With some exceptions, tech has responded to the call, at the cost of its relationships with Russia. But ...it requires the tech companies to acknowledge in a very public way that their products and policies aren't neutral after all — and it reminds us all of their own unchecked power over the world's information systems". It posited that "It's unfortunate that it has taken a world-shaking war to jolt [digital platforms] in the direction of transparency as to the biases built into their products, and accountability for their effects."<sup>78</sup> An opinion commentary in Newsweek on March 14 made a similar point: "After years of equivocating on the sidelines as social media platforms were used to propagate Russian propaganda and cultivate audiences for its media mouthpieces, they finally took steps to staunch the firehose of disinformation"<sup>79</sup>. Similarly, an opinion commentary in The Hill: "Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sparked an information war that has turned social media into a key battlefield, placing a spotlight on inconsistencies in how tech platforms respond to life-or-death crises. The handling of posts about the war has shown how content moderation policies can turn on a dime during a crisis, and forced social media companies to take divisive positions on what speech is allowable during war times".<sup>80</sup>

In an interview with the Verge published March 11, Brandon Silverman, the founder of Facebook analytics tool CrowdTangle, described how the open-source intelligence community and visual forensics teams at news outlets are using social media data to help verify posts from on the ground in Ukraine. The work is critical to what we know about the crisis, and it highlights exactly why it's so important that social media companies make it easier for civil society to be able to see what's happening on their platforms. Platforms could make more privacy-safe data available, or easier to access, or more useful through organization. The platforms that are proving to be most important in the conflict - TikTok, Telegram, and YouTube - have the longest

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<sup>76</sup> <https://twitter.com/nytimespr/status/1503339366688636928>

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/12/russia-putin-google-apple-navalny/>

<sup>78</sup>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/12/duckduckgo-russian-disinformation-unbiased-search-results/>

<sup>79</sup>

<https://www.newsweek.com/technology-not-neutral-russian-invasion-ukraine-made-that-clear-opinion-1687385>

<sup>80</sup>

<https://thehill.com/policy/technology/598543-russias-war-shines-a-light-on-social-medias-inconsistencies>

way to go.<sup>81</sup>

On March 11, National Security Council staffers and White House press secretary Jen Psaki briefed TikTok influencers about the United States' strategic goals in the region and answered questions on distributing aid to Ukrainians, working with NATO and how the United States would react to a Russian use of nuclear weapons. The platform has been a primary outlet for spreading news abroad. Ukrainian citizens have shared their stories to the platform, while dangerous misinformation and Russian propaganda have also spread.<sup>82</sup>

On March 11, New York Post ran an opinion commentary expressing an emerging point of view that given their rapidly changing approaches and policies in regard to disinformation about the war, platforms "should have no more involvement in what people are saying using its service than Verizon or UPS does."<sup>83</sup>

On March 10, Wikimedia, EFF, and a wide range of human rights organizations published a letter to the Biden administration expressing "concerns about growing calls to interfere with the Russian people's access to the internet, which we fear will hurt individuals attempting to organize in opposition to the war, report openly and honestly on events in Russia, and access information about what is happening in Ukraine and abroad."<sup>84</sup>

Given its importance in sustaining both military and humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, on March 10 an activist organization associated with Global Voices prepared a detailed assessment of how to address disruption on any of the three layers of cyberspace: physical infrastructure, protocols that allow computers and subnetworks to communicate with each other, and site destinations that most people are familiar with.<sup>85</sup>

This week, several news outlets reported that clips of Fox News' Tucker Carlson have become a regular feature of Russian state TV, which portrays the television host as being pro-Russia and able to influence America's opinion of the war in Ukraine.<sup>86</sup>

On March 10, Cyabra, a disinformation monitoring platform, announced that it had tracked more than 115,000 Twitter and Facebook accounts that it alleged were spreading Russian propaganda. According to Cyabra, negative content against Ukraine on Twitter increased by over 11,000 percent on February 14 compared to the days previous, while it also found that much of that content came from inauthentic profiles. On Twitter, for example, from some 4,000 profiles that used the hashtag #standwithRussia, 13.7 percent were inauthentic, and many had

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<sup>81</sup>

<https://www.theverge.com/2022/3/11/22972002/russia-ukraine-meta-facebook-youtube-tiktok-data-crowdtangle-ceo-interview>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/11/tik-tok-ukraine-white-house/>

<sup>83</sup> <https://nypost.com/2022/03/11/ukraine-invasion-proves-big-tech-cant-be-arbiter-of-truth/>

<sup>84</sup>

[https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2022/03/Civil-society-letter-to-Biden-Admin-re-Russia-sa-nctions-and-internet-access\\_10-March-2022-1.pdf](https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2022/03/Civil-society-letter-to-Biden-Admin-re-Russia-sa-nctions-and-internet-access_10-March-2022-1.pdf)

<sup>85</sup>

<https://advox.globalvoices.org/2022/03/10/can-ukraines-internet-sustain-longer-term-attacks-and-destructi-on-from-russia/>

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/how-russia-using-tucker-carlson-propaganda-pawn-1687402>

been newly created only in the days after Russia launched its invasion.<sup>87</sup>

#### March 11 Report:

On March 11, Russian authorities called for Meta to be labeled an extremist organization and said they would restrict access to its Instagram app, after the social media giant said it would temporarily permit some calls for violence against Russian soldiers. It came after Meta made an unusual exception on Thursday to its rules prohibiting most overtly violent speech. The company said it would permit posts calling for violence against Russian soldiers from users in Ukraine, Russia and some other countries in eastern Europe and the Caucasus.<sup>88</sup> Russia then actually restricted Instagram, one week after the same Russian regulator announced it would block access to Facebook. Instagram is more popular in Russia than Facebook.<sup>89</sup>

On March 8, European Union ministers explicitly made two requests for technology platforms: they should respond more quickly to requests made by governments when they report “fake news” or an account of dubious origin; and they should increase their moderation teams in all languages. They asked that platforms strengthen their fact-checking capabilities and make sure they have enough native speakers and local contact points on the ground.<sup>90</sup>

As of Monday, March 7, the only US-based tech platforms still operating in Russia were Instagram (which was subsequently restricted by the Russian government, see above), Whatsapp, and Youtube. One commentator summarized, “Some say the actions of Silicon Valley’s social media giants have come way too late. But others have expressed concern that communications platforms’ pulling the plug on Russia entirely means fewer online spaces where independent, critical voices can share information and access alternative points of view. What is clear...is that Silicon Valley’s myth of laissez-faire neutrality is fracturing in real-time as the world recognizes the role the industry plays in modern conflict”.<sup>91</sup>

A wide variety of news outlets and media organizations have also pulled staff or suspended operations in Russia, including the New York Times, Discovery, Condé Nast, CNN, the London Stock Exchange, ABC and CBS, Bloomberg, and Radio Free Europe.<sup>92</sup>

In response to a letter from a letter from Andrii Nabok of the Ukrainian Ministry of Digital Transformation to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) asking

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<sup>87</sup>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuciu/2022/03/10/russian-sock-puppets-spreading-misinformation-on-social-media-about-ukraine/>

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/11/1086005218/russia-instagram-meta-extremist-group>

<sup>89</sup>

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2022/03/russia-blocks-instagram-as-clampdown-on-social-media-increases-00016490>

<sup>90</sup>

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/digital/news/ukraine-les-27-exhortent-google-meta-et-twitter-de-passer-a-la-vitesse-superieure/>

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.codastory.com/newsletters/ukraine-russia-silicon-valley/>

<sup>92</sup>

<https://www.axios.com/media-companies-russia-fake-news-law-aae63875-2189-4d92-bbec-e423aba44758.html>

for a range of internet governance sanctions against Russia, a group of experts from the internet governance world issued an open letter on use of Internet Governance for sanctions. They basically boil down to (with thanks to Harold Feld): don't cut off countries; don't mess with the current processes; and create a new multi-stakeholder group to develop a list of appropriate, targeted sanctions that could be invoked and distribute that globally for ISPs and governments to follow voluntarily. They also concluded that well-established methods of blocklisting provide the best mechanism for sanctioning both IP routes and traffic and domain names, and that this mechanism, if implemented normally by subscribing entities, has no significant costs or risks.<sup>93</sup>

Now there's "fake fact-checking" - researchers at Clemson University's Media Forensics Hub and ProPublica identified more than a dozen videos that purport to debunk apparently nonexistent Ukrainian fakes. They were part of a novel and disturbing campaign that spreads disinformation by disguising it as fact-checking. The goal of the campaign is to inject a sense of doubt among Russian-language audiences, who are increasingly the single-minded focus of Russian propaganda efforts.<sup>94</sup>

Protocol pointed out, "tech giants have arguably found themselves in, arguably, a worst-case scenario: Having allowed Putin's propaganda machine to grow online for years, they had no choice but to take a blunt instrument to it when a war broke out. Now, Russia has cut off access to a critical communication tool for millions of people. Which is, of course, what these companies wanted to avoid all along."<sup>95</sup> The Washington Post did a similar opinion commentary, noting that, "Maintaining a presence in Russia while standing up for civil liberties will be difficult to do at all and impossible to do perfectly... The platforms shouldn't buckle to the pressure, but neither should they abandon Russia altogether. Instead, they should do all they can to prevent their abuse, whether that means banning Russian state-run media worldwide or disciplining authorities' other accounts for spreading dangerous disinformation."<sup>96</sup>

Cogent Communications, Russia's second-largest internet provider, severed ties with its Russian clients to prevent its networks from being used for propaganda or cyberattacks aimed at beleaguered Ukrainians. It was described on one blog: "A backbone carrier disconnecting its customers in a country the size of Russia is without precedent in the history of the Internet."<sup>97</sup>

A report from the Network Contagion Research Institute, which tracks online disinformation, says online activity has surged by almost 20%, and conspiracy theories centered on a "new world order" have migrated from COVID and vaccines to the conflict in Ukraine.<sup>98</sup> Another report notes that misinformation about COVID has plummeted since Russia's Internet infrastructure and payment networks were limited by sanctions. The conclusion that's reasonable to draw from these anecdotal reports is that Russian Internet infrastructure was a vital part of the tool kit of

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<sup>93</sup> <https://www.pch.net/resources/Papers/Multistakeholder-Imposition-of-Internet-Sanctions.pdf>

<sup>94</sup>

<https://www.niemanlab.org/2022/03/in-the-ukraine-conflict-fake-fact-checks-are-being-used-to-spread-disinformation/>

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.protocol.com/newsletters/policy/russia-facebook-propaganda>

<sup>96</sup>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/03/08/internet-companies-shouldnt-leave-russia-they-shouldnt-become-its-tools-either/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/04/russia-ukraine-internet-cogent-cutoff/>

<sup>98</sup> <https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/NCRI-Insights-SitRep-March-2022.pdf>

people who spread misinformation.<sup>99</sup>

The U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned 11 Russian intelligence-directed disinformation outlets and their leaders for spreading false narratives to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This marks the strongest set of actions the U.S. government has taken against Russian-government operated media since the invasion. The sanctioned people and entities will have their U.S. assets frozen. It does not include RT or Sputnik Today.<sup>100</sup>

Many outlets picked up on the New Yorker referring to the invasion of Ukraine as the "TikTok war," as the site has become a method to mainline short video clips that include a healthy dose of Russian disinformation and fake viral footage alongside legitimate content shared by users on the ground. TikTok does not appear to have a posted policy on state media, and commentators wonder if the conflict will force the company to invest more in content moderation, trust and safety policies, and efforts to address disinformation.<sup>101</sup> (Within days, news reports shifted their focus to the role of Telegram.)

Two analytical themes have emerged in commentary about the role of media in the conflict. The first is that social media has changed the way war is understood by those outside the zone of conflict, making the war in Ukraine "the first social media war." But this thread negates the role played by such media in Syria over the past decade and introduces implicit racial bias as a possible reason we pay more attention to Ukraine than to, say, Yemen. A second analytical theme is that while seeing images of the war on social media creates empathy, it may not last. The platforms' algorithms favor engagement, and it may render ongoing coverage of the war as entertainment.<sup>102</sup>

In response to the new Russian law described below on March 4, a flurry of major Western news outlets — ranging from CNN to Bloomberg, the BBC and more — announced that they'll suspend broadcasting and reporting from Russia.<sup>103</sup>

Predictably, research from the Global Disinformation Index shows that despite the effort across the ad tech supply chain to manage disinformation about the war, advertisers are still showing up on disinformation sites, thereby funding disinformation.<sup>104</sup> Media Matters says similar things about YouTube.<sup>105</sup>

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<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/russia-is-having-less-success-at-spreading-social-media-disinformation/>

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/03/treasury-sanctions-russia-online-outlets-00013931>

<sup>101</sup> <https://techpolicy.press/tech-firms-caught-in-the-middle-of-russias-war-on-ukraine/>

102

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/hugh-linehan-as-ukraine-burns-the-global-media-landscape-is-transformed-1.4817569>

103

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andymeeke/2022/03/04/bloomberg-the-bbc-cnn-and-more-stop-reporting-from-russia-over-putins-fake-news-law/>

<sup>104</sup> <https://disinformationindex.org/research/>

105

<https://www.mediamatters.org/google/youtube-making-money-false-ukraine-biolabs-conspiracy-theory-tied-russian-disinformation-and>

Russian government documents suggest the country is preparing to disconnect from the global internet. An order from Andrei Chernenko, Russia's deputy digital minister, demanded that Russian state-owned websites and online portals beef up their security by today, Friday, March 11. It tells them to move their hosting to Russian services if they are currently using foreign hosting services; to scrub their web pages of all JavaScript code that has been downloaded from foreign sources; and to switch to domain name system (DNS) servers located on Russian soil.<sup>106</sup>

Russia's internet censor demanded YouTube undo restrictions on CSKA, a Russian football club, saying the decision harms everyday Russians, and called YouTube a tool of Western "information warfare." One commentator believes this portends even more aggressive attacks on US technology companies which may outlive the war in Ukraine.<sup>107</sup>

March 4 Report:

Per Protocol, Llabels have continued to be one of the primary tools tech companies have used in the days since Russia invaded Ukraine. Twitter and Facebook have both said they will label all tweets with links to Russian state media and demote them in users' feeds. A new study would suggest that the most effective way to actually stop a lie from spreading is to directly call it out as one.<sup>108</sup>

On Friday, March 4, Russia blocked access to Facebook, wrote letters to Google and TikTok, and threatened to punish anyone spreading "false information" about its armed forces with as much as 15 years in prison, clamping down on free speech more aggressively than at any other point in President Vladimir V. Putin's 22 years in power. The letter to Google complained of ads on YouTube allegedly containing "inaccurate content" with the intent of "misinforming the Russian internet audience" about the country's invasion of Ukraine. The letter to Tik Tok said the platform removed certain videos from state-run news site RIA Novosti. Such actions violated "free distribution of information."<sup>109</sup> (NOTE: less than one in ten Russian citizens use Facebook. Instagram, which is highly popular among Russian sports stars and celebrities, and WhatsApp, which is used by Russians to communicate outside the country, were not impacted.)<sup>110</sup> The government said it would block access to Russian-language media produced outside the country: the websites of the Voice of America, the BBC, Deutsche Welle, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the popular Latvian-based news outlet Meduza.<sup>111</sup>

Even well before Russian forces invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, false narratives about Ukraine and its allies, many promoted by the Kremlin's disinformation apparatus, were prevalent online. From false claims of Ukrainian genocide directed at Russian-speaking Ukrainians, to assertions that Nazi ideology has taken root in Ukraine's political leadership, these claims have

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<sup>106</sup> <https://fortune.com/2022/03/07/russia-runes-disconnect-ukraine-dns-cherenko-letter/>

<sup>107</sup> <https://slate.com/technology/2022/03/russia-roskomnadzor-youtube-information-warfare.html>

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.protocol.com/policy/trump-labels-russia>

<sup>109</sup>

<https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-blocks-tech-platforms-including-facebook-twitter-amid-ukraine-invasion-2022-3>

<sup>110</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/opinion/sway-kara-swisher-clint-watts.html>

<sup>111</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/04/world/europe/russia-censorship-media-crackdown.html>



been used to justify Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>112</sup> Platforms have treated Russian disinformation as fair game for removal since the Internet Research Agency showed their vulnerabilities in the lead-up to the 2016 election. Russia's invasion has made their approaches both more urgent, and more complicated.<sup>113</sup>

The attack actually began with cyberattacks that targeted Ukrainian government departments with floods of internet traffic and data-wiping malware. This was followed by a ground, sea and air incursion. News outlets in Ukraine are still reporting outages caused by cyberattacks, which the Ukrainian government says it has "unambiguously linked" to Moscow.<sup>114</sup>

Now digital platforms are facing enormous pressure to take a side – and to moderate content and their business models accordingly – in light of the unprovoked and violent invasion of Ukraine by Russia. News outlets have reported "fierce arguments" taking place within the companies about whether, or how, to abandon commitments to free expression in order to contain strategic disinformation from Russian news outlets and supplement the economic pressure being placed on the Russian government by western nations.<sup>115</sup> Under pressure from the Ukrainian government and other foreign leaders, tech giants and cable providers have issued a flurry of measures focused on curbing the reach of Russian state media in Europe and supplementing economic sanctions on Russia. Virtually all the major platforms have acknowledged public pressure from European Union officials for more aggressive action, even as these moves risk further antagonizing Russia. For example, European Union officials held a meeting with the CEOs of Google and YouTube to press the companies further and drew comparisons between the Russian invasion and the Jan. 6 Capitol riots in the United States, setting an expectation for similar action and cooperation from the platforms. Ukraine's Digital Minister has been particularly effective, using his own Twitter account to demand the chief executives of Google, YouTube, Apple and Netflix block or limit their Russian services in an effort to elicit discontent among young Russians and put pressure on Moscow's leaders<sup>116</sup>, and asked Apple to stop supplying services and products to Russia and to block the Apple App Store.<sup>117, 118</sup> Several of the platforms – especially Meta - have described how "extraordinary" and "exceptional" and "unprecedented" these circumstances are, probably in part to manage expectations about their efforts on other topics. (All platforms have also described efforts in regard to humanitarian aid and keeping their employees safe, though these will not be reported here.)

Tech companies are also facing pressure from US regulators to limit the spread of misleading information and propaganda about the conflict and to take a tougher stance against Russia. For example, Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va) last week sent letters to Meta, Twitter, Alphabet, TikTok, Reddit and Telegram urging them to protect their platforms from Russian influence operations.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/russian-disinformation-tracking-center/>

<sup>113</sup> <https://techcrunch.com/2022/02/24/russia-ukraine/>

<sup>114</sup> <https://techcrunch.com/2022/02/24/russia-ukraine/>

<sup>115</sup> <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2022/03/social-media-goes-to-war-00012993>

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/02/mykhailo-fedorov-ukraine-tech/>

<sup>117</sup>

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2022/02/ukraines-digital-minister-pleads-with-big-tech-to-pressur-e-moscow-00012087>

<sup>118</sup> <https://twitter.com/FedorovMykhailo/status/1497327555690610689>

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083291122/russia-ukraine-facebook-google-youtube-twitter>

However, this may also mean that evidence needed for war crimes or humanitarian prosecutions may be lost: human rights organizations and archivists are now racing to grab whatever they can before it disappears. Earlier this month, blockchain startup Arweave began asking people to collect whatever they could find related to the emerging conflict and commit it to the blockchain, creating a distributed ledger no platform can touch and no government can censor.<sup>120</sup>

Russia has been pushing tech companies in the opposite direction. It has called for platforms to reverse their restrictions on Russian state media channels and threatened to “restrict” or “throttle” them from access in Russia for actions like fact-checking and labeling (in the case of Facebook) or refusing to censor content about the war (in the case of TikTok). In each case, the threat would impact Russian citizens trying to obtain accurate information or spread dissent against the war. Conversely, Russian authorities have begun shutting down news outlets – or trying to – that contradict their narrative of the war. On March 3, the Russian government warned the Voice of America of its intention to block the VOA Russian language service’s news website unless it removes coverage of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The Russian government’s media regulator, Roskomnadzor, claims the news site “contains false messages about terrorist attacks or other kind (sic) of information of public concern.”<sup>121</sup> Russia has blocked TV Rain (also known as “Dozhd,” Russian for “rain”), its last independent news network, along with Echo of Moscow, one of its oldest radio stations, declaring them to be foreign agents.<sup>122</sup>

Multiple commentators have described the complex considerations of tech companies “staying or going” in Russia.<sup>123, 124</sup> One pointed out that it’s been easier for Apple, Amazon, Meta and Google to break ties with Russia because their revenue from the country is relatively small, in contrast to oil, defense and financial services companies.<sup>125</sup> This is all taking place against a backdrop of US officials releasing an extraordinary amount of information that would normally be considered highly classified.<sup>126</sup> It has made for an extraordinarily complex information environment. (Another illustration: an English Wikipedia page for the “2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine” sprang to life mere minutes after Putin’s televised address about the invasion, and has been collaboratively written by nearly 740 distinct authors over four days. It enjoys active support from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.)<sup>127</sup>

(It’s also not a simple story of Russian disinformation villains and Ukrainian truth heroes: some of Ukraine’s official accounts have pushed stories with questionable veracity, spreading

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<sup>120</sup> <https://www.protocol.com/newsletters/policy/russia-ukraine-tech-propoganda>

<sup>121</sup> <https://www.insidevoa.com/a/6467571.html>

<sup>122</sup>

<https://www.niemanlab.org/2022/03/russia-blocks-tv-rain-its-last-independent-tv-channel-and-tv-rain-airs-its-last-broadcast/>

<sup>123</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/technology/russia-tech-companies.html>

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/technology/ukraine-russia-social-media.html>

<sup>125</sup>

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2022/03/u-s-tech-giants-dont-have-much-money-on-the-line-as-they-split-from-russia-00014067>

<sup>126</sup>

<https://www.niemanlab.org/2022/03/sharing-top-secret-intelligence-with-the-public-is-unprecedented-here-s-why-the-u-s-decided-to-do-it-for-ukraine/>

<sup>127</sup> <https://slate.com/technology/2022/03/wikipedia-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-edits-kyiv-kyev.html>

“anecdotes, gripping on-the-ground accounts and even some unverified information that was later proved false, in a rapid jumble of fact and myth.” Have you heard about the “Ghost of Kiev?”<sup>128</sup>

In addition to content moderation, platforms have introduced features to keep users safe and their communications private. For example, Meta is offering encrypted Instagram DMs in Russia and Ukraine. Twitter's Safety team began sharing tips on how users can cover their digital tracks to help keep themselves safe. Meta launched a one-click tool for users to lock their Facebook accounts.<sup>129</sup>

Pressure to manage propaganda extends to more traditional media: TV outlets around the world have been asked to limit the reach of RT (which has been on American airwaves for 17 years) and other Kremlin-controlled media outlets. More than 20 providers in Poland, Australia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Canada, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, and Germany have started turning off Russian channels on their satellites, cable networks and across other platforms and sources. RT's domestic offshoot, RT America, has not yet been banned in the United States, although it's been reported that TV distributors are under pressure to stop carrying Russian state media. Roku, the streaming company, banned RT in Europe on February 28, but continues to carry RT America, as do the Dish and DirecTV satellite services.<sup>130</sup> (Update March 4: both DirectTV and Roku dropped RT America, and RT America is ceasing operations and laying off most of its staff.)<sup>131</sup>

Press advocates are also calling for support of journalists in Ukraine and Russia, and may see the situation as another reminder of the importance of preserving a diversity of free and independent media outlets. The International Press Institute urged the United Nations and European officials to monitor attacks on journalists and press restrictions, and hold those responsible accountable. Journalists and the flow of independent information must be protected under a 2015 United Nations resolution on the protection of journalists in conflict areas. Russia doesn't seem to care, as evidenced by the bombing this week of a Ukrainian TV broadcast tower and its domestic suppression of independent coverage of the war and protests. The war is also raising awareness of the larger attack on democracy being waged by Putin. Ideally, this will renew appreciation of the institutions of democracy, including a free press.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/technology/ukraine-war-misinfo.html>

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.protocol.com/policy/russia-ukraine-war-tech>

<sup>130</sup>

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/03/putins-external-propaganda-machine-is-swiftly-crashing-down>

<sup>131</sup> <https://www.protocol.com/bulletins/rt-america-shutdown-layoffs>

<sup>132</sup> <https://www.seattletimes.com/newsletters/voices-for-a-free-press/>

## Actions by Digital Platform

This summary lists what individual companies have communicated specifically in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

Digital Platform	Approaches & Actions
Priority Level 1	
Facebook/Facebook Messenger/Meta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 12: Meta withdrew a policy advisory opinion (see March 15 below) request related to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine that had previously been referred to the Oversight Board, citing “ongoing safety and security concerns”. The Oversight Board issued its own statement noting its “disappointment” and that “the withdrawal of this request does not diminish Meta’s responsibility to carefully consider the ongoing content moderation issues which have arisen from this war, which the Board continues to follow”. The theory is that the company’s legal and security teams became concerned that anything the board said might somehow be used against employees or their families in Russia, either now or in the future.<sup>133</sup></li> <li>• April 7: in its quarterly Adversarial Threat Report, announced that it had de-platformed a network targeting Ukraine that originated in Russia and Belarus. According to the announcement, the influence campaign dubbed Ghostwriter had intensified efforts to hack the social media accounts of Ukrainian military personnel. Facebook said it had blocked these videos and prevented other users from sharing them.<sup>134</sup></li> <li>• April 6: received wide coverage about the release of a new quarterly report detailing a surge in social media disinformation this year, including an increase in content linked to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. It also indicated an uptick in domestic disinformation and propaganda in countries around the world, suggesting that tactics pioneered by foreign intelligence agencies are now being used more widely.<sup>135</sup></li> <li>• March 15: said it would consult with its Oversight Board board for guidance about the policy shift allowing users in Ukraine to post some calls for violence against Russian invaders. It would mark the first time the panel has formally weighed in on the tech giant’s flurry of actions in response to the war, and it could shape its rules on violent rhetoric moving forward. So far, the Board’s narrow scope and elaborate consideration process has limited its role in rapidly unfolding events.<sup>136</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>133</sup> <https://www.platformer.news/p/how-facebook-undercut-the-oversight?s=r>

<sup>134</sup>

[https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Meta-Quarterly-Adversarial-Threat-Report\\_Q1-2022.pdf](https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Meta-Quarterly-Adversarial-Threat-Report_Q1-2022.pdf)

<sup>135</sup>

<https://www.usnews.com/news/business/articles/2022-04-07/meta-russian-invasion-driving-more-disinformation-online>

<sup>136</sup>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/15/war-ukraine-highlights-limits-facebooks-oversight-board/>

- March 11 (again): President of Global Affairs Nick Clegg somewhat walked back its statement regarding calls for violence against Russian and Russian soldiers, clarifying that the move doesn't signal tolerance for "discrimination, harassment or violence towards Russians." In an internal post, Clegg said, "We are now narrowing the focus to make it explicitly clear in the guidance that it is never to be interpreted as condoning violence against Russians in general." He added that the revised policy only applies in Ukraine, only in the context of speech regarding the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, and does not permit calls to assassinate a head of state.<sup>137</sup>
- March 11: Meta will allow Facebook and Instagram users in some countries to call for violence against Russians and Russian soldiers in the context of the Ukraine invasion, in a temporary change to its hate speech policy.<sup>138</sup> This resulted in the Russian government declaring Meta an "extremist organization", as noted in the commentary above.
- March 10: Disclosed at a Morgan Stanley conference that "ads from Russian advertisers for Russian users accounted for around 1.5% of the company's 2021 advertising revenue".<sup>139</sup>
- March 9: introduced a new feature that lets administrators of Facebook groups automatically decline incoming posts that have been identified as containing false information. Incoming posts that contain content rated by third-party fact-checkers as false are declined before they are seen in the group, which helps reduce the visibility of misinformation.<sup>140</sup>
- March 9: In an interview with CNBC, Sheryl Sandberg said, "Social media is bad for dictators, that's why Putin took us down." It was the first time since Russia invaded Ukraine that a Meta executive has specifically criticized Vladimir Putin by name, and the first time Sandberg or any other high-ranking executive has called Russia a "dictatorship."<sup>141</sup>
- March 1: said that Russian state media accounts, as well as content linking to their sites, will now be demoted across all Meta's platforms globally. The move to apply algorithmic restrictions to Russia-backed media outlets follows a similar move by Twitter announced on Monday. And it follows calls by European Union officials for tech platforms to do more to keep those outlets from being recommended to users. Meta

<sup>137</sup> <https://twitter.com/nickclegg/status/1502349805221126144?s=20&t=QZzvxs3UypRWNaQHOPZ1Xg>

<sup>138</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/exclusive-facebook-instagram-temporarily-allow-calls-violence-against-russians-2022-03-10/>

<sup>139</sup>

<https://seekingalpha.com/article/4494722-meta-platforms-inc-fb-management-presents-morgan-stanley-technology-media-and-telecom>

<sup>140</sup>

<https://www.facebook.com/community/whats-new/new-product-tools-to-help-make-community-building-safe-and-easier/>

<sup>141</sup>

<https://www.businessinsider.co.za/sheryl-sandberg-social-media-bad-for-dictators-putin-blocked-facebook-2022-3>

already labels accounts that it identifies as being operated by state-run media. The additional steps involve the labeling of links and the down-ranking of both the links and the Russian media outlets' own accounts. Users who attempt to share links to Russian state media websites will also be shown interstitial warnings on Facebook and Instagram.<sup>142</sup>

- March 1: Meta as well as Google faces possible punitive measures in Russia after failing to open local offices and take other measures required by a communications law. Since July 2021, Russian legislation signed by President Vladimir Putin has obliged foreign social media companies with more than 500,000 daily users to open local offices or be subject to restrictions as severe as outright bans.<sup>143</sup>
- February 28: Meta will block access to Russian news outlets RT and Sputnik across the European Union after receiving "requests from a number of Governments and the EU to take further steps in relation to Russian state controlled media"<sup>144</sup> Meta had already complied with such a request from Ukraine's government, "fully blocking the ability of a number of Russian state media entities from broadcasting into Ukraine."<sup>145</sup>
- February 28: said Russian authorities had ordered the company to stop labeling and fact-checking posts from four Russian state-owned media organizations. Russia's communications agency said Meta had violated "fundamental human rights and freedoms, as well as the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens" by limiting access to some content from Zvezda TV channel, the RIA Novosti news agency and the Lenta.ru and Gazeta.ru news sites. When this request was refused, Russian authorities announced they will be restricting the use of Meta's services.<sup>146</sup> It's unclear as of this writing which platforms will be affected.<sup>147</sup>
- February 27: applied algorithmic restrictions to Russian state media that should prevent it from surfacing as prominently in users' feeds; also said they would temporarily prevent a number of Russian channels, including RT, from monetizing their content.<sup>148</sup>
- February 27: Meta has created a special operations center to monitor the conflict in Ukraine and remove content that breaks its rules.<sup>149</sup>
- February 25: began to prohibit Russian state media from running ads or

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<sup>142</sup>

[https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-01-22/h\\_b4788f5c0ec7a84db226b03c05c652a0](https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-01-22/h_b4788f5c0ec7a84db226b03c05c652a0)

<sup>143</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/google-meta-face-penalties-russia-deadline-passes-open-local-offices-2022-03-01/>

<sup>144</sup> <https://twitter.com/nickclegg/status/1498395147536527360>

<sup>145</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/tech/big-tech-russia-ukraine/index.html>

<sup>146</sup> <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2022/02/russia-restricts-access-to-facebook-00011964>

<sup>147</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083291122/russia-ukraine-facebook-google-youtube-twitter>

<sup>148</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/tech/big-tech-russia-ukraine/index.html>

<sup>149</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083291122/russia-ukraine-facebook-google-youtube-twitter>

	<p>monetizing on Facebook’s platform anywhere in the world.<sup>150</sup> (Apparently, as of early March, that hasn’t stopped countries close to Moscow, like China, from using their state channels to buy ads pushing a pro-Russian line. In 2020, Meta said it would begin blocking state-controlled media outlets from buying advertising in the U.S. But those outlets can still buy ads targeting users abroad.)<sup>151</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>February 24: tweeted that Facebook established a Special Operations Center with native speakers to “closely monitor the situation and act as fast as possible.” Also deployed a feature in Ukraine that allows users to lock their account, meaning that those who are not a user’s friend cannot download or share their profile picture, or see posts on their timeline. (In Afghanistan, Meta also temporarily removed the ability to view and search the “Friends” list for users in Afghanistan and rolled out pop-up alerts for on Instagram with instructions about protecting their accounts. So far, those two measures haven’t been adopted for accounts in Ukraine.)<sup>152</sup></li> </ul>
<p>Google (search and ad technology)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>April 18: in response to a flurry of Twitter posts claiming that Google Maps had supposedly unblurred satellite images of Russian military installations, Google Maps released a statement denying that it had made any recent changes to its satellite imagery of Russia. According to the statement, unblurred versions of the imagery were already available on Google Maps, while independent researchers noted they had been able to access these kinds of images for years.<sup>153</sup></li> <li>March 31: announced new search features that will accompany its existing alert on rapidly evolving topics. Beneath that notice — “It looks like these results are changing quickly” — Google will add information literacy tips and a link to a resource page that includes how to best check that the information you’re looking at is credible. On fast-breaking topics, users will be cautioned to come back later. In Google News, the company is adding a label for highly cited sources, which will appear on top stories as a way to elevate the original reporting and help readers find details that are the most relevant to them. The label will appear as long as other outlets link to the original stories, press releases or sources.<sup>154</sup></li> <li>March 29: announced the introduction of Info Panels in local languages and Transparency Labels for publisher content on YouTube. Also committing an additional \$10 million for “new partnerships with think tanks and civil society organizations to conduct region-specific research into misinformation and disinformation, as well as cash grants to support</li> </ul>

<sup>150</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083291122/russia-ukraine-facebook-google-youtube-twitter>

<sup>151</sup>

<https://www.axios.com/chinas-state-media-meta-facebook-ads-russia-623763df-c5fb-46e4-a6a8-36b607e1b672.html>

<sup>152</sup> <https://twitter.com/ngeleicher/status/1496909654072315915>

<sup>153</sup>

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-war-report-google-refutes-misleading-claims-about-blurring-russian-military-assets/>

<sup>154</sup> <https://www.protocol.com/bulletins/google-search-news-literacy>

fact-checking networks and nonprofits”. Jigsaw, a unit within Google that builds technology to counter threats to open societies, will partner with local experts and academics to develop approaches to both directly counter disinformation and help people more easily identify disinformation.<sup>155</sup>

- March 28: The Intercept reported that in early March, Google instructed contractors working to translate text for the Russian market not to refer to the war against Ukraine as a “war”, but as “extraordinary circumstances.” The policy change was intended to keep Google in compliance with a Russian censorship law enacted just after the invasion of Ukraine. The orders apply to all Google products translated into Russian, including Google Maps, Gmail, AdWords, and Google’s policies and communications with users.<sup>156</sup>
- March 24: confirmed that “some people are having difficulty accessing the Google News app and website in Russia and that this is not due to any technical issues on our end.” Russia’s communications regulator had blocked Google News, accusing the news aggregator service of spreading false information about Moscow’s war in Ukraine.<sup>157</sup>
- March 23: announced it will not help websites, apps and YouTube channels sell ads alongside content that it deems “exploits, dismisses or condones” the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Google already bars ads from appearing next to content that incites violence and denies tragic events. It is broadly applying those policies to the war. Google also bars ads that capitalize on sensitive events and has applied that policy to the war.<sup>158</sup>
- March 10: informed Android developers that Play Store users in Russia have lost the ability to purchase apps, games, IAPs, and subscriptions. The company paused Play billing in Russia as of March 10, 2022.
- March 10: at the request, and with the help, of the government of Ukraine, started rolling out a rapid Air Raid Alerts system for Android phones in Ukraine.<sup>159</sup>
- March 9: instructed by the European Union to wipe Russian state media organizations RT and Sputnik from search results in Europe as part of its sanctions on the two entities.<sup>160</sup>
- March 3: in an effort to help advertisers and ad tech firms avoid funding state disinformation efforts, NewsGuard has identified 114 Russian disinformation sites and is tracking the top false narratives that they are publishing about the invasion of Ukraine. These include myths that exaggerate Ukrainian aggression or downplay Russia’s intentions; myths

<sup>155</sup> <https://blog.google/inside-google/company-announcements/warsaw-announcing-more-support-ukraine/>

<sup>156</sup> <https://theintercept.com/2022/03/28/google-russia-ukraine-war-censorship/>

<sup>157</sup>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/3/24/russian-watchdog-blocks-google-over-inauthentic-info-on-war>

<sup>158</sup>

<sup>159</sup> <https://blog.google/inside-google/company-announcements/helping-ukraine/>

<sup>160</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/09/eu-google-sanctions/>



	<p>that discredit Ukrainian leadership; myths that discredit Western support of Ukraine; and myths that falsely revise Ukrainian and Russian history.<sup>161</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 3: Google said that it had stopped selling any online advertising in Russia, a ban that covers search, YouTube and outside publishing partners.<sup>162</sup> Had also disabled live updates in Ukraine in Google Maps. However, Russian advertisers can still use Google's advertising services abroad, and Russian publishers can still receive revenue from ads displayed on their content to viewers outside the country.</li> <li>• March 1: blocked mobile apps connected to RT and Sputnik from its Play store, in line with an earlier move to remove the Russian state publishers from its news-related features. However, current users can still access the app.<sup>163</sup></li> <li>• March 1: Google as well as Meta faces possible punitive measures in Russia after failing to open local offices and take other measures required by a communications law. Since July 2021, Russian legislation signed by President Vladimir Putin has obliged foreign social media companies with more than 500,000 daily users to open local offices or be subject to restrictions as severe as outright bans.<sup>164</sup></li> <li>• February 26: said it was "pausing" the ability of Russian state-funded media to make money through Google's ad services.<sup>165</sup></li> </ul>
Apple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 1: stopped all product sales through its sales channel in Russia; limited access to digital services, such as Apple Pay, inside Russia; and blocked downloads of state-sponsored news outlets such as RT News and Sputnik News through its app store outside of Russia.<sup>166</sup> Also disabled both traffic and live incidents in Apple Maps in Ukraine as a safety and precautionary measure for Ukrainian citizens. The Ukrainian government had asked Apple to stop offering its app store in Russia, but some security and democracy experts said that that could harm Russian users who are protesting the Kremlin and who rely on Western tools to organize.<sup>167</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>161</sup> <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/russian-disinformation-tracking-center/>

<sup>162</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/technology/google-pauses-all-ad-sales-russia-2022-03-04/>

<sup>163</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/exclusive-google-blocks-rt-sputnik-play-app-store-europe-2022-03-02>

<sup>164</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/google-meta-face-penalties-russia-deadline-passes-open-local-offices-2022-03-01/>

<sup>165</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083291122/russia-ukraine-facebook-google-youtube-twitter>

<sup>166</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/apple-says-it-has-stopped-all-product-sales-in-russia-11646169327>

<sup>167</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/01/tech/apple-russia/index.html>

Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● On May 19, Twitter announced a policy change described as a “crisis misinformation policy” to combat the growing amount of false information arising from Russia’s war in Ukraine. The policy covers tweets in English, Ukrainian, Russian or Belarusian that contain specific types of false information (conditions on the ground, use of force or use of weapons on civilians, war crimes or mass violence against certain populations, international response, sanctions or humanitarian actions). Actions by Twitter may include warning notices and takedowns, friction in sharing, and labeling. It may be extended to other types of crises and conflicts in other countries, including the United States.<sup>168</sup></li> <li>● April 6: limited content from more than 300 official Russian government accounts, including that of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The accounts will no longer be recommended in timelines, notifications or elsewhere on the site. The targeted Russian government accounts include official ministry and embassy profiles, as well as the accounts of high-ranking Russian officials. The company said it would take action against any country which “restricts access to the open internet while they’re engaged in armed conflict”.<sup>169</sup></li> <li>● March 10: launched a privacy-protected version of its site to bypass surveillance and censorship after Russia restricted access to its service in the country. Known as an “onion” service, users can access this version of Twitter if they download the Tor browser, which allows people to access sites on what is also referred to as the “dark web.”<sup>170</sup></li> <li>● March 10: gained worldwide attention when it took down two tweets by Russia’s embassy in the United Kingdom for “the denial of violent events.” In a tweet, Russia’s embassy claimed that a pregnant woman seen in a photo of casualties at a children’s hospital in Mariupol was actually a Ukraine “beauty blogger” and suggested it was staged propaganda. Facebook also removed the posts.<sup>171</sup></li> <li>● March 3: announced that @Birdwatch notes will be visible on Tweets to some people in the U.S. Birdwatch is a collaborative way for people to add context to Tweets they believe are misleading.<sup>172</sup> The company will expand the number of participants beyond the original sample, show Birdwatch notes directly on disputed tweets, and allow more people to rate notes according to how helpful they are.</li> <li>● March 1: Russia reinstated a slowdown of Twitter traffic on computers, as a foreign ministry official accused Meta, Google and other Western tech</li> </ul>
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<sup>168</sup> Politico Pro Technology, “Twitter deploys crisis misinformation policy surrounding Ukraine war,” by Rebecca Kern, 05/19/2022 (paywalled content)

<sup>169</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-60992373>

<sup>170</sup>

<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-technology-business-europe-media-f1da10285a1631542b332597c5d35c29>

<sup>171</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/10/twitter-removes-russian-uk-embassy-tweets-for-ukraine-denials.html>

<sup>172</sup> <https://twitter.com/TwitterSafety/status/1499390527036432384>

giants of inciting war.<sup>173</sup>

- February 28: announced that any link shared by a user to a Russian state media organization's website will automatically receive a label warning viewers that the tweet "links to a Russia state-affiliated media website." The company began labeling and de-amplifying official Russian media accounts in 2020. This additional action applies to individual Twitter accounts that share links from those state-affiliated sites. Also plans to "reduce the visibility and amplification of this content site-wide, no matter who it comes from."<sup>174</sup>
- February 28: said it was temporarily pausing all ads in Ukraine and Russia "to ensure critical public safety information is elevated and ads don't detract from it". Twitter had already banned advertising from state-controlled media in 2019.<sup>175</sup>
- February 25: tweeted that it is "actively monitoring for risks associated with the conflict in Ukraine, including identifying and disrupting attempts to amplify false and misleading information". Launched Search and Home Timeline prompts that point to a Twitter Moment with digital safety and security resources in English, Ukrainian, and Russian; proactively reviewing Tweets to detect platform manipulation (or other inauthentic behavior) and taking enforcement action against synthetic and manipulated media that presents a false or misleading depiction of what's happening; continuing to provide as much context around content relating to the crisis as possible, including through Moments and Events on Twitter; actively monitoring vulnerable high-profile accounts, including journalists, activists, and government officials and agencies to mitigate any attempts at a targeted takeover or manipulation; and paused some Tweet recommendations from people users in Russia and Ukraine don't follow on Home Timeline to reduce the spread of abusive content.<sup>176</sup>

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173

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/google-meta-face-penalties-russia-deadline-passes-open-local-offices-2022-03-01/>

<sup>174</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/tech/big-tech-russia-ukraine/index.html>

<sup>175</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083291122/russia-ukraine-facebook-google-youtube-twitter>

<sup>176</sup> <https://twitter.com/TwitterSafety/status/1497353965419257860>

<p>Microsoft</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● March 4: Microsoft announced it will cut off “new sales” of all of its products in Russia after being “horrified, angered and saddened” by events in Ukraine. Windows is the dominant operating system in Russia and accounts for 55 per cent of computers in use in the country. Microsoft would not comment on the level of support it would continue to give existing customers in Russia, or whether it would supply upgrades and patches for its software.<sup>177</sup></li> <li>● February 28: Brad Smith initiated a blog to keep stakeholders up to date in four areas: protecting Ukraine from cyberattacks; protection from state-sponsored disinformation campaigns; support for humanitarian assistance; and the protection of employees. Emphasized the degree of cooperation and collaboration required across governments and corporations. Described how Microsoft’s Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC) detected a new round of offensive and destructive cyberattacks directed against Ukraine’s digital infrastructure and reported and addressed it; committed to ongoing efforts. In accordance with the EU’s recent decision, the Microsoft Start platform (including MSN.com) will not display any state-sponsored RT and Sputnik content. Microsoft is removing RT news apps from the Windows app store and further de-ranking these sites’ search results on Bing so that it will only return RT and Sputnik links when a user clearly intends to navigate to those pages. Also banning all advertisements from RT and Sputnik across our ad network and will not place any ads on these sites.<sup>178</sup></li> </ul>
<p>YouTube</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● April 9: blocked Duma TV, which broadcasts from Russia's lower house of parliament, “for a violation of YouTube's Terms of Service”.drawing an angry response from officials who said the world's most popular streaming service could face restrictions in response.<sup>179</sup></li> <li>● March 10: blocked the channels of Russian state media outlets globally after initially doing so last week in Europe only.<sup>180</sup></li> <li>● March 1: said it would block Kremlin-backed media outlets RT and Sputnik from Europe, following similar bans by Facebook and TikTok and an announcement from the European Commission that it wanted to remove these Russian media outlets from the EU. The block will apply within the European Union and the U.K.<sup>181</sup></li> <li>● February 27: says it has taken down hundreds of channels and thousands of videos in recent days for violating its policies, including rules against “coordinated deceptive practices.”<sup>182</sup></li> <li>● February 26: suspended several Russian state-media channels, including</li> </ul>

<sup>177</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/76e7aeb9-53fb-4418-8492-f22d9af5b7ec>

<sup>178</sup> <https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2022/02/28/ukraine-russia-digital-war-cyberattacks/>

<sup>179</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/youtube-blocks-russian-duma-channel/31794786.html>

<sup>180</sup>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/11/russian-prosecutor-general-seeks-ban-instagram-declare-meta-an-extremist-organization/>

<sup>181</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/youtube-bans-russian-media-outlets-across-europe/>

<sup>182</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083291122/russia-ukraine-facebook-google-youtube-twitter>

	<p>RT, from making money from ads.<sup>183</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>February 26: blocked Russian state media within Ukraine, including RT (although CNN found that YouTube was still allowing Ukrainian IP addresses to access content from RT's Arabic- and Spanish-language channels). Also said it would be "significantly limiting recommendations to these channels."<sup>184</sup></li> </ul>
Amazon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 9: said it had suspended shipment of retail products to customers based in Russia and Belarus and will not take any new third-party sellers from those territories. It also suspended access to Prime Video for customers based in Russia, and sales of New World, the only video game it sells directly in Russia.<sup>185</sup></li> <li>March 6: Amazon Web Services "quietly" stopped letting customers in Russia and Belarus open new cloud computing accounts (they announced it March 9), attributing the move to "...current events and the uncertainty and lack of credit available in Russia right now." A.W.S. does not have data centers or offices in Russia; its biggest customers there are multinational companies with local development teams.<sup>186</sup></li> <li>March 2: announced it is using its logistics capability to get supplies to those in need and cybersecurity expertise to help governments and companies as part of its support for Ukraine; earlier this week it pledged to donate up to \$10 million for humanitarian efforts.<sup>187</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Priority Level 2</b>	
Instagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See Meta, above.</li> </ul>
Pinterest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 9: communicated that it is applying its existing policies and practices in regard to disinformation, monitoring the situation with help from external experts, closely following requirements being issued by the EU and other governments, does not have an office in Russia and does not offer advertising in the country.<sup>188</sup></li> </ul>
Snapchat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 1: stopped all advertising running in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine; halted advertising sales to all Russian and Belarusian entities and "are complying with all sanctions targeting Russian businesses and</li> </ul>

<sup>183</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083291122/russia-ukraine-facebook-google-youtube-twitter>

<sup>184</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/tech/big-tech-russia-ukraine/index.html>

<sup>185</sup>

<https://deadline.com/2022/03/tech-giants-tout-ukraine-support-amazon-yanks-prime-video-in-russia-and-suspends-deliveries-facebook-adds-mental-health-resources-as-fundraising-hits-30m-1234974415/>

<sup>186</sup>

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/08/business/stocks-economy-inflation-ukraine#amazon-web-services-russia>

<sup>187</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/amazon-ceo-pledges-logistics-cybersecurity-support-ukraine-2022-03-03/>

<sup>188</sup> <https://www.webwire.com/ViewPressRel.asp?ald=286339>

	<p>individuals”. Does not accept revenue from Russian state-owned entities. Continues to offer the Snapchat application in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia as it remains an important communications tool for family and friends. The Discover feature only features content from verified media partners and creators, and Snapchat has never allowed Russian state media to distribute content.<sup>189</sup> (Due to how it works – mainly private feeds and ephemeral content – Snapchat has avoided becoming a hub for misinformation and other problematic content. They limit the size of group chats, snaps disappear, and the content on the public parts of the app (Discover and Spotlight) only host pre-moderated content.)<sup>190</sup></p>
TikTok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● March 10: announced a partnership with the Washington Post to develop news content specific to TikTok that discusses the facts surrounding an attack on a Ukrainian nuclear plant.<sup>191</sup></li> <li>● March 10: has blocked <u>all</u> non-Russian content in Russia other than historical content uploaded by domestic accounts, including state-backed news services. This means the only content Russian users can see is old videos uploaded by Russia-based accounts.<sup>192</sup></li> <li>● March 6: announced it is suspending live streaming and new posts from Russia in response to the new disinformation law.<sup>193</sup></li> <li>● March 5: announced new labels for posts made by Russian state-controlled media accounts to combat disinformation about the invasion of Ukraine. Also said that such posts would be prohibited from placement on For You pages. TikTok said the labels are part of an “expedited” approach to state media.<sup>194</sup> (Note: in general, TikTok has followed the actions of its Western peers by banning Russian state media from using the app in the European Union and adding labels to content.)</li> <li>● March 4: said that it had dedicated more resources to monitoring for misleading content about the war. (The volume of war content on the app far outweighs what is found on some other social networks, according to a review by The Times.)<sup>195</sup></li> <li>● March 1: the 10th most popular platform in Russia<sup>196</sup> announced it is blocking RT and Sputnik News in the EU. The moves mean people using TikTok in EU countries won't be able to access pages or content posted by</li> </ul>

<sup>189</sup> <https://newsroom.snap.com/en-GB/we-support-ukraine>

<sup>190</sup> <https://mashable.com/article/social-media-misinformation-ukraine-russia>

<sup>191</sup> <https://www.tiktok.com/@washingtonpost/video/7071341587934006574>

<sup>192</sup>

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/mar/10/tiktok-users-in-russia-can-see-only-old-russian-made-content>

<sup>193</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/opinion/sway-kara-swisher-clint-watts.html>

<sup>194</sup>

[https://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/US/2022/03/05/tiktok-unveils-labels-russia-state-controlled-media/7511646518881/](https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/03/05/tiktok-unveils-labels-russia-state-controlled-media/7511646518881/)

<sup>195</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/05/technology/tiktok-ukraine-misinformation.html>

<sup>196</sup>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/tiktok-is-just-the-platform-russian-dissidents-need/2022/03/09/13775ace-9f96-11ec-9438-255709b6cddc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/tiktok-is-just-the-platform-russian-dissidents-need/2022/03/09/13775ace-9f96-11ec-9438-255709b6cddc_story.html)

	<p>RT and Sputnik.<sup>197</sup> (This platform’s soaring popularity, immediacy, and ability to convey emotion has made it a particularly important carrier of information, and disinformation, about the conflict in Ukraine. It has also come under scrutiny for its inability to police content. TikTok has partnered with independent fact-checking organizations to try and combat disinformation, but has struggled to slow the spread of fake or distorted news on its platform more than some of its more established social media competitors due to its own design features (e.g., tools like duetting and stitching). TikTok did not answer questions about the scale of fake content about the war, or how far content around the conflict had been shared off-platform. TikTok also did not respond to questions about how many moderators it employs and how many videos and livestreams the app has taken down.<sup>198</sup> However, this same day, it announced it is introducing a capability for long-form content.<sup>199</sup>)</p>
Reddit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● March 2: made restrictions about links to Russian state media outlets like RT, Sputnik, and their foreign language affiliates universal across the site in all geographies. Will continue <u>not</u> to accept advertisements that target Russia or originate from any Russia-based entity, government or private. Have “calibrated our automated safety systems and are providing daily guidance...to ensure that we are not incorrectly removing important and newsworthy citizen journalism that might otherwise be mistaken for rule-breaking content”.<sup>200</sup></li> </ul>
WhatsApp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● April 4: news site WABetaInfo reported that the beta versions for iOS and Android make it impossible to forward any already-forwarded message to more than one group chat at a time. That would mean that restrictions previously placed on “<i>highly</i> forwarded” messages to slow the spread of misinformation would now apply to <i>any</i> previously forwarded messages. WhatsApp had no comment on the story.</li> <li>● February 27: shared best practices on how to secure accounts and take advantage of security features.<sup>201</sup></li> </ul>
Telegram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● March 10: The New York Times launched a Telegram channel to provide news about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, becoming one of the most prominent outlets to explore using the messaging app to promote its reporting. Mainstream British and American news organizations creating accounts on Telegram is a shift for the app, which has often been associated with ISIS, far-right groups and QAnon-affiliated accounts, and demonstrates its significance as a communication channel in the war.<sup>202</sup></li> <li>● March 4: a spokesperson said the social network had now barred</li> </ul>

<sup>197</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/28/1083633239/facebook-and-tiktok-block-russian-state-media-in-europe>

<sup>198</sup> <https://www.wired.com/story/ukraine-russia-war-tiktok/>

<sup>199</sup> <https://mashable.com/article/tiktok-ten-minute-videos-youtube>

<sup>200</sup> <https://www.redditinc.com/blog/supporting-ukraine-and-our-community>

<sup>201</sup> <https://twitter.com/WhatsApp/status/1497986231090565121>

<sup>202</sup> <https://www.insider.com/new-york-times-telegram-russia-ukraine-coverage-2022-3>

	<p>Kremlin-backed media outlets from using its platform within the EU, as required by new EU sanctions. The ban currently applies to only people who had signed into Telegram with an EU-based phone number. The companies' engineers were expanding that to include people with non-EU phone numbers who were physically located there.<sup>203</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 1: Telegram's Russian founder posted to his more than 600,000 followers on the platform that he was considering blocking some war-related channels inside Ukraine and Russia because they could aggravate the conflict and incite ethnic hatred. The app is popular in Russia and Ukraine for sharing images, videos and information about the war. Users responded with alarm, saying they relied on Telegram for independent information. Less than an hour later, Mr. Durov reversed course.<sup>204</sup> (Due to its flexibility - it supports newsfeeds, both public and private group chats, and one-to-one communication – its encryption, and its lack of meaningful content moderation, Telegram has quickly become a uniquely important platform in both Ukraine and Russia.<sup>205</sup> It was founded in 2013 by Pavel and Nikolai Durov, the brothers behind Russia's Facebook equivalent VKontakte.<sup>206</sup>)</li> </ul>
<b>Priority 3</b>	
Netflix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• February 28: refusing to air Russian state TV channels in the country. A new law, which would have applied to Netflix as of March 1, requires media platforms that reach more than 100,000 subscribers in Russia to distribute free-to-air Russian news and entertainment TV channels. It is overseen by the country's communications regulator, Roskomnadzor. For now, Netflix will continue to operate in Russia.<sup>207</sup></li> </ul>
Spotify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 25: said it will suspend its streaming service in Russia in response to the country's new media law.<sup>208</sup></li> <li>• March 2: closing its offices in Russia "indefinitely" and restricting the discoverability of Russian state-affiliated content. In addition, the company has removed all content from Kremlin-backed outlets RT and Sputnik from Spotify's platform. However, as of this date, the company is not disabling access to its service within Russia.<sup>209</sup></li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 2: Airbnb will provide free housing to 100,000 refugees fleeing Ukraine. CEO Brian Chesky announced on Twitter that the company,</li> </ul>

<sup>203</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-rt-media-telegram-ukraine/>

<sup>204</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/technology/ukraine-russia-social-media.html>

<sup>205</sup>

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2022/03/banned-russian-state-media-finds-a-home-on-telegram-00014209>

<sup>206</sup>

<https://www.unilad.co.uk/technology/meet-the-russian-mark-zuckerberg-in-the-ukraine-conflict-20220310>

<sup>207</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/media/netflix-russia-channels/index.html>

<sup>208</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/technology/spotify-says-it-will-suspend-service-russia-2022-03-25/>

<sup>209</sup> <https://variety.com/2022/digital/news/spotify-closes-russia-office-removes-rt-sputnik-1235194594/>



which stepped up to help Afghan refugees last summer, is working with hosts to house refugees. The company also suspended operations in Russia and Belarus.<sup>210</sup>

- March 2: DuckDuckGo paused its relationship with Russian search engine Yandex.<sup>211</sup>
- March 10: DuckDuckGo announced that it has started down-ranking sites based on whether they're deemed to be associated with Russian disinformation, a significant reversal for a search engine that provides "unbiased results," criticized other search engines for failing to show "neutral, unbiased results," and criticized bias in algorithms.<sup>212</sup> This has generated enormous criticism from those who somehow thought search engines were in fact "neutral."

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<sup>210</sup> <https://www.protocol.com/policy/russia-ukraine-war-tech>

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> <https://reclaimthenet.org/duckduckgo-down-ranking-russian-disinformation/>