



Faltering on Facebook, Ignored on Instagram

Examining the Activities of Russian
State-Controlled Media on Meta Platforms
Two Years After the Invasion of Ukraine

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Executive Summary

This February marks two years since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a decade since “little green men” first [appeared](#) in Crimea, paving the way for Moscow’s illegal annexation of the peninsula. The events of February 2022 triggered the largest military conflict in Europe since World War II, killing or injuring hundreds of thousands of people and prompting social media platforms to take unprecedented [actions](#) to curtail the reach of Russian state-controlled media. Over the last two years, Graphika has worked with industry partners at Meta to detect, track, and expose overt and covert Russian influence operations on its platforms.

Last year, our [analysis](#) of the activities of Russian state media outlets on Facebook and Instagram found that restrictions Meta introduced on these actors in February - March 2022 led to a sharp decline in posting and engagement volumes. By Aug. 24, 2022, six months after the invasion began, posting volumes were down 43%, and engagement levels had fallen 80% compared to the same day a year earlier. Two years on from the invasion, we repeated our analysis to assess whether those trends have persisted, and more closely examine the narratives and content promoted by Russian state media since the beginning of the war.

Using data provided by CrowdTangle, we analyzed the posting volumes and engagement levels for a set of 298 Facebook pages and Instagram accounts labeled as “Russian state-controlled media” by Meta that were active between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024. The set includes prominent outlets, such as RT and Sputnik, as well as lesser-known digital content producers with [reported](#) ties to the Russian state. Our analysis found that reduced posting and engagement levels have continued or fallen further since March 2022. As of Jan. 31 this year, posting volumes were down 55% and engagement levels had fallen 94% compared to the same day two years earlier. More than half of all Russian state media assets had stopped posting altogether.

Working with the same set of accounts, we also reviewed and labeled the narratives advanced by Russian state media outlets on Meta platforms during three one-month observation periods: February 2022, February 2023, and January 2024. Taken together, these data sets provide a series



of snapshots of the content posted by Russian state media outlets at key points over the last two years.

A comparative analysis of the datasets shows that what started as a broadly aligned set of narratives focused on the war in Ukraine and COVID-19 has diversified over time, as different outlets pursued a wider range of topics reflecting their individual audiences. Coverage of the war in Ukraine has decreased and evolved since the start of the invasion, becoming increasingly intertwined with overarching criticism of the West, and attention has shifted to the Israel-Hamas conflict and events in the Middle East. The accounts have also stepped up their focus on non-political infotainment content and promotional narratives about Russia, such as local human interest stories or Russian Soviet nostalgia.

Content Analysis

We reviewed and labeled the narratives advanced by Russian state media outlets on Meta platforms during three one-month observation periods over the last two years: February 2022, February 2023, and January 2024. Taken together, these data sets help us identify and evaluate the main topics of discussion promoted by Russian state media outlets, how they have changed over time, and how they manifest across Meta platforms.

Across all three datasets, the conversation comprised an average of 106 individual narratives grouped into six distinct thematic groups: the war in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East, U.S. and Western imperialism, global politics, Russian culture and self-promotion, and non-political infotainment content. The themes and narratives were distributed evenly across Facebook and Instagram, suggesting Russian state media outlets do not tailor their posting activity to either platform.

Key Findings

- **The topics of conversation have become more diverse and evenly distributed over time, indicating Russian state media outlets have moved from broadly aligned coverage of Ukraine and COVID-19 to posting about a wider range of issues reflecting their different audiences.**
 - In February 2022, Ukraine and COVID-19 dominated the conversation, with narratives in these thematic groups comprising 50% of the data set. By January 2024, Ukraine narratives accounted for just 3% of the set, and conversation about COVID-19 had completely disappeared, in part replaced by a broader discussion of global affairs and non-political issues.

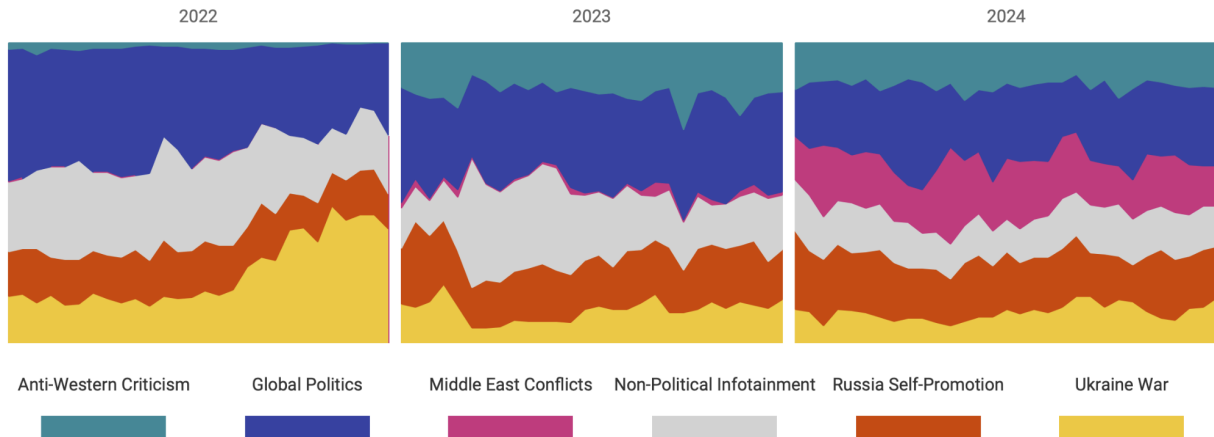
- The share of the conversation focused on the Israel-Hamas conflict and events in the Middle East increased dramatically over time, tracking with global news events. In February 2022, narratives on this topic accounted for 1% of the data set, rising to 15% by January 2024.
- **Russian state media coverage of the war in Ukraine has decreased and evolved since the start of the invasion, becoming increasingly intertwined with overarching criticism of the West.**
 - Narratives about the war in Ukraine accounted for nearly 40% of the data set in February 2022, falling to just 3% by January 2024. In the days leading up to and immediately after the invasion, these narratives focused on criticism of Western “war hysteria,” dismissing the threat of Western sanctions and justifying Russia’s “special military operation.” In 2023 and 2024, the conversation was more focused on depictions of Ukraine as a tool in the West’s war of aggression against Russia.
 - Russian state media outlets appear to have avoided more extreme narratives about the war in Ukraine, including those promoted by Russian officials on other platforms. For instance, none of the data sets contain coherent narratives about purported secret biolabs operating in Ukraine.
- **Russian state media outlets have increased their focus on non-political infotainment content and self-promotional narratives about Russia since the start of the war. This could reflect a wider off-platform effort to cater to domestic Russian audiences after multiple Western countries blocked the outlets in 2022.**
 - The share of conversation focused on non-political or Russia self-promotion topics, such as local human interest stories or Russian Soviet nostalgia, increased from 27% in 2022 to 50% in 2023 and 41% in 2024.
- **The top posting Russian state media accounts on Facebook and Instagram have changed over time, very likely reflecting shifting coverage topics.**
 - The TASS news agency was the most active across Facebook and Instagram in February 2022, posting predominantly about the war in Ukraine, but did not appear as a top poster in February 2023 or January 2024.
 - RT accounts ActualidadRT, RT Balkan, and RT DE - focused on audiences in Spanish-speaking countries, the Balkans, and Germany, respectively - were the top posters in February 2023, concentrating their coverage on Russia self-promotion and criticism of “Western imperialism.”

- By January 2024, the most active Russian state media account was RT Arabic, leading coverage about the Israel-Hamas war and events in the Middle East.

Visualizations

Narrative Share: 2022 – 2024

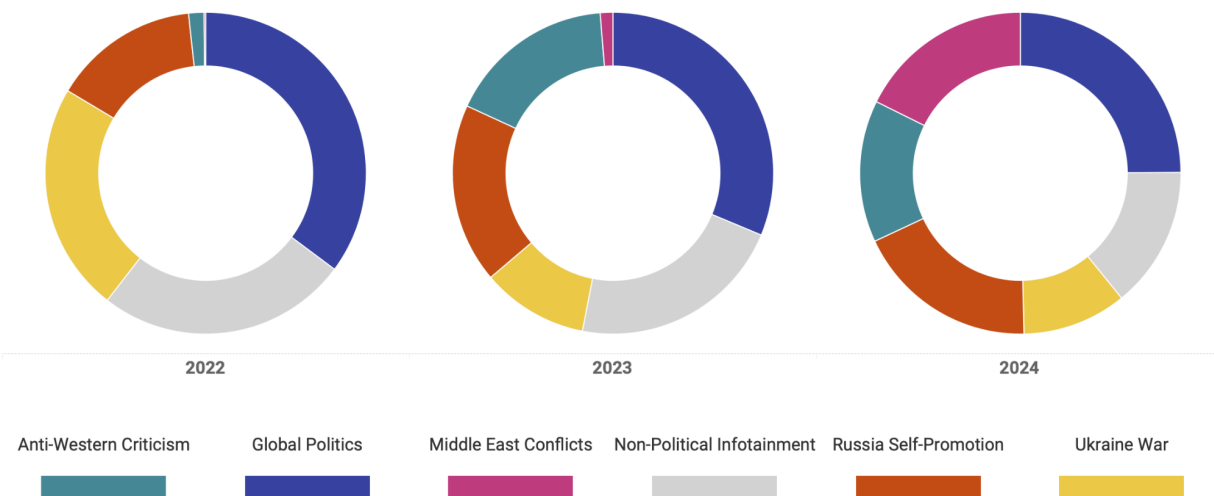
By Volume



Post volumes by thematic group for each year show an increased diversity of conversation topics over time, with more focus on conflicts in the Middle East and anti-Western narratives.

Narrative Share: 2022 – 2024

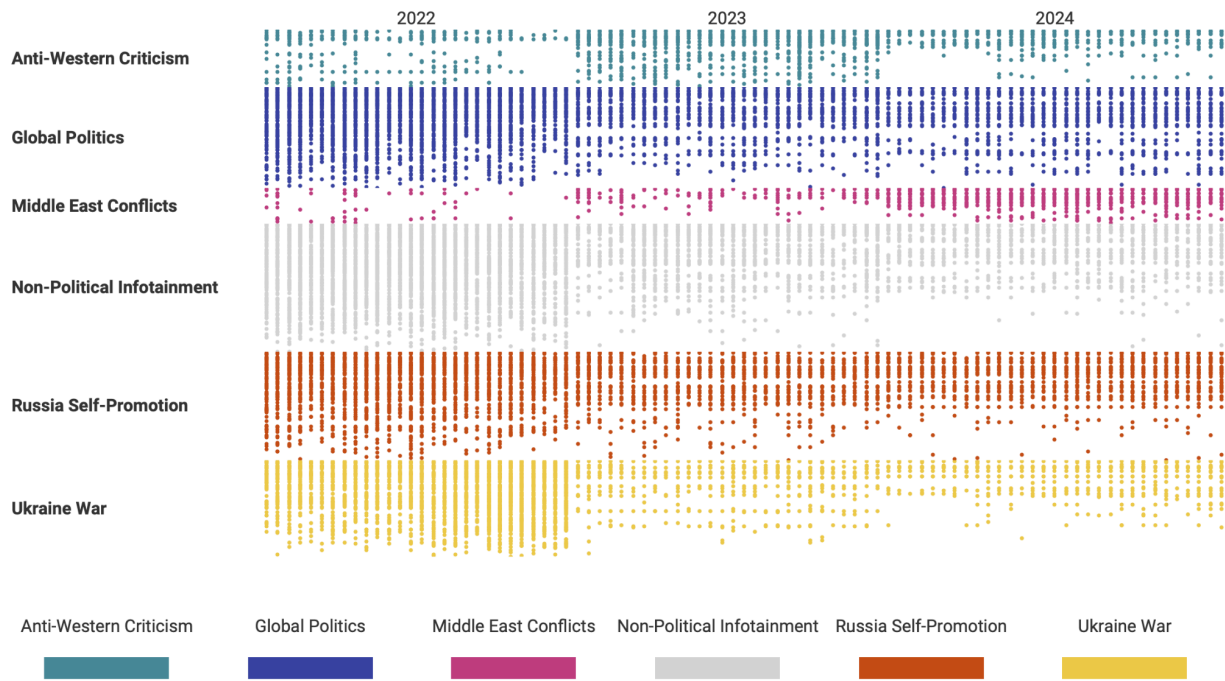
By Volume



Post volumes by thematic group for each year show a reduced focus on the war in Ukraine over time.

Posting Activity

By Asset and Narrative Category



Posting activity by asset and thematic group shows higher overall participation in February 2022 and an increased focus on conflicts in the Middle East by January 2024.

Narrative Share

By Platform



Conversation share by platform shows a relatively even spread of topics across Facebook and Instagram.

Top Asset Per Narrative

By Posting Volume



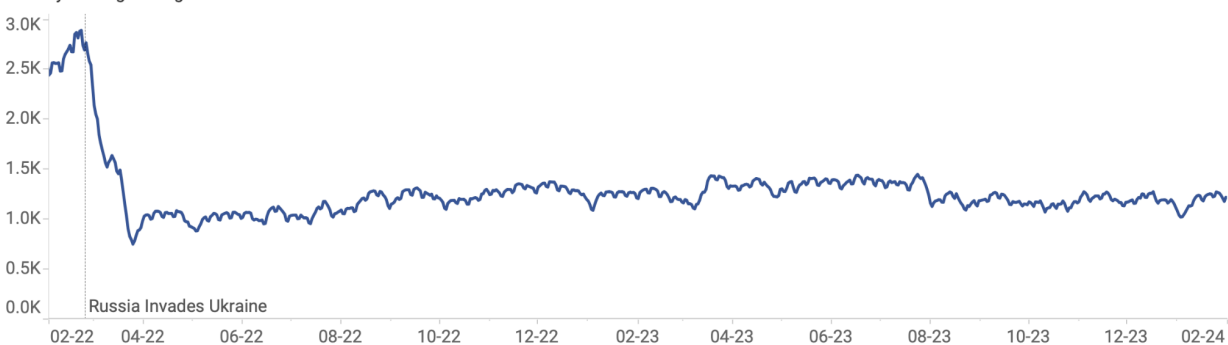
Posting volumes for each asset by thematic group show RT and Sputnik accounts were the most active across all three data sets. The RT Balkan accounts focused largely on anti-Western narratives, whereas Spanish-language ActualidadRT accounts engaged with a wide range of topics.

Activity Analysis

Posting Activity & Engagement

Posting Volume – Facebook

Weekly Moving Average



Posting volumes for Russian state-controlled media on Facebook between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024, show reduced activity levels have persisted since Meta introduced on-platform restrictions in late February 2022.

Posting Volume – Instagram

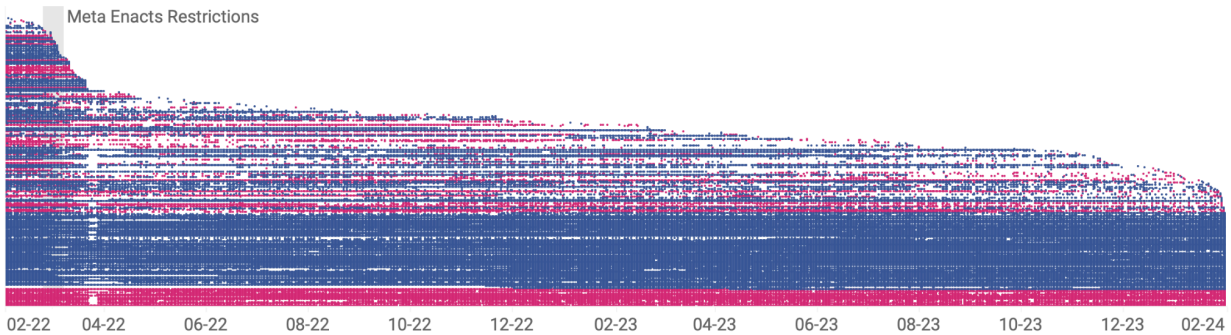
Weekly Moving Average



Posting volumes for Russian state-controlled media on Instagram between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024, show activity levels have continued to decline since Meta introduced on-platform restrictions in late February 2022.

Posting Activity – All

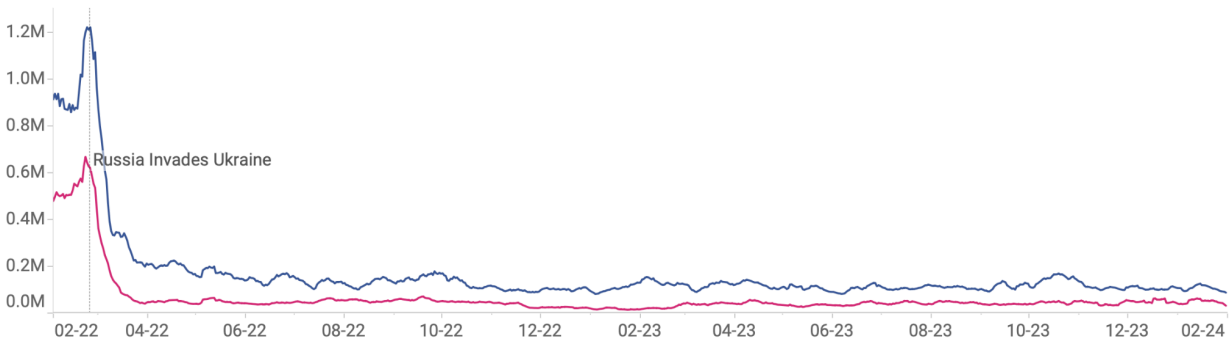
By Asset



Posting times for Russian state-controlled media on Facebook and Instagram between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024, show that 54% of assets have stopped posting altogether over the past two years.

Interactions – All

Weekly Moving Average

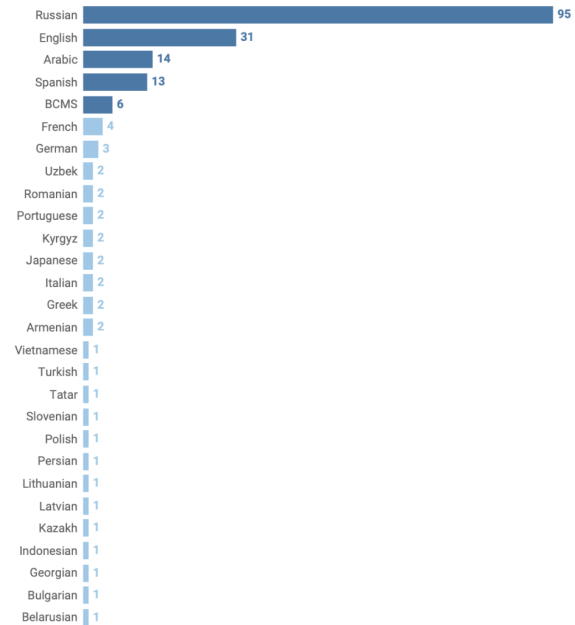
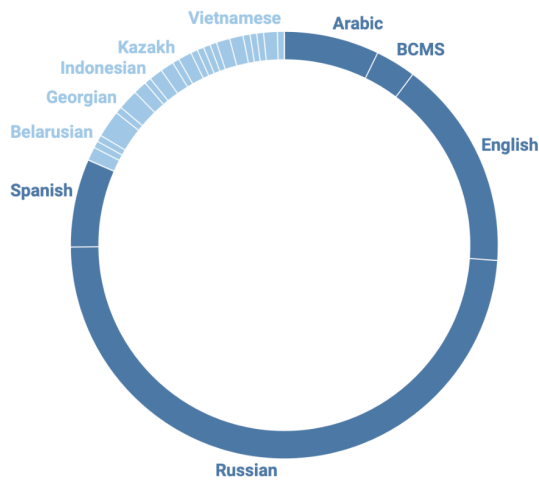


Interactions for posts by Russian state-controlled media on Facebook (blue) and Instagram (pink) between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024, show reduced engagement levels have persisted since Meta introduced on-platform restrictions in late February 2022.

Language Breakdown

Facebook Assets

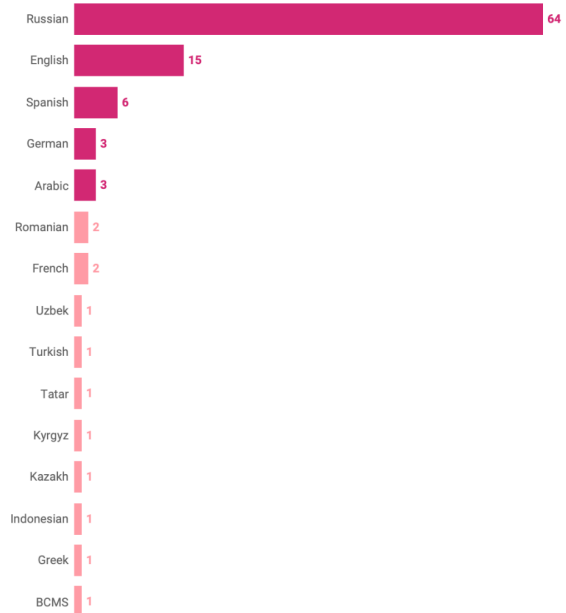
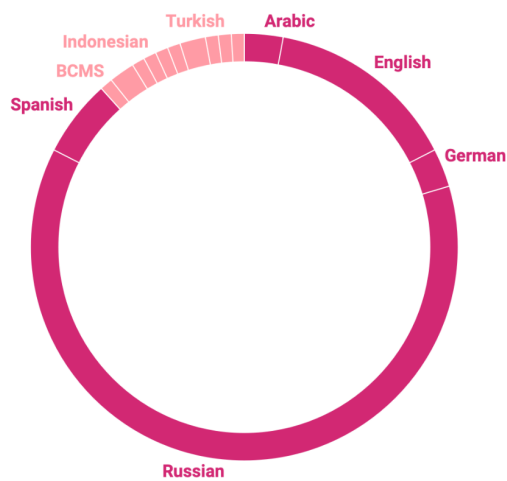
By Language



A breakdown of Russian state-controlled media pages on Facebook by language shows Russian and English are the most used operating languages, followed by Arabic, Spanish, and Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian ([BCMS](#)).

Instagram Assets

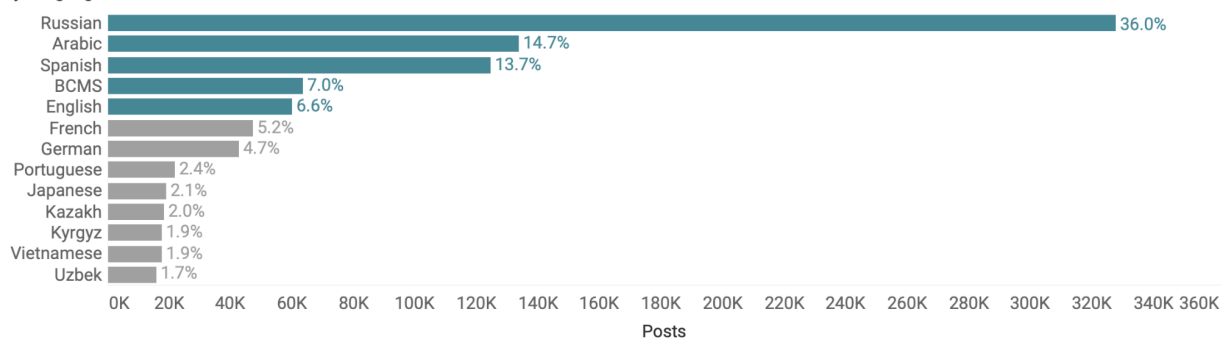
By Language



A breakdown of Russian state-controlled media accounts on Instagram by language shows Russian and English are the most used operating languages, followed by Spanish.

Posting Volume

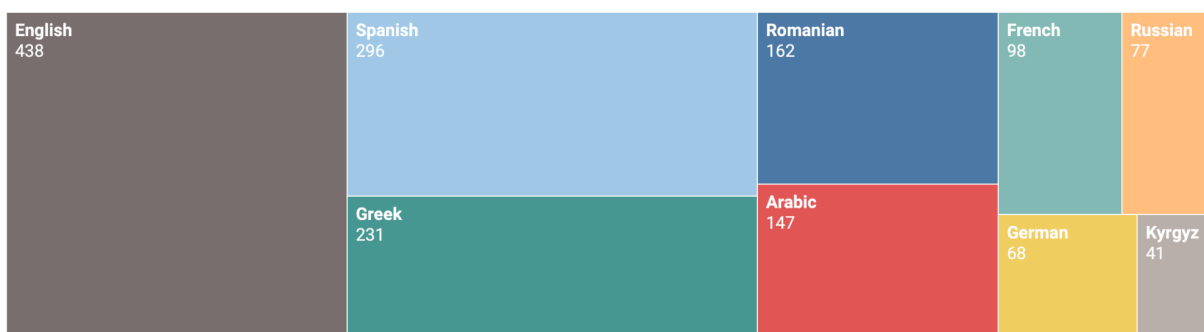
By Language



A breakdown by language of posts from Russian state-controlled media on Facebook and Instagram between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024, shows more than 30% of the activity was in Russian.

Interactions Per Post – Facebook

By Language



The average number of interactions per post for Russian state-controlled media on Facebook between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024, shows English-language pages generated the highest levels of engagement.

Interactions Per Post – Instagram

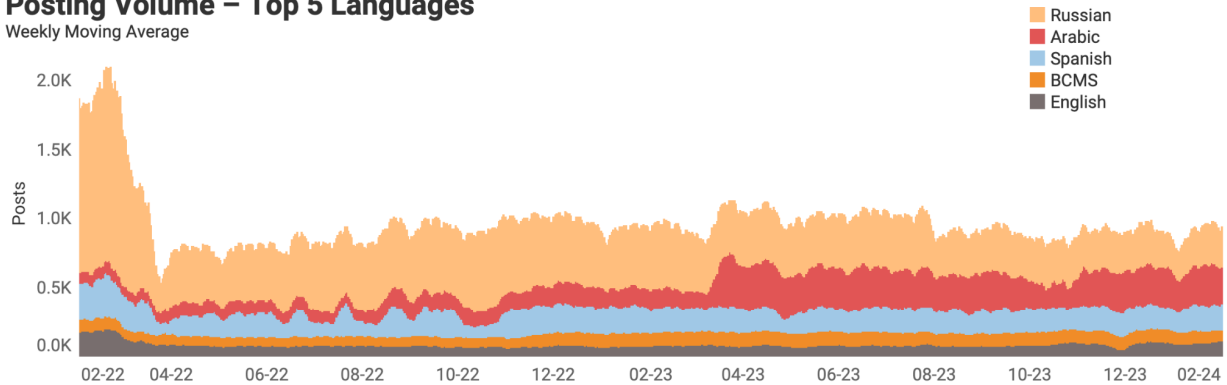
By Language



The average number of interactions per post for Russian state-controlled media on Instagram between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024, shows accounts operating in Spanish generated the highest engagement.

Posting Volume – Top 5 Languages

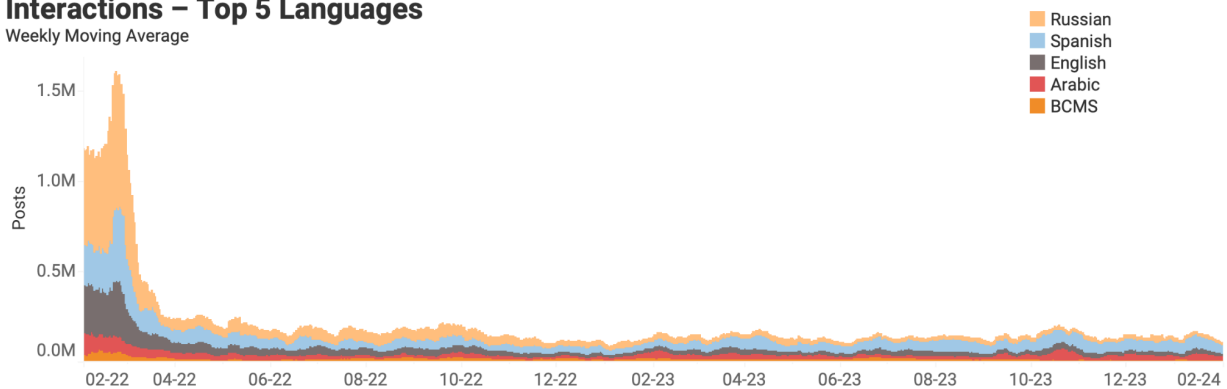
Weekly Moving Average



Posting volumes for the top five languages used by Russian state-controlled media on Facebook and Instagram between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024, show reduced activity levels have persisted since Meta introduced on-platform restrictions in late February 2022, with an increase in Arabic-language activity since March 2023.

Interactions – Top 5 Languages

Weekly Moving Average



Interactions (weekly moving average) for posts in the top five languages used by Russian state-controlled media on Facebook and Instagram between Feb. 1, 2022, and Jan. 31, 2024, show reduced engagement levels have persisted since Meta introduced on-platform restrictions in late February 2022.



About Us

Graphika is an intelligence company that maps the world's online communities and conversations. We help partners worldwide, including Fortune 500 companies, Silicon Valley, human rights organizations, and universities, discover how communities form online and understand the flow of information and influence within large-scale social networks. Customers rely on Graphika for a unique, network-first approach to the global online landscape.

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