

Tracking Exposed Special Report: Content Restrictions on TikTok in Russia following the Ukrainian War

How are TikTok's policy decisions affecting
pro-war and anti-war content availability in Russia?

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Foreword

Tracking Exposed has been investigating social media platforms' algorithms and their impact on society since 2016. This report is the second investigation into **TikTok** since Russia invaded Ukraine.

As the only global social media platform still available in Russia, **TikTok has a powerful role in influencing Russian public opinion** regarding the war.

Our findings unequivocally show that **TikTok is not being transparent** about its actions in Russia.

Opaque policies have been **enforced inconsistently**, and the result is that **pro-war content has flourished**. Russians may have a distorted picture of the war in Ukraine because of TikTok's decisions.

This is the latest example of the tragic real world consequences that opaque social platform policy decisions have. **TikTok must clarify its content policy** in Russia and give **data access for public scrutiny**, without delay.

Regulators should enforce laws to stop the amplification and monetization of disinformation and hate, **like the EU Digital Service Act**, which we hope will be adopted in full on April 22, 2022.

At this moment in time, **a truly free internet has never been more important**. We are stepping up Tracking Exposed's investigations and looking for collaborators, funders and volunteers to help us scale this important work.

~ Marc Faddoul, co-director, [Tracking Exposed](#)

Report authored by:

Marc Faddoul, Salvatore Romano, Ilir Rama, Natalie Kerby, Giulia Giorgi

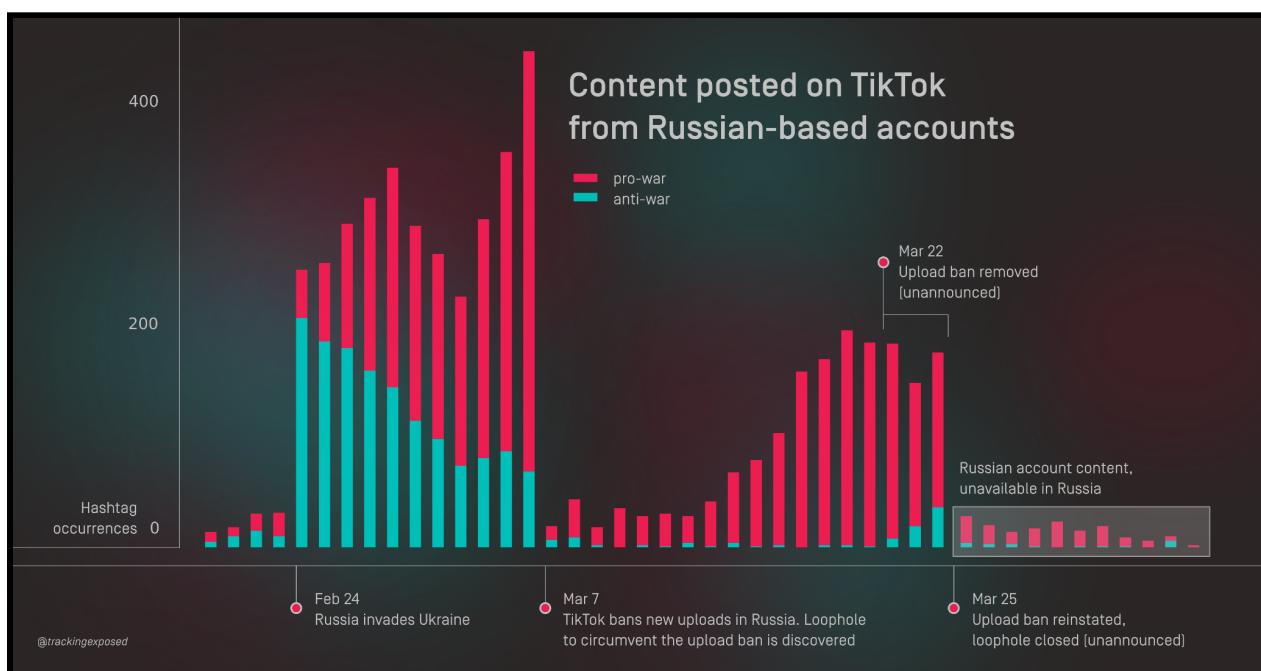
~ Tracking Exposed

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Key Findings

- On March 6, TikTok said it would ban new content uploads in Russia but the ban implementation was inconsistent until March 25, including a period around March 23 - 25 where new uploads were not actually banned on the desktop application.
- During the 17 day period that TikTok didn't comprehensively implement the ban, new content uploads related to the war were overwhelmingly pro-war. Before the ban was announced, the balance of pro-war and anti-war content was roughly equal. After, 93.5% of war-related content was pro-war, while only 6.5% was anti-war.
- Today, new uploads in Russia are not possible, and content from outside Russia is banned. Therefore, the only information about the Ukraine-Russia war available on TikTok in Russia is the content that was uploaded before March 25, which is dominated by pro-war content and propaganda.



Temporal distribution of content posted from Russian-based TikTok accounts, on a sample of pro-war and anti-war hashtags, from February 20 to April 5, 2022.

See more in the [Findings](#).

Timeline

February 24	Russia invades Ukraine
February 28	Tracking Exposed starts a systematic observation of TikTok in Russia
March 4	Russia announces “fake news” law , which makes spreading “fake” news about the Russian army a crime with a maximum 15 year prison sentence.
March 6	TikTok updates its policy and announces it will ban new content uploads in Russia, in response of the “fake news” law
March 15	Tracking Exposed releases: “ Tracking Exposed Special Report: TikTok Content Restriction in Russia ”, showing that TikTok blocked 95% of content for Russian users, without announcing it.
March 15 - 25	Tracking Exposed observes a surge of pro-war content on TikTok in Russia, despite the upload ban announced on March 6.
Around March 23 - 25	Tracking Exposed observes that new uploads are not actually banned on the desktop version of the app.
March 26	Tracking Exposed verifies that the upload ban announced on March 6 is, finally, implemented properly. No new content has been observed on TikTok in Russia since this date.

Research Questions

How are TikTok's policy decisions affecting pro-war and anti-war content availability in Russia?

Our last report compared what TikTok users in Russia see as compared to the rest of the world, since TikTok announced it banned new uploads from Russia in response to the "fake news" law.

In investigating this, we found technical evidence of a number of unannounced policy decisions. It prompted us to wonder what impact these opaque changes are having on the war-related content available in Russia.

This report investigates TikTok's unannounced policy decisions, and their consequences on the availability of pro-war and anti-war content available to Russians.

In particular, we explore:

1. How did TikTok implement the upload ban it announced?
2. Is it still possible to upload new content, despite the ban?
3. How have these restrictions influenced pro-war and anti-war content in Russia?

This report investigates TikTok content in Russia, but it does not investigate content that has been demoted (available but not picked up by algorithms, often known as a shadow ban) or promoted (algorithmically given higher prominence in users feeds). This will be the subject of a further report.

Background

Tracking Exposed is a European non-profit organization defending digital rights through algorithmic investigations.

Since 2016 Tracking Exposed has pioneered new methodologies to scrutinize the most influential recommender systems including YouTube, Facebook, Amazon, PornHub and, more recently, TikTok.

As the war in Ukraine unfolded, Tracking Exposed started investigating how TikTok manages and distributes content, since they don't provide public access to data for scrutiny. As the only foreign-owned global social media platform still available in Russia, TikTok plays a significant role in shaping the Russian public opinion regarding the war.

On March 15, Tracking Exposed released a special report which uncovered that:

- On March 7, TikTok made all the content posted by non-Russian channels unavailable to Russian users. This unannounced restriction removed an estimated 95% of the content previously available to Russian TikTok users.
- A network of coordinated accounts were found using a loophole to post new content promoting Russian pro-war propaganda in Russia, despite the current ban on new content uploads.
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The report was picked up by news outlets such as [The Wall Street Journal](#), [The Financial Times](#), [Vice News](#), [Le Monde](#), and [WIRED](#), but TikTok did not directly address the report findings in their responses to journalists.

In this report, we examine the content related to the Ukraine–Russia war on TikTok, following the platform's new content ban. The investigation focuses on Russian-language content posted from Russian-based accounts.

The Tracking Exposed team has been tracking the availability of TikTok content in Russia since late February, enabling us to notice unannounced shifts in TikTok's policies or inconsistencies in how policies are implemented in practice.

Methodology

There are two main steps in our methodology.

- First, we attempted to upload content from a number of accounts and IP addresses, to assess whether and how new content can be uploaded and made available from Russia. We repeated these experiments several times over the past month, allowing us to observe changes and inconsistencies. (Research Questions 1 and 2)
- Then, we collected a sample of war-related content that had been posted from Russia after the upload ban was announced. We carried a temporal analysis of the volume of pro-war and anti-war content among these new uploads, on a sample of hashtags. (Research Question 3)

1) Assessing upload and availability restrictions of new content in Russia

To understand how TikTok implemented content restrictions regarding both profile and video availability, we uploaded and accessed videos and profiles using different geographical IP addresses over a series of days.

On March 24 we created two accounts: one with an Italian IP and another with a Russian IP. We attempted to upload and access content from both locations. We repeated our analysis on March 24, 29, 31 and April 6, both from VPNs and residential IP addresses.

We attempted to access profiles and content in two ways: through a direct link and by using TikTok's internal search function. This allowed us to differentiate between restrictions affecting access to content, and restrictions regarding the indexing of videos and profiles (i.e., geo-blocking).

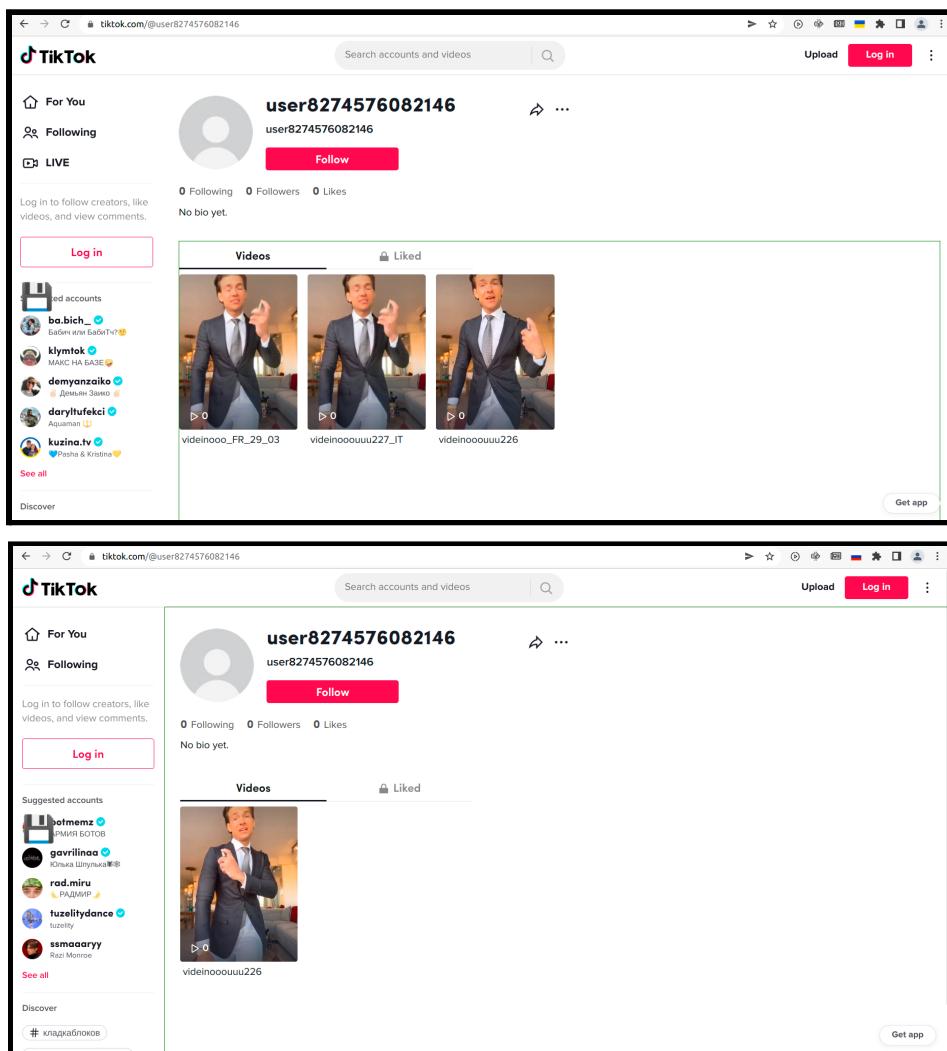
Taking our Russian profile as an example, our research protocol was as follows:

- 1) Create a [new account under a Russian VPN](#), on which we then upload two different videos from different locations. [This](#) video was uploaded from Russia on March 24 and [this](#) video was uploaded from Italy on the same day.
- 2) Attempt to access the content posted on this account from Russia, Italy, and France, as well as through authenticated and non-authenticated accounts coming from said locations.
- 3) We repeated this procedure on different days, videos, and profiles. This allowed us to analyze not only how restrictions were implemented, but their evolution over time.

This research protocol allowed us to conclude the following:

- Profiles created with a Russian IP address are accessible and searchable in Russia.
- Profiles created with non-Russian IP addresses are accessible through direct URLs, but they do not appear in the search bar (a form of geo-blocking).
- Videos uploaded with a Russian IP address (circumventing the ban) were accessible in Russia, as well as in the rest of the world for the time period around March 23 - 25.
- Videos uploaded with a non-Russian IP address were not available in Russia, even when posted from a profile created with a Russian IP address.

Therefore, the content availability restrictions are now implemented at the video level: if the same profile uploads two videos, one within Russia and one outside, only the first one will be visible from Russia.



The same profile was accessed from Italy (first image) and Russia (second image) on April 5, showing how users with a different IP receive different types of moderation.

However, it highlighted inconsistencies in the policy regarding the upload of new content. While we know that TikTok banned new uploads after March 7, we found that on March 24 users could upload content and make it available to Russian users by simply using a Russian IP on the web application. This was no longer possible when we repeated the experiment on the 29, 31, and April 6.

2) Analysis of war related content posted from Russian accounts after the upload ban

This analysis evaluates the impact of the recent shifts in the content restrictions policies on the availability of war-related content for TikTok Russian users.

To do this, we analyzed the time distribution of content posted by Russian-based accounts that mention certain Russian-language hashtags related to the war.

To compare the volume of TikTok videos defending the war with those criticizing it, we assembled a set of hashtags that are used unambiguously by one side or the other.

Notably, using unambiguous hashtags may be limiting as Russian TikTokers that are critical of the war might rely on less-popular and more ambiguous hashtags to avoid governmental and platform control. The hashtags were collected using a form of ‘snowball sampling’ of hashtags: in other words, we started from content related to the war, to then extract the hashtags which were being mentioned. Since hashtags are an essential parameter in the platform logic of content distribution, they give a good glimpse into the content that is displayed to users.

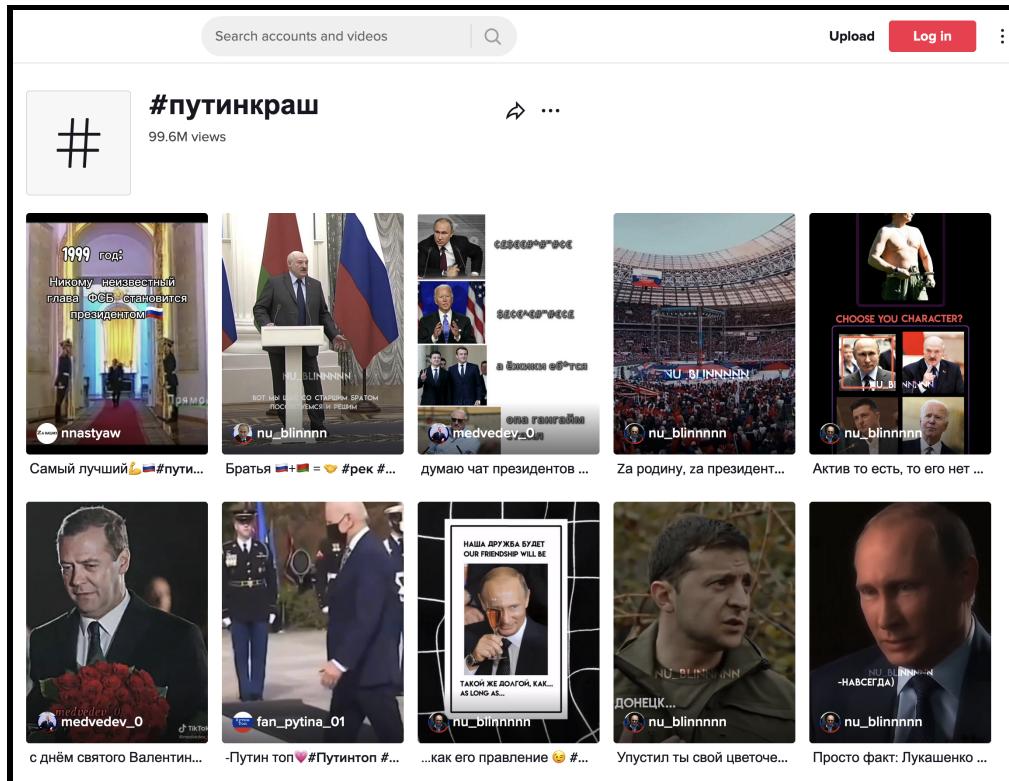
To obtain our set of unambiguous hashtags, we collected a sample of Russian language TikTok videos containing hashtags loosely related to the conflict, such as #россия (Russia), #україна (Ukraine), #донбасс (Donbass). We then retrieved the hashtags most frequently occurring in those videos. The 25 most frequently used were shown on the table below.

Then we selected the ones that were used unambiguously by one side or the other from this list. This evaluation was done in two steps: by translating the hashtags to evaluate their meaning, and by validating individual content corresponding to the hashtags through qualitative analysis.

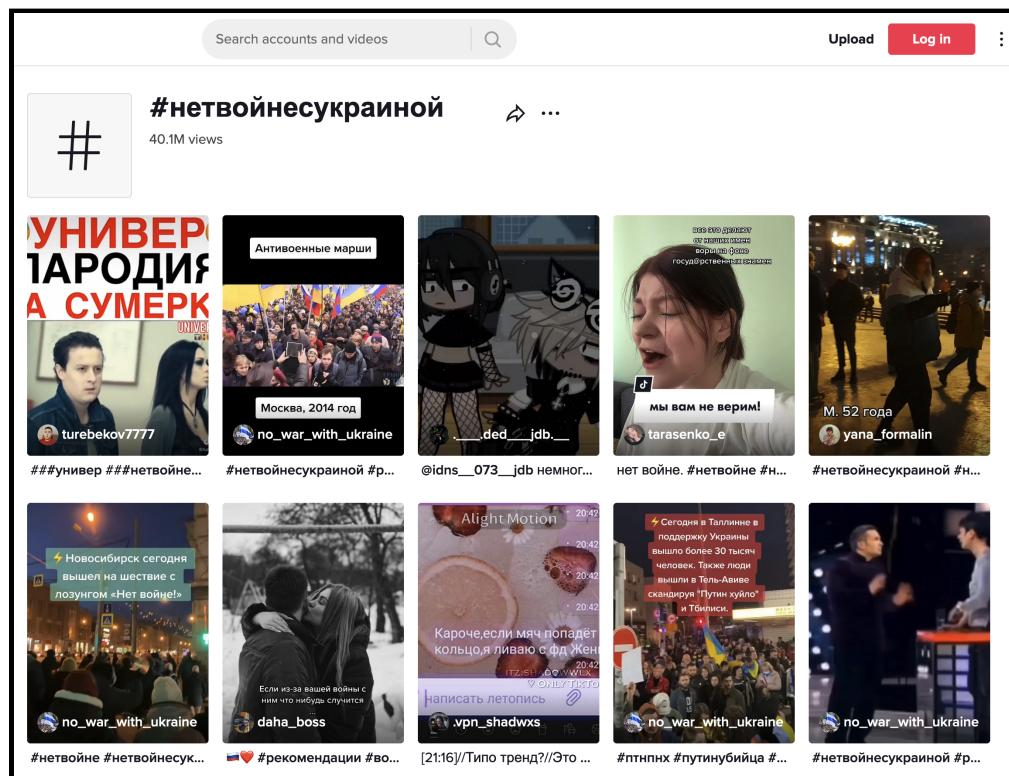
For instance, a post containing the hashtag #япротиввойны (*I am against the war*) is used almost exclusively to criticize the war. Similarly, the hashtag #запутіна (*For Putin*) is used almost exclusively to support the invasion. On the other hand, the hashtag #україна (*Ukraine*) is used by both sides, and would therefore require a qualitative analysis of each individual post in order to assess the true sentiment regarding the invasion. Therefore, these ambiguous hashtags were not included in the analysis.

Count	Hashtag	English Translation
2424	россия	russia
2190	нетвойне	No war
1656	занаших	for us
1526	замир	for the world
1511	украина	ukraine
1355	путинхуйло	putin is a prick
1329	рекомендации	recommendations
1326	рек	rivers
1306	зароссию	For Russia
1235	славаукраїні	glory to ukraine
1035	нетвойнесукрайной	No war in ukraine
1011	противйни	anti-war
1005	япротиввойны	I am against the war
992	путин	Putin
892	россия 	russia 
883	своихнебросаем	we don't abandon our own
835	война	war
769	запутина	For putin
767	путиннашпрезидент	Putin our president
735	україна	ukraine
661	україна 	ukraine 
659	путинкращ	putin crash
623	fyp	fyp
583	z	z
580	мненестыдно	I am not ashamed

Top 25 most frequently occurring hashtag in the retrieved sample of war related TikTok videos.



Example of an unambiguous pro-war hashtag. Source: screen capture (April 7 2022)



Example of an unambiguous anti-war hashtag (April 7 2022)

Following this procedure, we extracted from our dataset the 6 most frequently occurring hashtags that are used unambiguously to defend the invasion, and 6 used unambiguously to oppose the war (see chart below).

For each of these hashtags, we used a [Python wrapper](#) (DOI 10.5281/zenodo.6374001) developed by David Teather around an unofficial TikTok API, which allowed us to retrieve around 1,000 of the most viewed videos containing each hashtag.

With this method, we collected over 11,000 videos. Even though all this content was in Russian language, a proportion of it had been posted from non-Russian based accounts. As noted in our previous section, the content posted by these accounts is not accessible from Russia, and are therefore not relevant to our analysis. To remove content not visible in Russia, we thus developed [a script](#) to systematically test which content is accessible to a Russian IP address.

The resulting dataset is described in the table below, with the breakdown of content per hashtag, before restricting to Russian accounts, and after removing duplicate videos.

	Hashtag	Translation	Retrieved Instances	From Russian Accounts	Unique Russian Accounts
Pro-War	занаших	For us	1223	959	597
	путинкрабш	Putin Crash	1020	936	378
	путиннашпрезидент	Putin Our President	1012	956	483
	путинтоп	PutinTop	847	890	478
	запутина	For Putin	767	418	213
	зароссию	For Russia	716	609	404
Total Unique			5628	4725	2371
Anti-War	ЯпротивВойны	I'm against the war	1083	631	396
	путинхуйло	putin is a prick	1063	28	18
	нетвойне	no war	1049	596	539
	нетвойнесукрайной	no war in Ukraine	1033	402	193
	противійни	anti-war	1025	23	2
	славаукраїні	Glory to Ukraine	991	14	9
Total Unique			6244	1694	1135

Description of the videos captured in the analysis

This dataset does not contain all the war-related content posted in Russia, neither pro-war nor anti-war. Therefore, the absolute volume of content on either side cannot be extrapolated from it. Though, since the collection method was the same for pro and anti-war content, and remained consistent throughout the period of analysis, it captures the temporal trends in terms of relative prominence of pro-war and anti-war content.

The dataset, as well as a jupyter notebook to render the graph can be found here:
<https://github.com/tracking-exposed/experiments-data/tree/master/tiktok-russia>

Findings

Key Findings

- On March 6, TikTok said it would ban new content uploads in Russia but the ban implementation was inconsistent until March 25, including a period around March 23 - 25 where new uploads were not actually banned on the desktop application.
- During the 17 day period that TikTok didn't comprehensively implement the ban, new content uploads related to the war were overwhelmingly pro-war. Before the ban was announced, the balance of pro-war and anti-war content was roughly equal. After, 93.5% of war-related content was pro-war, while only 6.5% was anti-war.
- Today, new uploads in Russia are not possible, and content from outside Russia is banned. Therefore, the only information about the Ukraine-Russia war available on TikTok in Russia is the content that was uploaded before March 25, which is dominated by pro-war content and propaganda.



Temporal distribution of content posted from Russian-based TikTok accounts, on a sample of pro-war and anti-war hashtags, from February 20 to April 5, 2022.

Detailed Findings

1) How did TikTok implement the upload ban it announced?

Inconsistently. For 17 days, at least one loophole around the upload ban was available (see Q2, below), and around 23 - 25 March, without announcing it, the upload ban was removed completely so anyone could upload content again.

TikTok implemented the upload ban as originally announced on March 6, finally, on March 26. This means:

- No new uploads from Russia
- Russian accounts outside Russia are shadowbanned (the content is available outside Russia, but not inside Russia)

Another inconsistency is in how content is being restricted at the content *and* account level. Videos posted by accounts created in Russia are not available within the country, regardless of whether it's pro-war or anti-war. The same content, however, is available outside of Russia. Profiles, on the other hand, are accessible from Russia regardless of where they were created. If a profile is created in Russia, it is not indexed in the search bar.

2) Is it still possible to upload new content despite the ban?

We identified two ways to upload new content after the ban was implemented. One loophole allowed you to post content from a web browser, switching a VPN back and forth. Then, for a short period of time, it was possible to upload content from the web application without any particular circumvention.

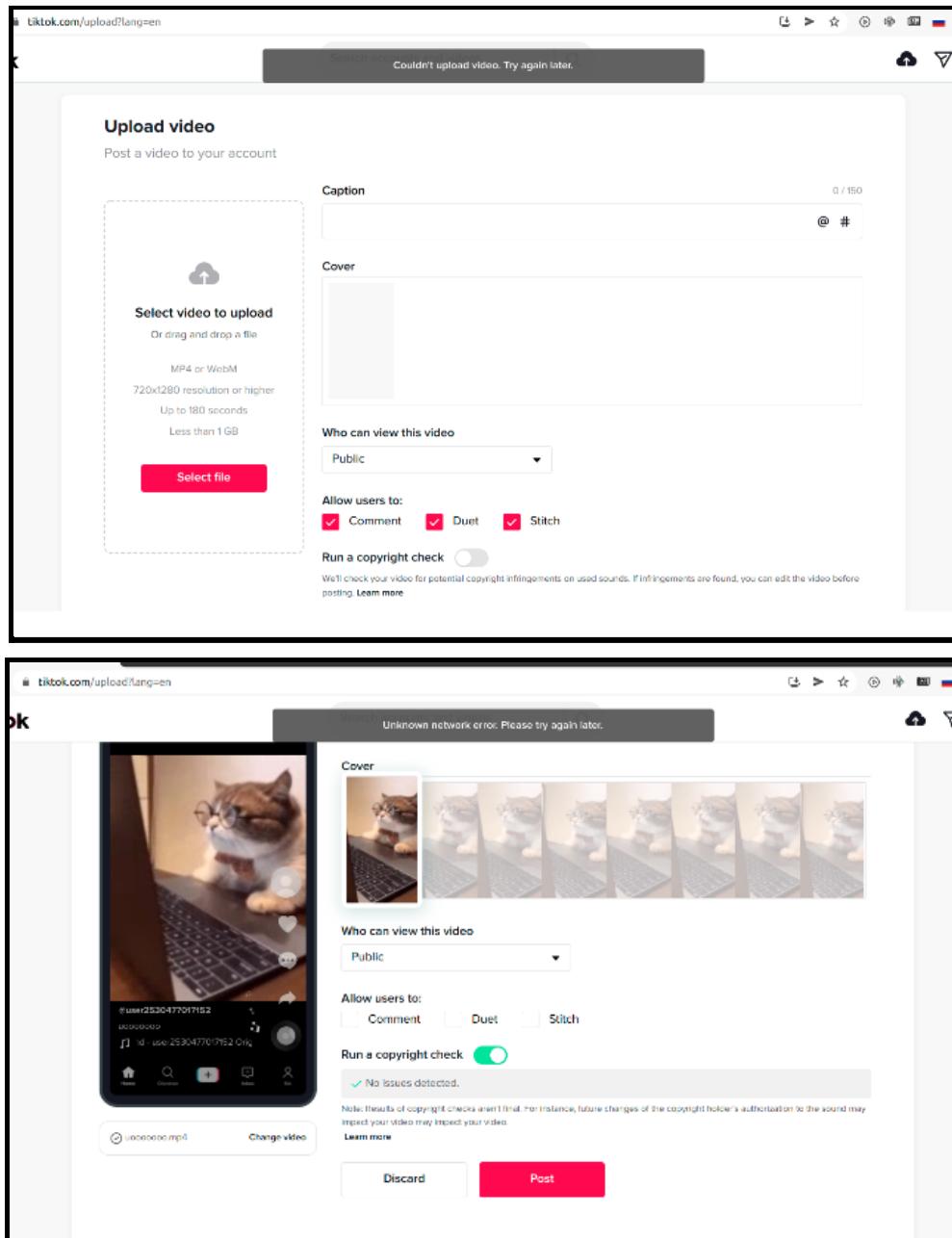
This list is not exhaustive, and other methods might have been used to upload content in Russia since the ban.

First Loophole

We originally set out to test the loophole shared with us by Vice journalist David Gilbert, who [reported](#) on March 11 that a pro-Kremlin network had shared a loophole with select TikTok influencers to promote Russia propaganda despite the new content upload ban. To use the loophole a user needed to:

- 1) Access the TikTok browser with a Russian VPN or Residential IP
- 2) Move to outside Russia using an additional VPN to "select file" and upload it as a draft
- 3) Change the location back to Russia before pressing "post" and publishing the video.

We weren't able to test the loophole as, at the time of the test on March 24, we were able to post content without employing it. When attempting to replicate this procedure in the following days, we couldn't upload new videos with a Russian IP, we kept getting the error "Couldn't upload video. Try again later". When trying to move back to Russia just to "post" and publish the video, as suggested by the loophole, the platform returned another error: "Unknown network error. Please try again later".



The error messages displayed when trying to upload a video using the loophole on a Desktop Computer. In the first image it is impossible to "Select File". When selecting the file from another Country, It is impossible to "Post" it with a Russian IP.

Temporary Deactivation of the Upload Ban

We found that around March 23 - 25, all accounts in Russia were able to upload new content to TikTok from the desktop version of the app, despite the upload ban. This could have been responsible for the visible uptick in anti-war content (see graph, above). Shortly after, the ban was reinstated and content can no longer be uploaded as of March 26.

As of publishing this report on April 11, we have found no evidence of content posted after March 26 that was available to Russian users.

3) How have TikTok's policy changes influenced pro-war and anti-war content in Russia?

TikTok's policy changes, many of which were unannounced, led to a proliferation of pro-war content, as well as to a significant reduction in anti-war content. Since March 26, it does not seem anymore possible to upload new content in Russia, and content from outside Russia is still banned. Therefore, the only information about the Ukraine-Russia war available on TikTok in Russia is the content that was posted within Russia, either before the March 6 upload ban, or by circumventing the ban between March 7 - 25.

Many of the accounts that remained active after the March 6 upload ban, uploaded pro-war content.

From March 14 the number of TikTok videos posted from Russia with pro-war hashtags significantly increased. Russian-state propaganda networks might have been sharing more widely the circumvention techniques which allowed them to [keep posting](#). By March 23, Russian TikTok had been flooded with pro-war content. The pro-war hashtags we analyzed had even returned to a level of activity similar to what it was before the upload ban was announced.

On the other hand, anti-war activity had almost completely disappeared. Unlike coordinated pro-Kremlin networks, which have been [shown](#) to share loopholes among them in order to keep posting, anti-war activists might have been unaware of the loopholes. This could be supported by the observable uptick in anti-war content observed between March 23 - 25, when no particular technique was required to upload new content.

Despite these indications, we should also note that the decreased activity of anti-war content cannot be solely attributed to TikTok's content restriction policies. The 'fake news' law introduced by the Kremlin on March 4 is likely to have also increased the level of self-censorship within Russia, refraining TikTok users from voicing anti-war sentiments and to rely on popular hashtags.

The fact that content could still be posted and made accessible to Russian users after the official ban on March 6 is more likely to be a technical glitch than a backdoor left by TikTok intentionally. The changes of behavior regarding the upload possibility throughout this period indicates that the platform must have been aware of some of these loopholes and tried to patch them, possibly creating even bigger ones in the process as happened around March 24.

On March 26, TikTok reinstated the ban, much more effectively this time. We found no evidence that any of the posts that were uploaded from Russian accounts after this time were visible to Russian users.

The content uploaded through the various loopholes between March 6 and March 25 still remains on the platform, and accessible to Russian users. The resulting catalog of content available to Russian TikTok users regarding the war is now overwhelmingly pro-war, while it was much more balanced when the ban was first announced.

In summary, TikTok's failure to properly implement their upload ban policy, which was overwhelmingly exploited by proponents of the war, led to a surge in pro-war content which is still accessible in Russia.

NB: The small number of posts visible after March 26, on the right side of the graph, have been posted from Russia-based accounts with a non-Russian IP address (either by users traveling, or using a non-Russian VPN). These posts are not accessible in Russia, unlike the content that was posted from Russian-based accounts before March 26.

Discussion

"Since the war began, TikTok's policies in Russia have been opaque and inconsistent. In particular, the platform's failure to properly implement the upload ban they had announced was exploited to flood the platform with pro-war narratives. Meanwhile, critics of the invasion have disappeared. Now, Russians are left with a frozen TikTok, dominated by pro-war content. There will be no Russian-spring on TikTok."

Marc Faddoul, co-director, [Tracking Exposed](#)

"As social media becomes increasingly central in managing and distributing information, its intersection with political power becomes crystal clear, as TikTok content restrictions in Russia show. The upload ban implemented by the platform not only boosted pro-war content, but its opacity might have actively advantaged coordinated state-backed actors. In such a context, the role of public auditors such as Tracking Exposed becomes central to ensure that platforms are held accountable for their role in distributing (mis)information"

Ilir Rama, Researcher, [Tracking Exposed](#)

TikTok's actions in Russia take us into uncharted territory for the internet, where your predicted nationality prevents you from seeing content the rest of the world can freely access. Regulators around the world need to legislate to stop nationality-based content restrictions before we sleepwalk into an era where a digital passport dictates where you can travel online.

The increased relevance and sensitivity of nationality-related data requires a critical public discussion. Without proper regulation, platforms will likely act in their own economic interest and avoid transparency.

Salvatore Romano, Head of Research, [Tracking Exposed](#)

"In just one month, TikTok went from being considered a serious threat to Putin's national support for the war to becoming another possible conduit for state propaganda. Our findings clearly show how TikTok's actions influenced that trajectory"

Giulia Giorgi, Researcher, [Tracking Exposed](#)

Further Discussion

Consequences of TikTok's inconsistent enforcement of content restrictions in Russia

When the conflict unfolded, it sparked a brave protest in Russia, condemning the Russian invasion. These protests were both offline, with demonstrations in various Russian cities, and online, through anti-war social media campaigns.

The Russian government soon started cracking down on this opposition. The Kremlin ordered large-scale arrests at the physical protests, and coined a "fake news" law to make any online protest of the war illegal. Even the use of the term 'war' itself was outlawed.

TikTok's policy updates came in reaction to this "fake news" law. At this time, on March 6, our investigation shows that opposition to the war was still quite vocal on TikTok, and the Kremlin propaganda less widespread.

If TikTok had properly implemented the upload ban it announced, effectively leaving TikTok frozen in Russia at this moment in time, Russian users would have had access to a relative plurality of opinions regarding the war.

Instead, two other things happened, which were not announced. First, as detailed in our [March 15 special report](#), international content was blocked. Since most of the international content related to the war is critical of the Kremlin, this drastically shifted the balance of opinions available to Russian TikTok users in favor of the war.

Secondly, the upload ban was not implemented properly, and was exploited to spread pro-war content and propaganda within Russia. Since recent content made available to Russian users was scarce, and in the absence of international content, we can infer that these posts have a particularly prominent role in shaping the perceived sentiment regarding the war for Russian TikTok users.

In just one month, TikTok went from being considered a serious threat to Putin's national support for the war, to becoming another channel to churn out state propaganda. Why did TikTok allow uploads after they said they wouldn't? Why weren't they more transparent with their policy changes? Most other social media platforms have already been banned from Russia, but TikTok seems to accept the risk of being seen as an arbiter of war in order to continue operating in Russia.

The new relevance of nationality related data

The ongoing war-related geopolitical polarization provokes an increased “splinternet” or “balkanization” of social media. This increased national separation of the internet, akin to the Chinese “great firewall”, can lead to information silos and increased authoritarian control over the informational landscape. We see more and more social media like TikTok creating a national-specific version of their app, such as the one currently available in Russia, or altering their products and policies to be compliant with local laws, as has happened to Meta with Facebook.

More generally, if platforms rely on data related to nationality to significantly determine a users' platform experience, these data risk serving as a type of passport to access new borders rising inside nationally-restricted platforms. This is critical, as it can compound and augment control from state-side actors, which becomes especially relevant when considering moments of crisis—such as a war.

The increased relevance and sensitivity of nationality-related data requires a critical public discussion. Without proper regulation, platforms will likely act in their own economic interest and avoid transparency.

Privacy concerns and national data

Putting aside transparency, the question remains: does TikTok's policy protect users from the “fake-news” law made in Russia?

TikTok supposedly implemented its current content restriction to [protect their staff and evaluate how users can safely post videos](#) in the wake of Russia's “fake news” law. The law prohibits the spread of fake news about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while leaving what constitutes fake news undefined.

However, the content ban ends up leaking sensitive information relative to the IP location of the content uploaded. According to our findings, if content is accessible with a Russian IP, then the videos have been posted with a Russian IP.

In most cases, this privacy leak is benign, as people are typically not trying to mask their location when posting on social media. But in some edge cases it can be serious, especially in the context of this conflict. The “fake news” law applies to Russian citizens, not those outside of Russia.

Nonetheless, TikTok has blocked non-Russian content in Russia, whereas any Russian citizen could have posted anti-war content on March 24, revealing their location in Russia and risking jail.

Conclusion

TikTok is the only global social media platform still available in Russia, and therefore has a powerful role in influencing Russian public opinion regarding the war.

This report evaluates the impact of the recent shifts in the content restrictions policies on the availability of war-related content as well as on the possibility for Russian users to upload new content.

Our findings show that TikTok's upload ban policy in Russia announced on March 6 has been enforced inconsistently.

Until March 25, new content was still being uploaded to TikTok from Russia and made accessible to Russian users, despite the ban.

Among this content, we found a large amount of videos supporting the war and Kremlin narratives. Conversely, we found that anti-war content almost completely stopped being posted on TikTok from Russia, whereas these views were quite prominent on the platform before the new policies were implemented.

This was combined with the fact that international content was made inaccessible to Russian users, a restriction which was exposed in our previous report, but had not been announced by the platform.

In conjunction, these two phenomena led to a drastic increase of the predominance of pro-war content visible to Russian users as compared to anti-war content.

Overall, the fact that opaque policy changes can lead to an increase of content encouraging war and violence is precisely why external scrutiny is required.

Platforms with the size and relevance of TikTok should invest enough resources to face wars and social crises with adequate moderation strategies. These policies should be transparent, and geared toward harm reduction, beyond the protection of business interests.

As of April 12, TikTok has not acknowledged the presence of loopholes, and has not removed the content that has been uploaded circumventing the restrictions.

About Tracking Exposed

[Tracking Exposed](#) is a European non-profit organization defending digital rights through algorithmic investigations.

For more than 5-years, its team has been pioneering new methodologies to scrutinize the most influential recommender systems, such as those of YouTube, Facebook, Amazon, PornHub and TikTok. The [code](#) is released as free software, enabling anyone to use, extend or review it.

Tracking Exposed's infrastructure and methodologies have been validated in several [peer-reviewed publications](#), and the works of the team have received coverage on [major media outlets](#). Some of its reports have been cited in a [United Nations report](#), a house [testimony](#) and a [US Congress official letter](#) to YouTube's CEO.

Tracking.Exposed is also developing [YouChoose.ai](#), an alternative recommendation system for YouTube which empowers users and content creators.

Tracking Exposed was born in Italy and its legal nonprofit is registered in France. The organization is funded through various grants and foundations, including from the European Commission, the Mozilla Foundation or [Reset.tech](#).

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