

The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the Creator Economy in the Eastern European Region and Beyond

Trends report by AIR Media-Tech



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INTRODUCTION

It's hard to overestimate the impact of the war that started in February 2022 in Ukraine on the creator economy throughout Eastern Europe. Although the market performance hasn't changed significantly on a global scale, the war and its consequences have triggered the emergence of new trends in the industry.

With a part of the team in the Kyiv office and a large number of partner creators from Eastern Europe, including over 500 creators from Ukraine, AIR Media-Tech has been observing several trends in the digital creators' industry in the region since the war in Ukraine began.

In this report, AIR Media-Tech reviews the latest trends in digital platforms, among creators, the content they make, and influencer marketing in the Eastern European region. This information is supported by relevant market data, the company's internal research, and real-life examples of influencers and their posts.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Global platforms are experiencing pressure from the Russian government because of the struggle to openly spread the truth.

Many social media companies took action to limit the spread of misinformation from Russia. In response, the Russian government has blocked some of the most popular digital platforms in the country. Those remaining are under a lot of pressure. Russia's approach now reflects the Chinese model of a more limited social media ecosystem.



Instagram and Facebook

have taken extensive steps to fight the spread of misinformation and implement more transparency and restrictions around state-controlled media outlets. Tons of fake content on the war has been removed while posting shocking footage of the destructive actions of the Russian army in Ukraine is allowed. Unable to promote their own information agenda, Russian authorities have called Meta's activities "extremist" and have banned Facebook and Instagram in Russia, making the work of the platforms illegal in the country.



YouTube

has blocked hundreds of Russian channels with misleading content, suspended all kinds of advertising in the Russian market, and consequently, the monetization of views from Russia on the platform. In response, Russian authorities are dropping hints about possibly blocking the YouTube platform in Russia.



TikTok

has suspended the ability for users in Russia to post videos and live streams to protect itself against the new Russian law criminalizing "fake news" about Russia's war against Ukraine. Non-Russian content is also no longer viewable to the Russian audience. Norwegian media company NRK [estimated](#) that Russians no longer have access to 95% of global content on the platform.



Twitter

has limited content from more than 300 official Russian government accounts, including that of President Vladimir Putin. Although the platform remains available, Russian authorities have severely slowed it down to the point of inoperability.

Sanctions against Russia impact many other platforms widely used by creators.

As a result of international sanctions against Russia for the invasion of Ukraine, many financial institutions in Russia have been excluded from the international banking system. Therefore, many Russian creators cannot withdraw money from their accounts on Patreon, OnlyFans, Twitch, etc.

Alternative and local platform development

While many international digital platforms remain unavailable for Russian users, the popularity of alternative platforms continues to increase.



Telegram

Telegram's web ranking has significantly advanced in Russia - from #50 in February 2022 to #30 in April 2022. The largest flow of traffic in April was from YouTube (42%), followed by Twitter (17%) and Facebook (13%).



Vkontakte

Vkontakte's position in Russia hasn't changed. The platform remains in 4th place in terms of popularity in Russia, with 81.6% of its audience from Russia.



Rutube

Rutube's popularity skyrocketed in Russia from February-April 2022. During that time, the number of visitors increased 7 times to over 60 million. One of the likely reasons is that viewers can watch propagandists' videos and channels on Rutube that are blocked on YouTube, such as Soloviev LIVE. This channel is in the top search queries.



Yandex Zen

Though Yandex Zen views and rankings haven't grown lately (434.7M visits in April vs 554.1M in February), Russian creators consider it a promising platform with low competition and opportunities to grow both organically and through paid traffic.

CREATORS

As of February 2022, the number of YouTube influencers globally amounted to 1,435,375*.

Over 115 thousand influencers are creators from Eastern Europe, most of whom are Russian creators (more than 60 thousand).




Different activity patterns are emerging among creators from Ukraine, Russia, and other countries worldwide due to the war.


Ukraine

Creators have refocused their activities and joined efforts to spread the truth, help in volunteering initiatives, and raise donations for Ukraine.

Many Ukrainian influencers have participated in volunteering projects, joined the Territorial Defense or armed forces, and implemented diverse projects to support fellow citizens and spread the truth about events in Ukraine. Many of them changed the traditional format of their content, adjusting it to deliver messages about the situation more effectively.




YOUTUBE
Natasha Shelyagina
 400 K subscribers



YOUTUBE
Yevgen Bondarenko
 2,04 M subscribers


[Natasha Shelyagina](#), who usually reviews gadgets on her channel, and [Yevgen Bondarenko](#), who shares speedcubing secrets with his viewers, released talk videos about events in Ukraine.




INSTAGRAM
andriihorolski
 189 K subscribers

The music funk-rock band Boombox leader [Andriy Khlyvnyuk](#) joined Kyiv's territorial defense on the first day of the war and now talks about his military routine on his Instagram.

At the beginning of the war TOP Ukrainian influencers also [joined efforts](#) to shed light on the current situation in Ukraine and to call people worldwide, and from Russia particularly, to participate in anti-war meetings in their cities.




YOUTUBE
Anton somewhere
 439 K subscribers



TIKTOK
Khrystyna Korban
 624.9 K subscribers

Some who stayed in Ukraine, like [Anton Ptushkin](#), are documenting life in the country through their videos, including the [first days](#) of the war, Kyiv's life under the [Russian siege](#), the work of [volunteers](#), and so on.

Kyiv resident [Khrystyna Korban](#) used to post about sports motivation and personal finances before the war started. Today, her videos are first-person accounts of life in the capital of a warring state, including videos about air-raid sirens, food stocks in Kyiv stores, and communicating live with subscribers.



YOUTUBE
Aleksey Durnev
 1,11 M subscribers









YOUTUBE
Dmytro Komarov
 2,98 M subscribers

[Aleksey Durnev](#) reformatted his "Durnev's watching stories" show to "Durnev's watching Russians' stories," where he makes fun of the "troubles" some Russians are experiencing such as Instagram shutting down, leaving the market, and rising prices. All funds from the monetization of his videos go to aid the Armed Forces.

[Dmytro Komarov](#), a traveler and host of the Inside-Out-World show, is filming and publishing footage of Ukrainian cities destroyed by Russian troops, including the liberated Gostomel, Bucha, and Chernihiv Oblast. He called the series of short videos on the project's YouTube channel "Chronicle of War."

Switching to the Ukrainian language as a sign of patriotism and protest against Russian invaders


 <p>INSTAGRAM annatrincher_official 1.8 M subscribers</p>	 <p>INSTAGRAM vladimirdantes 704 K subscribers</p>
 <p>INSTAGRAM marta_let 947 K subscribers</p>	 <p>YOUTUBE Dasha Makogon 34,5 K subscribers</p>
 <p>YOUTUBE Lvi na Jeepe 634 K subscribers</p>	 <p>YOUTUBE METYOLKINA 17,1 K subscribers</p>

With the outbreak of the war, many nationals who spoke Russian began to abandon it and switched to Ukrainian. Among them are ordinary citizens, popular architects, restaurateurs, business owners, and influencers like [Aleksey Durnev](#), [Anna Trincher](#), and [Dantes](#). Among AIR Media-Tech partners, YouTube creators switching to the Ukrainian language are [Marta Let](#), [Dasha Makogon](#), [Lvi na Jeepe](#), and [METYOLKINA](#).

This is an important step toward strengthening unity in the country. Moreover, many Ukrainians are giving up on influencers who continue to use the Russian language. According to a survey by [UMG International](#), 7 out of 10 Ukrainians won't be following Russian-language bloggers on social media, even if they are Ukrainian.

New types of influencers are also emerging: politicians, soldiers, and citizen journalists.

Government Officials




INSTAGRAM
Volodymyr Zelensky
 17 M subscribers

Many Ukrainian government officials have successfully adapted digital influencers' approach to social media usage and have grown their following. Currently, the account of the Ukrainian President [Volodymyr Zelensky](#) on Instagram has more followers than [Kanye West](#) and a bit less than [President Biden](#) and [MrBeast](#).

During the first month of the war, his Instagram audience grew 41%. Furthermore, in May 2022, Zelensky became one of the Top 5 Instagram influencers in Poland, according to HypeAuditor.


Other popular Ukrainian officials on Instagram who have significantly gained followers include [Alexey Arestovich](#), adviser to the head of the President's Office, [Vitalii Kim](#), head of the Mykolaiv regional state administration, [Michael Fedorov](#), the minister of digital transformation of Ukraine.



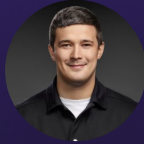
YOUTUBE
Oleksiy Arestovych
 1,51 M subscribers

[Oleksiy Arestovych](#) has become famous for his calming and reassuring comments on the current situation at the front.

[Vitaly Kim's](#) been reporting to his fellow citizens with the help of short videos on Telegram. His optimistic speeches have received 50 million mentions on TikTok.



TELEGRAM
Vitaly Kim
 786 K subscribers



INSTAGRAM

michael.fedorov

1,51 M subscribers

[Mykhailo Fedorov](#) keeps Ukrainians updated on numerous Ukrainian victories in IT and the digital sphere through his Telegram channel.

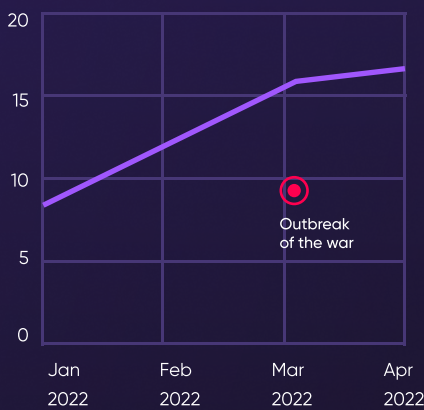
Followers growth of Ukrainian politicians

Thousand followers



- Alexey Arestovich
- Vitalii Kim
- Michael Fedorov


Million followers




- Volodymyr Zelensky

Soldiers

The Ukrainian military is actively sharing news and achievements from the front on TikTok to thousands of viewers from all over the world who are watching. They also dance, joke, or save animals from homes destroyed by the occupiers during their free time.



TIKTOK
shtefan_01
251.1 K subscribers




TIKTOK
oleksandr.kolym
101.3 K subscribers



Infantryman and staff officer Anatoliy Shtefan, known as [Stirlitz](#), creates short videos about the victories and achievements of the Ukrainian army, supports female soldiers, and fights the enemy. His videos are watched by over 250,000 people.

Paratrooper [Oleksandr Kolym](#) became popular for dancing on his TikTok. He regularly shares videos from the front and shows how the military has fun in their free time. The military also shows the handling of equipment and transport at their disposal.



Dozens of pets are left without owners due to constant shellings. The Ukrainian military doesn't ignore them but offers shelter to these four-legged friends. There are plenty of touching posts on TikTok, such as those by [@good_danya94](#), [@ded.shinobi](#), [@alexandriashuk](#).




good_danya94
94.7 K subscribers

ded.shinobi
76.1 K subscribers

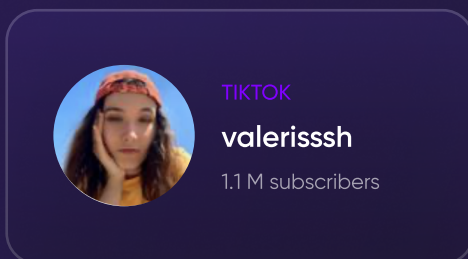
alexandriashuk
13.3 K subscribers



Citizen Journalism

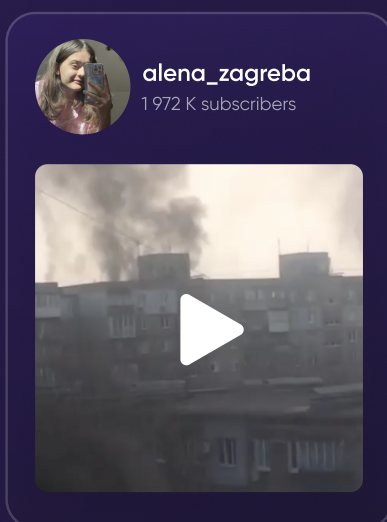
Since almost everyone now has a cell phone, and the recent events in Ukraine are absolutely shocking for everybody, many Ukrainian people have become civilian journalists covering what's happening in the cities.

Ukrainians show life in bomb shelters, the consequences of shellings and bombings by the Russian military, etc., to the whole world. The most widely used media for that are Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

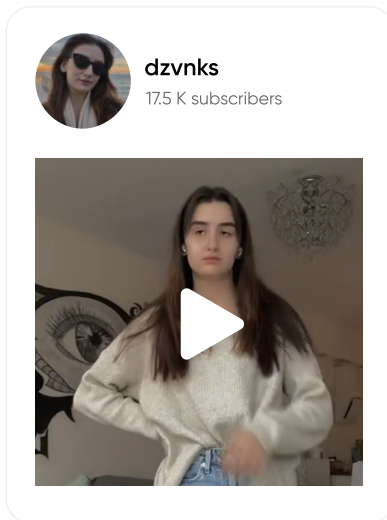


After sharing videos of her life in the shelled-out city of Chernihiv, a Ukrainian girl under the name [Valerie Ssh](#) became an unexpected sensation on TikTok.

Her audience got a behind-the-scenes look at the ongoing fight in the war-torn country of Ukraine and the war's impact on civilian life in Ukraine. Her "My Typical Day In A Bomb Shelter" video has garnered 22 million views.



Another touching example of citizen journalism is [this video](#) made by Alena Zagreba, a 15-year-old Ukrainian girl from Mariupol. Within 7 minutes she was able to depict 14 days of hell in a blocked city. The teenager has published a diary on YouTube to show how she has withstood the horrors of war in Ukraine for three weeks.



[Dzvinka Hlibovytska](#), an 18-year-old influencer from Ukraine, documented her life under the invasion, including spending parts of her days hiding from bombings. She is already abroad after fleeing the war, but still keeps her viewers updated on the situation in Ukraine.

Russia

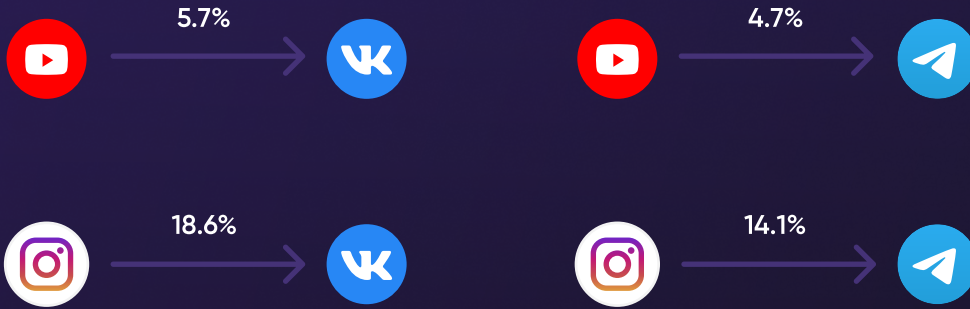
Creators pivot to other platforms

Starting in March, Russian creators were losing at least 65% of their income on YouTube only due to the demonetization of all views in Russia, according to AIR's internal analysis. Calculations by [Russian analysts](#) show even larger numbers and estimate that Russian creators have lost up to 80% of their profits on social media.

Limited in opportunities to earn on YouTube and use other global video platforms, Russian influencers continue to post on the banned Instagram platform using VPN-services and try to convert their audience to local and legal Russian platforms. Creators placed links to their alternative social media in the description under the video or their account's bio. According to [Brand Analytics](#), they more often invited the audience to VKontakte (35%), followed by Yandex.Zen and Odnoklassniki (17% both). The share of links to Rutube was 9%.

For creators, converting their YouTube and Instagram audiences to these other platforms is challenging. AIR has analyzed the audience conversion rate for the top 20 Russian influencers with the highest number of YouTube subscribers to other platforms, including [Nastya Ivleeva](#), [Ruslan Usachev](#), [Yuriy Dud](#), [Sasha Spilberg](#), and others. The audience conversion rate does not exceed 20%, and the averages are as follows:

Average audience conversion rates among TOP 20 Russian influencers



Worldwide

Creators globally unite their efforts to support Ukraine.

Influencers from all over the world have launched various campaigns to raise awareness about what's happening in Ukraine and to support its citizens by raising donations or humanitarian aid.



In a selfless effort to deliver supplies to those suffering in Ukraine, [Yes Theory](#) teamed up with fellow influencer [Max Rantz-McDonald](#) on a [GoFundMe](#) to aid Ukrainian refugees. These donations have gone towards 2 places: aiding people who are still in Ukraine and helping refugees who have come to Poland.

The [#CreatorsForPeace](#) movement, set up by VidIQ, partnered with creators all over the world to raise awareness and money for displaced children in Ukraine.

By talking about these children on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media, influencers helped more people understand the level of humanitarian crisis happening in Ukraine. Over 2.5K videos are now uploaded by more than 700 creators on YouTube under this hashtag. The #CreatorsForPeace hashtag on TikTok has over 70K views.

The war transformed the Ukrainian brothers' gaming YouTube channel [Sawayan Games](#). Sava Tkachov and his brother Yan have added a somber tone to their YouTube gaming channel, popular among young Japanese fans, by providing war updates from their country. The brothers have raised 3.6 million yen (\$29,000) in donations for Ukraine with the platform's help. Fans have left comments of support on their videos, which are tagged with the #NoWar slogan and mix gaming commentary with information and appeals to help Ukraine.

World-famous celebrities also support Ukraine in a number of ways – from public calls to help Ukrainians to multimillion-dollar donations and even hosting refugees



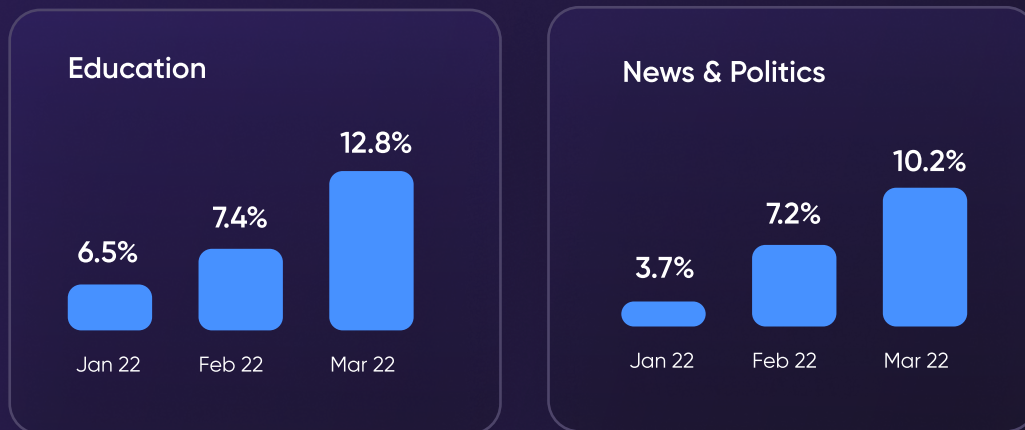
- Mila Kunis and Ashton Kutcher have raised over \$30 million in donations for humanitarian aid to Ukraine and temporary housing for Ukrainian refugees.
- Sting has released a new version of his 1985 song, "Russians," to aid Ukraine.
- Benedict Cumberbatch continuously speaks in support of Ukraine and calls for people to do more for Ukrainians.
- Madonna shared support for Ukraine with her release of the 'Sorry' remix video and a number of posts.
- Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds matched donations to reach \$1 million to help refugees.
- Angelina Jolie defends refugee rights globally. As Ukrainians fled war zones, she traveled to Ukraine to meet refugees and volunteers.

— CONTENT TRENDS

Ukraine

News, political, and educational content are on the rise.

The number of video views in these genres by Ukrainian creators has more than doubled in March 2022 compared to the previous month. The shares in these genres of all views also demonstrate growth in March:



The rise of educational content is related not only to distance learning during wartime, but also fighting all the fake messages and propaganda that the Russian side spreads.

Many Ukrainian creators are debunking myths to fight against Russian fakes.

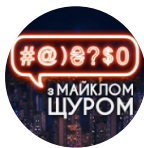
YOUTUBE
History Without Myths
 347 K subscribers

[History Without Myths](#) is one of the most famous Ukrainian historical Youtube channels with 300K subscribers where professional historians speak about Ukraine, both past and present.

[StopFake](#) This YouTube channel is just one of many platforms of the project that checks journalistic materials, refutes false information, and opposes Russian propaganda about Ukraine.



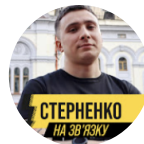
YOUTUBE
StopFake.org
30 K subscribers



YOUTUBE
Toronto Television
636 K subscribers

[Toronto Television](#) is a common-sense show. Hosts usually talk about Ukrainian politics and culture and make fun of the weaknesses in Russian and pro-Russian propagandists.

Ukrainian activist [STERNENKO](#) fights against Russian myths, calls things by their names, briefly and clearly identifies propaganda lies, and shows how things really were.



YOUTUBE
STERNENKO
919 K subscribers



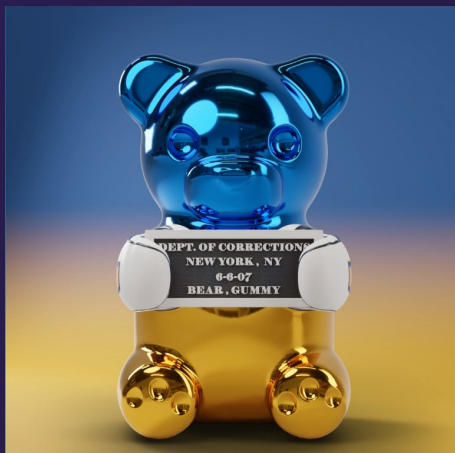
YOUTUBE
Tell the Russians the truth
1,12 K subscribers

1+1 media group has launched "[Tell the Russians the truth](#)," a YouTube channel where Ukrainian and Russian public figures address the Russian people to convey the truth about the war to burst propaganda myths imposed by the Russian authorities.

New war-related formats appear

Ukrainian influencers are joining or launching new projects to support Ukraine and spread the truth about the war. Here are some of the most recent initiatives.

NFT projects are gaining popularity worldwide and aim to raise money for refugees and the people of Ukraine.

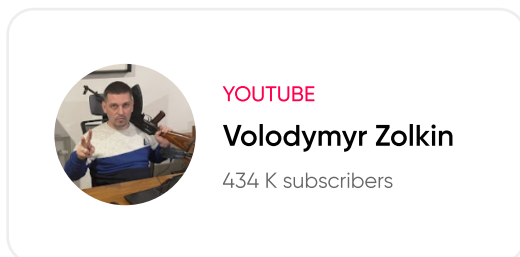


The iconic boxer [Wladimir Klitschko](#), brother of Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko, is the person behind this NFT collection created to raise money to help the people of Ukraine. Called "Vandalz for Ukraine: WhlsBe x Wladimir Klitschko" the collection is available on NFT marketplace OpenSea. All the proceeds from the sale of these NFTs will go to Red Cross Ukraine and UNICEF. The cost of these NFTs starts at ETH 0.04 (USD 104).



The [ArtWaRks](#) Ukraine NFT project has been put together by a group of Ukrainian IT entrepreneurs, art historians, artists, and media creators with the aim of raising money for charitable aid for civilians and the Ukrainian military. The project is on OpenSea, and prices start at ETH 0.07 (\$182 / £140).

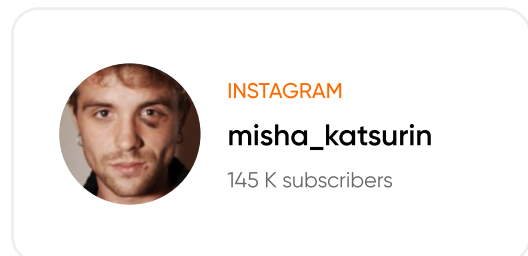
Influencers have also launched new projects on their social media accounts, YouTube channels, and specially designed websites.



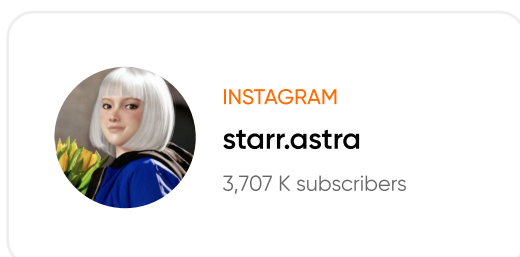
YOUTUBE
Volodymyr Zolkin
 4,34 K subscribers

[Volodymyr Zolkin](#) worked as a freelance analyst and was engaged in video editing before the war. Since, he has started collaborating with the "Look for Your Own" project, which reveals the truth about the war in Ukraine to the average Russian. Now the YouTuber publishes conversations with captured Russian invaders and their relatives on his [YouTube](#) channel.

Ukrainian restaurateur, [Misha Katsurin](#), fights Russian propaganda and gives many interviews to foreign media, talking about how his father in Russia doesn't believe that his children are being bombed. He created the "[Dad, believe me](#)" project to help people explain the real events in Ukraine to their relatives in Russia.



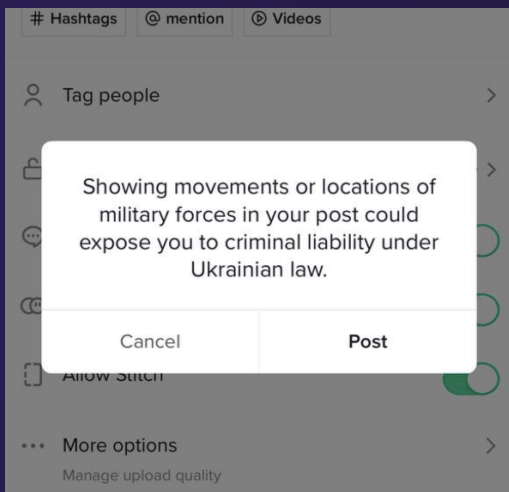
INSTAGRAM
misha_katsurin
 145 K subscribers



INSTAGRAM
starr.astra
 3,707 K subscribers

The world's first virtual influencer [Astra Star](#) shares the realities of wartime life in a series of stories called Astra War Diaries. She talks about explosions in Kyiv, evacuating to Lviv, volunteering, weaving nets, hiding in a bomb shelter, and other stories of a fictional girl. For each repost of her "diaries," Astra donates 50 UAH to the Ukrainian military.

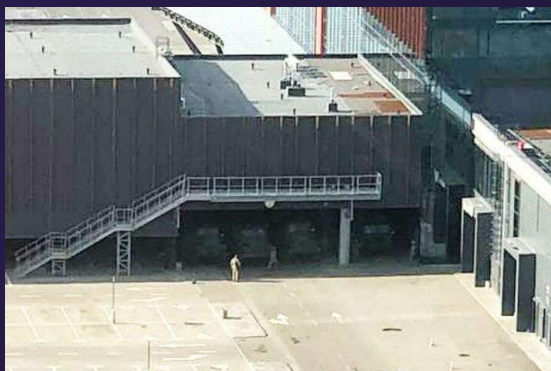
Military-related content is regulated by the government to avoid attacks



TikTok screenshot of the warning that users from Ukraine see when uploading content

In the context of wartime content regulation, Ukrainian legislative initiatives have a reactive nature aimed at preventing further attacks on its territories caused by media leaks. The Ukrainian parliament, Verkhovna Rada, has adopted a law introducing criminal liability for illegal photos and video recordings of the movement and dislocation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and international military assistance to Ukraine. Disseminating such info is also forbidden and is punishable by law. TikTok is already warning users from Ukraine about the consequences of such postings.

These legislation changes occurred after the country faced some tragic consequences of irresponsible blogging. For example, a fatality happened at the Retroville shopping mall in Kyiv. The building was shelled by Russians because a TikToker published a photo with military equipment in that building. This is the image he took and the consequences of the shelling.



Piece of content published by an influencer

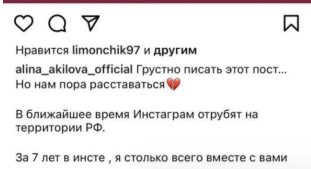


Retroville shopping mall in Kyiv before and after shelling

Russia

The impact of international sanctions against Russia on people's lives is widely covered by influencers.


One of the main concerns for many Russian creators is the discomfort they experience resulting from international sanctions against their country. They make emotional posts expressing outrage about the ban on Instagram, the impossibility of flying to Europe and the US, not be able to use ApplePay, the closure of their favorite brand outlets, and so on.




Farewell post by Russian influencer Alina Akilova on her Instagram:

"It's sad to write this post, but it's time for us to leave. Instagram will soon be cut off in Russia. During these 7 years, I've had so much with you ..."

Very few Russian creators speak openly about the war, support Ukraine publicly, and oppose the actions of their government

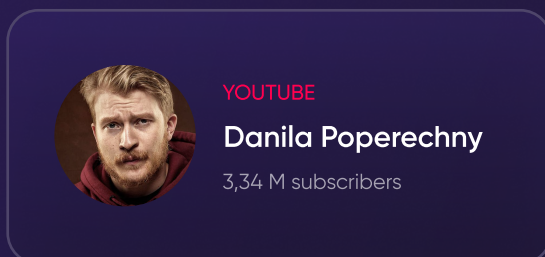
 **INSTAGRAM**
yurydud
5.1 M subscribers

 **INSTAGRAM**
Ruslan Usachev
2,68 M subscribers

Some Russian influencers, after all, have addressed their authorities to stop the war.

Popular Russian journalist, [Yuri Dud](#), condemned the recognition of "LDNR" terroristic republics by Russia and spoke out in support of Ukraine. "I did not choose this government; Putin is an emperor who got carried away by history," Dud posted. The Russian government named Dud a foreign agent in response to his position.

One of Russia's most popular YouTubers, [Ruslan Usachev](#), has spoken out against Vladimir Putin and his decision to invade Ukraine. He strongly [opposes](#) his home country's recent actions in Ukraine and is against any military action that cause the death of innocent people.



YOUTUBE
Danila Poperechny
 3,34 M subscribers

[Danila Poperechny](#), a Russian stand-up comedian, YouTuber, actor, and podcaster, has also posted a [video](#) on his channel calling for an end to the war.

Dissemination of truth about the war in Ukraine is not supported by Russian government

Many creators are afraid to speak out against their government since any public opposition or independent news reports about the war against Ukraine are criminalized. According to updated Russian legislation, spreading information about the war that the government considers "fake" can lead to prison sentences (which in fact can be anything contradicting Russian state media narratives).

Russian legislation also prohibits the military from distributing information related to military service on the Internet and mass media. Therefore, Russian soldiers aren't posting any content from the front on their social media.

INFLUENCER MARKETING

Most influencer marketing projects are on pause both in Ukraine and Russia

The war hit hard the markets of advertising and marketing services in Ukraine. Almost 70% of digital advertising agencies have stopped working, according to [research by IAB](#). 95% of influencer marketing projects are suspended.

The influencer marketing industry in Russia is also in crisis. Most global brands that invested in influencer marketing in Russia either left the market or cut their advertising budgets. Those who remain active aren't interested in investing in projects on banned global platforms where a substantial part of Russian influencers' audience was accumulated. The budgets of players who remain active are also significantly reduced due to the general economic crisis in Russia. A portion of budgets is being directed at local digital platforms or others available to Russian users.

CONCLUSIONS

Today's digital world is more interconnected than ever. Events occurring in one country that at first don't seem to influence other countries can have a global effect. The war in Ukraine has shown how new trends are emerging, how critical the voice of every influencer is for revealing the truth to the world, gaining support for those in need, and changing the course of events. Everyone is fighting their own front, and the information front is no less important than the others.

If you want to help Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, you can:

- support one of the projects of this trusted fund - [Nova Ukraine](#), one of the largest Ukrainian aid organizations since 2014,
- donate to the Armed Forces of Ukraine via the official website of the [National Bank of Ukraine](#)
- support [Overhelp Social Hub](#), the volunteer organization created by AIR's staff.

ABOUT AIR MEDIA-TECH

This data and insights are brought to you by AIR Media-Tech, an international company helping digital-first creators and brands globally grow faster and earn more on YouTube and beyond. AIR has been a YouTube Certified partner since 2011 and has been working with TikTok since 2019. Founded in Canada in 2010, the company currently works with creators and influencers from 44 countries.

AIR offers advanced services and tools to boost growth and monetization on digital platforms, including:



The development of creators' channels on YouTube



Services to increase monetization and get additional income for creators



The development of branded channels on YouTube



Influencer marketing services

...and much more.

If you're looking to boost your YouTube channel growth, AIR is here to help. Visit air.io to learn more, or email us at my@air.io to get answers to your questions and assistance in choosing the most effective growth strategy.