SPOTLIGHT ON SOCHI:
Social Media Analysis Series

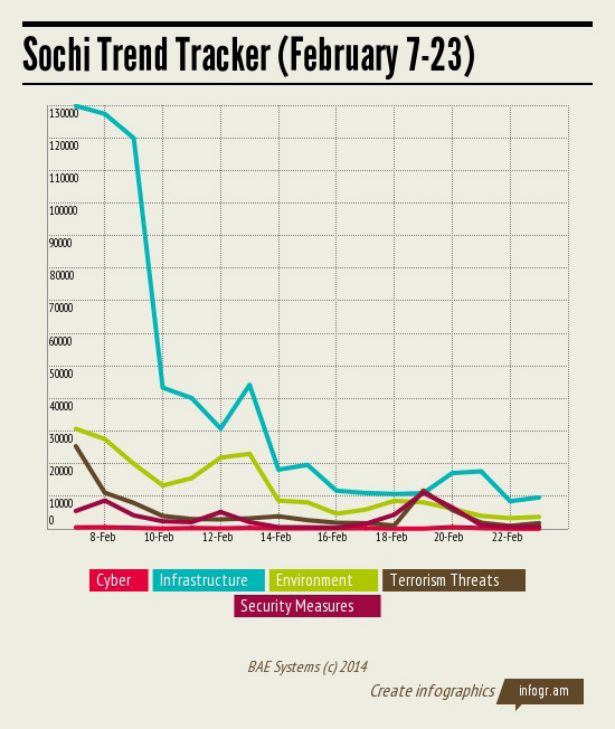
BAE SYSTEMS
INSPIRED WORK

CURTAIN CALL

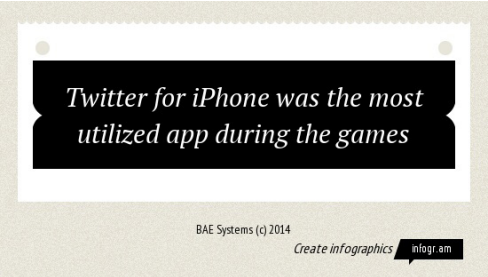
BAE Systems is partnering with Homeland Security Today magazine to produce a daily report that provides a unique perspective on the 2014 winter games in Sochi, Russia.

On Sunday night, the 2014 winter games closed with an artistic splendor of fireworks, music and dance. People in Sochi and around the globe once again by took to social media to share their experience. In addition to supporting messages for the athletes, the social media dialogue was dominated by Russia's self-deprecating joke over the ring malfunction it suffered during the opener. As the arena reflected on the athleticism displayed throughout the competition, our Advanced Analytics Lab took a moment to revisit the social media themes that took hold.

The intent behind this series was to let the data tell the story, providing a perspective that might not be readily apparent through traditional media reporting. Achieving this objective required some data acquisition, a lot of processing, and even more thoughtful selection and interpretation by the analysts. Given BAE Systems' client base, and the Homeland Security Today audience, we deliberately chose a more manageable data set from within the Sochi-related social media domain focusing on: Terrorism Threats, Security Measures, Infrastructure concerns, Environmental issues, and Cyber activity.



On some days, a macro-level view of the data was appropriate, and on others, our analysts took a closer look at one particular issue. Still other posts aimed to inform our readers of social media phenomena we had observed within the context of the games, such as Twitter storms and hashtag hijackings. We've provided a chart to show how our five themes trended over time. Here are a few additional statistics from our collection over the 17-days' of jumps, slopes, and slides:



- Twitter was far and away the most popular platform evaluated, over Facebook, Tumblr and Reddit
- The most popular app used for sharing social media posts was Twitter for iPhone, followed by web posts, and Twitter by Android
- Infrastructure was by far the dominant theme we monitored, making up over 50% of the dialogue even after it dropped significantly after the official games began
- Russian was the fourth most common language in our posts, outdone in order by English, Spanish, and French

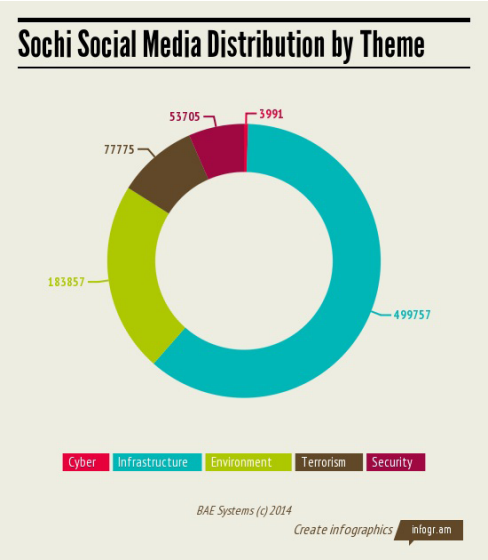
Within each of our themes, some issues stood out more than others.

Security and Terrorism

With two significant terrorist attacks in its recent history, Russia was under an enormous amount of pressure to keep the Sochi games safe and secure. Security discussion on social media dropped significantly once the opening ceremonies went off without incident (save for a malfunctioning ring display that indeed did draw a great deal of social media attention). A momentary spike occurred during the early part of our series after reports of a hijacked plane headed for Sochi, but that too lost steam once the threat was neutralized. The leading topics in both our Security Measures and Terrorism Threats categories by volume were inspired by the incident involving protest punk band Pussy Riot we discussed in two of our later posts. Generally speaking, the social media community breathed a sigh of relief that the host nation had avoided a mass casualty event. During the closing ceremonies, Twitter users commended Russia with messages such as “Despite initial security concerns & whether #Sochi2014 could be pulled off, a very successful & worthwhile games. Congrats Russia.”

Infrastructure

Infrastructure concerns dominated social media discussion around the games by a longshot as the Twitter handle @SochiProblems and hashtag #SochiProblems went viral. While we had considered possible snags in the transportation system, or safety issues in and around the arenas, it turned out that the hotel and lodging conditions were the primary source of aggravation, appearing in nearly 15% of the messages collected. Journalists, being the first to arrive and in some cases be turned away, were key influencers in the spread of negative messaging. This thread sustained its lead throughout the period of reporting, but only by a narrow margin at the end of the games.



Environmental

Animal rights also drew significant attention in the social media domain, with specific devotion to Russia's efforts to clear the streets of stray dogs, and the possibility of orca whales being sent to Sochi for tourists' amusement. Discussion of the dogs consumed 90% of the Environmental theme. The stray dogs of Sochi became an unofficial mascot of the games, as athletes joined activists in a number of rescue operations. Social media users have dedicated numerous hashtags and accounts to the issue.

Cyber

Another community surfacing animal rights issues through social media were hacktivist collectives- many of whom fall under the Anonymous umbrella. A temporary flood of tweets rallying around the hashtag #OpSochi, was posted to raise awareness for the cause and criticize the Russian government. Other hackers were more aggressive, and launched attacks against websites associated with the Sochi games

Whether it was something as trivial as Bob Costas' eye infection, or as significant as the unrest in Ukraine, social media has been a voice for people involved with, or interested in the Sochi games. Soon, Brazil and Scotland- two nations with heavy social media penetration- will be on the world stage as they prepare to host international competitions of their own later this year. One Twitter user posted Sunday, "#Sochi2014 is over - just the World Cup & the Commonwealth Games to get through now..." Reports of construction and security concerns in Brazil have already surfaced, and a whopping 170,000 troops are said to be deploying to keep the soccer games safe. On this sunset post of our series, we'd like thank our readers for accompanying us on our journey through social media during the 2014 games, and hope it provides some lessons learned for special event security practitioners in the future.

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