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# SPOTLIGHT ON SOCHI: Social Media Analysis Series

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# VOICE OF DISSENT

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.

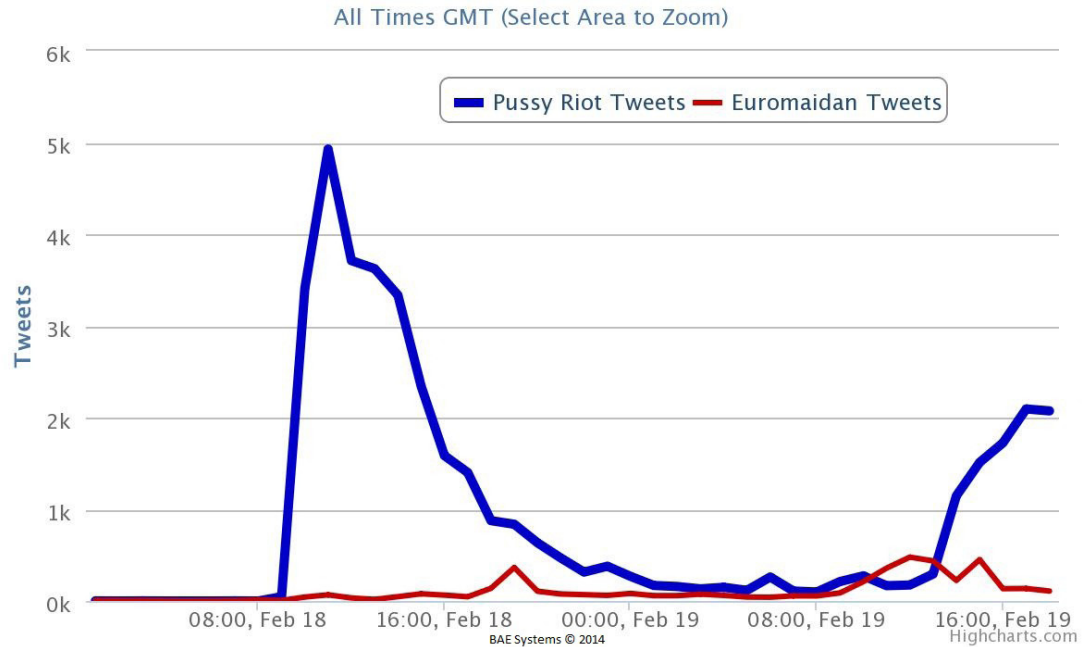
In our February 14 report, “Hashtag Hijacking”, we described how Twitter users can use (or misuse) Sochi hashtags to direct global attention to a particular issue. Two such issues have gained prominence in recent days amongst our collection of Sochi-related tweets; the brief arrest of several members of the Russian protest punk band Pussy Riot in Sochi, and the ongoing Euromaidan protests in Ukraine. Both issues clearly have Russian connections, so it is perhaps unsurprising to see them connected to the winter games in Sochi.

## Pussy Riot?

Pussy Riot is a Moscow-based protest punk band formed in 2011. The group varies in size, but the three most prominent members are Yekaterina Samutsevich, Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova. They often stage provocative performances in public places with themes including opposition to Russian president Vladimir Putin, feminism and LGBT rights. Some members of the group were imprisoned in August 2012 following an anti-Putin protest performance at a prominent Orthodox Christian cathedral in Moscow.

Pussy Riot was first mentioned in conjunction with the Sochi games in the summer of 2013. At the time, several Twitter users mused about how NSA-leaker Edward Snowden – who had recently been granted political asylum in Russia – was free to visit Sochi while Pussy Riot and millionaire businessman and self-described political prisoner Mikhail Khodorkovsky were imprisoned. An August 2013 call by Samutsevich to boycott the Sochi games did not gain much traction on Twitter. Twitter users took more of an interest in December 2013 when fellow band members Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina were released from prison and joined the call for a boycott. Twitter also buzzed when, on the first day of competition, Russian snowboarder Alexey Sobolev used a snowboard which featured an image of a woman in a ski mask – Pussy Riot’s signature look. Many people labeled this the “first sign of athlete protest” at the winter games. When news of the group’s February 18 arrest in Sochi broke, there were over 22,000 tweets worldwide from people using hashtags related to the winter games.

## Sochi-tagged Pussy Riot and Euromaidan Tweets, February 18 – February 19



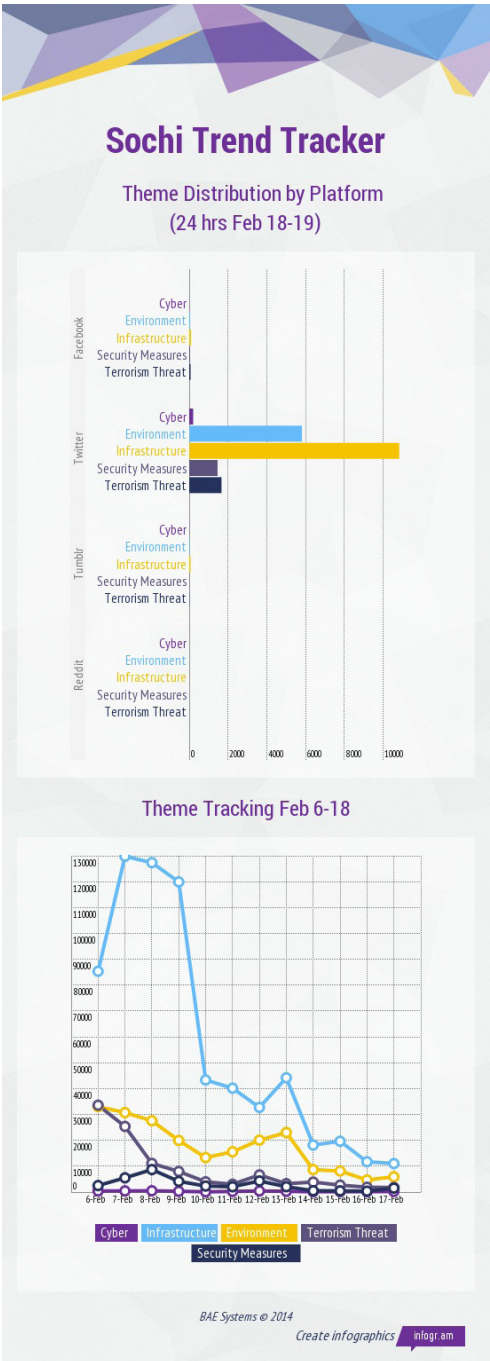
### Euromaidan?

Euromaidan – which translates to “Eurosquare” – is the name given to the ongoing protests and civil unrest in Kiev, Ukraine. The protests began in November 2013 in reaction to the Ukrainian government’s suspension of an agreement intended to boost economic ties with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Russia. Since then, the scope of the protests has broadened – owing partially to a series of government crackdowns –and they are fueled by perceptions of widespread government corruption, abuse of power and human rights violations.

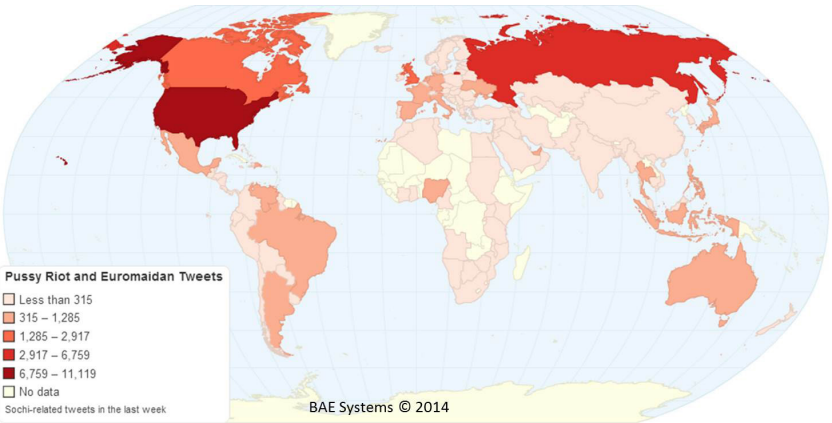
The Euromaidan protests were first mentioned in conjunction with the winter games in early-December 2013, when Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich met with Russian president Putin in Sochi. The mentions picked up steam in mid-January, and then spiked during the opening ceremonies, with one user noting, “Team Ukraine gets the loudest cheer I’ve heard so far”, while hashtagging the message with both Euromaidan and Sochi. Activity spiked again yesterday following a night of in which at least 25 people were killed and over two hundred were injured in another government crackdown in Kiev.

### Who is relating Pussy Riot and Euromaidan to Sochi?

We wanted to know which parts of the world were using Sochi-related hashtags to draw attention to either Pussy Riot or Euromaidan. Our Advanced Analytics Lab used a methodology similar to the one we utilized in examining security measure-related tweets in our February 16 “Security Atmospherics” report. We created a list of related keyword for each topic and searched Twitter in English, Russian, Ukrainian, Japanese, Dutch, French, Spanish and German over the last week. Here is what we found (see the map below for a full breakout by country):



- There were more tweets about Pussy Riot in the United States than any other country in the world. Of the over 33,000 tweets about Pussy Riot, over 30 % came from the United States. Russia was second (with about 5,000 tweets) and the United Kingdom third (nearly 4,000 tweets).
- Most people tweeting about Euromaidan did so from Russia. 41% of Euromaidan tweets came from Russia, more than any other country.
- Ukraine ranked third, behind Russia and the United States, in terms of Euromaidan tweets. 11 percent of Euromaidan tweets came from Ukraine. By comparison, less than one-half of one percent of tweets about Pussy Riot came from Ukraine.
- According to its Twitter activity, Japan cares more about Euromaidan (about 7 percent of all Euromaidan tweets) than Pussy Riot (about 1.5 percent
- ...but in the United Kingdom, Pussy Riot was the preferred topic (8 percent of all tweets compared to 3 percent of all Euromaidan tweets).
- Both issues received about equal coverage in Spain, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.



Hashtag hijacking has proven to be fairly common throughout the course of the winter games. As with the opening ceremonies, we expect to see a greater focus on issues tangential to the athletic competition before high-profile events like the ice hockey finals and figure skating events are held and the games then come to a close. Given the escalation of violence in Kiev and yesterday's video of Cossack security forces beating members of Pussy Riot in Sochi, we expect these issues will remain a topic of discussion. We will continue to monitor these and other developments as they relate to the winter games.

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