



SPOTLIGHT ON SOCHI: Social Media Analysis Series

MINING FOR TWITTER GOLD

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.

Over the last two weeks, the BAE Systems Advanced Analytics lab has reported on games-related issues based on collections of social media data. We used this data to glean insights into public sentiment on a number of broad topical issues. What did most people think about x? Did y affect people in one place more than another? Is a small, but vocal, minority disproportionately talking about z? These are some of the questions we've attempted to answer.

A very different approach to gleaning insights from social media is to look for reporting from a specific person or organization, a defined location, or on a particular event. Instead of aggregating large amounts of information and summarizing general themes, we seek to cut through large amounts of information to find nuanced details. Social media is often the only resource for unfiltered observation from local activists, security forces, eyewitnesses and people engaged in the actual events of interest.

Social media is also a valuable information source in places with a restricted media environment, or when the media can't keep up with fast-breaking developments. The on-the-ground perspective it provides is invaluable in a country where the media is controlled by the government, or in dynamic situations such as protests sites or war zones. YouTube videos over the last three years have informed analysts' understanding of the conflict in Syria, for example. Photo-journalists are documenting the crisis in Ukraine via Instagram. Twitter continues to serve as one of the best sources for real-time information about protests; this time, in Venezuela. Terrorist groups around the world use all of these social media resources to disseminate statements and propaganda.

The media environment surrounding the winter games in Sochi proved to be one in which social media served very well in locating discrete bits of security-related information. The Committee to Protect Journalists released a special report in January which documented both state- and self-censorship in the Russian media. International journalists covering the games in Sochi reported difficulties when traveling around Sochi and the North Caucasus, especially when reporting on security, corruption, or other sensitive issues. Additionally, the sheer volume of news and social media reporting focused on the games themselves made locating security-related information a difficult task.

Both traditional media and social media were saturated with coverage of the terrorist threat leading up to the games in Sochi. As we reported in "Pageantry over Politics" on February 8, social media discussion of terrorism declined rapidly once the games began.

MINING FOR TWITTER GOLD

▲ **2,366,000**

Number of Russian tweets about the Sochi games since February 7, 2014.

▼ **485**

Number of Russian tweets about Doku Umarov since February 7, 2014

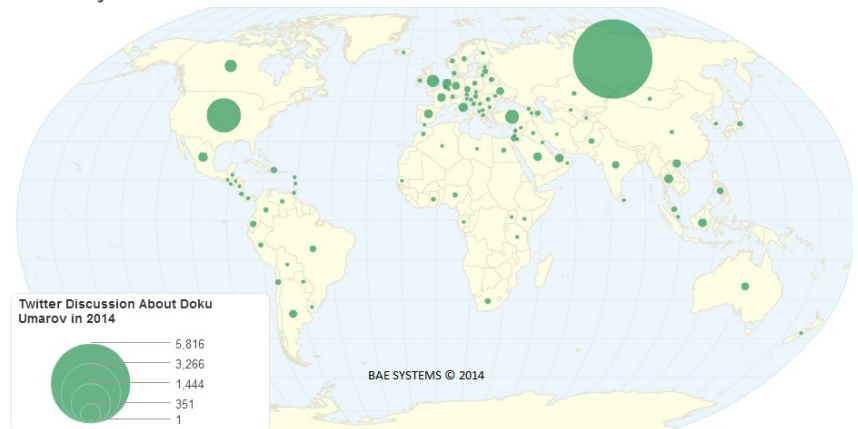
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Aside from a small number of protests and a handful of activist arrests, there have not been any significant security incidents which threatened international visitors. Additionally, there have not been any major insurgent or terrorist attacks throughout the North Caucasus during the course of the games. However, that is not to say there haven't been any security incidents.

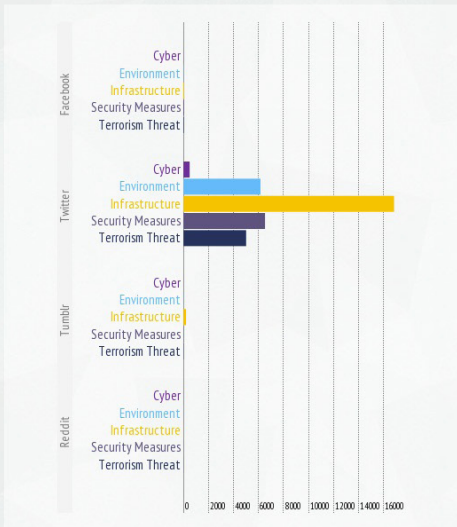
As we reported in "Terror in the Twittersphere" on February 13, the pace of Russian security operations in the North Caucasus, especially Dagestan, has increased sharply in recent weeks. Mainstream media reporting on these operations is largely absent. However, Twitter accounts affiliated with the umbrella terrorist organization Caucasus Emirate (Imarat Kavkaz) have been tweeting photos of Russian security operations. They've also claimed to have killed several Russian security forces during the course of these operations. Their claims are often corroborated by tweets and blog posts from human rights activists in the North Caucasus.

Another example of where social media is filling the void in mainstream media reporting is in regards to the current status of the leader of the Caucasus Emirate, Doku Umarov. In recent months Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of the Chechen Republic and ally of Russian president Vladimir Putin, has made several unsubstantiated claims via his Instagram account that Umarov is dead. One such claim, on January 17, garnered significant media attention – despite the fact that Russian intelligence services admitted they could not confirm Umarov's death. The story has largely dropped from mainstream media, but rumors of his death persist on social media. The map below displays the Twitter talk about Umarov by country so far this year.

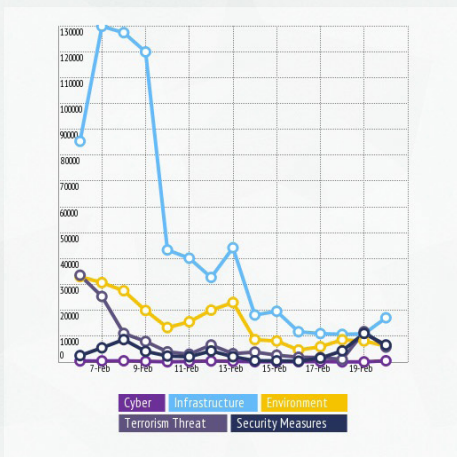


Sochi Trend Tracker

Theme Distribution by Platform
(24 hrs Feb 21-22)



Theme Tracking Feb 6-21



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One major jihadist news outlet for the Caucasus region tweeted responses to questions on Umarov’s status on February 14. The outlet said that Umarov had been “accepted by God” and that the search for a new leader was ongoing. The outlet also claimed that “most of the brothers” wanted Aslambek Vadalov to lead the Caucasus Emirate. Vadalov was briefly appointed Emir (leader) of the Caucasus Emirate in August 2010, though that appointment was later retracted by Umarov. These social media discussions between supporters of the Caucasus Emirates lend credence to rumors of Umarov’s death.

Intelligence analysts, first responders, and journalists alike require information that can be transmitted rapidly, preferably derived from multiple sources in order to corroborate initial reporting. Social media, if mined effectively, can be a precious resource.

Concerns about security issues, and likewise the social media chatter about them, change constantly as the environment around the winter games evolves. Understanding how and why those changes occur will help us better understand both the mood on the ground in Sochi and emerging concerns from the worldwide audience. For the duration of the games, the BAE Systems Advanced Analytics Lab is tracking dynamic social media activity related to common security issues by category and will report daily on how that discussion progresses.

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