



Russian Disinformation Campaign Targeting the United States

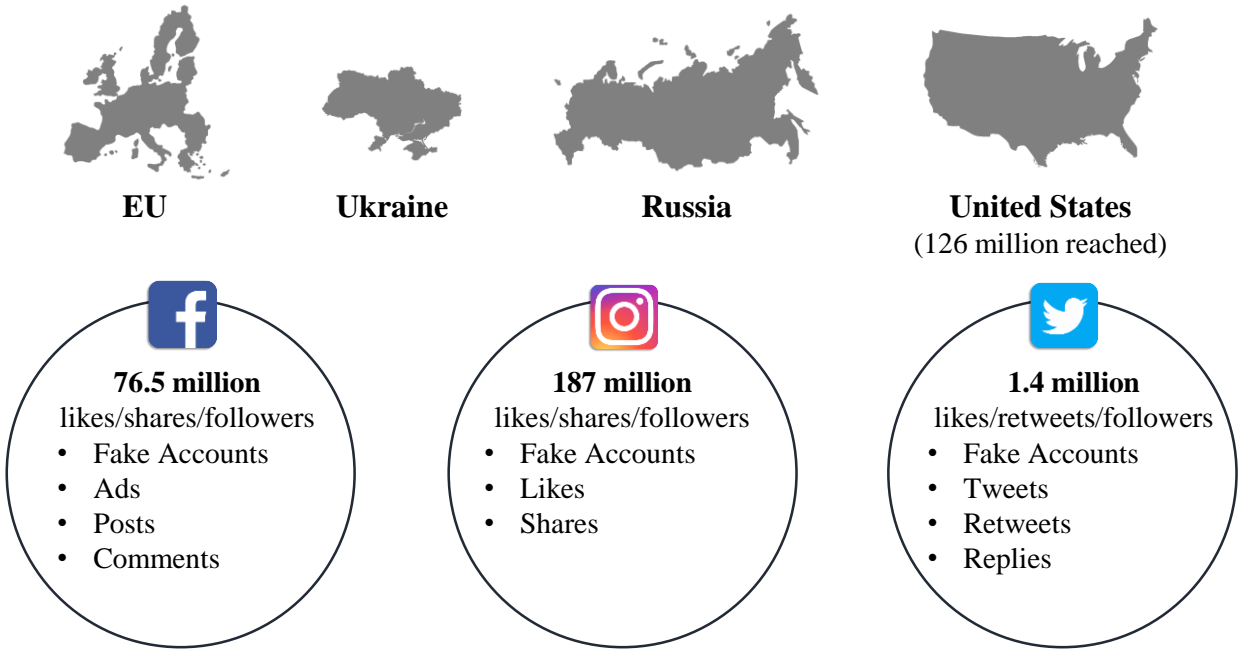
Background

- Federal indictments reveal the reach of recent Russian disinformation campaigns, with over 126 million Americans consuming and interacting with fake content intended to amplify societal divisions and sow mistrust in US government institutions, according to media reports.* Major social media platforms are cracking down and closing accounts linked to state-backed influence and disinformation campaigns.
- From 2012-18, the Russian government’s disinformation “factory,” the Internet Research Agency (IRA), disseminated US-targeted content, that was “liked” or “shared” 187 million times on Instagram and 76.5 million times on Facebook.
 - In October 2018, Twitter disclosed information on 3,841 accounts linked to the IRA and almost 6 million tweets containing divisive content, while Facebook removed more than 600 fake accounts spreading misleading content. In January 2019, Twitter announced they removed an additional 491 accounts, while Facebook removed 364 more accounts and pages.

Project Lakhta

- Internet Research Agency (IRA):**
Russian entity that employs people to conduct the social media disinformation campaign
- Funded by IRA chief Yevgeny Prigozhin**
- January 2016 – June 2018: Over \$35 million
 - January 2018 – June 2018: Over \$10 million

Targeted Areas & Platforms Used



Content Focus: American Political Debates

- Immigration
- Gun Control
- Race Relations
- LGBT Issues
- Women’s March
- NFL Controversy
- Police Shootings of African American Men
- Mass Shootings:
 - Las Vegas, NV
 - Charleston, SC
 - Parkland, FL
- 2017 Charlottesville Rally

Removal of Content: January 2019

- Twitter:**
4,260 IRA accounts & nearly 6 million tweets
- Facebook:**
Over 964 fake accounts

Indictments/Sanctions

- In March 2018, US Department of Treasury sanctioned IRA chief Prigozhin and other IRA employees for election interference.
- IRA continued to operate, resulting in a second round of sanctions in December 2018.

Project Lakhta

- Project Lakhta is a global Russian disinformation operation that included targeting the 2016 US presidential election. The project’s infrastructure still operates today.
- Project Lakhta produced thousands of contentious social media posts, created fake social media accounts, and imitated US persons to promote partisan opinions aimed at people supporting specific sides of political issues.
- In an effort to preempt future campaigns, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms are employing algorithms and implementing policy changes to reduce the spread of disinformation.

Internet Research Agency

- The Internet Research Agency (IRA) is a Kremlin-sponsored organization, based in St. Petersburg, that executes part of Russia’s disinformation campaign.
- The IRA was charged with pushing false themes, information and content to influence public opinion and spread confusion so that the public could no longer distinguish fact from fiction.
- Set up in 2013, the IRA first focused on Russian and Ukrainian citizens, turning its attention in early 2014 to the 2016 US presidential election. IRA-sponsored social media accounts often pretended to be real American persons or organizations and frequently shared information produced by Russian state media and American news outlets.
- Last March, the US Department of Treasury sanctioned IRA chief Yevgeny Prigozhin and other IRA employees for their election interference. In December 2018, a second round of sanctions were imposed on Russian intelligence operatives after the IRA’s continued spread of disinformation.



Example of a post from an IRA-linked social media account targeting US citizens.
(Source: New Knowledge)