

| MARCH 2022

THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The largest conventional warfare operation in Europe since World War II – in the era of social media – will be uniquely shaped by cyberattacks, social virality, misinformation and other dynamics. We have some preliminary observations as FGH begins to help its clients navigate this moment.

The Last 120 Hours on Social Media

Social media is its own front in the war.

Top news outlets, including [The New York Times](#), [CNN](#), and [The Associated Press](#), have continuously tweeted updates on the state of the war, providing on-the-ground coverage of the Russian invasion. On February 28th, [reports](#) of initial talks between Russia and Ukraine yielding no resolution were circulated.

Also, on February 28th, news outlets [shared](#) that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had signed an official request to join the European Union.

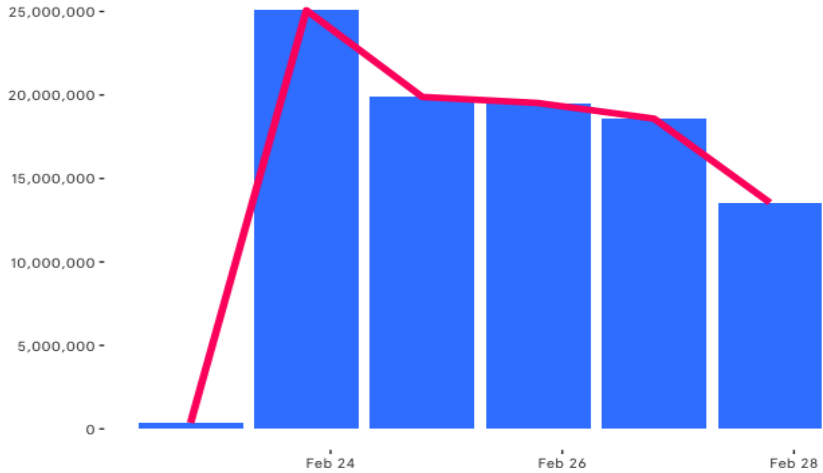
President Zelenskyy has been widely [praised](#) for his emergence “as a potent symbol of Ukrainian defiance.” President Zelenskyy has received significant engagement on [updates](#) penned from his personal Twitter account, many which call for continued support for Ukraine and for existing sanctions against Russia to be strengthened.

Among the most highly engaged with tweets, a majority are related to the severe [sanctions](#) and export restrictions currently imposed on Russia by both the U.S. and its Allies. Reports covering the immediate impacts of these measures, from the crash of the ruble to the closure of the Russian stock market and swift staggering of the country’s economy, have been [shared](#) by journalists.

Implications on the U.S. economy related to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine were also broadly reported on, with outlets like [The Economist](#) and [The Wall Street Journal](#), sharing articles on how the conflict might impact infrastructure and industries.

U.S. Intelligence, which warned the world of an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine weeks ahead of the attacks, was frequently recognized for its transparency and accuracy, including by Congressional members [Mark Warner](#) and [Adam Schiff](#).

Tweets by Day
5 p.m February 23rd to 4:30 p.m February 28th



AP The Associated Press @AP

Russia launched its anticipated attack on Ukraine Thursday, as President Vladimir Putin cast aside international condemnation and sanctions and warned other countries that any attempt to interfere would lead to "consequences you have never seen."

9:03 AM - Feb 24, 2022 - Twitter Web App

373 Retweets 117 Quote Tweets 1,196 Likes

Володимир Зеленський @ZelenskyyUa

Strengthening sanctions, concrete defense assistance and an anti-war coalition have just been discussed with @POTUS. Grateful to 🇺🇸 for the strong support to 🇺🇦

1:00 PM - Feb 25, 2022 - Twitter Web App

20K Retweets 1,435 Quote Tweets 140.8K Likes

The New York Times @nytimes

Initial talks between Russia and Ukraine concluded without result on Monday evening, with both delegations returning from the site of the negotiations in Belarus to their capitals for consultations.

3:10 PM - Feb 28, 2022 - SocialFlow

130 Retweets 15 Quote Tweets 489 Likes

The Economist @TheEconomist

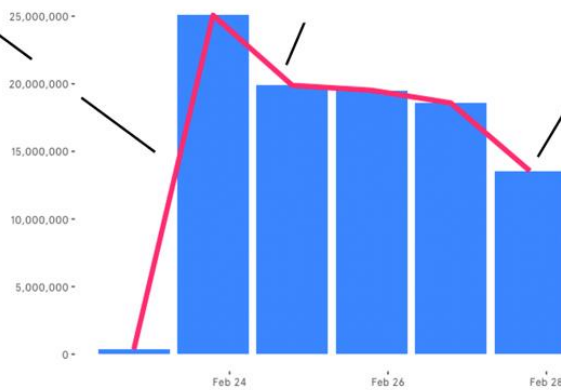
Brent crude is at a seven-year high. Wheat is up 9% in 2022. Natural gas is rising, too. Russia's menacing of Ukraine has hit commodity prices

Commodity prices, January 4th 2022=100

6:02 PM - Feb 23, 2022 - SocialFlow

24 Retweets 6 Quote Tweets 47 Likes

Tweets by Day
5 p.m February 23rd to 4:30 p.



nytimes.com

Initial talks between Russia and Ukraine yield no resolution. Russia's delegation leader said the next meeting would take place once more along the Ukraine-Belarus border in the "coming days."

3:10 PM - Feb 28, 2022 - SocialFlow

130 Retweets 15 Quote Tweets 489 Likes

Bots are rampant.

Our bot detection algorithm analyzed a sample of approximately 171K unique users who actively participated in this conversation in the last 120 hours and found that 60% of the accounts have medium to high probability of being bots. A high percentage of bot presence in a discussion around a sensitive issue is a strong indicator of intentional spread of misinformation. Further, it emphasizes the need for vetting any and all information flowing into your consumption space before engaging with it.

There are plenty of handles you can rely on, including journalists on the ground, reputable mastheads and others. Like any topic, looking at a variety of sources and viewpoints is important to build a well-rounded viewpoint. And look for the blue checkmark.

[Here are some accounts we're watching for the latest in Ukraine.](#)

Real world impact.

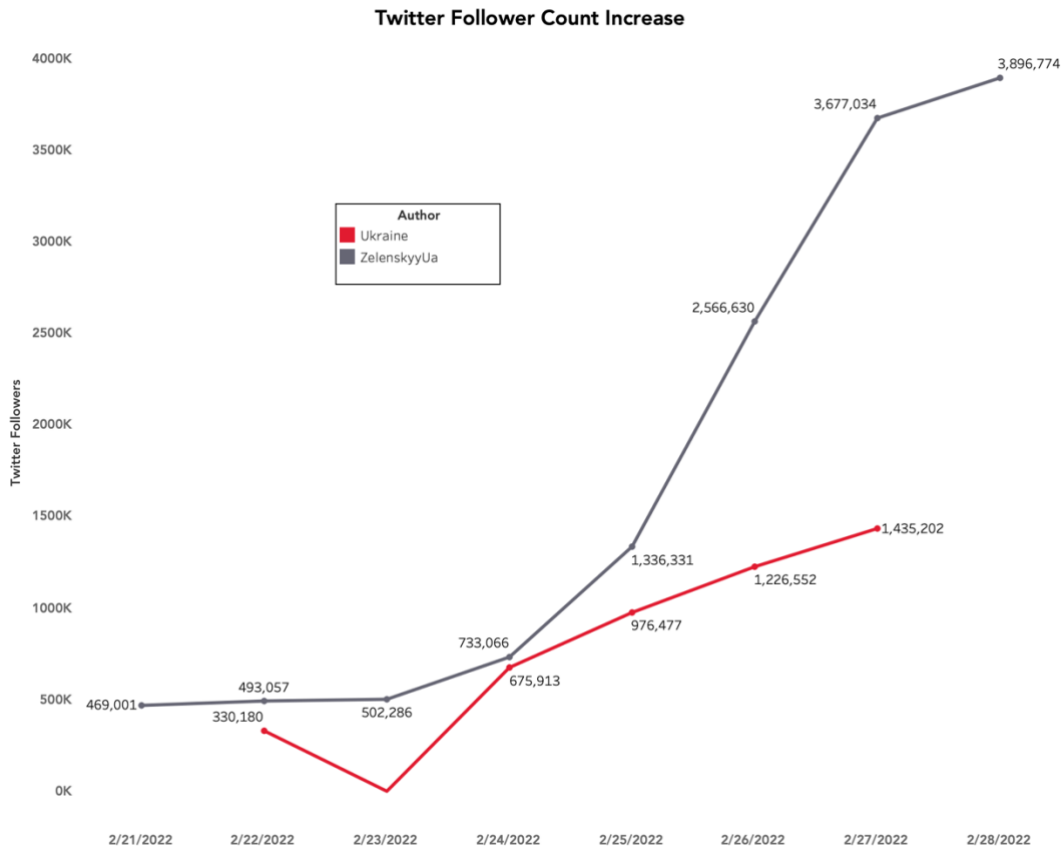
The prevalence of social media amid the invasion continues to make headlines. (e.g. - [How Zelenskyy and Putin Are Using Online Media in the War for Ukraine](#)).

[Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) has been lionized for being exceedingly active on social media – reporting from the ground with real-time messaging that Kyiv won't relent. From [thanking world leaders](#) for their support, to registering actions by nations, Zelenskyy has been recording important milestones in the fight directly on his feed. This heavy cadence of hope, courage, candor, and grit has led to Zelenskyy gaining **630% more Twitter followers** and Ukraine's Twitter handle gaining **238% more Twitter followers** since February 24th.

HOW TO SPOT A BOT

If you suspect a bot, look for:

- | Username ending in a string of numbers (this indicates the account didn't change the username automatically generated by Twitter)
- | Whether the account was recently established
- | An imbalanced ratio of followers-to-following (low followers to high accounts followed)
- | Auto-responses
- | A high number of tweets/retweets in a short timeframe
- | Activity at times not aligned with identified location.



In a [live-tweeted interview](#) with NowThis, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken mentioned that Russian President Vladimir Putin ‘dramatically underestimated’ the role social media would play amid his invasion of Ukraine.

“The ability of Ukrainians, including Pres. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to speak directly to what they’re seeing & experiencing on the ground has been a major force in galvanizing the Ukrainian defense efforts, not to mention informing viewers worldwide about the conflict in real time...It’s one thing to wage war with a powerful army using 20th-century means. It’s another thing to factor in the 21st century and social media, in the fact that virtually every moment, every inch of this aggression is being captured, and being shared, and being spread. The lies coming from the Putin administration don’t hold up to the scrutiny of social media, don’t hold up to the reality that’s being shown to the world as a result of incredibly brave Ukrainians who are capturing every minute of it...It’s very clear who the aggressor is, it’s very clear who the victim is, and that is contributing powerfully to the world standing up and saying, ‘No, this has to stop.’”

Social Media Posting Considerations as of February 28, 2022

In some cases, continue pausing or delaying paid advertising. Ask whether your rollout/content/campaign is better served to wait until there is more geopolitical certainty.

- | [Twitter Pauses Ads in Russia, Ukraine to Keep Focus on Safety](#)
- | [Applebee's trends over an unfortunate moment during CNN's live Ukraine coverage](#)
- | [Meerkat ads pulled over Ukraine war sensitivities](#)

Reviewing message implications: if you do decide to post on social media, whether it be original or evergreen content, ensure posts treat the conflict in Ukraine with the reverence and urgency it deserves.

- | [Insensitive Employee Post](#) + [Company Response](#)

The implications of sharing false information: vet sources and know that getting it right is crucial.

- | Don't retweet misinformation. Even video evidence can be manipulated or repurposed.
 - o [Reuters Fact Check Thread](#)
 - o [Ben Collins, NBC News Thread](#)
- | Rely on verified (blue check) sources, verified journalists on the ground, and official government accounts for developing events.
 - o [Twitter will label all tweets with Russian state media links](#)

Follow the "Do No Harm Principle" regarding social media posting: what is the rationale for posting on the conflict? Is it relevant and appropriate for the organization or brand to comment?

- | For example, does the entity have employees or business operations in Ukraine? Russia? Is it better to stand down?

Consider close monitoring of comments on all posts across platforms in the coming weeks to understand community sentiment and/or if your followers are demanding action.

Consider the shifting domestic political temperature. In this dynamic environment, commentary, especially on social media, may be more susceptible to ongoing polarized "culture wars".

- | [Fox News hosts play down Russia's attack on Ukraine](#)
- | [Mitt Romney says Americans who support Putin are 'almost treasonous'](#)
- | [Coverage of Ukraine has exposed long-standing racist biases in Western media](#)

What's Coming Next

With Russian escalation, a long-term war or long-term occupation, social media conversations will evolve and may tuck into more existential debates on topics like democracy, capitalism, imperialism, etc. This can create an environment where grassroots social media movements shame companies (and countries) that continue to do business with or align with Russia. This also could translate to real world protests across the West.

- | [Russian vodka pulled from shelves in US, Canada bars, liquor stores: 'Every small thing makes a difference'](#)
- | [FIFA And UEFA Ban Russia And All Russian Clubs From World Soccer](#)
- | [Ukraine asks FIA to ban Russian drivers from racing](#)
- | [Stockholm Film Festival Bans Russian State-Backed Films, Stands With Ukraine](#)