

Vkontakte Manipulated Web Content to Counter Opposition, Report Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Pavel Durov, chief executive of Vkontakte, Russia's largest online social network, worked with the presidential administration and the FSB in using online media to counter the opposition's influence during the Dec. 2011 rallies in Moscow, opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta reported Wednesday.

The newspaper, known for its investigative journalism, says it obtained a letter sent by Durov to Vladislav Surkov, then-first deputy chief of the presidential administration, in which he highlighted Vkontakte's importance in countering the opposition's influence on the web and offered his suggestions on how to use the social network to the state's advantage.

Specifically, one measure mentioned in the letter concerns Vkontakte's former press secretary, Vladislav Tsiplyukhin, who reportedly helped "create tension" between opposition groups by creating fake profiles on the site purporting to be opposition groups and redirecting protesters from rallies.

Durov also notes in the letter how useful Vkontakte could be "patriotically," with its monopoly on the Russian market, but goes on to warn that the outright blocking of opposition groups on the site "will shatter users' trust in our network among the active youth" and make the Runet uncontrollable.

Durov's solution was to either "continue implicit control over the Internet, or begin to block websites on the national level, following the Chinese model."

Vkontakte's spokesman Georgy Lobushkin denied that Durov ever sent the letter.

Tsiplukhin confirmed that Surkov did communicate with Durov, but denied that he had ever written such letters.

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