

Russian Bloggers Bid Tearful Farewell to Instagram

By [AFP](#)

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Former reality TV star Olga Buzova was among those optimistic her work could continue on other platforms and urged followers to join her on VK. **Vyacheslav Prokofyev/TASS**

Russians were relishing their final moments scrolling through Instagram on Sunday, while bloggers and small businesses that rely heavily on the platform scrambled to lure followers elsewhere online.

Moscow announced this week that access to the social network would cease, accusing Instagram's parent company Meta of turning a blind eye to calls for violence against Russians.

In a farewell post, reality TV star Olga Buzova — who has racked up the second-largest audience in Russia with 23 million followers — was in despair and disbelief.

"Right now, I'm writing this post and crying," she wrote, annotating the text with a crying emoji. "I hope this isn't true."

Fashion blogger Karina Nigay, who meanwhile boasts nearly 3 million followers, was still processing the fact of the looming ban.

"I'm in a state of resentment and nowhere near a state of acceptance," she said.

The move comes as part of long-running efforts by President Vladimir Putin to rein in control of what Russians can and cannot access on the internet.

These efforts have quickened to a dizzying pace since he announced Russia's sweeping military incursion in Ukraine and as authorities work to control how the conflict is seen at home.

Russia's media regulator Roskomnadzor said this week that Instagram was being taken down for allowing posts urging violence against Russians.

But the official website Gosuslugi, which hosts government services, said Instagram would be pulled beginning March 14 citing Russians' "psychological health" and efforts to protect children from "bullying and insults."

Gosuslugi also recommended that Russians return to homegrown platforms that were abandoned as Instagram and Facebook's popularity ballooned.

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'We'll live without it'

Many bloggers said on Instagram they would pivot to VK, Russia's equivalent of Facebook.

It is closest among Russian social media platforms to Instagram in its features but has also been accused of cozying up to authorities.

Russians have also been turning to Telegram, a network already hugely popular in Russia and across former Soviet countries, which Moscow several years ago tried — and ultimately failed — to block.

The app was created to be a messaging service but also hosts channels where users can post photos and videos with accompanying texts.

Forty-one-year-old painter Alexei Garkusha told AFP in St. Petersburg that he would be among those turning to Telegram.

It's "more interesting," he said, sounding less concerned about Instagram's fate.

"If they shut it down, they shut it down!" Garkusha shrugged.

In farewell posts, bloggers lamented the need to rebuild their following and businesses, at a time when the economy is struggling under Western sanctions.

"Many, ironically, say that bloggers will finally get over their dependancy on easy money," said Alexandra Mitroshina, a popular user known for instructing others how to monetize their following.

"But don't forget that half of our small and medium businesses are linked to Instagram and Whatsapp," she told her 2 million followers.

For many small Russian businesses, Instagram was a primary platform for advertizing, processing sales and communicating with clients.

But former reality TV star, Buzova, was among those optimistic her work could continue on other platforms and urged followers to join her on VK.

"Of course it will be difficult and unusual but we are strong together," she wrote.

Instagram CEO Adam Mosseri has said the platform has 80 million users in Russia.

On the streets of Russia's former, imperial capital, St. Petersburg, some people said the ban was a pity, but was not the end of the world.

"I don't think anything globally catastrophic will happen," said Yelena Teleginskaya, 31.

Others were pleased to see the back of it, like engineer Nikolay Yeremenko, 45.

"If they closed it, it's for the best. We'll live without it."

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