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VK Video App Downloads Surge as YouTube Playback Speeds Plummet

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Mikhail Grebenshikov / RBC / TASS

The video streaming platform of the Russian social media company VK has seen a surge in downloads over the past week as playback speeds on YouTube plummet in an apparent attempt by the authorities to "throttle" the website.

"VK Video app downloads rose 4.5 times in the first week of August compared to July's monthly average, reaching more than 250,000 [downloads] per day," the state-run news agency TASS quoted the tech company's press service as saying.

Apple's App Store and Google Play also showed VK Video among their top downloaded apps, a significant increase after it remained outside the top 20 for the past two months.

Related article: As Russia Throttles YouTube, Exiled Opposition Voices Prepare for Total Blackout

Users across Russia began reporting problems with download speeds on YouTube last week after the authorities demanded that its owner Google restore around 200 pro-government channels. A prominent Russian lawmaker warned that the popular video platform's loading speeds would drop by 70%.

Google denied Russia's claims that the YouTube slowdown was "the result of any technical issues or actions on our part." Russia's state-owned telecom giant previously warned that Google's withdrawal of equipment from the country would degrade the playback quality of YouTube videos.

Besides VK Video, another domestic YouTube alternative, RuTube, appeared among the top downloaded apps this week. Both VK and RuTube are under the control of Gazprom Media, a subsidiary of the state energy giant.

The Kremlin has tightened control over internet and media freedoms in recent years just as YouTube has become a vital platform for dissenting viewpoints in the country.

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