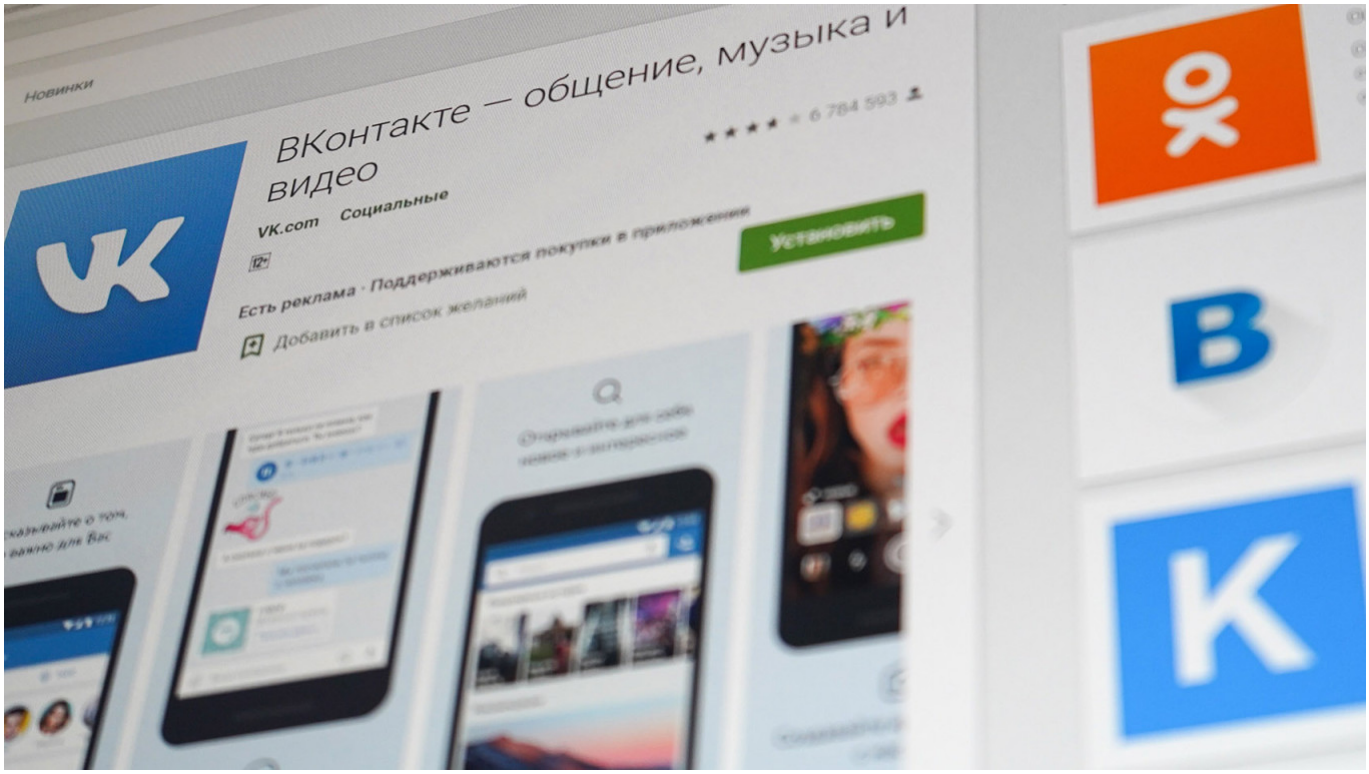
The Moscow Times
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VKontakte Overtakes YouTube in Web Traffic for First Time in Russia

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Moskva News Agency

Russian social network VKontakte overtook YouTube in monthly web traffic for the first time in December, the RBC business news website reported Wednesday, citing data from the research company Mediascope.

The platform, run by the technology firm VK, has witnessed a surge in traffic since August, when users in Russia began reporting problems with playback speeds on YouTube.

Google, which has faced mounting pressure from the Russian government since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, denied Moscow's claims that the YouTube slowdown resulted from technical issues or deliberate actions on its part.

According to Mediascope data cited by RBC, nearly 92 million users in Russia visited VKontakte at least once in December compared to 89.6 million who visited YouTube last month.

YouTube's monthly web traffic declined by 6% from December 2023 while VKontakte's traffic increased by 2.8%, according to the report.

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Authorities in Russia have tightened control over the internet and media freedoms in recent years just as YouTube has become a vital platform for dissenting voices in the country.

Rights groups say the vast majority of criminal charges pressed against anti-war activism are based on content posted to VKontakte and the messaging app Telegram.

During his end-of-year press conference last month, President Vladimir Putin accused the U.S. government of using Google for political purposes and alleged that YouTube was deliberately slowing down playback speeds in Russia.

Putin added that YouTube was facing growing competition from domestic platforms, including VKontakte, where the son of Deputy Kremlin Chief of Staff Sergei Kiriyenko, Vladimir Kiriyenko, serves as CEO.

VKontakte has sought to lure popular Russian YouTubers onto its own VK Video platform through generous financial incentives.

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