

Shakespeare Lives in Russian

Vitaly Kazakov

Contents

1	Executive Summary.....	3
1.1	Summary of Findings: Twitter	4
1.2	Summary of Findings: Facebook and VKontakte (VK).....	4
1.3	Recommendations	5
	Phase One: Shakespeare Day.....	6
2	Methods	8
2.1	Twitter	8
2.2	Facebook and VK.....	8
2.3	Notes On Coding for Values	9
3	Findings and Analysis	10
3.1	Twitter	10
3.1.1	Most Common Types of Tweets.....	10
3.2	Overview of Findings.....	16
3.2.1	Most Frequently Discussed Topics.....	19
3.3	Facebook and VK.....	23
3.3.1	Overview.....	23
3.3.2	Shakespeare Lives Posts That Generated Most Engagement	24
3.3.3	Other Russian-Language Cultural Diplomacy Institutions Pages	31
4	Conclusion.....	35
	Phases Two and Three: Shakespeare Lives in Russian.....	36
5	Methods	38
5.1	Twitter	38
5.2	Facebook and VK.....	39
6	Findings and Analysis: Twitter.....	40
6.1	Actor Type.....	40

6.2	Location.....	41
6.3	Focus	41
6.4	Tone.....	42
6.5	Values.....	45
6.6	Shakespearriad.....	49
6.7	Conclusion: Shakespeare Lives on Twitter	50
7	Findings and Analysis: Facebook and VK	51
7.1	Audiences and Levels of Engagement	51
7.2	Types of Posts	52
7.2.1	Contests.....	52
7.2.2	Shakespeare Lives Programme Updates	57
7.2.3	Resources	64
7.2.4	Information About Britain, Trivia, and Popular News	67
7.3	Shakespeare Lives Posts by Partners and Ambassadors	68
7.3.1	UK Embassy in Russia.....	68
7.3.2	Celebrities	71
7.3.3	Media Outlets.....	74
7.4	Conclusion: Shakespeare Lives on Facebook and VK.....	77

1 Executive Summary

This report examines the conversation in Russian around the Shakespeare Lives programme on social media throughout 2016. It explores how Shakespeare Lives was promoted both by the British Council and by partner organisations (such as the British Embassy in Russia) and prominent ambassadors (such as Sir Ian McKellen), and how audiences engaged with and responded to different Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns on Twitter and Facebook. This includes analysis of the extent to which audiences perceived elements of the Shakespeare Lives programme to be valuable, and associated Shakespeare Lives, Shakespeare, the British Council and/or Britain with the values which the British Council sought to promote through the programme. We begin by giving a summary of findings from our research of Shakespeare Lives on Twitter, Facebook and VKontakte (a popular Russia-based social media platform similar to Facebook with over 350 million users worldwide, subsequently referred to as VK). We then give recommendations on how social media can be used to promote, and promote engagement with, ambitious international cultural programmes such as Shakespeare Lives.

The analysis for the Russian report covers international celebration of Shakespeare Lives in the period around Shakespeare Day, as well as Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns specific to Russia throughout 2016. In our first phase of research, in common with our reports on Shakespeare Lives in Arabic, English, Mandarin, Spanish, and on Instagram, we focused on the weekend around Shakespeare Day – 23 April, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death. This most notably included [Shakespeare Day Live](#), a day of live Shakespeare Lives broadcasts streamed around the world through a digital pop-up channel co-curated by the BBC and the British Council. Highlights of Shakespeare Lives were also made freely available through the BBC iPlayer. Analysis of the British Council’s posts about Shakespeare Lives and engagement with them on Facebook and VK covered the period from Shakespeare Day to the end of June, studying the themes and level of engagement with posts by British Council Russia, and comparing this with other cultural relations organisations. In the second phase of our research we studied tweets (covering the period 1 May to 17 September) about two Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns in Russia: the [Midsummer Nights Festival](#), which was launched by Sir Ian McKellen, and [Shakespeare on the Moscow Metro](#). In the third phase of our research we continued to analyse tweets about the Metro, also looking at other events and campaigns specific to Russia such as the ‘[Shakesperiad](#)’ campaign, which included a series of educational competitions. During the second and third phases of our research we continued to study the promotion of and engagement with Shakespeare Lives on British Council Russia’s Facebook and VK pages, also comparing this with the role of partner organisations and ambassadors in stimulating engagement with the programme.

1.1 Summary of Findings: Twitter

- **Russian Twitter users tend to share information, links and opinions on the platform**, but do not usually engage in longer, in-depth discussions on the topics related to Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives. Comparatively few tweets reflected on the values that Shakespeare Lives sought to associate with Britain (12%). The vast majority of tweets were neutral in tone.
- **The most common value that was reflected or pointed out in the tweets related to Shakespeare Lives was creativity.** Twitter users admired the creative nature of Shakespeare Lives events; the high quality of the programme, a sense of mutuality, the welcoming nature and enjoyability of Shakespeare Lives events were the next most commonly expressed values.
- **The reach of the Shakespeare Lives programme was wide**, and we noted significant generational differences in responses. People of various backgrounds, and located across Russia and the Russian diaspora, shared their messages about Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives. As a general rule, younger people (high school and university students) tended to express emotions and report engaging with Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns, while older groups were more likely to be discursive and provide intellectual opinions in their messages.

1.2 Summary of Findings: Facebook and VKontakte (VK)

- British Council Russia shared a variety of high-quality content on its Facebook and VK accounts, which appealed to diverse audiences. British Council Russia's content, and general patterns of follower engagement with it, were almost identical on both platforms. **British Council Russia have not adopted different strategies for these two platforms.**
- **There were low levels of engagement with British Council Russia's content on Facebook and VK:** lower numbers of likes, shares and comments than the main British Council Facebook page in English, but higher than other cultural diplomacy accounts in Russian, such as British Council Kazakhstan and the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation. Typically, the reaction of followers of British Council Russia Facebook and VK pages ranges from dozens to hundreds of likes, and often multiple shares.
- **The highest levels of public engagement were noted in the posts sharing contests and resources.** Posts about Shakespeare Lives often included positive reviews of various elements of the programme, and expressed gratitude to the organisers. Many of the users who commented asked practical questions about Shakespeare Lives events and content. Very few negative comments were observed, and these mostly disputed results of contests.

- **There were few discussions about Britain or British culture**, and comments largely constituted short expressions of emotion rather than extended discussions with British Council Russia or other members of the public.
- **Audiences were most excited about posts featuring celebrities, strong audio-visual elements, or useful/quirky content.** Posts such as BBC Russia's video of Sir Ian McKellen riding the train in the Moscow metro were a good example of bringing all of these elements together to promote a meaningful conversation among followers.

1.3 Recommendations

1. **Use competitions to drive engagement and feedback.** Hosting competitions that prompt public responses to and evaluation of a programme offers an incentive for people to share their memories, photos and experiences. This would provide both additional engagement with a programme, and meaningful feedback for the British Council on various elements of it.
2. **Keep the tone positive and content engaging.** Create appealing and interesting posts targeting diverse audiences.
3. **Do not use social media mainly for public relations and information, but strive to engage audiences.** This requires a greater investment of resources and training. If the British Council invites responses from audiences, then it is very important to respond to their questions and comments.
4. **Rely on strong visual elements and topical content** to engage a wider range of audiences in conversation, and regularly prompt them to share content.
5. **Create opportunities to harness the potential of social media to reach new audiences.**
6. **Develop closer cooperation with cultural partners and government organisations, celebrities and media personas, and mass-media channels.** Their influence over social media audiences is usually much larger than that of British Council Russia, which means they can help to promote the British Council's messages to the wider public.
7. **Go to where the audiences you want to reach are, and do not always expect them to come to you.** Share content with specific interest groups on Facebook and VK depending on the topic to reach wider audiences and potentially increase the following of British Council pages. If other events and pages are created on Facebook and VK, promote them more widely.
8. **Be clear about who you are trying to reach**

Phase One: Shakespeare Day

This section of the Shakespeare Lives in Russian report sets out our analysis of conversation in Russian around the Shakespeare Lives programme on Twitter during 22-25 April 2016, the weekend around Shakespeare Day. This case was selected for analysis as celebrations of Shakespeare Day drove a peak in discussion of Shakespeare across our languages of interest. This section of the Shakespeare Lives in Arabic report sets out our analysis of conversation in Arabic around the Shakespeare Lives programme on Twitter during 22-25 April 2016, the weekend around Shakespeare Day. This case was selected for analysis as celebrations of Shakespeare Day drove a peak in discussion of Shakespeare across our languages of interest (Arabic, English, Mandarin, Russian and Spanish). This section of our report also studies how the British Council used Facebook and VK to promote Shakespeare Lives during this period and the earlier stages of the programme more broadly until the end of June, how members of the public engaged with different types of post, and how this compares with the level of engagement received by other cultural relations organisation.

This analysis finds that during the period around Shakespeare Day, Russian-speakers on Twitter shared the following: the news about Shakespeare's anniversary, quotes from Shakespeare plays, quizzes and fact lists related to Shakespeare, facts and controversies surrounding the life of Shakespeare, and audiovisual materials such as videos showing readings of Shakespeare's works. Others reported their engagement with Shakespeare Lives or Shakespeare more broadly, in most cases saying that they were studying the playwright in school, with some also reporting their attendance of a Shakespeare play or a Shakespeare Lives event, and other sharing audiobooks or other Shakespeare-related materials. Those who reported their active engagement with Shakespeare Lives or the works of Shakespeare were mostly younger people in school or university. While Russian Twitter users share a lot of information, links, and opinions, they generally do not engage in broader discussions of topics related to Shakespeare. They also rarely use the hashtag associated with the Shakespeare Lives programme, #ShakespeareLives. About 20 percent of tweets associated the Shakespeare Lives programme or Shakespeare with creativity (through various art/theatre/creative events), and mutuality (due to Shakespeare's connection to Britain, and to bring up Russian and British cultures in some way). In contrast, few tweets associated Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives with the other values the British Council sought to promote through the programme, diversity, innovation, or welcoming, and few stated that the programme itself was valuable by referring to its usefulness, enjoyability, or quality.

We also found that Shakespeare Lives content on the British Council Russia Facebook and VK pages was varied (although almost identical on both platforms) and mostly of a high-quality, appealing to diverse audiences. Posts about Shakespeare Lives events and content receive similar numbers of likes and shares as content on other topics. Comments on Shakespeare Lives posts are often direct answers to the questions posed by the page administrators (for example, what is your favourite Shakespeare's play?), sharing a reaction about an upcoming event (usually excitement), asking questions about events, and asking questions and sharing opinions about hosted contests.

Page administrators on both platforms are very good at responding to these comments, which is very important in creating the feeling of a conversation and a sense of openness to British Council Russia. The conversations do not tend to be extensive, and typically do not include more than two mutual replies; however, the followers' queries appear satisfied. The level of followers' engagement with British Council Russia's content overall is not extensive, with lower numbers of likes, shares and comments than the main British Council Facebook page in English, but higher than the other cultural diplomacy accounts in Russian we evaluated: British Council Kazakhstan and *Russkiy Mir* Foundation. Typically, the response from followers of the British Council Russia Facebook and VK pages ranges from dozens to hundreds of likes and often multiple shares (sometimes over 30, or more).

2 Methods

2.1 Twitter

Using Sysomos MAP, we obtained tweets over the period of four consecutive days, 22–25 April 2016, the weekend around Shakespeare Day. The search for tweets in the Russian language used the following keywords:

Шекспир OR Шекспира OR Шекспиру OR Шекспире OR Шекспиром OR Шекспириада OR "Shakespeare Lives" OR Shakespearelives OR ("годовщина памяти" AND 400).

(Various spelling of Shakespeare's last name depending on the grammatical case used, Shakespearriad, or ShakespeareLives, or commemoration).

Of 7,258 (excluding retweets) tweets returned by the query, 1,000 were randomly selected for interpretative coding and analysis. A Russian-speaking researcher then individually analysed collected tweets according to the project's coding framework (see the Summary of Methodology document for more information on our approach and full coding frameworks)

2.2 Facebook and VK

The analysis of Facebook and VK¹ Russian language engagement with Shakespeare Lives is based on British Council Russia's [Facebook](#) and [VK](#) pages. Additionally, [Facebook](#) and [VK](#) accounts of British Council Kazakhstan and [Russkiy Mir Foundation](#) (Russian World Foundation, Russia's cultural diplomacy institution) were explored for comparison with British Council Russia's social media strategy. All other British Council Facebook and VK accounts in the republics of the former Soviet Union share their content either in the official language of the country (for example in Ukrainian for British Council Ukraine, or in Georgian for British Council Georgia) or in English (for instance British Council Uzbekistan). They were not included in the Russian language analysis for this reason. Our analysis looks at the themes of British Council Russia posts about Shakespeare Lives on Facebook and VK and the level of engagement with these different posts, comparing this with engagement with other types of British Council content and other cultural relations organisations. This covers the period from the Shakespeare Day celebrations until the end of June, covering Sir Ian McKellen's visit to Russia to participate in the Midsummer Nights Festival.

¹ 'VKontakte' [InContact] is a popular Russia-based social media platform very similar to Facebook, with over 350 million users around the world.

2.3 Notes On Coding for Values

It is important to note that five main values the British Council sought to associate with Britain through the Shakespeare Lives programme (diversity, innovation, welcoming, creativity, mutuality) were interpreted by the researcher in the same fashion as other languages using the project coding framework (see the Summary of Methodology document). Following the team discussion after the coding process, we found that the following two values had been understood slightly more widely in the Russian tweets:

- Creativity: users implicitly or explicitly evoke the notion of creativity (issues or events related to the world of arts, culture, and literature), and/or using imagination to create something new.
- Mutuality: users implicitly or explicitly note some aspect of multiculturalism, the international nature of described figure, event, or phenomenon; or the sharing of a feeling, action, or relationship between two or more nations and/or identities (especially between Britain and Russia).

3 Findings and Analysis

3.1 Twitter

The social media activity investigated for the Shakespeare Lives programme in Russian was extensive across all studied platforms. We discovered both positive and negative aspects of the promotion of and engagement with the programme. British Council Russia's Twitter account (@ruBritish) was very active in the period around Shakespeare Day, tweeting multiple times a day with varied content. The account has a relatively high number of followers (over 5,000), sharing updates on the Shakespeare Lives programme in Russian and other posts related to British culture, history, and the English language.

One of the most startling findings from the Russian language tweets is that, in our sample analysed, there were zero posts from this account, or any other public posts directly engaging with posts from this account or including a direct reference to the British Council in the body of the tweet. This in itself does not necessarily reflect negatively on British Council Russia's social media strategy for the Shakespeare Lives programme. Instead, it may suggest that Russian-language conversations and messages focused on Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives-related activities were so diverse and large in quantity that the corpus of 1,000 we analysed simply did not include any of the British Council Russia-initiated conversations on Twitter. However, it still seems somewhat surprising. Only a handful, fewer than 2%, of captured tweets had a reference to the British Council in the body of a shared news story. This suggests the British Council was at the margins of the Shakespeare Lives Twitter conversation in Russian.

3.1.1 Most Common Types of Tweets

Overall, the majority of tweets in our sample fell within one of the following categories:

- 1) Sharing the fact that it is Shakespeare's birthday – often with a link to a news story, or an existing biography page, but rarely mentioning events. Some posts also acknowledged the significance of Shakespeare's cultural contribution, appreciation of the quality of his works and the joy they bring to the readers. Here is an example:



 Follow

Сегодня 400 лет со дня смерти великого драматурга Шекспира. Сколько же мудрости в его фразах!)
#Shakespeare400

Image 1: Tweet about the anniversary of Shakespeare's death

Translation for Image 1 above: "Today is 400 years since the date of death of the great playwright Shakespeare. So much wisdom in his words! 😊 #Shakespeare400". The account of this user seems to belong to an online store, which advertises its products and occasionally posts on various unrelated topics.

- 2) Sharing a direct quotation from Shakespeare's works: 23% of all tweets.
- 3) A very large portion of all tweets investigated shared links to one of the following external pages without further engagement with Shakespeare Lives activities or Britain:
 - Collections of "best" Shakespeare quotes;
 - Quizzes (i.e. which character would you be in Shakespeare's works);
 - Other lists (i.e. list of Shakespeare's places in England);
 - Videos of present-day actors' reading of Shakespeare's works (both English-language and Russian-language videos). For example:

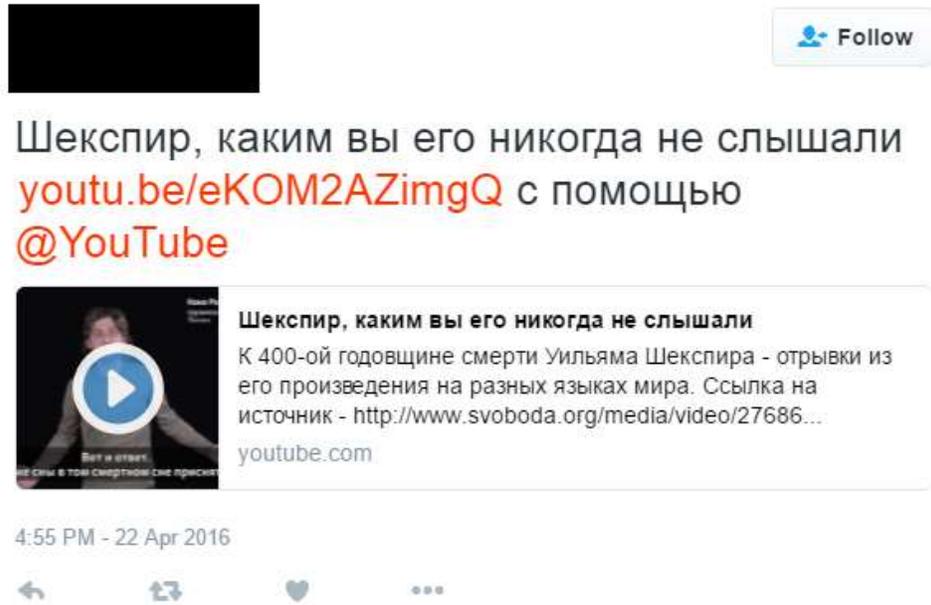


Image 2: Tweet sharing a YouTube video of actors performing Shakespeare's works

Translation for Image 2 above: “Shakespeare like you’ve never heard before [link] with the help of @YouTube”. Link description: “Dedicated to 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare’s death – excerpts from his works in different languages”.

- 4) Reporting some form of engagement with Shakespeare and his works:
 - Studying for exams, writing essays in school based on his works, or reporting an education event. For example:

Follow

25 апреля- Всероссийский день Шекспира в рамках Года языка и литературы в России.



3:25 AM - 25 Apr 2016



Image 3: Tweet showing Russian schoolchildren learning about Shakespeare

Translation for Image 3 above: “25 of April: All-Russia day of Shakespeare held as part of the Year of language and literature in Russia”. The attached picture shows elementary school students learning about Shakespeare during the lesson. The account belongs to a Russian public school.

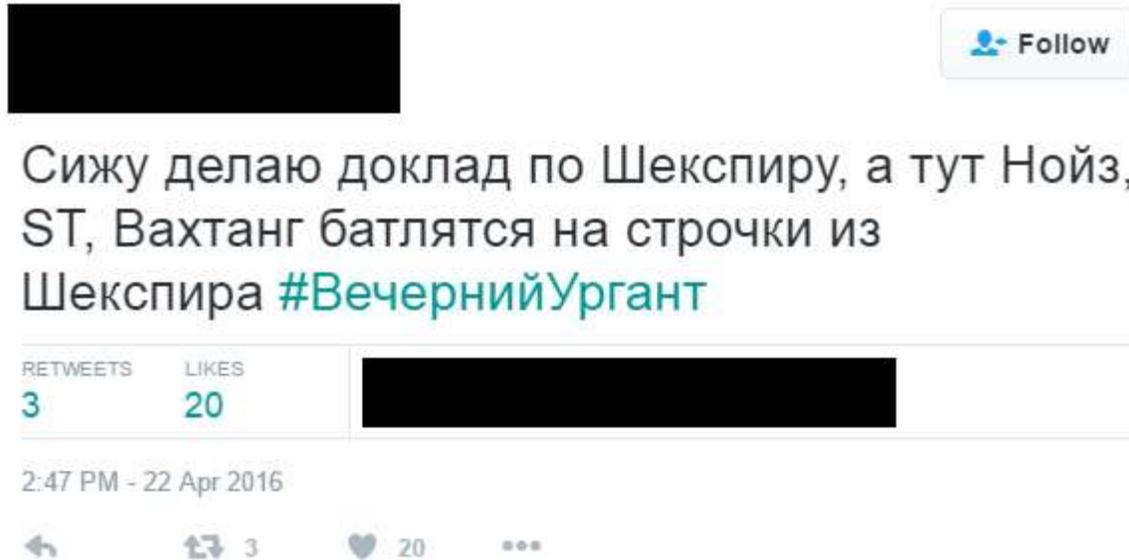


Image 4: Tweet about learning about Shakespeare

Translation for Image 4 above: “I am sitting and writing an essay on Shakespeare and there is Noiz and Vachtang [Russian rap performers] battle using Shakespeare’s lines #NightUrgant”. The account belongs to a high school student with an interest in popular culture. The NightUrgant hashtag refers to the popular Late Night with Ivan Urgant TV show, on which the mentioned Shakespeare-inspired “rap battle” took place.

- Few posts mentioned attending plays, or watching Shakespeare Day Live. For example:

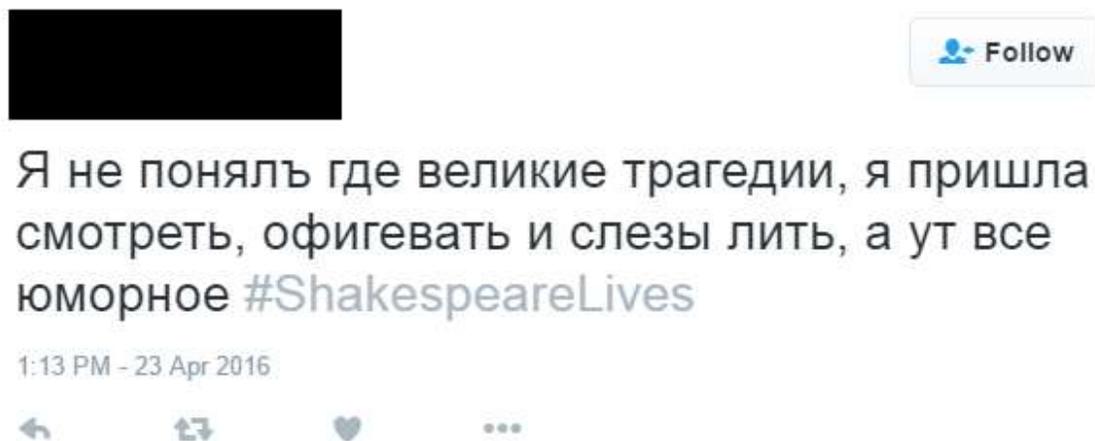


Image 5: Tweet about watching Shakespeare Day Live

Translation for Image 5 above: “I don’t understand, where are the great tragedies: I came here to watch, be impressed and cry my tears, and everything here is humourous #ShakespeareLives”. The account belongs to a university student, who comments on popular culture and literature, often jokingly.

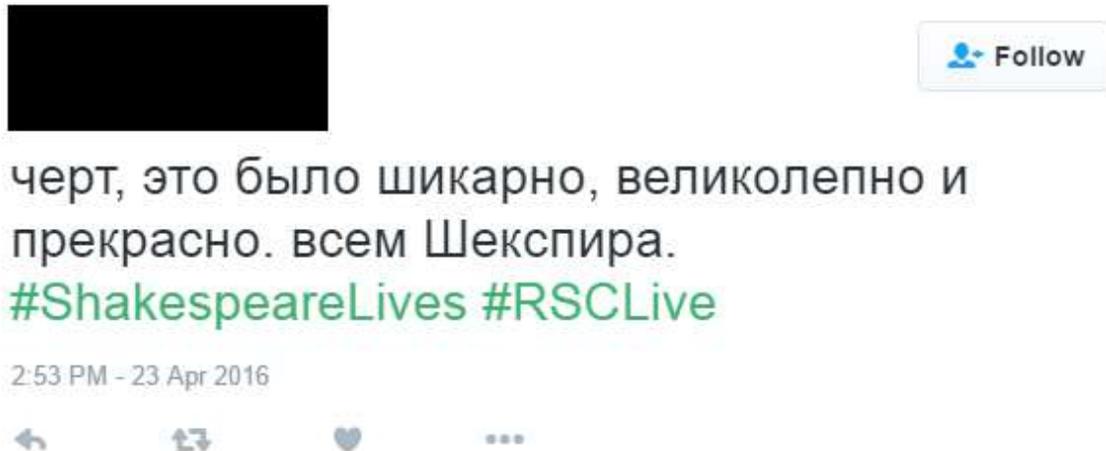


Image 6: Tweet about watching Shakespeare Day Live

Translation for Image 6 Above: “Damn, this was chic, fabulous and delightful. Shakespeare to All! #ShakespeareLives #RSCLive.” This comment was provided by a student interested in a wide variety of topics, commenting on anything from popular culture and literature to sports.

- Sharing questions about him and his works (i.e. what is *Romeo and Juliet* about?)
 - Sharing links to audiobooks, summaries of contents, or full bodies of work (often unlicensed).
- 5) Sharing a link to a page or posing a question including one of the controversies surrounding the life and works of Shakespeare: Did he live at all? Who wrote his plays? Was Shakespeare a woman?

3.2 Overview of Findings

The vast majority of users, over 60% of all tweets, came from Europe, particularly Russia and Ukraine.² Only a small portion of users were located in other parts of the world, such as North America, or Asia. It is plausible to think that a large portion of users who did not disclose their location in their profile, over 30% of all posts, were also based in Europe (most likely Russia or Ukraine).

Out of all the tweets by members of the public, just under a quarter had a focus on Britain. Of those tweets, a quarter also had a simultaneous focus on the Shakespeare Lives programme. Shakespeare was the focus of 100% of the investigated tweets because of the keywords and the dates used during the collection of data.

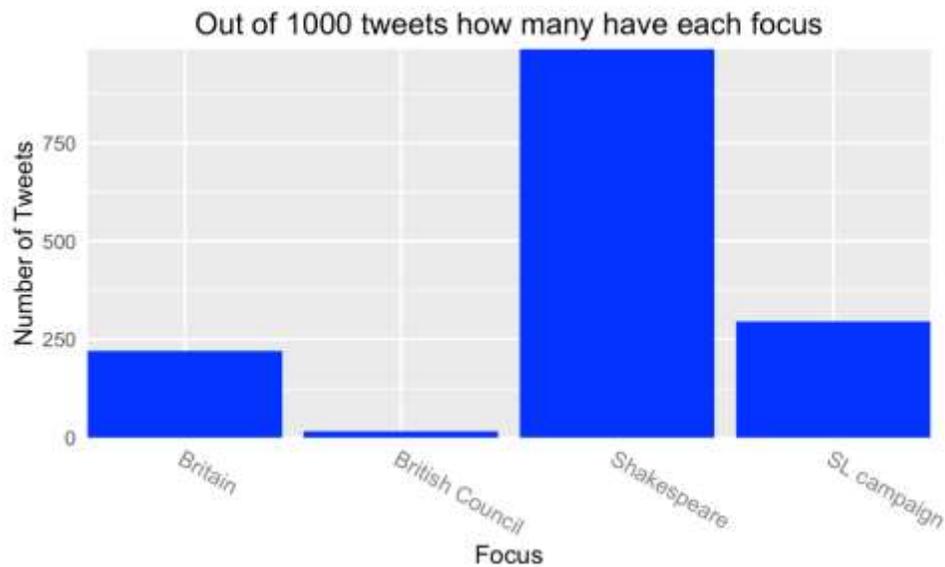


Figure 1: Number of tweets by focus

² For the purposes of simplicity, all users from Russia, whether from its European or Asian geographical parts, were considered to be located in Europe.

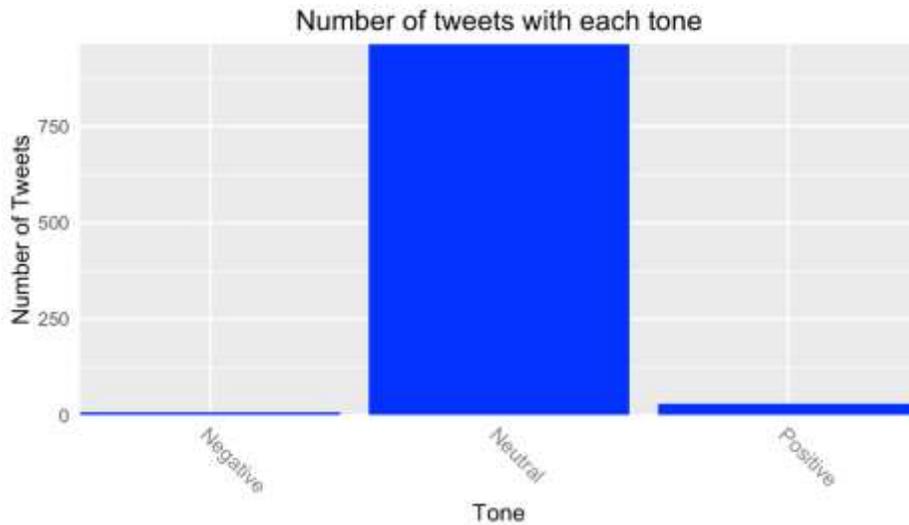


Figure 2: Number of tweets by tone

As Figure 2 above shows, the vast majority of tweets were neutral in sentiment, while only a handful of tweets (less than three percent) were positive, such as expressing being impressed by Shakespeare Lives events or campaigns, and only a few (less than 1%) were negative. Images 7 and 8 below show examples of a tweet coded as positive, and a tweet coded as negative.

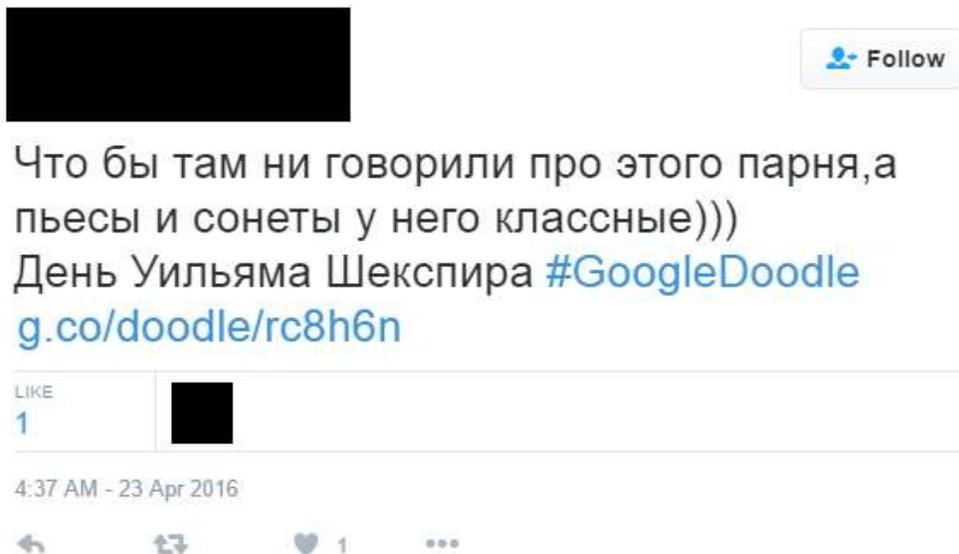


Image 7: Example of a positive tweet

Translation for Image 7 above: “Whatever they say about this guy, his plays and sonnets are great © William Shakespeare Day [Link to the Shakespeare Google Doodle]” This post belongs to an

ethnographic researcher and blogger tweeting on various Russian and international topics around policy and anthropology.

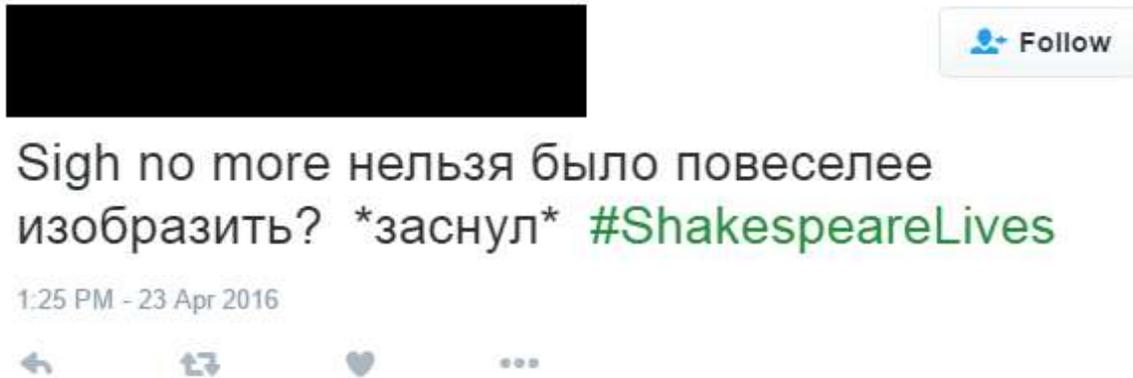


Image 8: Example of a negative tweet

*Translation: "So there is no way to make Sigh No More livelier? *fell asleep* #ShakespeareLives" This user is likely to be providing their opinion on the musical performance of ['Sigh No More'](#) during the Shakespeare Live! broadcast. The comment was provided by a user who seems to be a fan of British TV shows, a traveller, who provides opinions on various world news.*

The vast majority of tweets analysed were simply tweets (about 93%), even though some of them were exact copies of tweets from other accounts (an estimated 20% of all tweets). Only a fraction of posts were replies to other users (6%), and a handful (less than 1%), commented retweets. The most common type of tweets, over 80%, were those promoting or providing information about Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives, for example, by sharing the information that it was Shakespeare's birthday, or sharing a quotation from his works. Less than 10% of tweets offered an opinion (see Images 7 and 8 above for examples), or provided any other type of reaction. One clear conclusion from such a heavy representation of tweets over replies and commented retweets is that Russian-speaking Twitter users tend to share information, links and opinions on the platform, but do not tend to engage in larger, in-depth discussions on topics related to Shakespeare.

One particular problem was the prevalence of bot-account-generated messages: about 10% of the tweets we analysed were spam tweets which included mentions of Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives. These tweets often contained the same content, word for word either in part or in full, as some of the posts by "real" people or organisations. They also included an unrelated link or

message, sometimes advertising a service or product. 10% may be low for the bot-dominated Russian Twittersphere,³ but these bot messages must still be manually detected and removed.

Alternative media/blogger accounts seemed to have followed a similar strategy. They tweeted the same message, word for word, as some of the other media sources, but did not always include the link to the news story webpage from the original post. Although both the alternative media/citizen journalist/blogger and bot-generated posts could be seen as problem for communicating meaningful messages about Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives in the “sea of Twitter noise”, such Twitter activity could potentially be harnessed in a positive way. If messages from official accounts with desired, trusted content, such as links to official pages with information about events and programmes, do get picked up by such actors and shared to their followers then they reach larger audiences. It seems that the best strategy to achieve this is to regularly tweet trusted content and share it with partner or related organisations as much as possible, who could, in turn, share it with their followers. Some of them may be “parasite” or “hijacking” Twitter accounts that nevertheless could further spread the message.

3.2.1 Most Frequently Discussed Topics

Unfortunately, very few of the tweets we analysed made reference to the values of diversity, innovation, and being welcoming. However, the values of creativity and mutuality were much more prominent: over 20% of all posts related to each of these values.

Posts about performances and other arts-related events, such as exhibition openings, were common. For example:

³ Sergey Sanavoch (2016) ‘Automated detection of bots in the Russian Twittersphere’, George Washington University, Washington DC, 21 April. Sanavoch noted there are almost as many anti-Putin bots in the Russian Twittersphere as pro-Putin bots; this points to the ubiquity and normalisation of bots in that environment.



 Follow

Известные актёры и принц Чарльз
посоревновались в чтении Шекспира на
британском телешоу -
24videonews.ru/2016/04/25/%d0 ...



11:42 AM - 25 Apr 2016

Image 9: Example of tweet referring to creativity

Translation for Image 9 above: "Famous actors and Prince Charles competed in reading Shakespeare on British television." The tweet by an alternative news blog shared a short news story about the BBC's production during the Shakespeare Lives launch day with a video.

References to mutuality were prevalent in tweets seemingly because of Shakespeare's English origin, implicit connection to British culture, and the English language. Many of these tweets reflected an aspect of internationalism, and an interest in British history, culture, and language, as well as Shakespeare's influence on them. For example:



 Follow

Шекспир и Пушкин: война миров

Западный эгоизм против Русского бессмертия Широки [#РусскийМир](#)
vremya4e.com/world/36459-sh ...



5:55 AM - 25 Apr 2016

Image 10: Example of tweet referring to mutuality

Translation for Image 10 above: “Shakespeare and Pushkin: War of the Worlds. Western Egoism against Russian immortality. #RussianWorld [Image with the poets’ portraits and caption: “classics of world literature”]. The post links to an opinionated blog post comparing Russian and European cultures and both Shakespeare’s and Pushkin’s contributions to shaping their respective cultures. The post is shared from an account of a blogger who posts other similar pro-Russian nationalist content.

Some posts suggested the universalism of Shakespeare’s world and legacy, and a mutuality between English, Russian, and international cultures. For example:

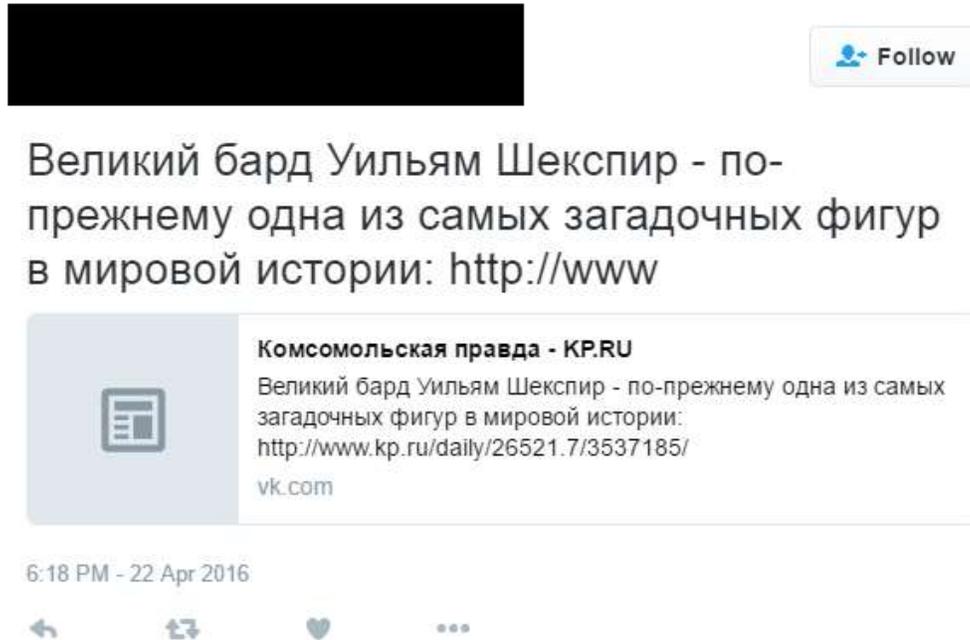


Image 11: Example of a tweet referring to mutuality

Translation for Image 11 above: “The great bard William Shakespeare is still one of the most mysterious figures in the world history (link to a mainstream paper article about mysteries surrounding Shakespeare)”. The post was shared by a news blog.

Few tweets reflected on or were welcoming in nature (such as inviting others to attend an event). In terms of commenting on the value of the Shakespeare Lives programme, only a few more tweets, less than 1%, shared an appreciation of the quality of Shakespeare Lives-related programming (including the posts reporting engagement above). No tweets shared an appreciation of the usefulness of Shakespeare Lives social media posts or other content. Very few members of the public adopted #ShakespeareLives in their tweets.

Finally, some of the events that caused Russian-speaking Twitter users to post most frequently were the opening of a British portrait exhibition in Moscow’s Tretyakov Gallery, the opening of the Shakespeare Day Vnukovo library exhibition, a Shakespeare education day held at Moscow schools, the sketch with a Shakespeare’s works-inspired “rap battle” on TV Show *Vecherniy Urgant*, the Shakespeare-inspired [Google doodle](#), and the celebrations of the Queen’s anniversary in Britain.

Overall, those few Twitter users who included #ShakespeareLives or discussed the Shakespeare Lives programme specifically in their messages seemed to be university students with a general interest in international popular culture, since they also comment on foreign TV shows and literature. British Council Russia’s varied content on its social media channels already appeals to these users; perhaps the challenge is to attract them to follow the British Council Russia pages.

Other types of posts, tweeting more broadly about Shakespeare and his legacy, were shared by a range of various types of tweeters.

3.3 Facebook and VK

3.3.1 Overview

British Council Russia's Facebook and VK pages have large numbers of followers, 86,817 and 24,274 respectively.⁴ The page administrators of both share a wide variety of often-identical posts on a frequent basis, often several times a day. The content of posts covers all aspects of British Council Russia's activity in the country, and also shares Britain-related news, trivia, and other useful links covering a wide spectrum of topics, from culture, history and travel, to the English language, and sometimes even a combination of these. For example, a popular post shared the news that it was both Winnie-the-Pooh and the Queen's anniversaries, and shared illustrations that reimagined Winnie and his friends attending various parts of the Queen's anniversary celebrations. The post received 264 likes and 102 shares on British Council Russia's VK page, one of the highest numbers for all posts on the Russian-language British Council pages in the investigated period. Curiously, however, the post did not receive any comments. In comparison, British Council Russia's post asking their followers to name their favourite British music artists prompted followers on both Facebook and VK to comment much more actively: 23 comments with band and artist names on VK and 16 comments on Facebook, which is significantly higher than the several comments posted on average in response to other posts. This demonstrates that Facebook and VK followers of British Council Russia react differently to different types of posts.

Such varied topics covered by the Facebook and VK pages appeal to a wide variety of audiences: from high school students interested in tools to help them learn English, to fans of British celebrities, to people enjoying world literature and popular culture, to those who have a general interest in the UK (as can be seen in examples provided below). Overall, content related to the Shakespeare Lives programme and Shakespeare in general generates a similar level of interest in comparison to posts on other topics. Typically, the reaction of followers ranges from dozens to hundreds of likes and often multiple shares: sometimes over 30, or more.

The followers' engagement with Shakespeare Lives-related content, however, does seem somewhat limited. While posts on Shakespeare Lives events, contests and updates do receive a lot

⁴ While these numbers are significantly lower than the main British Council Facebook page in English, which has over 1.7 million followers, they reach more people than the Russia-based cultural diplomacy organisation *Russkiy Mir Foundation* [Russian World Foundation] via its VK and Facebook page which have 2,500 and 7,700 followers respectively. Similarly, the British Council Russia pages on Facebook and VK have more followers than British Council Kazakhstan—the only other Russian-language British Council Facebook page—which have 32,900 and 5,300 followers respectively.

of reaction by way of liking and sharing the posts, the engagement of followers by way of commenting on these posts is not extensive, and follows several patterns, described below.

One of the very positive aspects of British Council Russia's social media presence, including its Facebook and VK pages, is the high level of responsiveness to public comments made on posts. The administrators seem to quickly and appropriately respond to the various questions and comments made by followers, whether they are positive or negative in nature. This certainly helps not only to answer the actual questions users may have about Shakespeare Lives events and programming, but also creates the sense of a real conversations between regular members of the public in Russia and the organisation, promoting cultural exchange between Britain and Russia.

3.3.2 Shakespeare Lives Posts That Generated Most Engagement

Some of the main spikes in engagement with British Council Russia's posts about Shakespeare Lives included:

- 1) A programme announcement for the Midsummer Nights Festival in June, which included Sir Ian McKellen's participation in film screenings of *Richard III* in Moscow, St Petersburg and Ekaterinburg. Some of the examples of related posts and followers' comments can be seen below:



Image 12: British Council Russia post announcing Sir Ian McKellen's visit to Russia

Translation for Image 12 above: "Famous Gandalf, British actor Ian McKellen, is coming to Moscow, Ekaterinburg and St Petersburg. Together with us, on June 21 the actor will open the 'Shakespeare in Midsummer Night' festival – one of the main events of the #ShakespeareLives

programme, which is held in conjunction with the commemoration of Shakespeare's 400th anniversary of death and the Year of Language and Literature of Russia and Great Britain 2016. On June 22 at Gogol-Centre Ian McKellen will present his film Richard III (1995), in which he played the lead role. In addition, the actor will tell the spectators about his experience playing Shakespeare characters: at just 12 years old he debuted in the role of Malvolio, and since then he was an actor in most plays of the bard. Tickets are already on sale and are going fast!"

This post (see Image 12 above) resulted in 146 reactions (likes, love and surprised), 32 shares and 11 comments. The comments included practical questions about the details of the screenings, such as when the St. Petersburg screening will take place and whether volunteers will be needed, and statements of general excitement. However, these are not deep, elaborate statements of appreciation of the event, but rather simple happy emoji faces and words of thanks to the British Council.

A similar post by British Council Russia on their VK page generated 94 likes, 17 shares, and 19 comments. Although the number of comments is relatively high, they again were not substantial. Comments included appreciation of the event organisers, users stating that they already purchased tickets, and happy face emojis. Some of the negative comments on this post focused on not being able to get tickets. British Council Russia and other members of the public promptly responded to these concerns. Additionally, followers asked about the format of the screening, and the availability of similar events in other Russian cities.

A personal friend of the researcher, who attended the film screening and talk with Sir Ian McKellen in Ekaterinburg, posted the following opinion on their own Facebook wall:

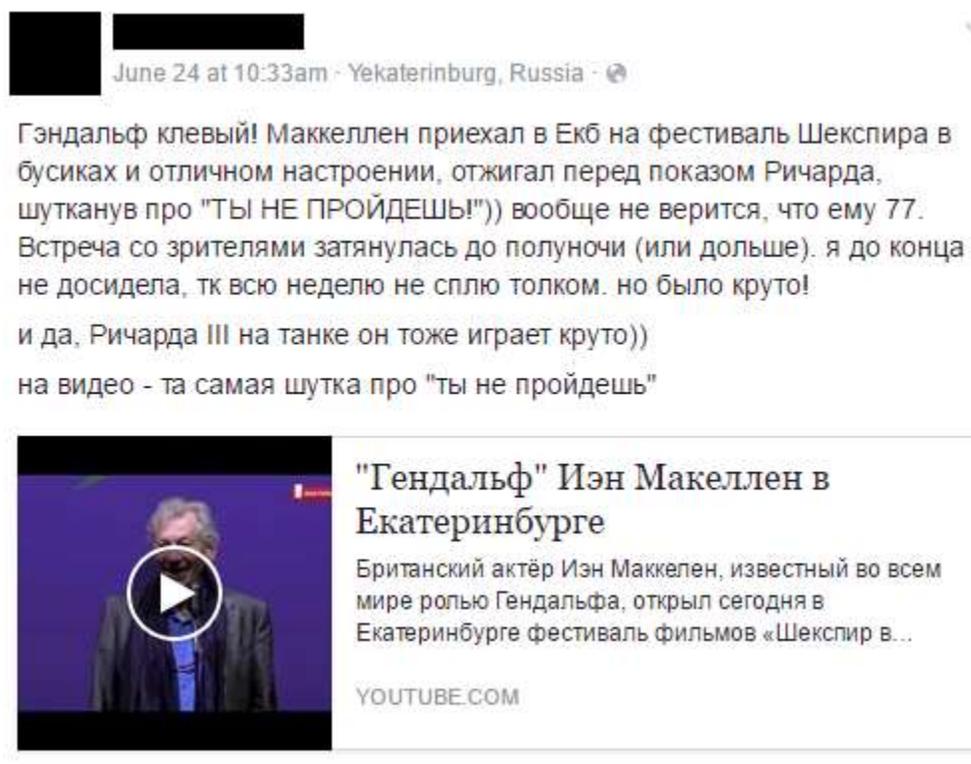


Image 13: Facebook post by member of the public about Sir Ian McKellen's talk in Ekaterinburg

Translation for Image 13 above: “Gandalf is cool! McKellen arrived in Ekaterinburg for the Shakespeare festival wearing beads and was in great spirits, he was just on fire before the showing of Richard, joking ‘You shall not pass!’ ☺ It is hard to believe that he is 77. The meeting with spectators lasted until the middle of the night (or even longer). I did not stay until the end, because I do not sleep well. But it was cool! And yes, he plays Richard III on a tank also very charmingly ☺ And this is the video with the ‘You shall not pass’ joke.”

This direct observation of a Shakespeare Lives event by a young Russian professional gives an example of the sense of excitement that an event such as Ian McKellen’s creates. Celebrities help create this positive impression, and spread the Shakespeare connection. They might therefore increase and improve personal experiences with the British culture among members of the public in Russia, even if they do not discuss Britain directly.

2) Re:Shakespeare contest results;

British Council Russia ran a contest from March to May 2016, asking participants to create adaptations of Shakespeare’s works in modern times, for example, asking how his characters would fare in everyday situations of today, or how one would rewrite a portion of Shakespeare’s great works in the conditions of the modern world. The contest prompted several updates from the British Council Russia administrators throughout its duration. The engagement in the early stages was limited to questions around the rules and deadlines of the contest. However, considerable reaction met the British Council Russia post on both Facebook and VK pages naming the winners and titles of their projects, along with a brief description of the grand prize winner’s submission. The winner contributed a rework of the plays *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, as if narrated by a modern person using Google’s ‘Ok Google’ voice search function. The following is an excerpt from [the winning submission](#):

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo:

Ok Google

Are there any places around where I can hang out with mates?

Ok Google

How to pick up a girl?

Ok Google

Is there a way to engage in secret?

Ok Google

Quick and easy fencing tutorial

Juliet:

Ok Google

Is it okay to kiss on first date?

Ok Google

Which age is appropriate for wedding?

Ok Google

Can I get married without parents' permission?

Laurence:

Ok Google

What medicine can trick everyone into thinking that you are dead while you are just asleep?

The VK followers' reaction to this post included 44 likes, six shares and 27 comments. Some of the comments can be seen below:



Image 14: A comment on A British Council Russia VK post, with British Council Russia reply

Translation for Image 14 above: "Reading these works one remembers that Shakespeare was a poet, but you do not see poetry in any of these works, neither monologue, nor rhymes... Just some dry prose of documents: a resume, a will, a protocol [police report], Google search terms, news feed, etc. 'An everyday' of today's Internet";

British Council Russia's response: "The users were following the rules of the contest"

Some users, like the example seen in Image 14 above, complained about their dissatisfaction with the works selected by the British Council Russia. Another set of followers, including the comment seen in Image 15 below, shared their own contest submissions, which were not among winners.

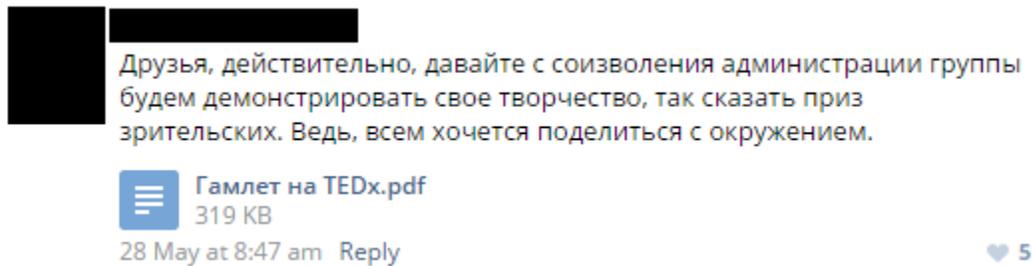


Image 15: A comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 15 above: “Friends, indeed, with the permission of administrators of this group, let’s share our creative work, for a so-called fan favourite prize. Because everybody wants to share with their peers [document attached: Hamlet at TED Talks]”.

The comment above received five likes, prompting another user to respond: “great idea with your submission [two thumbs up emoji]”. Several other users shared their contest submissions in the subsequent comments.

Finally, some of the other comments included simple congratulations to the contest winners. For example:

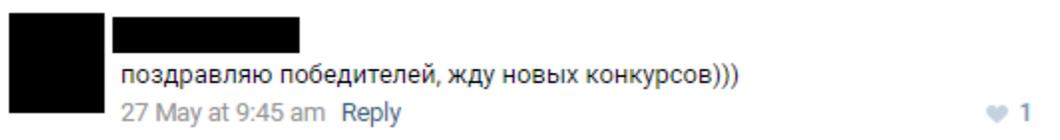


Image 16: A comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 16 above: “I congratulate the winners, and I wait for new contests (three happy face symbols)”.

Overall, despite the negative tone of some of the comments on this post, it provides us with evidence that contests seem to generate genuine interest from followers, and prompt them to share more elaborate comments and opinions.

3) Moscow Metro Shakespeare Lives-Themed Car Launch

The high-profile launch of a Shakespeare Lives-themed Moscow Metro car was dedicated to Shakespeare’s world as part of British Council Russia’s Shakespeare Lives programme. Several posts from British Council Russia on both their Facebook and VK pages were dedicated to the [Shakespeare on the Moscow Metro](#) campaign. The following VK post is an example of a post that successfully combined social media user engagement and sharing information about a high-profile Shakespeare Lives campaign in Russia:



Британский Совет (British Council Russia)



19 May at 4:29 pm

«Осторожно, двери закрываются. Следующая станция – «Дом Капулетти», платформа справа»!

Уже 24 мая в московском метро по Филёвской линии в рамках проектов "Поэзия метро" и #ArtMetro начнет курсировать наш тематический поезд, посвященный Уильяму Шекспиру! <http://bit.ly/Shakespeareinmetro>

А как звучали бы названия станций «шекспировского» метро в Москве? Появилась ли бы на карте станция «Глобус» вместо привычной «Театральной»? Стоит ли переименовать «Чистые пруды» в «Пруд Офелии»?

Оставляйте ваши предложения в комментариях до 14.00 23 мая + сделайте репост! Авторов самых оригинальных названий для московских станций мы будем рады пригласить на торжественный запуск поезда «Шекспировские страсти в метро» 24 мая (днём) и подарим специальный сувенирный набор!

#YoLL2016 #артметро #поэзиявметро #Shakespearelives

#шекспировскиестрасти

(В качестве иллюстраций - логотип нового супер-поезда и шекспировская карта лондонского метро)

Image 17: British Council Russia VK post about Shakespeare on the Moscow metro

Translation for Image 17 above: “‘Careful, the doors are now closing. The next station is ‘House of Capuletti,’ the platform will be on your right. [emulating announcements in Moscow metro]. Already on May 24 in Moscow metro on Filevskaya line a special thematic car dedicated to William Shakespeare will start to run as part of the ‘Poetry in Metro’ and ArtMetro campaigns. And how would the names of ‘Shakespeare’s’ metro sound in Moscow? Would there be a ‘Globe’ Station instead of the familiar ‘Theater’ station? Or should we rename ‘Chistye Prudy’ [Clear Ponds] into ‘Ophelia’s Pond’? Leave your suggestions in the comments and share this post until May 23! We will invite the authors of the most original names to the launch of the car ‘Shakespeare passions in metro’ on May 24 and will award them with a special gift. [Relevant hashtags, and images of the car included]”

Some of the creative responses by followers to this post included:

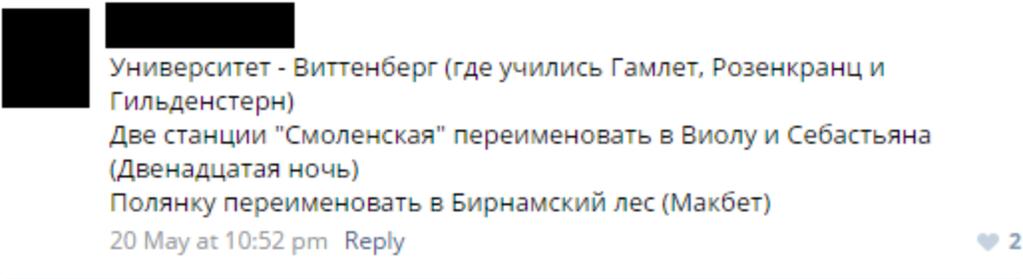


Image 18: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 18 above: “‘University’ – ‘Wittenberg’ (where Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern studied); Two stations ‘Smolenskaya’ rename into ‘Viola’ and ‘Sebastian’ (Twelfth Night); ‘Polianka’ [Little Clearing] rename into ‘Birnam Woods’ [Macbeth]”.

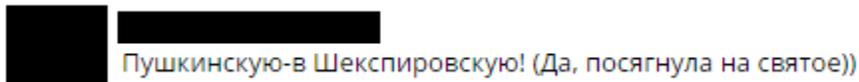


Image 19: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 19 above: “‘Pushkin’s’ station into ‘Shakespeare’s’, (Yes, I encroached against the sacred ☺)” The humorous addition suggesting that this is an almost “sacrilegious” renaming, reflecting that the figure of Shakespeare could be considered as important as the “sacred” figure of Pushkin to Russian culture.

While this and other Shakespeare Lives Moscow Metro campaign posts proved to be popular among followers of British Council Russia of Facebook and VK, it is useful to provide a comparison with posts about the campaign from other pages. A similar post about the Shakespeare metro car launch in Moscow on popular, news sharing microblog *Lentach’s* VK page, resulted in 5863 likes and 164 shares:



Лентач

24 May at 9:40 pm

В Москве запустили Шекспировский поезд. Смотрите, какой прикольный



В метро запустили Шек..

[View page](#)

Like 5863 Share 164

Image 20: Lentach VK post about Shakespeare on the Moscow metro

Translation for Image 20 above: “They launched a Shakespeare metro train in Moscow. Look how cool it is!” This community’s reaction to the post also included multiple comments such as attempts at sarcasm, memes, some positive responses, and humorous photoshopped images, and, undoubtedly, reached a much larger audience of young Russian social media users than British Council Russia’s posts. However, this again points to the manner in which British Council Russia and Shakespeare Lives content or activities gains a life beyond British Council Russia- and Shakespeare Lives-directed posts.

3.3.3 Other Russian-Language Cultural Diplomacy Institutions Pages

How does British Council Russia’s Facebook and VK presence, and the level of engagement with their posts, compare with other cultural relations institutions’ pages? The British Council Kazakhstan Facebook page, the only other Russian-language British Council Facebook page, shares very similar content to British Council Russia. One social media campaign that British Council Kazakhstan runs that British Council Russia does not is sharing weekly posts with Shakespeare quotations. The engagement with these posts does not seem extensive on British Council Kazakhstan pages: only several likes and shares, but no comments from their followers.

As sharing quotations seems to be popular with individual users on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, it still might be a useful campaign to adopt on the British Council Russia profile, which has a larger audience. If such posts also included links to relevant information on Shakespeare Lives events and programmes, this sharing activity could boost the size and engagement of audiences through Facebook and VK.

We also investigated the Facebook and VK pages of the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation (Russian World Foundation), Russia's cultural diplomacy organisation, to compare social media strategies and levels of engagement. The types of post these pages' administrators share are similar to those of the British Council Russian and Kazakhstan pages. Naturally, however, they focus on Russian rather than British popular culture, cultural legacy, history, education, the Russian language, and some other topics which do not have an equivalent in British Council Russia's newsfeeds, such as stories related to the Orthodox Church and Russia's military history.

Curiously, while the British Council Russia pages shared various information related to Shakespeare and the Shakespeare Lives programme in May and June 2016, *Russkiy Mir* shared similar types of posts, trivia, contests, and information about events, dedicated to the various celebrations and events held in conjunction with Alexander Pushkin's birthday celebrations on June 6. For example:



Image 21: *Russkiy Mir* Facebook post about Pushkin

Translation for Image 21 above: “‘Reading Pushkin in different languages’ event is held across the world. The programme is aimed at popularisation of Russian language and literature”.

This post received 60 likes and 12 shares, while one follower commented the following:

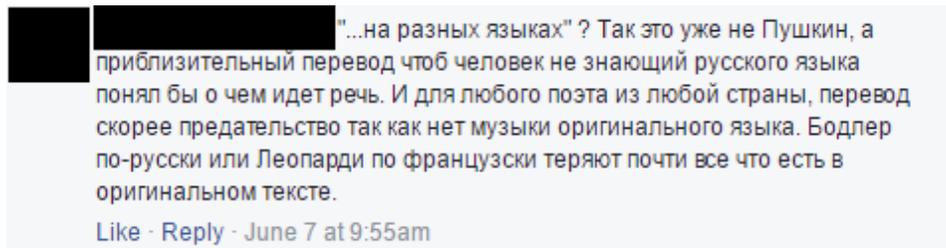


Image 22: Comment on a Russkiy Mir Facebook post

Translation for Image 22 above: “‘...in different languages’? This is then not Pushkin, but an approximate translation so that a person not knowing the Russian language could understand what is said in the original. And for any poet from any country a translation is more of a betrayal because there is no music of the original language. Boder in Russian or Leopardi in French lose all that is in the original text.”

Beyond this opinion, engagement with posts on Pushkin commemoration-related events are virtually non-existent in terms of followers’ comments. Moreover, engagement with all other types of posts on *Russkiy Mir*’s Facebook page are less extensive than on British Council Russia’s pages, as few posts receive more than one or two comments, and even those are rarely substantial in terms of opinion offered.

Similarly, on the *Russkiy Mir* VK page, very few post, many of them copies of the Facebook page posts, receive comments. One finding of interest is a public poll for the followers of the group, shown below:

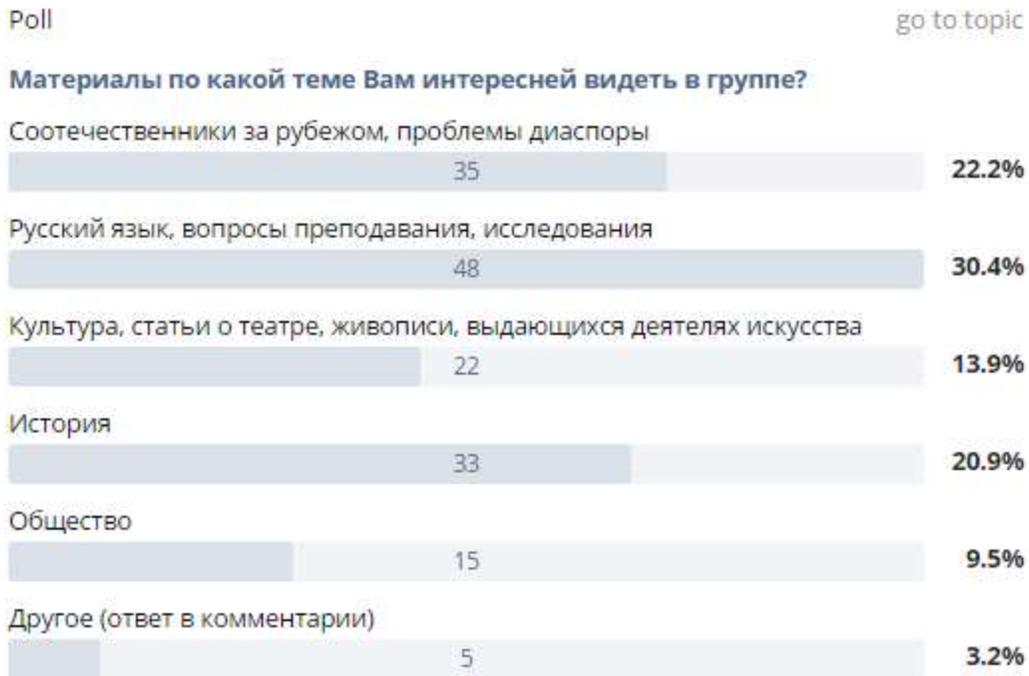


Image 23: *Russkiy Mir* VK post, sharing a user poll

The question in the poll shown in Image 23 above reads, “*Materials on what topics are you most interested in seeing [on our page]?*” The options with corresponding voting results are: Expats abroad, and the problems of diaspora (22%); Russian language, matters of teaching, research (30%); Culture, articles about theatre, fine arts, great artists (14%); History (21%); Society (10%); Other (3%). The preferences of the *Russkiy Mir*’s VK group followers may be of interest to the British Council Russia administrators, since they may have similar interests and curiosities, helping to determine what type of content followers may want to see in their feeds, and are more likely to like, share, and comment upon.

4 Conclusion

The posts generating the highest level of engagement (for both Shakespeare Lives-related and other content on British Council Russia Facebook and VK pages) include contests, questions to followers or other forms of active engagement with followers, announcements of events, practical tips, and audiovisual materials.

Engagement through comments was not characterised by extensive discussions on the role of Shakespeare or Britain. Most reactions were basic expressions of appreciation of the content, practical questions, and some concerns from the public.

British Council Russia must use hashtags more consistently. Some of the Shakespeare Lives-related posts use #Shakespeare400, others #ShakespeareLives, while some use both or other event-specific hashtags. This prevents the cumulative building of attention to and familiarity with hashtags that characterises effective use of Twitter. It is not always clear if there is a reason for the different hashtags, or if all posts should use both or one of these hashtags.

It may be that people who follow the British Council Russia on VK, Facebook and Twitter are inherently interested in some aspect of British culture, or British Council Russia itself, since they actively found the page to follow it. Based on the types of comments followers leave on posts, they are either generally interested in British history and culture, or are actively trying to learn the English language. This means that the page does not reach some of the users of VK and Facebook who may otherwise be interested in shared content but do not see it. British Council Russia could, therefore, consider either promoting the most important content that may be of interest to the wider public, not just those following the account, or attempting to feed such content into popular blogs, for example, news sharing microblogs like *Lentach* as appropriate.

Phases Two and Three: Shakespeare Lives in Russian

This section of the Shakespeare Lives in Russian report focuses on Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns in Russia, in particular the [Midsummer Nights Festival](#), [Shakespeare on the Moscow metro](#), the [Shakespeareiad](#) educational campaign, and the [Shakespeare. A Warning to the Kings](#) film shown on Channel One in Russia. In addition to studying tweets about these events and campaigns, we continued to study the promotion of and engagement with Shakespeare Lives through British Council Russia's Facebook and VK pages, comparing this with engagement with other types of British Council content. Having noted the important role of partner organisations and ambassadors in promoting the programme, we also examine engagement with Shakespeare Lives posts on their pages.

This analysis shows that tweets about the Midsummer Nights Festival were far more frequent than tweets about [Shakespeare on the Moscow metro](#), with interest in the former driven by talks given by Sir Ian McKellen during the festival. Tweets about the festival rarely expressed emotions, or reflected or referred to any of the values that the British council sought to promote through the Shakespeare Lives programme. While tweets about Shakespeare on the Moscow metro were less common, they were more likely to offer an opinion (for example by referring to the quality or creativity of the train, indicators of perceived value), or report engagement with this Shakespeare Lives campaign (for example by taking a selfie or checking in on the train). Tweets about Shakespeare on the Moscow metro were also mostly positive in tone. In contrast, the vast majority of all tweets coded during this period were neutral in tone, with only 0.4% expressing positive sentiment. Twitter users admired the creative nature of the festival and the metro train, making creativity the value most frequently referenced in tweets about the programme.

British Council Russia's Facebook and VK pages attracted similar levels of engagement with the same posts across the two platforms, though the Facebook page as around three times the number of followers than the VK page. British Council Page administrators shared a variety of posts on different topics, with appropriate inclusion of photo galleries, videos, and links, targeting diverse audiences. Overall, the content is well-written and has a positive, welcoming tone. Official hashtags for the campaigns were used consistently across the posts by British Council Russia. The most public engagement was noted in the posts sharing competitions and resources. Commons, while usually few in number, often included positive reviews of various elements of the campaigns and thanked the organisers. Many of the users who commented asked practical questions about the hosted events and programmes. Very few negative comments were observed, and these mostly disputed results of competitions. There were few elaborate discussions on Britain or British culture, and the comments largely constituted short expressions of emotions or opinions rather than extended discussions with British Council Russia or other members of general public. As we found in the first phase of research, audiences were most excited about posts featuring celebrities, strong audio-visual elements, or useful/quirky content. Some posts, such as the video of Sir Ian McKellen riding the train in the Moscow metro, are a good example of a post bringing these different elements together to promote the Shakespeare Lives programme. A specially created

event [page](#) for Midsummer Nights Festival on the VK platform did not seem to generate a lot of activity, as only just over 100 people followed it, and rarely commented on the posts. Content shared from this page on the main British Council Russia VK profile reached a much wider audience.

5 Methods

5.1 Twitter

An initial search for tweets including #Shakespearelives AND NOT RT⁵ between 1 May and 1 August returned only 46 tweets.

A combination of generic Shakespeare keywords (Шекспир OR Шекспира OR Шекспиру OR Шекспире OR Шекспиром⁶ OR Shakespeare) over the same period, excluding retweets, showed 38,989 tweets.

After consultation with British Council staff in Russia, the Midsummer Nights Festival in Moscow, St Petersburg and Ekaterinburg in June 2016 (Шекспир в летнюю ночь [Shakespeare in Midsummer Night]) was identified as an event which attracted a lot of attention on social media.

“Шекспировскиестрасти” [Shakespearepassions] was also identified as a hashtag or phrase used by people posting pictures of the Shakespeare metro train in Moscow.

Therefore, the final search conducted to compile the data set was:

(“Шекспир в летнюю ночь”⁷ OR “Шекспировскиестрасти”⁸ OR #Shakespearelives) AND NOT RT 1 May to 17 September. Total tweets = 1344

It was clear that the tweets collected mentioning Шекспир в летнюю ночь [Shakespeare in Midsummer Night] were very repetitive, due to many tweeting links to news articles announcing that Sir Ian McKellen would appear at the festival. On this occasion, therefore, rather than a random selection of 1,000 of these 1,344 tweets (1,332 after deleted tweets had been removed), 332 of these frequently repeated tweets, which used identical wording, were removed. These included:

- Иэн Маккеллен открыл в Москве фестиваль «Шекспир в летнюю ночь» (*Ian McKellen opened the Shakespeare in Midsummer Night Festival in Moscow*).
- В Москве откроется фестиваль «Шекспир в летнюю ночь» (*The Shakespeare in Midsummer Night Festival is going to open in Moscow*).
- В Москве пройдёт фестиваль «Шекспир в летнюю ночь» (*The Shakespeare in Midsummer Night Festival will take place in Moscow*).

⁵ Including AND NOT RT in Boolean searches excludes retweets from search results

⁶ Variations of Shakespeare’s name spelling in Russian depending on grammatical case.

⁷ [Shakespeare in Midsummer Night]

⁸ [Shakespearepassions]

- МакКеллен посетит фестиваль «Шекспир в летнюю ночь» в Москве (*Ian McKellen will attend the Shakespeare in Midsummer Night Festival in Moscow*)
- Актер Иэн МакКелен участвует в фестивале «Шекспир в летнюю ночь» (*Actor Ian McKellen takes part in the Shakespeare in Midsummer Night Festival*).

Additionally, we conducted searches for four special aspects of Shakespeare Lives programme and its promotion by British Council Russia in Russia in the final months of the programme. We searched for #Шекспириада [Shakespeareiad] and responses to tweets by British Council Russia’s account for all of 2016, as well as #Шекспировскиестрасти (Shakespeareaspassions – tweets about Shakespeare on the Moscow metro) and “Шекспир. Предостережение королям” (Shakespeare. A Warning to the Kings) from September until December 2016 to gain insights into the Shakespeare Lives and Shakespeare-related Twitter activity at the end of the year.

5.2 Facebook and VK

We used relevant keywords and hashtags, including “Шекспировскиестрасти” (Shakespeareaspassions) and “Шекспир в летнюю ночь” (Shakespeare in Midsummer Night), to search for posts on key parts of Russia’s Shakespeare Lives programming over the summer: the Shakespeare Moscow metro car and the Midsummer Nights Festival. Additionally, we browsed through the news feed on British Council Russia’s social media platforms from June until October 2016 to find relevant examples and saved them to illustrate the discussion. We also examined the Facebook and VK feeds of [British Council Kazakhstan](#), celebrities, including Ian McKellen and Vladimir Posner, UK Embassy to Russia, mass-media channels, including BBC Russia and *the Moscow Times*, to find relevant examples and make comparisons of social media engagement around the Shakespeare Lives programme with partner organisations and individuals.

6 Findings and Analysis: Twitter

As outlined in the methodology, our analysis focused on a body of tweets collected using a keyword search relating to two specific campaigns organised by British Council Russia: the [Midsummer Nights Festival](#) [*Шекспир в Летнюю Ночь*], the opening of which was marked by Sir Ian McKellen's talks in Moscow, St Petersburg, and Ekaterinburg, and the Shakespeare-themed metro train [*Шекспировские страсти в метро*] in Moscow. The change in focus of collected tweets for this report resulted in interesting observations, both similarities and deviations, when compared to our findings from the first phase of our research. We will now set out our findings and analysis for tweets about these Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns.

6.1 Actor Type

The majority of posts were shared by members of the general public (over 55% of all captured tweets), followed by alternative media (22%), which includes various blogs and citizen journalists sharing news and links, and commercial accounts (5%). The majority of these posts captured from commercial accounts came from a publishing house which shared a series of Shakespeare-related blog posts, such as lists of favourite plays, characters, and quotations. An example of their update is included below:

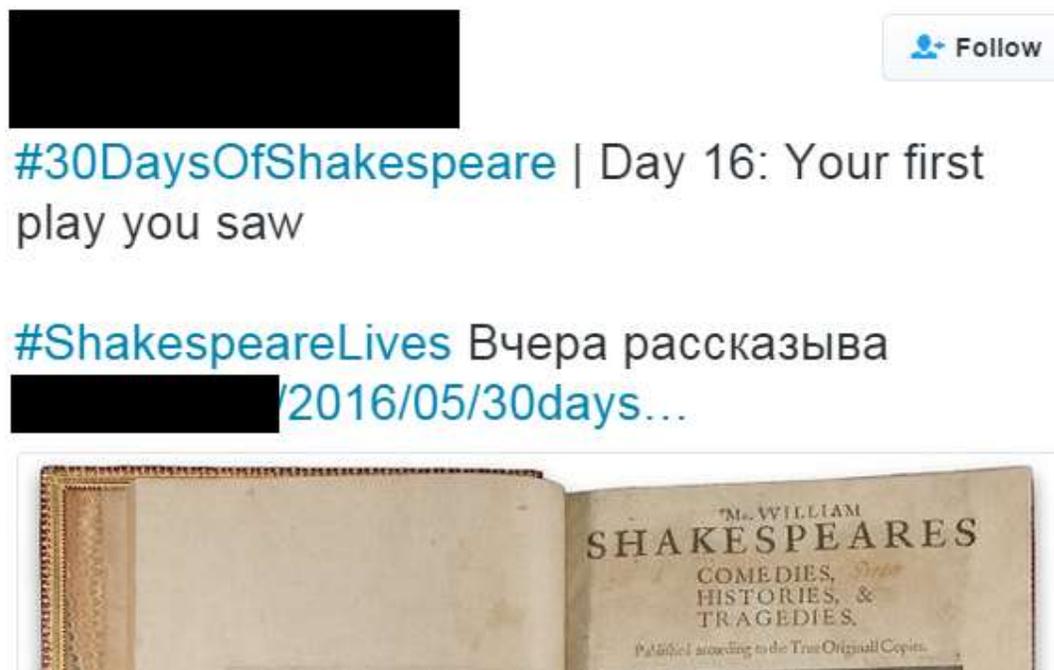


Image 24: Publishing house tweet sharing a blog post about Shakespeare

The tweet links to a blog post on the company’s website. The fact that #ShakespeareLives is used in this and other similar posts, as well as the creative nature of the post (as opposed to direct advertising of products) may suggest that the main hashtag of the programme was adopted by other entities outside cultural organisations and British Council partners, and this may be considered as a sign of success.

Another finding is the fact that 28 tweets from British Council accounts were captured (as opposed to zero in the first phase of research). These tweets from British Council Russia and British Council Kazakhstan advertised various aspects of the Shakespeare Lives programme in their respective countries. Additionally, about 3% of tweets were shared by high profile mainstream mass-media channels with very large social media followings, including *Телеканал Культура* (Federal TV channel “Cultura”, @KulturaTV) and *РИА Новости* (RIA Novosti, one of Russia’s leading news agencies, @rianru). Despite accounting for a small number of all tweets, these updates on Shakespeare Lives events in Russia reached a large number of followers of these channels, which is another sign of the success of the programme.

6.2 Location

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of tweets in Russian were posted by users based in Russia, or elsewhere in Eastern Europe (about 96% of all tweets). About 3% of captured tweets were shared from Kazakhstan, primarily by British Council Kazakhstan rather than by members of the public.

6.3 Focus

Given the search terms, almost all—99.9%—of captured tweets were focused on the Shakespeare Lives programme. However, within this set, only around 9% and 6% also had a clear focus on Shakespeare and the British Council respectively⁹. Britain was the focus of only 2% of all posts.

These figures could be explained by the more focused, event-related selection of keywords selected for this report. Most analysed tweets were about the Midsummer Nights Festival, and many were focused on the Moscow metro Shakespeare train. However, it is interesting to note that comparatively few included explicit references to Shakespeare himself, Britain, or the British Council as the organiser of the programme.

An obvious conclusion is that tweets about Shakespeare Lives events did not automatically bear explicit connections with or references to Britain or the British Council. This may highlight the fact that the high-profile campaigns in Russia, such as the Shakespeare Lives-related events, may not be as effective in evoking an automatic positive impact on the image of Britain among Russian-speaking Twitter users. However, this finding could also simply reflect that most tweets, as will

⁹ One tweet could have more than one area of focus, for example both the Shakespeare Lives programme and Shakespeare.

be discussed below, just recycled the news stories relating to the Midsummer Nights Festival (and Sir Ian McKellen’s appearances at it) without any further engagement with the story itself or the festival programme. It would be the reactions and comments made by people who attended or otherwise engaged with the festival, whose opinions or views on the UK may have been altered positively (or negatively), that would present more meaningful insights into any possible change of attitude towards Britain because of the Shakespeare Lives programme.

6.4 Tone

The majority of the tweets, around 95%, are neutral in tone. As mentioned before, many users simply shared various news stories relating to the Midsummer Nights Festival, often highlighting that Sir Ian McKellen was opening it, but without any further emotional connotation attached to the messages. For example:

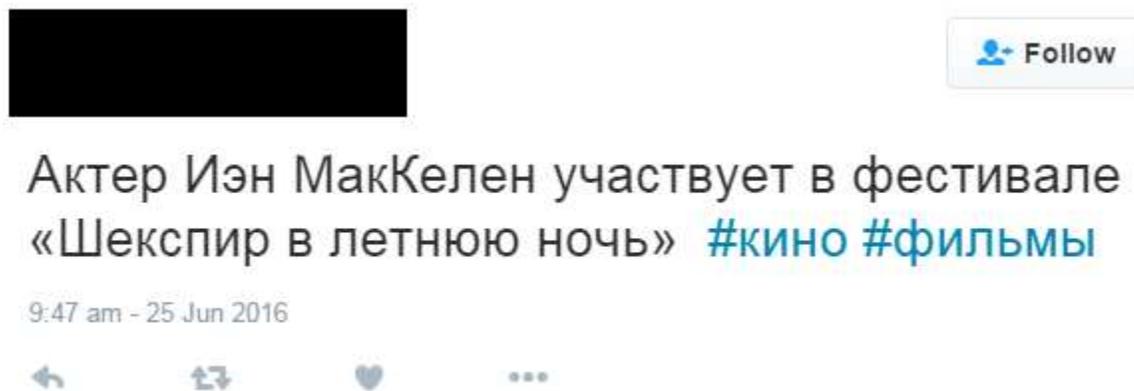


Image 25: Movie news blog tweet about the Midsummer Nights Festival

Translation for Image 25 above: “Actor Ian McKellen participates in the festival ‘Shakespeare in Midsummer Night’ #movie #films”.

This tweet from a movie news Twitter blog is one of the most typical updates captured in the sample. Often such updates would also include a link to a news story about the opening of the festival, posted through one of the popular online news portals.

Table 1 below illustrates that tweets of this type (ones that promote or provide information about the programme in neutral tone) formed the vast majority of all tweets analysed about the Midsummer Nights Festival.

Number of tweets with each tone concerned with each value				
Reaction Type	Promoting / providing info	0	922	15
	Reporting engagement	0	13	20
	Offering an opinion	4	9	11
	Making comparisons	0	1	0
	Expression of emotions	0	1	3
	Other	0	1	0
		Negative	Neutral	Positive
		Tone		

Table 1: Number of tweets by tone and reaction type

In contrast, tweets focussing on the other major Shakespeare Lives campaign in Russia, Shakespeare on the Moscow metro, often shared an explicit attitude towards the campaign, mostly positive but sometimes also a negative evaluation. The positive messages commented on the quality and creativity of the train (offering an opinion and commenting on the value of the programme), or simply reported pleasure from taking the train (reporting engagement). For example, a member of the public tweeted:



Follow

Я обожаю поезда на Филевской линии
#шекспировскиестрасти 🥰🔥❤️



LIKES
3



Image 26: Member of the public tweet about Shakespeare on the Moscow metro

Translation for Image 26 above: “I adore trains on the Filev line #ShakespearesPassions



The few negative tweets, 0.4% of the total sample, simply stated their dissatisfaction with the train (see the example provided below from a member of the public):

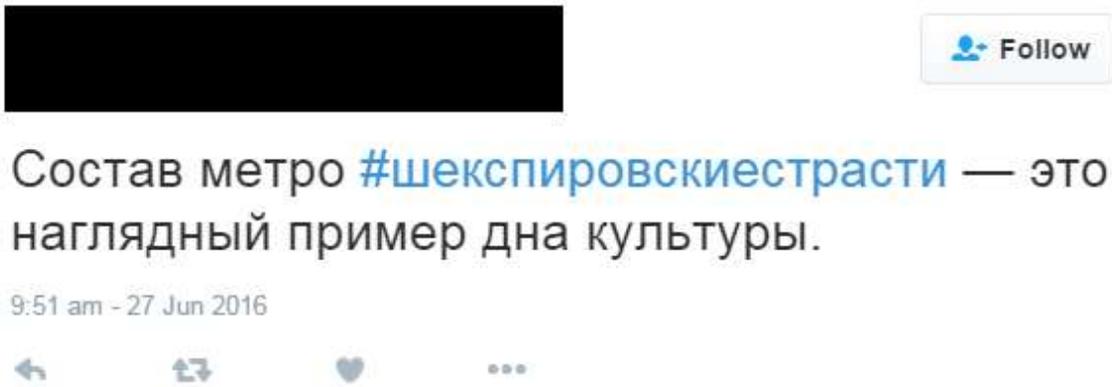


Image 27: Member of the public tweet about Shakespeare on the Moscow metro

Translation for Image 27 above: “The #ShakespearesPassions metro train is an obvious example of rock-bottom of culture.”

6.5 Values

Despite a more focused keyword search for tweets specifically addressing British Council Russia’s major Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns, only a small proportion of our sample included references to the values the British Council sought to promote. As Figure 3 below shows, only 122 tweets, just over 12%, reflected on one or more of these values.

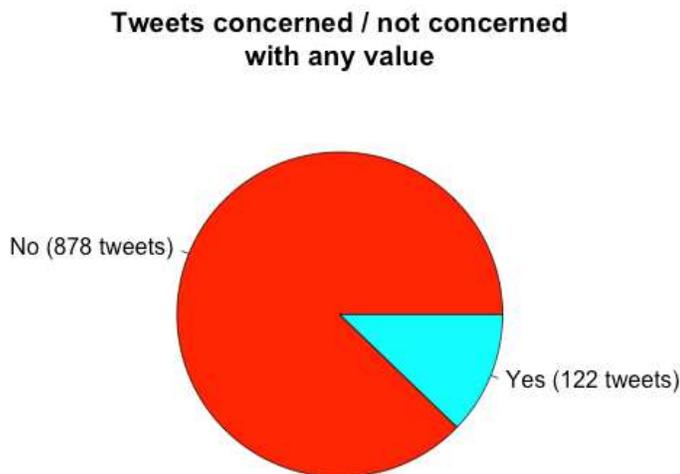


Figure 3: Number of tweets that included reference to a value

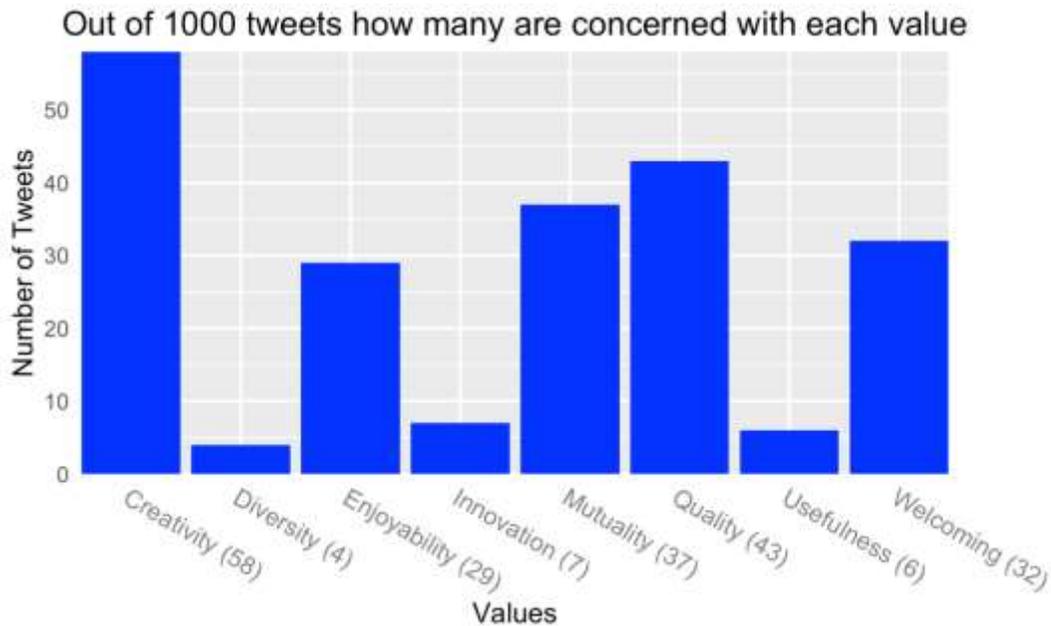


Figure 4: Number of tweets expressing a value, or referring to the value of Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives

As Figure 4 above shows, the most common value reflected upon in the tweets was creativity. Members of the public or other accounts made references to the creative nature of the Midsummer Nights Festival’s programme, such as the performances by Sir Ian McKellen in three cities in Russia to kick it off, the creative nature of the Shakespeare metro train, or other associated events. Image 28 below gives an example from the British Embassy in Russia’s tweet:



Image 28: UK in Russia tweet about Shakespeare Lives and the UK-Russia Year of Language and Literature 2016

Translation for Image 28 above: “Meeting with director Donnellan after his Russian production of Measure for Measure #YoLL2016 #ShakespeareLives #edfests”

Quality was the second most prevalent value (in this case, an expression that Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives *is valuable*) expressed in the collected tweets (4% of all tweets). Such messages often complimented the design of the Shakespeare metro train, or shared appreciation for Ian McKellen’s performances at the festival. For example:

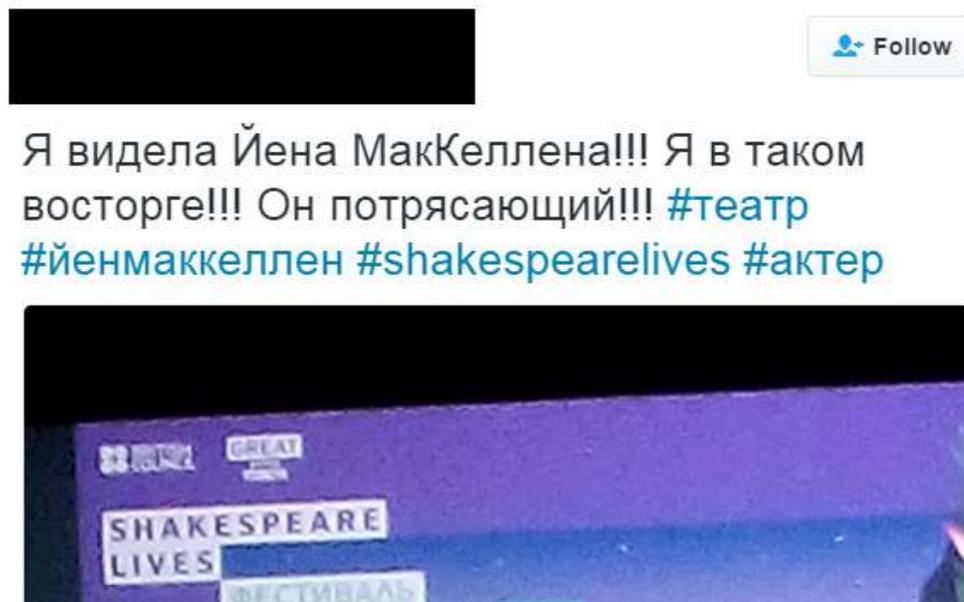


Image 29: Member of the public tweet about the Midsummer Nights Festival

Translation for Image 29 below: “I saw Ian McKellen!! I am in such awe!!! He is fantastic!!! #theater #ianmckellen #shakespearelives #actor”

Mutuality was the third most common value expressed or referred to in the evaluated tweets. Although the value of mutuality was less apparent in the Midsummer Nights Festival than in the tweets around Shakespeare Day, where this was the most commonly evoked value, mutuality still remained prominent due to the explicitly stated connection of the discussed topic or person with the English-speaking world or Britain more specifically. For example:

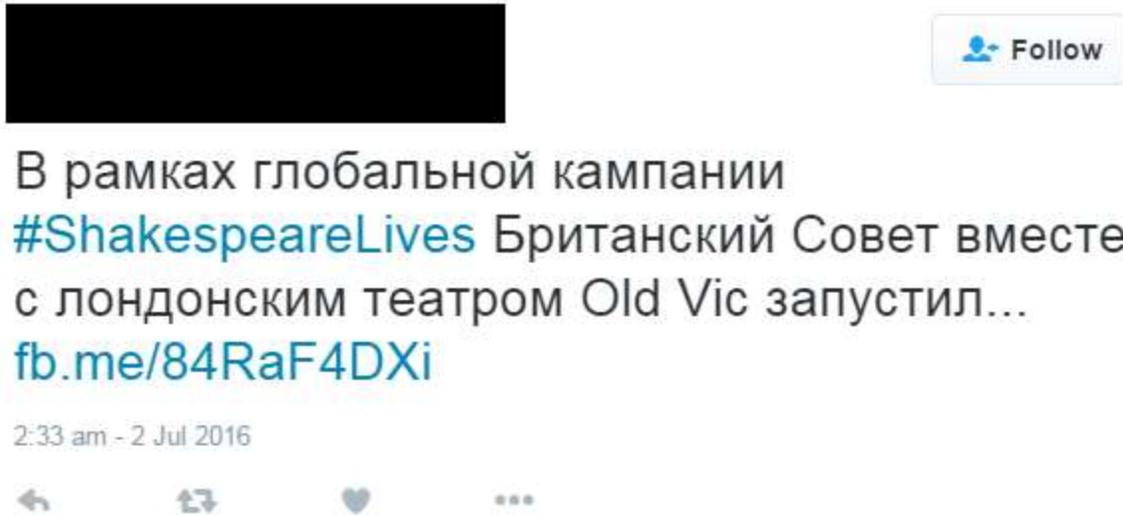


Image 30: Tweet linking to a Facebook post about Shakespeare Lives

Translation for Image 30 above: “As part of its global campaign #ShakespeareLives, the British Council, together with London theatre Old Vic launched [...continued in a Facebook post]”.

Other values, such as welcoming and enjoyability, were represented in approximately 3% of all evaluated tweets, while others were reflected in even fewer messages.

Most references to values or the value of Shakespeare Lives were expressed in the tweets which promoted or provided information about the programme. However, when we take into consideration that posts promoting or providing information accounted for around 94% of all tweets, while those offering an opinion or reporting engagement accounted for just 5% of tweets, posts which offered an opinion or reported engagement were much more likely to refer to a value, or comment on the value of Shakespeare Lives. The same thing applies to the question of who was most likely to refer to a value, or the value of the programme. While members of the public posted the majority of these tweets, factoring in that British Council posts account for only 3% of the tweets studied, the British Council were much more likely to include an implicit or explicit reference to the values that they sought to promote through Shakespeare Lives.

6.6 Shakespearriad

Our analysis of Twitter conversations about the [Shakespearriad \[Шекспириада\]](#) educational campaign provides interesting insights because we collected tweets about the campaign for the entire of 2016. There was evidently not as much Twitter conversation around this overarching British Council Russia Shakespeare Lives programme, only 74 tweets in total. This is due to the fact that this campaign featured many specific events and contests, such as *RE:Shakespeare*, which used their own hashtags. However, the tweets that did use #Шекспириада (#Shakespearriad) provided an interesting case for reactions to a specific-year long Shakespeare Lives-related campaign. Specifically, they provide an overview of values expressed. Almost every one in three tweets about Shakespearriad included or reflected on the values of creativity, mutuality, and welcoming, a far greater proportion of references to values that we have seen in other tweets about Shakespeare Lives events or campaigns. Consistently with our findings in other cases, all other values have been only reflected in very few instances (see Figure 5 below).

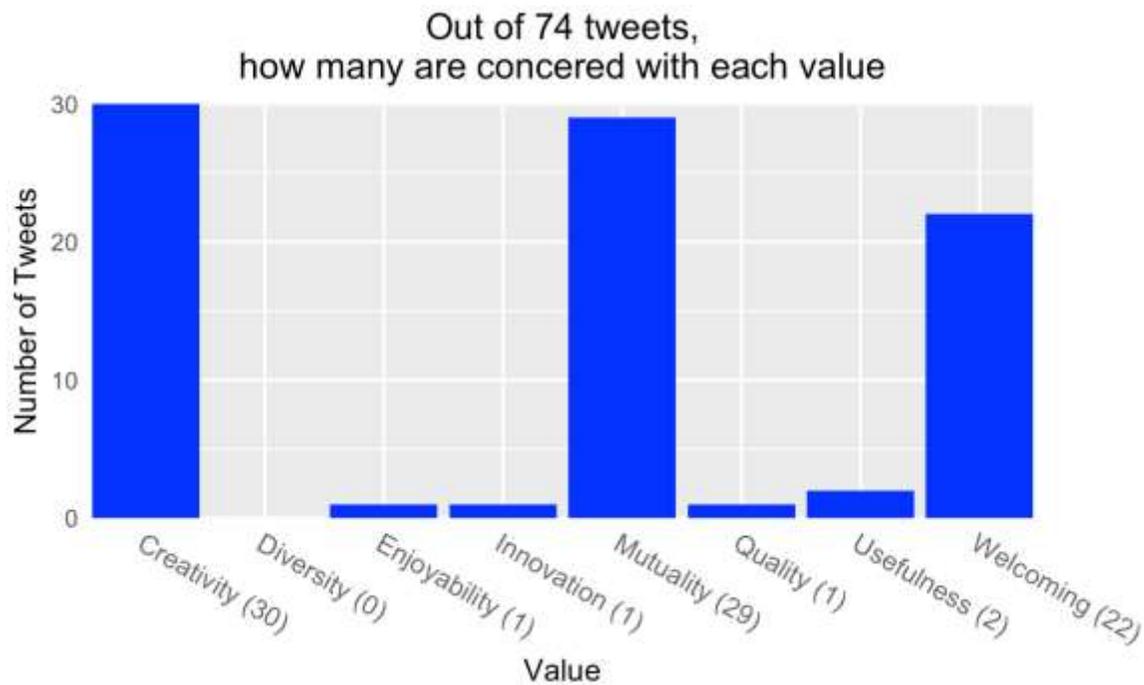


Figure 5: Number of tweets about Shakespearriad which reference a value, or the value of Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives

6.7 Conclusion: Shakespeare Lives on Twitter

The analysis of the second set of Twitter data collected following the flagship Shakespeare Lives events in Russia showed some variations from our first phase of research, which focused on the weekend around Shakespeare Day in April 2016. Firstly, the focus on the specific events of the programme, the launch of the Midsummer Nights Festival featuring Ian McKellen and the Shakespeare themed Moscow metro car, ensured that all tweets collected reflected on the programme; indeed, in contrast with the posts analysed from the weekend around Shakespeare Day, very few tweets of the 1,000 concerning the Midsummer Nights Festival featured quotations from, or general statements about, Shakespeare himself. Instead, these mostly promoted news stories about the festival. The vast majority of tweets, from members of the public and alternative media or Twitter news blogs, simply recycled the various news stories about the launch of the festival and Sir Ian McKellen's participation without offering an opinion, reporting engagement with the events, or expressing any of the values the British Council sought to promote through Shakespeare Lives. In contrast, the posts on the Shakespeare-themed Moscow metro train, although fewer in numbers, seemed to always express an opinion about the quality of the train or report engagement with the campaign, sharing photos and videos of the train and often expressing joy or awe. Still, although the most common reflected value was creativity, there were comparatively few tweets in total which reflected one or more of our values of interest, or commented on the value of the Shakespeare Lives programme.

7 Findings and Analysis: Facebook and VK

7.1 Audiences and Levels of Engagement

Over the second half of the year 2016, the number of followers of British Council Russia's Facebook and VK pages increased in similar proportions. Since June 2016, Facebook page membership rose from about 87,000 to just under 91,000 users (around a 5% increase), while the VK page following increased from 24,000 to nearly 30,000 users (around a 25% increase).

The content mirrored on both pages by British Council Russia administrators, in general, received comparable levels of engagement on the two social media platforms considered. For example, a post about the rerouting of the Shakespeare Passions train to a different Moscow Metro line received more likes and shares on Facebook but no comments. The post, which cleverly draws attention to the programme by sharing staged photos of a cat in a stylised ruff collar captured in different parts of the train, also shares a link to the Shakespeare's train website, achieving several purposes at once (such as entertaining its social media audience with ever-popular cat images, while also providing several pieces of information relating to the train campaign and practical info about the train's new route). On VK, the post received 117 likes, 20 shares and six comments (mostly praising the cat); on Facebook, the same post resulted in 562 reactions (like, love, and so on), 48 shares, and zero comments.

To provide another example of the differences in audience engagement between the two pages, a recent announcement of the British Film Festival taking place across several large cities in Russia generated 159 reactions, 44 shares, and three practical questions on the Facebook page, and 146 likes, 50 shares, 13 questions (excitement, practical questions and responses from the page administrators) on the VK page. While the numbers of reactions and comments fluctuate depending on the post across the two platforms (sometimes slightly higher on Facebook, sometimes on VK), overall they generate comparable levels of engagement. Considering that the audience of the British Council Russia Facebook page is nearly three times higher than that of British Council Russia VK group, the members of VK community are *more* proactive in their levels of engagement with British Council Russia's content, as they interact with British Council content to a greater degree in absolute terms. This suggests that the British Council should concentrate more on engaging with local social networking platforms, which may also help to promote a sense of mutuality between the British Council and members of the public.

7.2 Types of Posts

7.2.1 Contests

Contests relating to Shakespeare Lives and other British Council Russia programmes have again proven to be one of the best ways to get followers on the Facebook and VK pages to actively engage with Shakespeare Lives and other British Council programming.

For example, as a follow up post to the announcement of the British Film Festival in Russia, British Council Russia asked its VK followers (the contest announcement only appeared on the VK page) to explain in a comment why they want to attend the festival, and share the announcement of the festival with their friends. As a result, the post received 41 comments in addition to 79 likes and 39 shares (a comparatively high level of engagement, particularly in the form of comments). Some of the responses included:

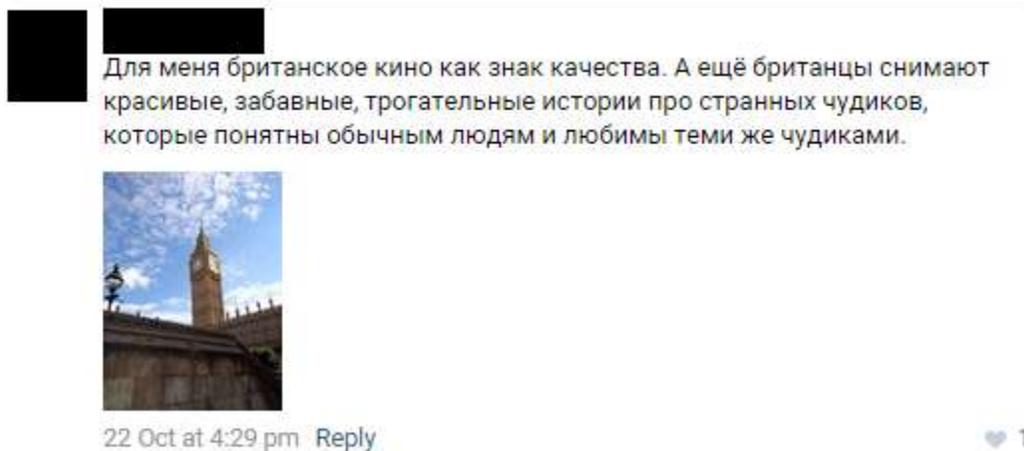


Image 31: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 31 above: "British cinema is a sign of quality for me. Also, Brits shoot beautiful, amusing, touching stories about eccentric oddballs, which are relatable to normal people and loved by other oddballs." (Picture of Big Ben attached to the comment)

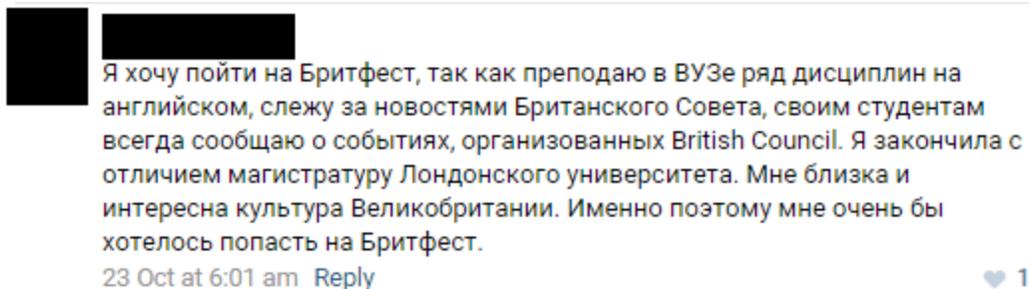


Image 32: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 32 above: "I want to go to the BritFest because I teach several disciplines in English at a university, follow British Council news, always inform my students of events hosted by the British Council. I graduated with distinction from a University of London Masters programme. British culture is close and interesting to me. This is exactly why I want to make it to the festival."

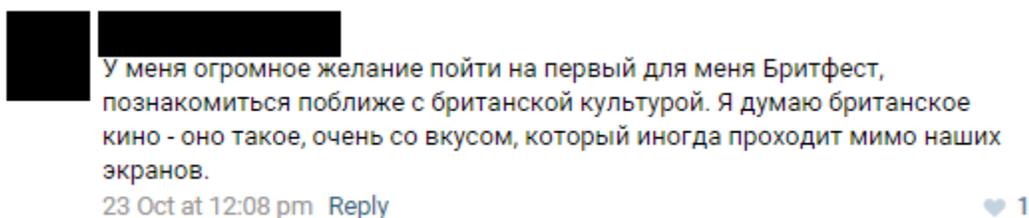


Image 33: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 33 above: "I have a great desire to go to my first BritFest, to become better acquainted with British culture. I think that British cinema is so, with such a taste [sic], which sometimes eludes our big screens"

As we can see from the above examples, users eagerly express their interest, curiosity, and appreciation of British culture. Even though the desire to express such feelings may be encouraged by the prospect of free festival tickets, the strategy of public contests does create additional incentives for the public to participate actively and share their feelings and opinions about Britain.

British Council Kazakhstan hosted another notable contest on its Facebook page, where it invited followers to submit answers to a Shakespeare-themed quiz and attend an UK education exhibition in one of the two host cities in Kazakhstan. The post received over 800 reactions (like and love) and over 100 shares from its followers, which is a fairly large number compared with other posts on the page, however only about ten comments, most of which were practical questions about the contest, and several expressions of intention to participate. As the participants had to submit their quiz entries separately, this perhaps limited the number of responses on the Facebook page. Even though the allure of an iPad as the main prize prompted a lot of reaction and sharing, the contest

could have been enhanced if the participants had more of an incentive to share their reflections or opinions on the exhibition rather than respond to generic questions about Shakespeare’s life.

Another contest, promoted on British Council Russia’s Facebook and VK pages, was co-hosted with a British culinary school. The participants had to prepare and share pictures of Shakespeare-inspired dishes to have a chance to win a trip to London for culinary lessons provided by the sponsor school. The results of the contest, shared with pictures of the winning submissions, resulted in relatively extensive discussions on both Facebook and VK. While the post generated some negative comments, mostly reflecting dissatisfaction with other participants about the outcome of the competition and questioning of the rules, the majority of the messages were positive. Some of the positive examples from the VK page are provided below:

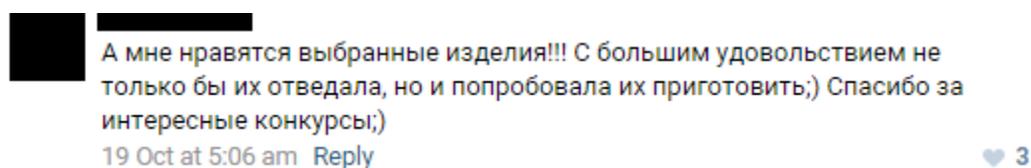


Image 34: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 34 above: “And I like the chosen dishes! It would be a great pleasure to not just try them, but also attempt to make them myself ;) Thank you for interesting contests ;)”

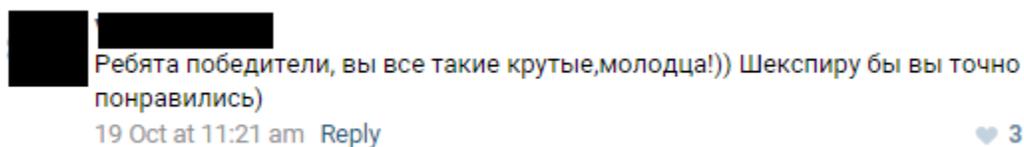


Image 35: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 35 above: “Dear winners, you are so great, well done! [Smiling emoji] Shakespeare would definitely like you as well!”

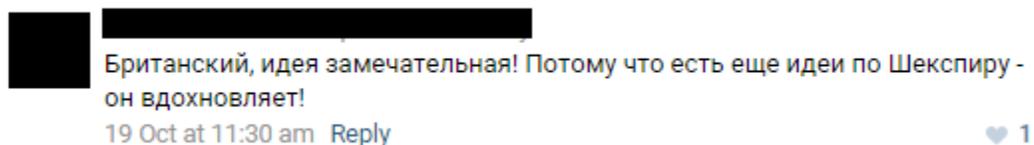


Image 36: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 36 above: “British Council, what a great idea! Because there are still many more great ideas around Shakespeare – he truly inspires!”

As we can see from these brief examples shown above, users appreciate the creativity associated with the winning submissions and the creative nature of the contest itself. In general, contests seem to be a fail-proof way to generate online conversations, particularly where users must post their submissions in comments on the British Council’s posts, or where the winning submissions are posted for others to see and comment on. One thing that the British Council can consider is running an online contest with a desirable prize aimed at VK and Facebook users in Russia, prompting them to share their experiences and opinions about Shakespeare Lives campaigns hosted in Russia and explaining how this influenced their opinion about Britain in general. For instance, this could be a contest encouraging people to share photos taken at a Shakespeare Lives event in Russia (for example a selfie at a Sir Ian McKellen talk, or on the Shakespeare metro train) with a brief caption about their experiences at the event, and possibly their change in attitude towards the UK. Although such a contest would inevitably create insincere submissions with the goal of winning a prize, it will still allow the British Council to gather some additional audio-visual materials, and opinions of social media users about the effectiveness of the programme.

British Council Russia’s contest “[England, Shakespeare and I](#)”, hosted late in 2016, included some of the features of a possible initiative discussed above. British Council Russia challenged contestants to submit a photo or a collage dedicated to the theme “England, Shakespeare and I” with the prospect of winning a language course in the UK. The winning entry combined a Shakespeare-style sonnet which referenced his works, and promoted the idea of pursuing one’s dreams. The contest winner’s dream, as expressed in the sonnet, was to win the language course trip at stake in this competition. The entry also included a collage of portraits of the contestant and Shakespeare. The winning submission clearly evokes values of creativity and mutuality, and expresses deep interest in the British culture. The British Council Russia post announcing the contest’s winner prompted 12 comments from users on VK: many of them simply congratulated the winner and expressed their admiration of the winning entry. For example, one user commented:

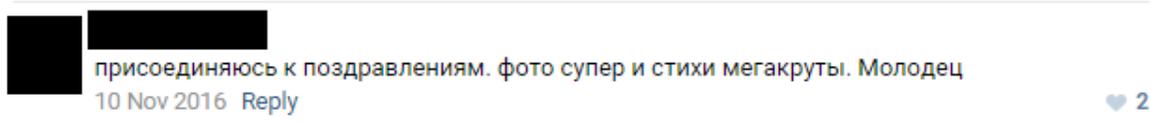


Image 37: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 37 above: “I join in the congratulations. The photo collage is super, and the poem is ‘mega-cool’. Well done!”

The contest winner herself commented:

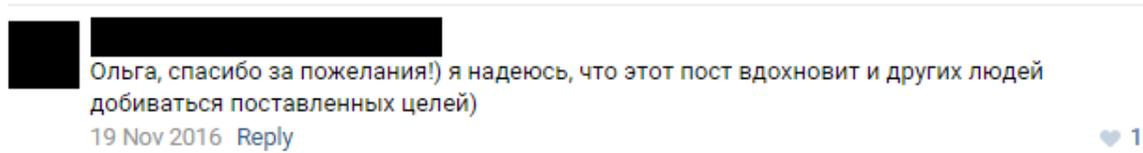


Image 38: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post, a competition winner responds to other followers

Translation for Image 28 above: “Thanks for your well-wishes. I hope this post inspires others to reach their goals”.

British Council Russia’s post about the results of the contest on Facebook, in comparison, resulted only in one comment, which did not address the contest, but instead praised the Shakespeare metro train:

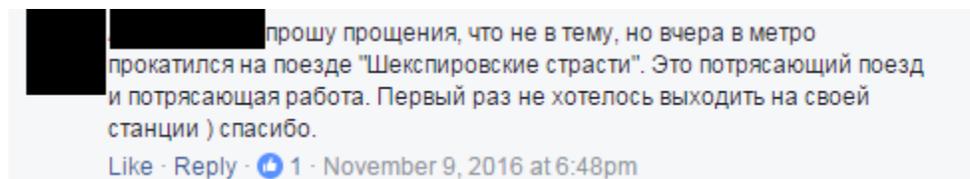


Image 39: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 39 above: “I apologise that this is not related to the topic, but yesterday I rode on the ‘Shakespeare Passions’ metro train. It is a breath-taking train and a fantastic project. It was the first time in my life that I did not want to get off at my stop. Thank you!”

This contest and social media engagement around it present a clear example of the types of positive reactions such initiatives produce. The users’ comments evoked expressions of our values of interest. However, as contest participants were submitting their entries not through the social media channels but directly to British Council Russia, the contests did not fully harness the possibility of creating a conversation among users and followers of the British Council Russia’s pages. We predict that a prospective contests seeking direct input about the followers’ experiences at Shakespeare Lives and other programmes and events of interest via social media channels would provide us with more relevant and elaborate explanations of attitudes towards British Council Russia and Britain, and inspire further creative exchanges among the social media communities.

7.2.2 Shakespeare Lives Programme Updates

British Council Russia hosted multiple large campaigns over the summer and autumn. The British Council Russia Facebook and VK page administrators shared many updates on various parts of the programme, which received varied levels of audience engagement. We also found that the specific page on [VK](#) created to share the news and events about the Midsummer Nights Festival was only followed by just over 100 users, and seemed to have low levels of popular engagement. This makes it questionable whether it was necessary to create the separate page since it was not promoted more widely, and all of the content posted here was also posted on the main British Council Russia VK page.

As we have already noted, the various contests seem to have generated the most responses from the public. General information about upcoming events, however, was not as conducive to provoking comments from the pages' followers. Most of the time, posts announcing upcoming theatre performances or similar updates would result in only a few practical questions, i.e. whether the tickets were still available. Posts reporting on Shakespeare Lives events, such as links to broadcasts of plays, or photo galleries of Sir Ian McKellen's performances in Russia, also did not result in notable levels of response, usually no more than ten comments per post. One such Facebook post on Sir Ian McKellen's performance resulted in the following comments (notably posted in English):

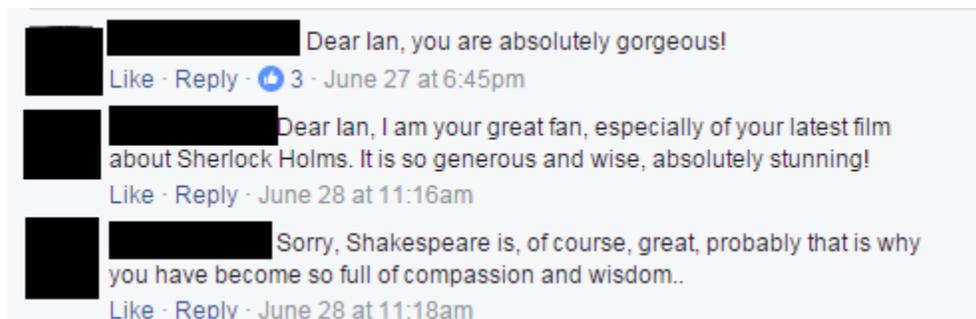


Image 40: Comments on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Strong audio-visual elements in a post seem to enhance the rate of engagement by the audience. For example, another post on Facebook shared a video segment by BBC Russia covering Sir Ian McKellen's journey on the Shakespeare train in the Moscow metro during his visit. The shared video resulted in around 1,800 reactions (like, love, share), which is a very high number, and several comments, both in English and Russian. For example:

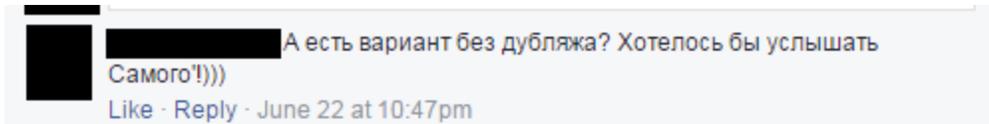


Image 41: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 41 above: “Is there a version without dubbed translation? It would be great to hear Him (McKellen!)” (Ian McKellen’s remarks while on the train were dubbed into Russian)

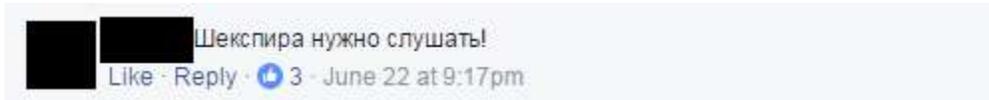


Image 42: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 42 above: “You need to hear Shakespeare” (Reiterates the point that McKellen makes in the video)

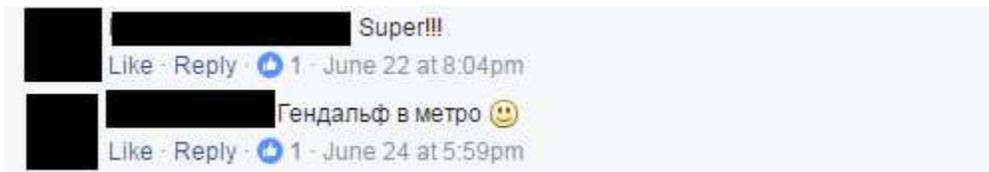


Image 43: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 43 above: “Gandalf in the metro (smiley face)”

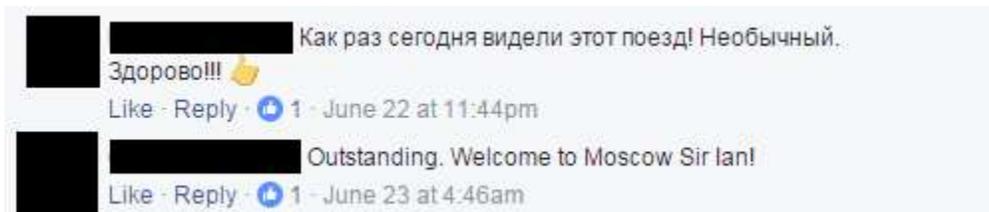


Image 44: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation: “Just today saw this train. It’s unusual. Wonderful!! (thumbs up emoji)”

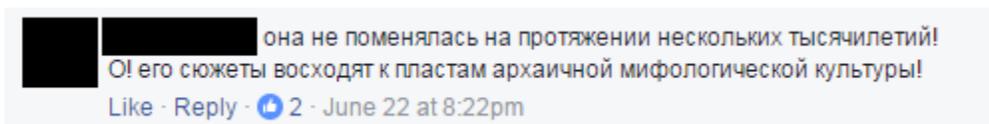


Image 45: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation: “She did not change in several millennia (Not clear what the user refers to here). Oh! His stories refer back to the archaic elements of the mythological culture” (It seems that this post discusses inspiration of Shakespeare’s works)

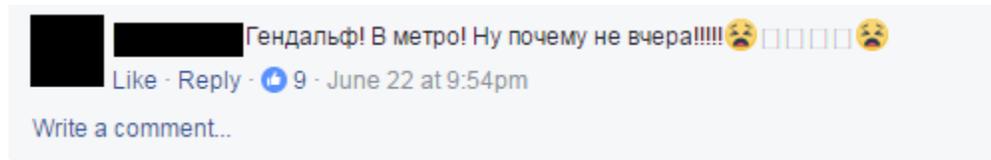


Image 46: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation: “Gandalf! In the Metro! Why wasn’t he there yesterday!! (distressed emoji)”

As we see from the examples above, this post provoked several different reactions, such as admiration of the Shakespeare metro train campaign, expressions of love to Ian McKellen as an actor and public figure, opinions that Shakespeare is best experienced in a theatre setting rather than through reading, and opinions about the inspiration of his works. This is a great example of a post capitalising on the celebrity’s participation, bringing attention to two distinct parts of the Shakespeare Lives programme (the Midsummer Nights Festival and the Shakespeare metro train), while also stimulating broader discussion on the legacy of Shakespeare and the quality of his works through an attractive video clip that the wider audience can relate to and share.

The British Council Russia-supported “Shakespeare. Forewarning to the Kings” documentary provides another interesting example of the utility of high-quality audiovisual material and a celebrity to promote Shakespeare’s legacy in Russia. This was a documentary directed by Vladimir Posner, a famous Russian journalist and media personality, shown in December 2016 on Channel One Russia, one of the most popular domestic TV outlets. British Council Russia’s initial posts advertising the broadcast of this documentary triggered many fewer comments compared to the BBC video about Sir Ian McKellen discussed above: the users mostly questioned the late air time (just before midnight) of the documentary prior to its release, and then shared their appreciation of the film on both Facebook and posts once it had aired.

British Council Russia shared a link to the recording of the documentary, and several more followers commented on this post. One of the followers shared their appreciation of the project, pointing out to how passionate the interviewed actors, historians and directors are about the figure and legacy of Shakespeare. However, the user engagement around this movie was much more intense on the posts promoting the documentary on Posner’s own Facebook and VK accounts. This reiterates the importance of finding a good balance of relaying on engaging videos, and whenever possible, leveraging the reach and influence of media personalities and celebrities over social media audiences. The case of Posner’s own posts will be discussed in a later section. This also suggests that partners and ambassadors with a larger social media following should be encouraged

to share British Council posts, in addition to promoting the events/campaigns they are involved in through their own posts.

Another example of positive engagement with the British Council Russia's Facebook and VK Shakespeare Lives posts can be seen in the case of a link to a live broadcast of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* at the Globe Theatre in London. This post on British Council Russia's VK page prompted the following positive responses (also with comments in both English and Russian):



Image 47: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 47 above: "Thank you! this was wonderful"

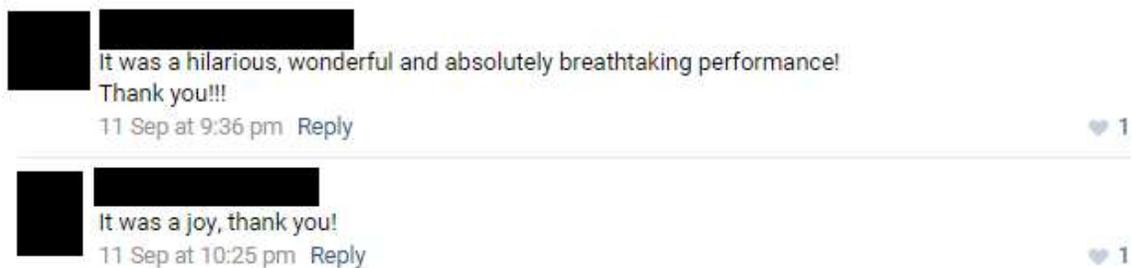


Image 48: Comments on a British Council Russia VK post

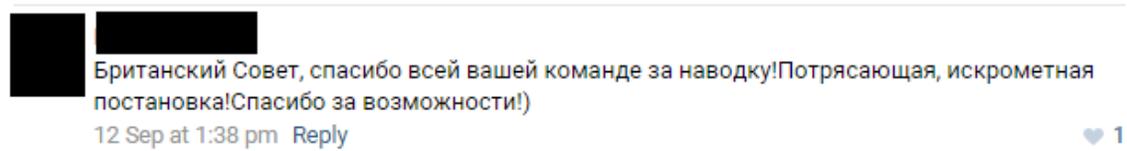


Image 49: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 49 above: "British Council, thanks to all your team for this tip! Amazing, exuberant production! Thanks for making it possible! [smiley face]"

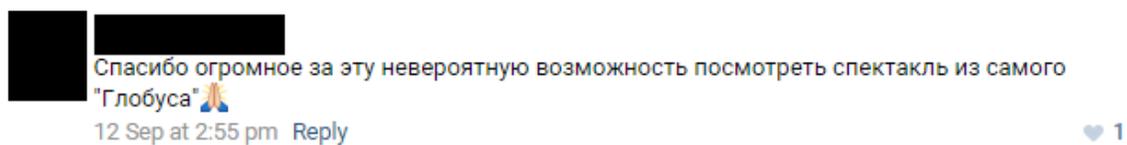


Image 50: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 50 above: “Many thanks for this incredible opportunity to watch a play from the ‘Globe’ itself (thankful emoji)”



Image 51: Comment on a British Council Russia VK post

Translation for Image 51 above: “We are in awe! Thank you”.

Other British Council Russia Facebook posts provided highlights from the Midsummer Nights Festival, in this case a evening in a park with talks:



Image 52: British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 52 above: “Well, our romantic Thursday is here. The weather in the park is great, and in case of evening chills we are equipped with blankets. If you are not with us, follow the broadcast! [link provided] We begin at 7 p.m. at the Muzeon Arts Park! We will talk about Shakespeare sonnets and English love poetry of the 16th and 17th centuries, and then together with curator Ian Haydn Smith and famous actor Leonard Whiting will discuss cult production of Romeo and Juliette by Franco Zeffirelli. [hashtags included]”.

Responses to this post, which received 25 likes and 3 shares (relatively low numbers), included:



Image 53: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

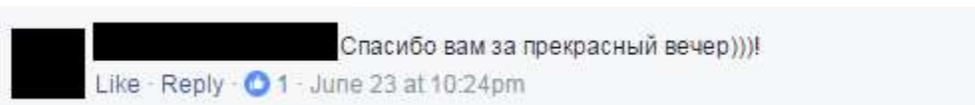


Image 54: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 54 above: “Thank you for a wonderful night! (smiley faces)”

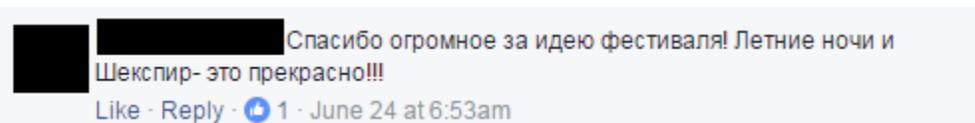


Image 55: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 55 above: “Huge thank you for the idea of this festival. Summer nights and Shakespeare is simply wonderful combination!”

As we can see from these appreciative comments shown above, the audience is yet again reacting positively to the well-organised events and the strong audiovisual elements in the material shared (such as links and recordings of broadcasts or high-quality images).

It is also important to note here that the administrators of the pages, as noted earlier, do a great job responding to the followers engaging with their posts, whether with positive or negative comments, and promptly respond to their inquiries. British Council Russia’s responses always seem to be down-to-earth and good-natured. This is very important in promoting conversations and future engagement from users, and ensuring the organisation is seen as transparent, communicative, and personable. This also promotes a sense of mutuality between the British Council and members of the public in Russia.

Shakespeareiad [Шекспириада], one of the key British Council Russia Shakespeare Lives campaigns which featured various educational contests and events dedicated to Shakespeare's works and legacy across Russia, provided us with another useful case study. In total, British Council Russia shared 29 posts relating to Shakespeareiad on its Facebook page in 2016. Only ten of these received comments from the page followers (ranging from one to four comments only). Importantly, all ten posts that received comments either promoted contests or events, or announced winners of these contests. For example, British Council Russia shared the results of an all-Russian English language competition among high-school children, a section of which tested participants' knowledge of Shakespeare's works. Here are the comments this post generated:

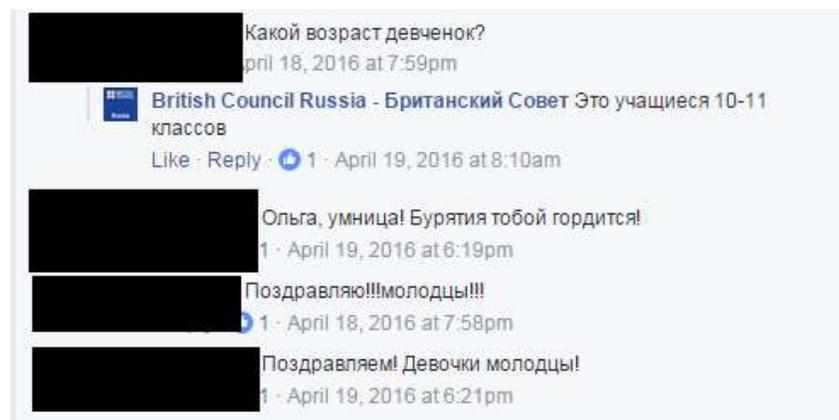


Image 56: Comments on a British Council Russia Facebook post, including a reply from British Council Russia

Translation for Image 56 above: [Comment 1] What is the age of participants? [British Council Russia's Response] Students of grade 10 and 11. [Comment 2] [one of the winners], well done! Buryatia [A region in Russia] is proud of you! [Comment 3] Congratulations! Well done! [Comment 4] Congratulations! Well done, girls!

As we can see, even the posts that did receive several comments did not produce extended discussion, but simply shared emotions and asked questions. Similarly, an important point from this case study is that some of the other posts out of the 29 dealing with Shakespeareiad also promote event or contest information, but they did not result in direct engagement from users by way of commenting on these posts. Therefore, while posts about contests are usually a useful way to encourage engagement from followers, such engagement is not guaranteed.

Finally, another important observation is that hashtags for the entire Shakespeare Lives programme (such as #ShakespeareLives, and #YoLL2016 for the Russian programme) have been used consistently throughout the social media posts studied as part of the Midsummer Nights Festival and Shakespeare metro train car which, undoubtedly, helped spread the word about the hosted events and ensured uniformity of the overall programme.

7.2.3 Resources

Posts on Facebook and VK providing various tools and resources, for the most part focusing on learning English and passing English language tests, remained very popular among followers. As highlighted in the previous analysis of British Council Russia's posts on Facebook and VK and engagement with them, posts sharing online lessons and tools for those preparing for exams often receive many reactions and comments, but they are usually of a practical nature. For example:



Image 57: British Council Russia Facebook post, showing likes and shares

Translation for Image 57 above: “Let’s start this Monday with useful links to practice your pronunciation. 1) Learn how to pronounce sounds using the phonetic table on this site (link included) 2) Exercises, which help with practicing pronouncing various sounds (link); 3) Word stress (link); 4) Sentence stress (link) (post continues)”.

The post shown in Image 57 above received 123 likes and was shared 111 times by followers, which is a high number. However, there were no comments or further engagement with the post by the users.

It would be useful to provide a couple of examples of Shakespeare Lives-related resources which we found on the VK and Facebook pages over last few months. One such post shares a link to a recording of a public lecture hosted as part of the Midsummer Nights Festival:

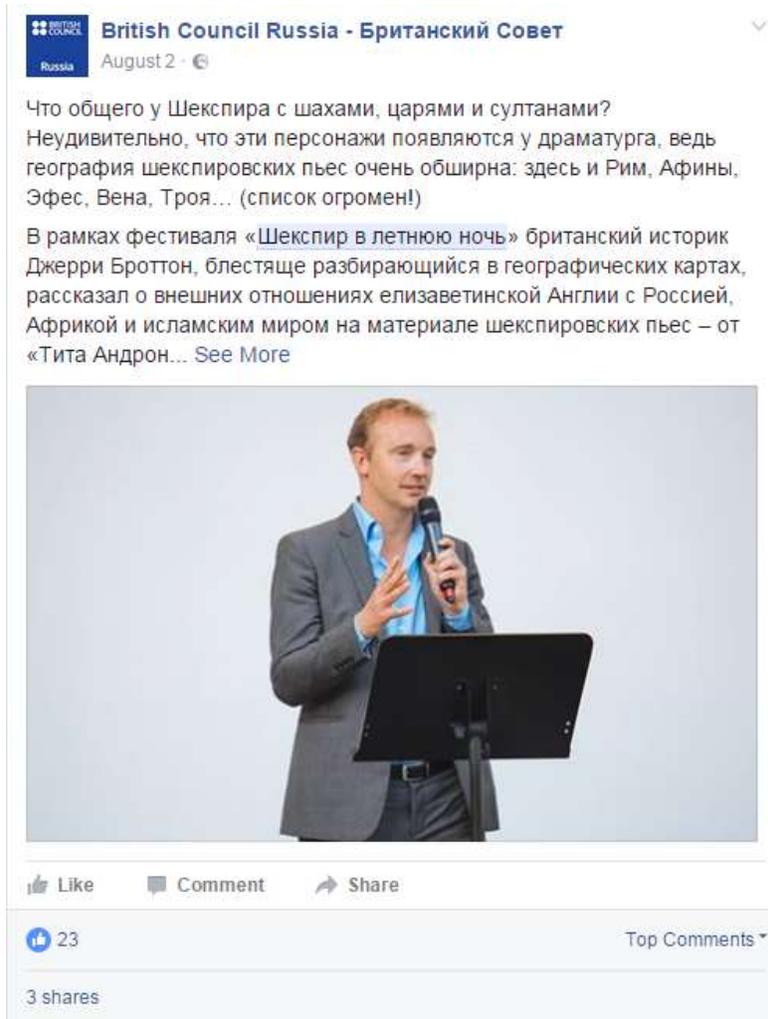


Image 58: British Council Russia Facebook post, showing likes and shares

Translation for Image 58 above: “What does Shakespeare have in common with shahs, tsars and sultans? Unsurprisingly, such characters appear in the playwright’s works, because the geography of his plays is very wide: it includes Rome, Athens, Efes, Vienna, Troy... (the list is huge!). As part of the Midsummer Nights Festival, British historian Jerry Barton, who is an expert in maps, spoke about international relations between Elizabeth’s England with Russia, Africa and Islamic world based on Shakespeare’s plays [post continues and includes a link...]”

Although the post shown in Image 58 above only received 23 likes and three shares, the one comment on this post read:

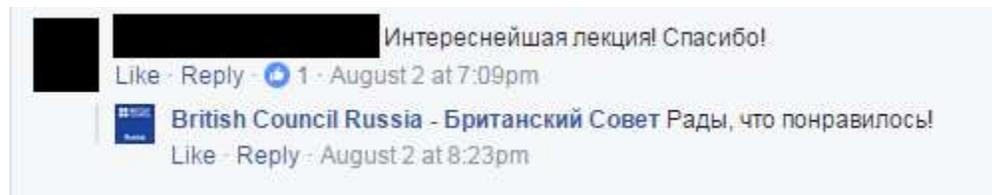


Image 59: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post, with British Council Russia reply

Translation for Image 59 above: “The most interesting lecture! Thank you!” British Council Russia’s response: “We are glad you liked it.”

In another similar post, British Council Russia shared a recording of a different lecture on Shakespeare’s works hosted as part of the Festival. Like the previous post, it received relatively few reactions and shares, but the one comment read:

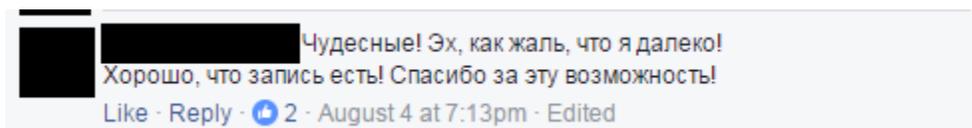


Image 60: Comment on a British Council Russia Facebook post

Translation: “Wonderful [speakers]! Sigh, so sad that I am based far away. It’s nice that there is a recording. Thank you for this opportunity.”

Although the reaction to these two posts was limited compared to other updates targeting the wider public, and compared to sharing resources relating to learning English, the notes of appreciation still showcase that content like this is relevant to some of the followers of the page. It is important to continue providing a variety of materials and content targeting diverse groups, which British Council Russia already seems to do well. One suggestion might be to share content like this to the walls of particular interest groups (for example literary historians groups, or other related communities), members of which may not be following British Council Russia page, but may be interested in the content and, consequently, start following and/or sharing British Council Russia’s updates on topics of interest.

7.2.4 Information About Britain, Trivia, and Popular News

Another very large category of posts encompasses almost all other updates from British Council Russia, from general information and trivia about the UK and the English language, to news of British celebrities. One such post is included below:



Image 61: British Council Russia Facebook post, showing likes and shares

Translation for Image 61 above: “According to the linguists, the sound ‘th’ will vanish from the English language by 2066. What do you think about this twist? #language”.

The post caused a lot of reactions and was shared by 150 people. The followers also left many comments, ranging from sarcastic “*Finally!! It used to give me so much trouble back in the day [at school]*”, to “*I hope they are wrong*”, to pedantic, pointing out that “th” is not a sound but a combination of letters. This post provides an example of a topic that stirs a lot of interest and

elaborate discussion among the followers. The British Council should consider how links can be drawn between topics that provoke conversation and the cultural programmes it is promoting.

Other posts of general interest about Britain and British culture included a link to the set of entrance exam questions at Oxford University, and an interview with Benedict Cumberbatch and Tom Hiddleston. This builds on our findings from the first phase of research, suggesting that posts about celebrities and quirky facts and news about the UK provoke comments and reactions from the audiences, sometimes on a wider scale when compared to news about Shakespeare Lives campaigns and events. A way to continue generating interest in cultural programmes is to try to link their events and campaigns with British celebrities (as with the successful case of Sir Ian McKellen taking the Shakespeare metro train), or current events and news which are relevant to the wider public, especially younger audiences who generally seem to be more proactive in online conversations.

We will now examine how partners and ambassadors of the Shakespeare Lives programme shared content about the programme, and the extent to which this encouraged further audience engagement with Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns.

7.3 Shakespeare Lives Posts by Partners and Ambassadors

7.3.1 UK Embassy in Russia

The British Embassy in Russia has covered the Shakespeare Lives programme thoroughly on its social media platforms,¹⁰ sharing both its own and British Council Russia's content. Unfortunately, the levels of engagement with the embassy's content do not seem to match that of British Council Russia. For example, in 2016 the Embassy shared 89 posts with references to Shakespeare and/or #ShakespeareLives on its Facebook page. Only 25 posts received at least one comment from the page's followers, and none received more than eight comments. This clearly suggests that the content shared rarely provokes extensive exchanges from social media users, despite generating reactions, such as likes or shares. However, we still found some notable cases of engagement with this partner's social media content. Their posts on the launch of the Shakespeare metro car have resulted in both positive and negative comments from the followers. Below we provide several examples:

¹⁰ Facebook: www.facebook.com/ukinrussia; VK: www.vk.com/ukinrussia; Twitter: www.twitter.com/ukinrussia

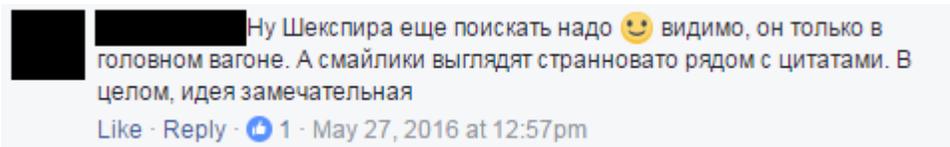


Image 62: Comment on a UK in Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 62 above: “You have to search for Shakespeare (‘s own image on the train, smiley face). It seems he is only located in the front car of the train. And smiley faces look strange next to the quotations. Overall, (though) the idea (of the train) is wonderful”.

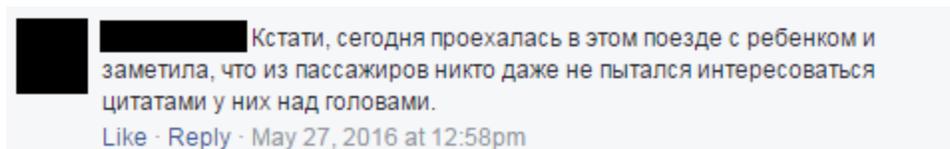


Image 63: Comment on a UK in Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 63 above: “By the way, I rode this train with my child today and noted that none of the passengers even tried to take an interest in the quotations over their heads”.

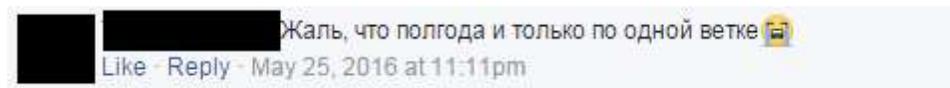


Image 64: Comment on a UK in Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 64 above: “It is too bad that (the train will be running) for half a year only and only on one of the metro lines”.

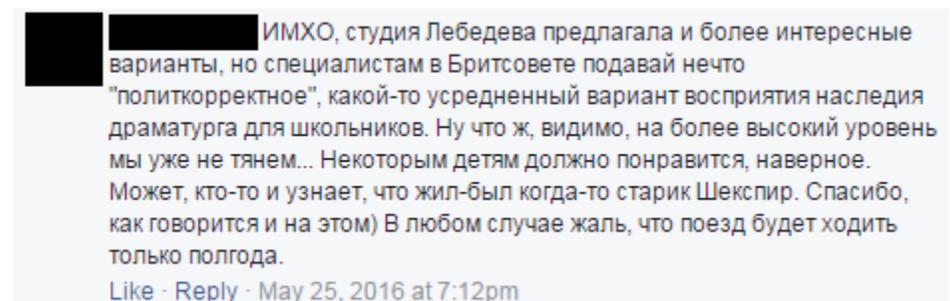


Image 65: Comment on a UK in Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 65 above: “IMHO, Lebedev’s studio (a famous Russian design agency) proposed some more interesting options (for the train), but the British Council specialists, it seems, decided to go for something more ‘politically correct,’ some sort of a middle line option for the playwright’s legacy interpretation intended for schoolchildren. Well, it seems, we cannot manage

a higher level... Some children might like it, perhaps. Maybe, someone will even find out that there was once a good old Shakespeare. Thanks for this, at least. In any case, the train will only be running for half a year.”

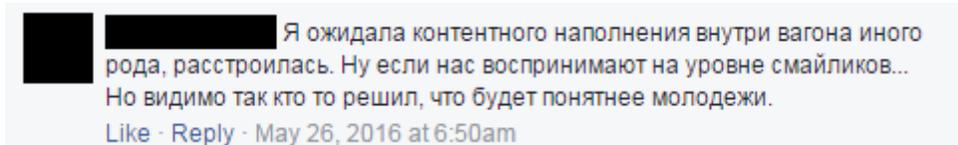


Image 66: Comment on a UK in Russia Facebook post

Translation for Image 66: “I was expecting a different kind of content, and am disappointed. Well, if we have to interpret everything at the level of emoji...But I guess somebody decided that this would be more relatable to the youth”.

These comments present interesting examples of contrasting attitudes towards British Council Russia’s initiatives, such as the “Shakespeare Passions” train, and how we should celebrate Shakespeare’s legacy. Three of these comments, shown above, openly criticise the creative concept behind the train. They express the idea that Shakespeare’s legacy cannot be reduced to the stylised quotations employing emoji to illustrate some of the characters and themes of his works, as expressed through the artwork on the train. These assessments also acknowledge with a sense of sadness that decisions to present Shakespeare through such a lens may be due to the desire to appeal to the younger generation of commuters.

We find traces of generational differences in attitudes towards the Shakespeare train on the Moscow Metro. All three users posting the comments in question seem to be of middle age, with families and established jobs. In contrast, many of the tweets sharing their appreciation and awe of the Shakespeare train, and reflecting on one or more of the values of interest, seem to belong to accounts of high-school and university students. While this is a generalisation, engagement around campaigns like the Shakespeare metro train can provide us with interesting insights about the differences in attitudes towards Shakespeare Lives and Britain in general across various social groups. Such insights may be useful when considering how to target the promotion of events and campaigns.

7.3.2 Celebrities

7.3.2.1 Sir Ian McKellen

Curiously, there were not as many comments on the UK's Embassy in Russia's social media posts about Sir Ian McKellen's participation in the Midsummer Nights Festival hosted across three cities in Russia, compared with the **British Council Russia** posts we discussed earlier. It is somewhat surprising that the audience of the embassy's social media accounts were not as active in sharing their opinions and thoughts on the celebrity's participation in this **Shakespeare Lives** programme in Russia.

The Facebook page of McKellen himself has a massive following, with over five million followers, far exceeding that of pages for **British Council Russia** and the other organisations we explored. McKellen shared several updates on his Facebook page while in Russia as part of the Midsummer Nights Festival. For example:



Image 67: Ian McKellen Facebook post, showing reactions, comments and shares

Notably, the levels of engagement (reactions and comments) are much higher for this post compared with any other discussed Facebook or VK post related to the Shakespeare Lives programme on British Council Russia pages. This is due to the global following of McKellen, resulting in many of the comments on the post not in any way being related to his trip to Russia, or the Shakespeare Lives programme. His mention of British Council Russia, included as a link to their Facebook page in the post is important, as it attracts at least some of his followers to visit the organisation's Facebook group. One of the suggestions in this regard would be to trace the number of new subscribers to the page after such a high profile post by a celebrity, something that British Council Russia can track internally, in order to assess the impact of a celebrity's participation or a notable event.

Some of the comments on McKellen's post provide interesting insights. Below we include some examples (notably, posted in English; in fact, none of the comments on the post were written in Russian):

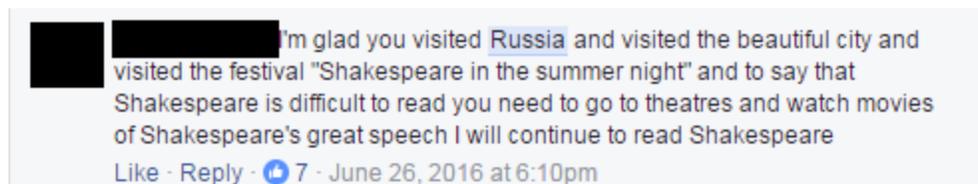


Image 68: Comment on an Ian McKellen Facebook post

The Russia-based user shares his appreciation of McKellen's visit, as well as his admiration of Shakespeare's works, while vowing to continue reading Shakespeare (presumably in English). This post evokes the sense of appreciation and awe around McKellen's visit to Russia, the exact type of excitement and engagement that British Council Russia can hope to generate by employing a celebrity as well-liked as Sir Ian McKellen to promote Shakespeare Lives and Britain and its culture more broadly.

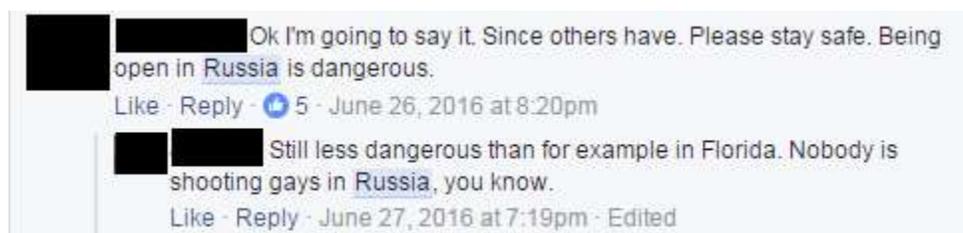


Image 69: Comment on an Ian McKellen Facebook post

This comment reflects on the tensions around Russia’s recent ban on “homosexuality propaganda” and McKellen’s sexuality and active promotion of LGBTQ rights. The first user, based in the US, warns McKellen about the risks of being openly homosexual while in Russia. The user who replied to this comment is Russian. They counter the previous commenter and proposes that it is more dangerous to be gay in the US than in Russia. This is an example of a sensitive issue that British Council Russia should be aware of while designing future social media campaigns, as contrasting narratives on political and social issues inevitably get reflected through the users’ comments. Overall, as we agreed across reports for all languages, McKellen’s post on British Council Russia’s Shakespeare Lives initiative confirms that celebrities and their reach of the international audiences through social media can provide an enormous boost in promoting hosted events and campaigns, and serve as catalysts of online conversations.

7.3.2.2 Vladimir Posner

Another example of successful engagement of a celebrity to promote British Council Russia’s programme was provided by the “Shakespeare. Forewarning to the Kings” documentary. This film was produced by Vladimir Posner, one of the most influential Russian TV journalists and media personalities. As we discovered, engagement with the posts about this documentary was fairly limited on British Council Russia’s own social media profiles: for example, British Council Russia’s posts sharing the link to the documentary received just two comments on VK, and six on Facebook. In comparison, the post with a link to the documentary on Posner’s own [Facebook](#) account resulted in 71 comments, many of which are much more elaborate than those comments on British Council Russia’s posts. Some of the Posner’s followers shared the following ideas on his post:

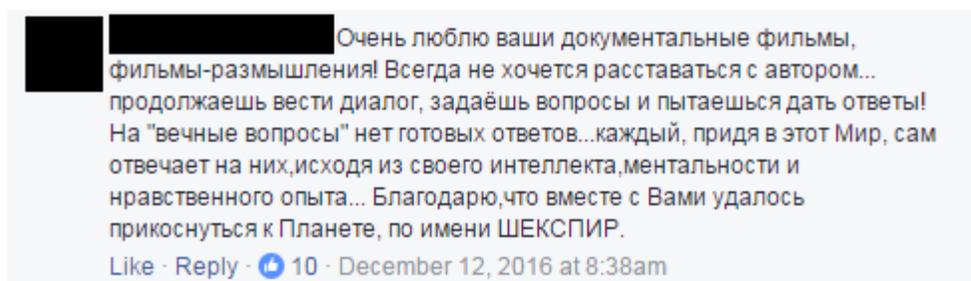


Image 70: Comment on a Vladimir Posner Facebook post

Translation for Image 70 above: “I like your (Posner’s) documentaries very much, thoughtful documentaries! It is always difficult to part ways with the author... one continues the dialogue, asks questions and tries to find answers! There are no ready answers for ‘eternal questions’ ...Everyone, coming this ‘World’, finds their own answers, depending on their intellect,

mentality, and moral experience... I thank you for the opportunity to touch this 'Planet' together, a planet called 'SHAKESPEARE.'"

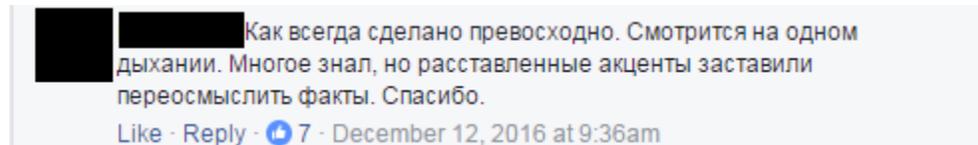


Image 71: Comment on a Vladimir Posner Facebook post

Translation for Image 71 above: "How wonderfully everything is executed (in this documentary]. You can watch it in a single breath. I knew much about Shakespeare, but your accents made me rethink some of the facts. Thank you."

As we see from the two examples shown above, followers of Posner's account in this case are eager to share their thoughts, offering their personal feelings about Shakespeare's legacy and reflecting on ideas put forward by the film (something that we did not notice on the posts on British Council Russia's pages on the same topic). Clearly, the influence, authority, and reputation of the director and producer of this documentary play a big part in high level of engagement in the content Posner shared. British Council Russia's sponsorship and involvement in production of this documentary is a clear success, as it was broadcast on Channel One Russia and reached its vast domestic audience. However, the potential for leveraging Posner's own reach of social media audiences was not fully explored in this case. For example, unlike McKellen's post discussed above, Posner did not refer to British Council Russia's involvement in the production of the documentary (there was no link to British Council Russia's Facebook page in his post). If such a link was included, it would have undoubtedly invited some members of Posner's page to visit and explore content on British Council Russia's social media channels. British Council Russia should consider reaching an agreement of a mutual promotion of hosted events and campaigns whenever high-profile persons are involved.

7.3.3 Media Outlets

Social media accounts for prominent Russian mass-media outlets have naturally also played a key part in creating conversations around the Shakespeare Lives programme, and another source for analysis of reflections on the attitudes towards Britain as expressed through its social media content. We will explore two specific cases below.

7.3.3.1 BBC Russian Service

We have already discussed the prominent and positive example of BBC Russia's video story featuring Sir Ian McKellen shared on British Council Russia's own social media accounts, attracting many reactions and interesting comments. When shared on [BBC Russia's](#) Facebook page this video resulted in even higher number of reactions, shares, and comments (mainly due to the bigger following of this page), and nearly 200,000 views of the video itself, an impressive number. One of the threads in the comments section, for example, took on the debate whether one should read Shakespeare's works in their original form, in old English, or in adapted Russian translations, which are very popular. Other participants in this thread also discussed whether Shakespeare's works need to be heard, such as through a theatre performance, in order to follow their rhythm and intonation, or whether they are better to be read in order to fully understand their meaning. Other comments, similar to the case of reactions on the British Council Russia pages focused, on the figure of McKellen himself, sharing their admiration for his career and personal qualities.

7.3.3.2 The Moscow Times

This popular [English language newspaper](#) based in Moscow also shared several stories related to the Shakespeare Lives programme in Russia. For example:



Image 72: The Moscow Times Facebook post, showing reactions, comments and shares

This exchange, conducted in English, brings to the fore some of the already noted tensions. As Spanish users argued that Cervantes was due equal recognition to Shakespeare, so Russian users question how the influence and legacy of writers across cultures should be celebrated. They also acknowledge that the campaign for Shakespeare is valuable and worthwhile.¹¹

Overall, content shared through such prominent social media channels as mainstream media accounts reach much larger audiences than the own accounts for British Council Russia or other cultural organisations. Mainstream media have the potential to amplify information and awareness of British Council campaigns. British Council Russia should aim, therefore, to continue working closely with mass media to promote their future programmes and events to maximise their reach.

¹¹ Notice how the last comment says that the user, originally evoking the idea there should be a Tolstoy-themed train, is not by any means against the Shakespeare train.

7.4 Conclusion: Shakespeare Lives on Facebook and VK

Our analysis of British Council Russia's Facebook and VK pages found similar levels of engagement with the same posts across the two platforms. Both platforms are clearly valuable and used well. However, since the audience of the VK page is roughly three times smaller than the Facebook page, VK users are more proactive in engaging with content about Shakespeare Lives.

Throughout 2016, online contests often generate the highest level of meaningful audience engagement on both platforms. The British Council could consider hosting an "exit" contest enticing followers on its Facebook and VK pages to share their memories about the Shakespeare Lives programme in 2016, while also trying to source information about their attitudes towards the UK at the same time.

On both the Facebook and VK pages the British Council Russia administrators effectively executed the social media campaign while promoting events and sharing relevant resources with online audiences. It was not the case that only people in host cities could participate but all across Russia. Although public engagement was not extensive, most comments were very positive. They reported engagement (either having attended the events or used the links provided) and thanked the event organisers, participants, and the British Council for the opportunity to experience Shakespeare in various ways.

Posts about celebrities, practical resources for learning English, and some quirky news stories attracted much attention and proactive reaction from audiences. The British Council should continue relying on such topics, and try to tie in relevant news, hot topics, and celebrities with ongoing and future programmes to maximise social media engagement.

In line with findings of our reports on Shakespeare Lives in other languages, cultural partners of British Council Russia, such as the British Embassy, other cultural organisations, celebrities and mass media channels, evidently have a great potential to promote content and stimulate online discussions around co-hosted events and campaigns. British Council Russia should aim to continue finding ways to harness this potential.