

APE Brief: RT_20220301

Some background on content of Russia Today (RT)



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Introduction

Agence Presse Européenne (APEurope)¹ is an alternative media organization with ten news, current events and specialized media. APEurope relies on its own Correspondents' Pool of independent associated journalists as well as other independent sources such as other more specialized alternative media. One such source is Russia Today (RT). From time to time we review RT programming and content to assess reliability of information broadcast by RT via television and online.

The recent military actions by Russia in Ukraine has given rise to calls by some politicians to ban RT transmissions and postings. The justification relates to an opinion that RT is a propaganda unit for the Russian government.

Some background on content of Russia Today (RT)

State funding

RT like BBC, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle in Germany are all "state broadcasters" in the sense they all receive state funding support. The BBC also receives funding via a compulsory "TV license" and the BBC World Service receives additional funding directly from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

Content

Of the 21 main programmes or shows on RT, 16 (76%) have nothing to do with Russia or the state and are run by independent journalists under no editorial constraints from RT. We understand that several of these cannot get placement on US/UK media or are unwilling to use mainstream media because of censorship or editorial intervention.

These include:

US journalists:

1. Boom & Bust – US commentators/analysts on economy - interviews leading economists mainly from US institutions
2. Keiser Report – Max Keiser & Stacy Herbert, US investigative specialists in finance
3. On Contact – Chris Hedges – US investigative journalist- very detailed review of current issues
4. Cross Talk – Peter Lavelle - US journalist - discussion and analysis of current events usually concerning Russian/international interactions
5. I Don't Understand – William Shatner – US journalist - review of "complicated issues".
6. Dennis Miller – US journalist – interviews celebrities.
7. The Big Picture – Hollande Cook – US journalist – covers current political events
8. Eat the Press – Steve Malzberg -US journalist – media topics
9. America's Lawyer – Mike Papantini US corporate lawyer
10. Redacted Tonight – DC-based Lee Camp US comedian
11. The World According to Jesse – Jesse Ventura – US journalist – various topics
12. Just Press Play – Trinity Chavez – US journalist – current events.

Russian journalists:

13. Worlds Apart – Oksana Boyko – Russian journalist interviews leading international figures concerning current events or major trends (very reflective – this anchor does her homework for interviews)
14. Sophie & Co – Sophie Shevardnadze – Russian interviewer interviews leading international figures concerning esoteric topics, current events or major trends (more laid back)

¹ APEurope has no commercial, relay or any other type of relationship with RT and in addition is not affiliated with any political party and operates on a non profit basis.

British journalists

15. Going Underground – Afshin Rettansi – British journalist dealing with current events in in UK and international
16. Renegade Inc. – Ross Ashcroft – British journalist dealing with analysis of major events including the economy
17. Sputnik – George Galloway – British journalist – Many different topics usually UK related
18. The Alex Salmond Show – Alex Salmond – British journalist: Mainly UK and Irish politics and related topics

Others include:

19. RT News,
20. Documentaries produced by various producers,
21. Interviews

Conclusion

The collection of programs on RT is unique in its ability to cover such a wide range of high quality content on a wide range of opinion and this is one reason that RT is one of the most popular broadcasters. In terms of upholding a broad freedom of expression and, in particular, covering minority interests, RT has a consistently good record.

The Russia/Ukraine events February/March 2022

RT has experienced journalists located in the Donbas region and therefore provide coverage of events which are not covered by any other media. Therefore, for the constituents of the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, this is a useful source of information.

Given the records of mass graves in the Donbas and the fact that many villagers who survived massacres are still alive and who witnessed the excesses of Ukrainian military and nationalist militia, the information being transmitted on the topic of genocide appears to be factual. Naturally because RT has access to much of this information it is reasonable to expect that they should present this information in their broadcasts and online. Since they have less direct access to information concerning the points of view from Ukrainian citizens and government, it is evident that they, like other media, will simply report what has been stated with no ability for direct validation. As a result, the notion of impartiality is something that is very difficult to apply when the medium concerned has far better sources to information on specific aspects of a topic and less about other aspects. At all times, if information is factual and only deals with one side, this is a preferable situation to ill-informed journalists attempting to balance contributions from both sides which they receive second hand and in most cases unverified. Most RT content is attributable to sources which is not the case in many Western media where a large amount of statements concerning the current crisis or concerning Russia's intent remain unattributable.

By far the most significant gaps in most mainstream media coverage in the UK and USA, is a failure to have recorded the continual assault and deaths of civilians in the Donbas carried out by the Ukrainian National Guard and different nationalist militia over the last 8 years. Broadly speaking most media, including national media in the United Kingdom, fail to provide this particular issue with sufficient coverage and therefore on the overall build up to this conflict, most have not demonstrated impartial reporting.

Government affairs content

Russian government announcements normally do not feature much on RT although with the build up to, and the current crisis, there have been more. In general, these are quite short and to the point transmitting the core messages. Even during the current crisis President Putin or Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statements are edited down to the core statements. President Putin is given more

coverage in some of his very long annual sessions of the state of the country and some business club seminars where general topics on the economy are reviewed.

Several of the programs are critical of different aspects of Russian and other government decisions and actions. This reflects the “hands off” approach by RT which does not interfere with editorial content of any of the independent journalists and programs.

Indeed, several journalists resigned from RT when Russia initiated its intervention in Ukraine. However, as the management of RT has explained, the decisions by the Russian government have nothing to do with RT. Therefore, preventing RT operations is deemed to be unfair and would only deny constituents access to factual information and expose them to a one-sided presentation of events. This, of course, would constitute a fundamental denial of the provision of access by constituents to impartial free expressions of information on important issues and events.

Propaganda

Propaganda is a psychological technique used to shape opinions of the constituents of a country either by omitting information critical to securing a balanced insight to a specific topic or the embellishment of facts to the degree of exaggeration so as to bolster the image or to justify the weight of some argument articulated to support a position of a group or government. Unfortunately, the balance between omission and embellishment is also complemented by the statements that have no factual basis at all but are lies. Therefore, the problem is separating fact from fiction under circumstances of military engagement, when the desire to convince is more intense, becomes a difficult task.

Confidence in a reliance upon facts usually supports a calmer demeanour of those expressing themselves on this basis whereas reliance of propaganda often supports a more agitated demeanour and frequent exaggerations and alterations in justifications to fit the changing circumstances.

On balance RT' general performance appears to be based on statements and communications that fall within reasonable parameters of editorial balance and in general are impartial.

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