

“Anything that causes chaos is RT’s line”- new study lifts the lid on RT’s role in wreaking political havoc. | Oxford Internet Institute

By Mona Elswah & Philip N. Howard

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New analysis from researchers at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, shows how internal processes at RT contribute to the anti-West news agenda and its critical representation of Western government across all RT languages. The Oxford study is the first of its kind to go behind the scenes, with researchers speaking to former and current staff, lifting the lid on daily newsroom practices at RT.

In this paper, co-authored by lead researcher Mona Elswah, Oxford Internet Institute and Professor Philip N. Howard, Director, Oxford Internet Institute, ‘The Organisational Behaviour of Russia Today’, the Oxford academics examine the current media system followed within RT and the ways in which its organisational behaviour ensures that editorial content is in line with the Russian government’s foreign policy positions. The paper is published in the Journal of Communication.

The Oxford researchers explore the organisational structure that forms the foundation of the process of content control, socialization of its journalists and the adaptability of the channel and its journalists. They also examine the ‘gatekeeping’ processes used at RT to reframe the news, such as the extent of the Russian governments’ involvement in hiring top managers, imposing story angles and in some instances, disapproving of stories. The researchers also explore how RT uses social controls such as rewarding loyalty to RT with greater career progression opportunities.

In addition, they set out a framework for examining state-backed media operations, using RT as a case study to show how understanding historical and domestic contexts can help scholars assess the level of propaganda prevalent within news output from domestic and foreign news bureaus.

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