

The website of RT America, a 24/7 TV news channel and Russian government disinformation and propaganda effort. RT was previously known as Russia Today.



Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic journalistic standards.

Score: 32.5/100

Ownership and Financing

RT is owned by Moscow-based ANO TV-Novosti, described on RT.com’s About Us page as an “autonomous, non-profit organization that is publicly financed from the budget of the Russian Federation.”

T&R Productions LLC, a Washington-based corporation, is RT’s U.S. production unit. Mikhail Solodovnikov, RT’s U.S. news director, is the corporation’s sole member and general manager. RT also publishes sponsored content.

Content

RT uses the tagline “Question More,” which is consistent with the policies of the Russian government under President Vladimir Putin to raise doubts about other countries and their institutions. The website also states, “We are set to show you how any story can be another story altogether.” Coverage on RT.com focuses on U.S., U.K., and Russian politics, sports, and business news.

The network broadcasts seven channels — RT (the flagship, English-language channel aired from Moscow), RT Arabic, RT en Español, RT America, RT UK, RT Documentary, and RT en Français. Users can watch most of these broadcasts live on RT.com, although RT Deutsch can only be viewed online. RT publishes content in six languages.

RT produces special projects such as FakeCheck, an interactive tool that is designed to teach users to “separate fact from fake” and #1917LIVE, a month-by-month overview of the Russian Revolution.

Credibility

RT.com’s About Us section states that the website “covers stories overlooked by the mainstream media, provides alternative perspectives on current affairs, and acquaints international audiences with a Russian viewpoint on major global events.”

However, RT.com’s news coverage regularly advances false claims and propaganda promoted by the Kremlin, and omits or refutes facts and positions that do not align with the Russian government, which owns and funds RT.

- ✗ Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)
- ✗ Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
- ✓ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
- ✗ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
- ✗ Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
- ✓ Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
- ✓ Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
- ✓ Reveals who’s in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
- ✗ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance. [More information.](#)

While RT.com accurately quotes Russian officials in its reports, NewsGuard has determined that RT.com, as a government-owned outlet publishing the government's false claims, has repeatedly published false content and advanced conspiracy theories that support the Kremlin's interests.

In multiple articles in 2018, RT.com advanced the Kremlin's claim that the Russia-backed Syrian government did not use chemical weapons in April 2018 against its own citizens. Those claims have been contradicted for years by first-person accounts, photos, and videos documenting the victims, and reports from the United Nations and France.

The RT stories advanced Russian government officials' assertions that activists' accounts of the chemical attacks were invented to provide a reason for the U.S. and foreign governments to attack Syria. An April 2018 article stated, "Russia insists the incident was staged and said it reserves the right to counter any attack on Syria." A September 2018 article declared, "Moscow has repeatedly warned that a false flag chemical weapon attack was being prepared in Idlib [Syria], giving the US and its allies justification to attack Syrian government forces."

A U.N. commission report shared with The New York Times in 2018 also detailed Syria's responsibility for the attacks. And in 2018, France released a declassified report stating that it had assessed "with a high degree of confidence" that the April 2018 chemical attacks were carried out by the Syrian regime based on "testimonies, photos and videos that spontaneously appeared on specialized websites, in the press and on social media in the hours and days following the attack."

In a May 2019 email response to NewsGuard's questions about how RT characterized the Syrian chemical attacks, Anna Belkina, RT Deputy Editor-in-Chief/Head of Communications, Marketing, and Strategic Development, wrote, "Given the major role Russia plays in many of the world's most significant geopolitical events, such as the conflict in Syria, to not include the official Russian perspective would not only be irresponsible, but would also make it impossible to provide a complete picture of the situation for our audience and the public at large."

Between May 2018 and April 2019, RT published multiple articles and videos falsely claiming that the 5G cellular telephone network can cause cancer. Other articles claimed that exposure to "radiations" from the towers could cause learning disabilities, and nosebleeds in children who attend school near them. In a March 2019 video segment, an RT correspondent said about cell phone radio wave signals, "The higher the frequency, the more dangerous it is to living

organisms ...” Other stories on the topic include “5G Wireless: A Dangerous ‘Experiment on Humanity’” in January 2019, “Could 5G put more kids at risk for cancer?” in March 2019, and “‘A global catastrophe’: Radiation activist warns that 5G networks are ‘massive health experiment’” in February 2019.

Multiple studies have not conclusively proven that cell phone exposure causes cancer in people, and none has focused on the emerging 5G technology. RT.com has occasionally referenced those studies, while saying in a February 2019 article that “many within the scientific community remain skeptical that the benefits of 5G technology outweigh the potential harm to humans.”

Several RT.com articles referred to a 2018 National Toxicology Program study that described the effects of high levels of radio frequencies on mice and rats. However, that study found “little indication” that the cell phone frequencies caused tumors in the rodents, after exposing rodents’ bodies to levels up to four times higher than the legal limit of cell phone exposure. RT.com also frequently cited a 2011 report by the World Health Organization International Agency for Research on Cancer, which classified cell phones as a “Class 2B carcinogen”. RT.com did not mention that the agency also classified pickles and aloe vera as a “2B” cancer risk.

“Unlike many other media, we show the breadth of debate” on the 5G issue, Belkina told The New York Times, which reported on RT’s 5G stories in May 2019.

“Russia doesn’t have a 5G play, so it tries to undermine and discredit ours,” Ryan Fox, chief operating officer of a U.S. technology firm that tracks disinformation, told the Times in explaining the RT stories.

Between March and April 2019, RT published more than a dozen articles about the release of U.S. special counsel Robert Mueller’s report, following a two-year investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Coverage reflected the views expressed by Russian officials, including Putin, that Russia never attempted to influence the election in Trump’s favor by spreading disinformation.

RT.com stories include “ICYMI: Mueller’s collusion delusion: US media is furious their president isn’t a Russian spy” in March 2019; “‘One of the greatest hoaxes in US history’: Russiagate narrative’s peddlers to be held accountable?” in March 2019; and, in April 2019, a story titled “Mueller report takes ‘Russian meddling’ for granted, offers no actual evidence,” which states, that it “remains unproven” that “Russia somehow meddled in the 2016 election.”

Thirteen Russian nationals and three entities, including the Internet Research Agency, were indicted on charges that they hacked into Democratic computers and spread disinformation on social media to influence the election. The indictments said that the nationals were in communication with members of Trump's campaign, although the Mueller report said that "the investigation did not establish that the campaign coordinated or conspired with the Russian government in its election-interference activities."

Multiple RT videos and articles have advanced claims that Russia's military agents were not responsible for the March 2018 poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in Britain, claiming that it was part of a "false flag" orchestrated by the U.K. In January 2019, RT published an article titled, "Russian foreign intelligence chief accuses Britain of 'destroying evidence' in Skripal case," which repeated the Russian official's assertions that British authorities were provoking Russia by covering up "traces of the crime," and hiding Skripal and his daughter from Russian authorities.

In September 2018, the U.K. charged two men suspected of being Russian military agents with attempted murder in Skripal's poisoning. British Prime Minister Theresa May said in a statement that "the two individuals named by the police and CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] are officers from the Russian military intelligence service."

In response to NewsGuard's inquiries about RT's coverage of the poisoning, Belkina said, "... In line with our overall editorial line, we have brought to light different sides of the story by sharing the opinions of a wide variety of commentators. This includes frequently referring to the opinions of the British government, the Russian government, international experts and other parties across its coverage."

RT's Skripal coverage fits into the broadcaster's mission of sowing "political dysfunction" in countries of special interest to the Russian government, according to a 2019 study published by the Policy Institute at King's College London. RT, as well as the Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik, accomplished this through many "separate – and often contradictory – narratives," the study said, including by airing the theory that Skripal was never poisoned and the incident was a hoax, and that the U.K. government staged the attack to frame Russia.

The study also found that RT.com repeatedly referred to "political dysfunction" in its coverage of several European countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the Ukraine, in addition to the U.S.

In late 2018, U.K. media regulator Ofcom said RT had violated its impartiality rules, in part, for biased coverage of the Skripal poisoning. Belkina told NewsGuard that RT "firmly" believes that none of its programs breached Ofcom's standards, adding: "we are in fact currently taking the only recourse we have to challenge the assertion made by Ofcom by seeking Judicial Review of the matter in the UK courts. Ofcom has publicly acknowledged that, in spite of its December decision, our compliance record has not been materially out of line with other broadcasters'."

In July 2019, Ofcom sanctioned RT and fined the organization 200,000 pounds, citing RT's "serious and repeated failures" to report impartially on stories such as the Skripal poisoning and Syrian conflict.

In response to the sanction, an unnamed RT spokesperson told the British newspaper Press Gazette, "It is very wrong for Ofcom to have issued a sanction against RT on the basis of its breach findings that are currently under Judicial Review by the High Court in London." RT did not respond to one NewsGuard email seeking further comment about Ofcom's determination.

The U.S. Department of Justice required RT America to register as an agent of the Russian government after the release of the 2017 intelligence report, forcing RT to disclose its government funding. In a September 2018 email, RT spokesperson Blair Dunbar said of the requirement, "We believe that the registration demand for RT America — staffed by American journalists covering American news for American audiences — contradicts the ideals of both democracy and freedom of speech. It deprives us of fair competition with other international channels, which are not registered as foreign agents."

Because RT.com has published false information and distorted coverage to support the views of the Russian government that owns it, and, through its reporting, serves a mission of sowing dysfunction in other countries, NewsGuard has determined that the website does not gather and present information responsibly, publishes deceptive headlines, and does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

RT regularly updates articles and publishes corrections when an error has been made, typically as an editor's note at the bottom of the story. "RT is committed to facts-based reporting," Dunbar told NewsGuard. "If a good-faith error occurs, we always correct it and let our audience know."

also describes its relationship to ANO TV-Novosti.

Most news articles on RT.com are not attributed to authors. Op-Ed columns do have bylines.

Asked about the lack of author attribution on articles, Dunbar told NewsGuard, “Many news stories are a collaborative effort, rather than the work of a single person — which is why this is a common practice within the international news space.”

RT.com provides biographies of the network’s on-air reporters, some of whom include links to their social media profiles. Biographies for RT’s editorial leadership are listed on a Management page. General email addresses for many RT departments are listed on the site’s Contact page. Russian phone numbers are also listed for some departments.

History

RT grew out of a decision in 2005 by the Russian government to extend its public opinion activities outside the country. Funded by the government, the broadcast channel launched as Russia Today in 2005. In 2009, it changed its name to RT (obscuring its status as an entity funded by the Russian government), later began paying U.S. cable companies to carry its channel, and launched a newsroom in Washington the following year.

The network focused on the internet as social media began to grow in popularity. In 2013, RT became the first news organization to gain more than 1 billion views on YouTube. In 2017, The Wall Street Journal reported that the English-language version of RT was close to CNN in having among the most views and subscribers for news channels on YouTube, with 2.1 billion views and 2.2 million subscribers.

There have been several incidents of RT correspondents resigning due to the requirements of propaganda. In 2014, Washington anchor Liz Wahl resigned when the network refused to air a reference she made to Russia’s intervention in Ukraine, Wahl explained in an article entitled, “I was Putin’s Pawn” published by Politico magazine. “I’d been a correspondent for RT — the English-language international cable network funded by the Russian government — for about two and a half years. I’d looked the other way as the network smeared America for the sake of making the Kremlin look better by comparison, while it sugarcoated atrocities by one brutal dictator after another.”

A London-based correspondent, Sara Firth, resigned in 2014 in protest of RT’s coverage of the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in Ukraine. RT.com stories backed the

government's contention that Russia or its allies were not involved in the plane crash.

Following concerns about Russian interference in the U.S. election, Twitter reported that RT had paid to promote its tweets and stopped taking their ads. In addition, YouTube removed RT from among the premium channels for which advertisers must pay higher prices. RT had been among the preferred advertising outlets on YouTube, a status for the top 5 percent of channels most popular among young viewers.

“Even though RT was removed from the program without any notice, Google has publically [sic] stated that it found no evidence that RT manipulated YouTube or violated its policies during the 2016 U.S. election campaign,” Dunbar told NewsGuard. “This speaks to the unprecedented political pressure increasingly applied to all RT partners and relationships in a concerted effort to push our channel out of the U.S. market entirely, and by any means possible.”

Corrections: An earlier version of this label erroneously reported that RT Deutsch was among RT's broadcast channels. RT Deutsch only publishes online content. An earlier version of the label also misidentified the name of Malaysia Airlines, and misstated the date that RT launched its Washington newsroom. An earlier version of the label also erroneously reported that RT was close to CNN in having the most views and subscribers on YouTube. In fact, while RT was close to CNN in popularity, the two networks were among the most popular channels on YouTube among news organizations, not all brands.

An earlier version of this label also erroneously attributed a quote that referred to a “false flag attack in Syria” to articles about the Skripal poisoning. The Skripal articles did not refer to Syria.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated in 2019 with additional examples of content on RT.com and new comments from RT Deputy Editor-in-Chief/Head of Communications, Marketing and Strategic Development Anna Belkina.

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