

FaR 2021**International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”****PECULIARITIES OF INFORMATION POLICY OF
RUSSIATODAY CHANNEL**

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Abstract

Being an important factor of shaping public opinion, information policy of mass media plays an especially important role in reference to foreign audience. In international broadcasting, mass media performs a number of presentational, propagandistic and image functions, which contribute to successful foreign policy implementation. Thus, we can state that the Russia Today channel is not only the subject of the international information market, but also an important foreign policy actor. This fact has an impact on the Russia Today information policy, which is realized not only by informing the viewer about the current agenda, but also by promoting and popularizing political ideas, by building and debunking stereotypes and by projecting the image of the state at home and abroad. Primarily, the information policy of the channel consists in selecting and adapting the news content for a foreign viewer. Apart from professional shootings and recordings, Russia Today broadcasts amateur videos, and it suits modern tendencies of development of citizen journalism, which is increasing participation of citizens in news production. Every separate segment that is broadcast represents a communicative whole consisting of textual, visual or audio-visual components. Thus, the channel successfully fulfills a complex of informational, presentational and propagandistic tasks at a high professional and artistic level, sets the agenda and, accordingly, increases loyalty and interest of foreign audience in internal and external policy of the Russian Federation.

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1. Introduction

The processes of qualitative transformation and globalization of information flows in the late XX and early XXI centuries had an impact not only on the constantly changing content, but also on the key principles of information work and the main features of information policy of mass media aimed at certain communicative objectives.

2. Problem Statement

Information policy of mass media has often become the subject of research of such scientists as Agapitova (2015), Dzyaloshinsky (1984), Iskandarova (2010), Larionov (2014), Popov (2001), Usova (2014) and others.

It should be noted that the most widespread conception of information policy accepted by researchers of the theory of journalism is Prokhorov's (2002) point of view. According to him, information policy of any mass medium is a creative unity of the subject matter and the range of problems, based on the social position of the mass medium.

Some researchers (Golyadkin (2015) and Popov (2001) consider that the most important feature of information policy is its ability to influence behavior and activity of the public (Golyadkin, 2015), its frame of mind and active life position connected with the interests of the state and civil society (Popov, 2001).

The position of other researchers is based on purely technical aspect of information policy. For instance, Yukechev (2006) defines information policy as "a set of various, jointly developed techniques, which we use in order to embody our conception and to release the promised product" (p. 46).

Among the most demanded techniques, the author mentions methods of media coverage of the main themes, principles of setting the agenda and selecting the main newsmakers and methods of working with them. According to Yukechev (2006), the concept of information policy encompasses even forms and methods of interaction of an editorial office with advertising agencies and circulation selling services. Of course, we should take into account the method and style of layout, placement of materials on pages and on the air.

3. Research Questions

However, it should be highlighted that information policy and conceptual model of issuance are two different things. If we assume that information policy is a set of techniques, we should take into account a pattern of conduct, but not a strategic approach, which is characteristic of the essence of information policy. Nevertheless, we should emphasize that information policy is embodied in the conceptual sphere and is realized through thematic and compositional-and-graphic models of mass media.

Shkondin (2007) correctly notes that information policy is realized through information activities. This approach is characteristic of both print media and electronic media. Let us consider this point in detail.

Fulfilling the information function of mass media, news programs are among the most demanded programs for people. Enriching the agenda with events and stories, news at the same time maintains the public's worldview, draws its attention to some events and distracts attention from certain facts.

Undoubtedly, information policy plays a key role in the process of choosing news stories and setting the agenda (Kodanina & Ryazanov, 2020).

Moreover, as Agapitova (2015) correctly notes, information policy allows not only shaping a worldview, but also managing information processes as well as developing dialogical interaction between the government and citizens for managing information flows.

4. Purpose of the Study

In fact, we are talking about shaping public opinion. Evidently, modern leading world channels such as CNN, BBC, Aljazeera, RT, Euronews are active participants of foreign affairs and often have a crucial influence on shaping world public opinion. It goes without saying that these channels have a great impact on the information policy of the states.

Thus, mass media with international broadcasting are subjects of both the world information market and foreign policy. Their function is not only to inform the target audience, but also to create stereotypes, to spread ideology and to urge citizens to take part in resolving important global problems (Klyuev, 2016).

There are some concomitant functions such as promoting and popularizing political ideas, criticizing or supporting state initiatives, blurring out or sharpening foreign policy contradictions, the radical form of which is manifested in ethnic hostility and conflicts.

In light of the above, it is evident that TV companies broadcasting international news set the current agenda. This agenda allows common citizens as well as newsmakers (politicians, officials, businessmen and others) to stay updated. Thus, for setting the agenda of governmental and diplomatic institutions news that was broadcast by TV companies plays an important role. Moreover, it is important not only to be aware of what is going on, but also to be ready to respond properly to the event that is effectively covered.

5. Research Methods

Using the method of content analysis, comparative and historical analysis as well as observation and generalization, let us try to reveal the main characteristics of the information policy of the RT channel.

6. Findings

RT (formerly named — Russia Today) is a digital information channel with international broadcasting. It is financed by the Russian government. It has been emphasized that the mission of RT is to present for the foreign audience an alternative perspective on the events happening in Russia and in the world and to position Russia in the international arena.

Russia Today was created on 12 December 2005. The core personnel consisted of Russian employees with an excellent command of the English language, foreign editors, reporters and presenters.

Let us dwell on the target audience, the range of which is quite broad. The target audience of RT consists of representatives of different confessions, age groups, occupations, levels of education and spheres of activity. These are men and women aged from 25 to 59. The majority are people with higher education or without it, but quite erudite and interested in the news.

Evidently, this fact has an impact on the information policy of the channel, the principles of creating and spreading information content.

It is important to underline that the broadcasting policy of RT pursues the following aims: firstly, to inform the foreign audience, to provide first-hand information about what is taking place in Russia; secondly, to set a certain agenda, to create the world picture, which suits the aims of the Russian government. Thirdly, it is necessary to admit educational aims and an important social function which consists in forming healthy moral values. Finally, one more important function of information policy is the image function which consists in projecting a certain image of the Russian Federation abroad. This image meets the requirements of the state information policy of the Russian Federation.

Speaking about the propagandistic function, we should note that the attitude to it is usually negative when we mean active criticism or stigmatizing decisions taken by the government of the country. That is why in modern international broadcasting it is better to speak about protection of national interests and projecting an image of a country. This is certainly true of RT that broadcasts an alternative view on the events pertaining to world affairs. This view is different from western standards. Nevertheless, we would like to highlight that propaganda is an important aspect of RT information policy, though not a defining one. We should emphasize that the success of any mass medium depends on the content or, to be more precise, on the quality of the content, and RT is distinguished first of all by professionalism of shooting, editing and montage, i.e. release of television products of high quality.

It is important to take note of the fact that the information from a Russian source should consider the mentality of the countries that become the target of information work. Obviously, the same information could evoke diametrically opposite reaction in different countries. At this point, it is crucial for the editorial staff to take into account both the global scale of the message spread and the peculiarities of certain countries and target audience groups. To add to this, the selection of relevant facts and arguments, as well as semantic accents, can also be variable depending on the chosen target audience.

Currently, the RT channel broadcasts in English, Arabic and Spanish. At the same time, it consists of several TV channels: the information RT International, RT Arabic, RT Spanish, RT America, RT UK and the documentary RTDoc. The company also owns the video agencies Free Video and RUPTLY (which provide services of selling video materials to mass media) and the Internet resource Ino TV (which publishes materials of other media). Each division of the company has an electronic version and a website that is available in German, Russian and French.

The round-the-clock (24/7) RT broadcasting assumes a continuous update of the news bulletin content in the course of work of the corresponding segment.

Today, in addition to news bulletins, the RT TV channel's content is represented by such programs as 'The Opposites' (emotional debates from the category of interview shows), 'SophieCo' ('a smart talk with smart people: politicians, experts, activists and celebrities), 'Erik's List' (unusual adventures of a Latin American in Russia), 'Max Kaiser's Review' ('an unbiased look at the facts behind the headlines of financial publications), 'CrossTalk' (a social-political talk show that raises the most acute problems of the modern world).

If we turn to the content of RT and analyze it, we can notice that its distinctive feature is the absence of TV series and entertaining programs on the air. This, in its turn, gives the reason to characterize the

channel as a serious high-quality media that produces objective news content for the benefit of a wide range of people interested in international politics (Mitrofanov, 2007).

Within the framework of certain analytical programs, the most resonant topics of predominantly international importance are discussed. For example, Peter Lavel's CrossTalk programs are built on the basis of discussion. The participants of the programs take part in debates related to the most conspicuous and sometimes sensitive issues. This may be the problem of Scottish independence, or the growing military potential of the Arab countries, or the peculiarities of the electoral process in the United States.

Let us get back to the information content produced by the RT TV company. From the very beginning of its existence, any newsbreak was marked by the verb 'to inject'; it means "to add, to introduce something new" and is correlated with the information presented to the public.

The basis of the modern broadcasting of the TV channel is made up of hourly news bulletins, which inform about the events in Russia, the world, politics, business, culture, and science. Approximately 70% of the channel's broadcast volume is international information and information about Russia.

Traditionally, the information content is divided into: 1) text (any articles, case studies, posts on social networks and other text materials), 2) videos (stories from 10 seconds to several minutes' long, or even hours in length in case of films or programs), 3) images (these are not only photos, but also infographics).

It is worth mentioning that Russia Today creates visual content not only by their own professional efforts, but also makes an extensive use of amateur videos or photos illustrating the news agenda. As an example, we can mention the amateur video of the meteorite fall in Chelyabinsk in 2013. The video was quite successful, and the total number of views rose to 30 million within a week. Many foreign channels actively rebroadcast the video.

The RT news story, which timekeeping rarely exceeds several minutes, is a certain communicative unit that consists of textual, visual, and sometimes audio-visual components (Mirimanov, 2008).

If we take a closer look, it becomes clear that an information message is constructed in accordance with the laws of infotainment and is characterized by a very noticeable emotional sounding. This emotional sounding is revealed both in the use of provocative headlines (for example, 'The situation is close to panic', 'Gesture of despair', 'The system does not think about the child') and in the general tone of the text offered to the audience. In addition, we should note that in some cases an information message is an original text-visual unit, in which the visual component does not play an auxiliary (illustrative) role, but serves as a full-fledged semantic component, participating on a parity basis in the formation of communication interaction with the audience.

Among the visual means used, one can distinguish both a pre-assembled video sequence and a video sequence broadcast from the event site, as a rule transmitted live (live pictures). In addition, infographics, animation, memes are widely spread on RT today, which once again confirms the course taken by the channel to visualize the proposed content.

Speaking about the program policy of the RT TV channel, we should note that the programs broadcast could be grouped into the following categories:

- news (informational, information-analytical, infotainment);
- social (programs with a social context);

- educational (programs with an educational and educational component, historical, about health);
- sports (sports news, broadcasts from sports arenas);
- criminal (criminal news reports).

The first positions in terms of broadcasting volume on RT are occupied by news and analytical programs. However, informing and explaining what is happening, the TV channel also fulfills both educational and socializing tasks.

We should also underline that the RT TV channel is characterized by the use of different platforms, striving to offer its audience, in addition to the official broadcast channel, the most familiar and easy-to-perceive form of presenting the content, including the use of social networks.

So, in addition to broadcasting the content via the official channel, RT uses the following resources in its information work. First, the site www.rt.com should be mentioned. It offers the content in six languages: English, German, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian. The site contains a news feed, comments, videos, photos. Materials are categorized into sections: 'World', 'Russia', 'Former USSR', 'Economics', 'Sport', 'Science', 'Without Politics' and others. The content is visualized as much as possible — each piece of material is provided with a photo (or several pictures).

Getting acquainted with the website of the TV channel, you can pay attention to the fact that interaction with the audience on the site is minimized, while modern information technologies allow activating the role of the audience in presenting the content by expanding feedback and introducing elements of an involved dialogue. So far, the audience can only point out an error in the text on the RT website. As for leaving a comment or evaluating the work of a journalist – it is not an option yet. Perhaps, this is due to the specifics of the image function of the TV channel with international broadcasting. Nevertheless, it is advised to expand the role of the audience, increasing its importance and activity and, therefore, its engagement in the content.

One can go directly from the official website to RT accounts on social networks. These are both familiar social media, such as VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, along with Flipboard or Rutube, which are not so popular in Russia yet.

In addition, today RT is the No. 1 international information TV channel on the YouTube video hosting. In 2013, RT became the first news channel to break the billion views mark on YouTube. Today the total number of views on all RT accounts exceeds 8 billion (Mitrofanov, 2007).

It should also be mentioned that currently RT remains the only Russian TV channel that has been nominated for an Emmy Award six times (Mirimanov, 2013).

The Russian ratings of citation and influence also show the high authority of the TV channel among the audience and the professional community. Thus, according to 'Medialogia' research, RT has been leading the annual citation rating of Russian TV channels in Russian-language segments of social media for five years in a row. Similar data is provided by the news aggregator Mediametrics, which claims that RT is the first in terms of traffic in monthly ratings since April 2017 (Mirimanov, 2013).

7. Conclusion

Summing up the above, it can be concluded that among the most important functions performed by RT, it is possible to distinguish informational, social, educational, image and propagandistic.

In addition to news broadcasts, the content of the TV channel is represented today by analytical, social, sports, educational and entertainment programs created at a high professional level, which is confirmed by various ratings and professional contests.

Every separate segment that is broadcast – a news story – represents a communicative whole consisting of textual, visual or audio-visual components.

However, analyzing the trends in the development of modern information broadcasting, the need for the dynamics and development of information broadcasting on the TV channel should be taken into account. It is recommended to expand the presence of the TV channel in the information field through the use of news aggregators, and the possibility of accessing news offline. Moreover, it is advised to increase the role of the audience in the work of the TV channel and the site and to add to the broadcast the features of interactivity and dialogue. The format of the dialogue and active feedback enhance the engagement of the audience and contribute to the growth of its interest and loyalty, which will undoubtedly raise the efficiency of information work in accordance with the tasks set.

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