[GB] Ofcom issues decision on misleading on-air tweets in a new current affairs programme broadcast on RT

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On 16 July 2018, Ofcom, the UK communications regulator, issued a notable decision concerning the first episode of a new current affairs programme broadcast on RT. The Alex Salmond Show is a political and current affairs series hosted by the former First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond, and produced by his own production company, Slàinte [Gaelic for "good health"] Media. RT is a global news and current affairs channel produced in Russia and funded by the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation. In the United Kingdom, the channel broadcasts on satellite and digital terrestrial platforms. The licence for RT is held by Autonomous Non-profit Organisation TV-Novosti ("TV Novosti" or the "Licensee").

A complaint was received concerning its first show claiming that four out of six tweets used to direct discussion and debate purported to come from real viewers whereas, in reality, the tweets were "sent by people connected either directly or indirectly to the production of the programme or to the presenter in some way."

Ofcom considered that this raised an issue under the Broadcast Code Rule 2.2: "Factual programmes or items or portrayal of factual matters must not materially mislead the audience".

It concluded that viewers would have been under the impression that the four questions quoted by Mr Salmond had originated from members of the public wholly unconnected with the programme or with him, when this was not, in fact, the case, meaning that, as a result of failure to disclose this information, viewers were misled. "Because viewer trust in this current affairs programme would have been undermined, we considered that this was materially misleading."

This investigation is one of eleven currently being undertaken by Ofcom into RT's broadcast output (see IRIS 2018-7/18).

Ofcom, Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin, Issue 358, 16 July 2018, p. 19

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/116048/Issue-358-Broadcast-On-Demand-Bulletin.pdf

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