Caffeina Magazine is owned by Caffeina Media Ltd, a privately held company that was incorporated in the U.K. in 2014 and is registered as an advertising agency. According to the U.K. Companies House, Caffeina Media Ltd's shares are owned by Gianluca Luciano, Caffeina Media Ltd's director (50%); Filippo Rossi, Caffeina Magazine editor-in-chief (25%); and Andrea Baffo (25%).

Caffeina Magazine's publisher is Caffeina Media Srl, a company registered in Rosignano Marittimo, in the Livorno province, Italy. According to the Italian company registry, Caffeina Media Ltd controls 70% of Caffeina Media Srl.

Caffeina Magazine derives its revenue from advertisements.

Content on Caffeina Magazine, which typically takes a colloquial, attention-grabbing tone, is intended to help the site gain popularity with social media and online search algorithms, Luciano told NewsGuard in a 2019 phone interview.

The site has 15 main sections — Video, Italy (Italia), World, Culture (Cultura), Society (Società), Entertainment (Spettacolo), Economy (Economia), Politics (Politica), Sport, Food (Gusto), Nature (Natura), Science (Scienza), Technology (Tecnologia), Wellness (Benessere), and Gossip. An additional 13 sections, featured under an Other (Altro) heading, include Beauty, Health (Salute), Children (Bambini), and Psychology (Psicologia). Many stories cover celebrities and gossip.
Headlines are often long and conversational. For example, “Temptation Island, Jessica and Andrea break the silence. But the reaction is tremendous: ‘Here’s what you did!’” (“Temptation Island, Jessica e Andrea rompono il silenzio. Ma la reazione è tremenda: ‘Ecco cosa avete fatto!’”); “High Flames: Very serious accident at the former Ilva of Taranto. The workers were at work. Here’s what happened” (“Fiamme altissime. Gravissimo incidente all’ex Ilva di Taranto. Gli operai erano al lavoro. Cosa è successo”); and “Safe for a miracle! Vittorio Sgarbi shock: what happened to the art critic” (“Salvo per miracolo. Vittorio Sgarbi choc: cosa è successo al critico d’arte”).

Articles sometimes cite reporting from media outlets such as the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera, and British tabloids such as the Daily Mirror. It publishes stories from AdnKronos, an Italian news agency. However, NewsGuard found multiple examples of plagiarism.

An April 2019 article titled “Ilary Blasi, the news on pregnancy triggers the gossip. And Totti comments so” (“Ilary Blasi, la notizia sulla gravidanza scatena il gossip. E Totti commenta così”), included more than four sentences taken from a story published the day before by the Italian edition of Vanity Fair under the headline “Are Ilary and Francesco expecting baby number four?” (“Ilary e Francesco aspettano il bebè numero quattro?”), including: “The followers went wild: according to many, from that comment it is clear not only that Ilary is pregnant but also that she is expecting a girl” (“I follower si sono scatenati: secondo molti, da quel commento si capisce non solo che Ilary è incinta ma pure che aspetta una femminuccia”); and “Others, however, pointed out that Totti, most likely, simply referred to the second-born Chanel” (“Altri però hanno fatto notare che Totti, con tutta probabilità, si riferiva semplicemente alla secondogenita Chanel”).

Another April 2019 article titled “Burnt tumors with electron beams in a second: the discovery of an Italian physicist” (“Tumori bruciati con fasci di elettroni in un secondo: la scoperta di un fisico italiano”) plagiarized
an article published by the website sinapsimag.it in February 2019 and headlined “A patent for the treatment of cancer: the discovery of Bari Gabriele Grittani” (“Un brevetto per la cura del cancro: la scoperta del baresse Gabriele Grittani”). Caffeina’s story plagiarized several sentences, including: “Irradiate the tumor masses for few seconds, through different sources of very high-energy electrons” (“Irraggiare le masse tumorali in pochi secondi, attraverso diverse sorgenti di elettroni ultra-energetici”); and “It is the idea of Gabriele Grittani, a young physician from Bari who, since 2013, has been studying and working in the laser-plasma acceleration sector in Prague” (“È l’idea di Gabriele Grittani, giovane fisico baresse che, dal 2013, a Praga studia e lavora nel settore dell’accelerazione laser-plasma”).

A March 2019 story titled “Less consumption, more you pay’: Electricity and gas, increases up to 46%: that’s what’s behind it” (“Meno consumi, più paghi’: Luce e gas, aumenti fino al 46%: ecco cosa c’è dietro”) includes entire paragraphs that originally appeared in a February 2018 article published by Il Corriere della Sera with the headline “Consumate poca elettricità? Pagherete il 46% di più in bolletta”.

A December 2018 story, “Like brothers:’ Bear and wolf found as follows: pictures that make you think (and from which to learn a lot)” (“Come fratelli: Orso e lupo beccati così: immagini che fanno riflettere (e da cui imparare molto”), includes paragraphs and pictures taken directly from an article published over two years earlier by the Italian site of National Geographic.

In a 2019 email interview with NewsGuard, the editor-in-chief Filippo Rossi, referencing the March 2019 example, stated that “the contested paragraphs are pieces from various news agencies and, as such, have been used by various websites” (“i paragrafi da te contestati risultano parti di diverse agenzie di stampa e, come tali, riprese da diverse testate web”). Referring to the December 2018 story, Rossi wrote that the site has “already started to verify and review articles related to ‘science-nature’ thanks also to your observation” (“abbiamo già avviato un lavoro di verifica..."
In January 2020 the site published an article supporting the unsubstantiated theory that the coronavirus was engineered in a Chinese military laboratory. The story, titled “‘They made it in the lab.’ Coronavirus, the former military biologist is sure: ‘This is where it comes from’” (“Lo hanno fatto in laboratorio’. Coronavirus, l’ex biologo militare ne è certo: ‘Ecco da dove proviene’”), quoted a Washington Times article and unspecified “Twitter profiles of Chinese dissidents and human rights activists” stated that the virus “could be originated in a Wuhan laboratory related to secret biological weapons’ program of China” (“potrebbe aver avuto origine in un laboratorio di Wuhan collegato al programma di armi biologiche segrete della Cina”).

There is no evidence that the virus originated in this lab. A February 2020 report by the World Health Organization said, “increasing evidence demonstrates the link between the 2019-nCoV [Wuhan coronavirus] and other similar known coronaviruses (CoV) circulating in bats.” A study published the same month in Nature found that the virus is “96% identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus.” Rutgers University chemical biology professor Richard Ebright also told the Washington Post that “based on the virus genome and properties there is no indication whatsoever that it was an engineered virus.”

The site has exaggerated the results of scientific research in both headlines and articles. An April 2018 article was titled “‘What causes severe brain damage: Cell phones, shocking proofs from the latest research. The scientists’ discovery that alarms millions of people’ (“‘Cosa provocano di grave al cervello: Cellulari, conferme choc dall’ultima ricerca. La scoperta
degli scienziati che allarma milioni di persone”). It based its claims on the results of a U.S. National Toxicology Program study released in February 2018, which found a link between cancerous heart tumors in male rats and exposure to high levels of radiofrequency radiation (RFR) similar to that in 2G and 3G cell phones. While the Caffeina Magazine article clarifies that the study’s results are based on rats, not humans, it omits several important caveats of the study, including that the rats were exposed to RFR at higher levels and for longer durations than what people experience, and that the study authors explicitly stated their findings should not be extrapolated to human cell phone usage.

“Caffeina doesn’t really cover news, but tells scandalistic and gossip stories,” Luciano told NewsGuard in a phone call in 2019. (“Caffeina in realtà non dà informazioni ma racconta storie scandalistiche e gossip”). He said that because of this, NewsGuard’s nine criteria — which he described as “interesting, but a bit strict” (“interessanti ma un po’ rigidi”) — would be more relevant to some of his other publications. Luciano added, “as a social network publisher, we work on virality, which is journalism’s real enemy because it forces everybody to write the same thing. We write what’s popular. Period.” (“Siamo editori da social network. Lavoriamo sulla viralità, che è il vero nemico del giornalismo perché costringe tutti a scrivere le stesse cose. Noi scriviamo quello che è popolare. Punto.”)

Because Caffeina Magazine has appeared to plagiarize at least four articles, and has exaggerated the results of scientific research, NewsGuard has determined the site has failed to gather and present information responsibly.

Images are generally not credited.

The site does not have a dedicated opinion section and generally refrains from including opinion in articles.

Caffeina Magazine does not have a stated corrections policy and NewsGuard could not find examples of published corrections although it invites readers to
request corrections or make comments at the end of every article.

Asked to provide at least three links to articles that have been corrected, Caffeina explained to NewsGuard in a 2019 email that the site has yet to receive requests for corrections from readers or people mentioned in its articles. If it makes what it called a “simple” (“mero”) mistake --- described as, for example, a wrong date of birth or a misspelled name --- the site would thank the person who reported it and change the text of the article. That does not meet NewsGuard standards. In “more complex cases” (“casi più complessi”), in which someone raises an issue with an article’s content, Caffeina Magazine told NewsGuard that it would change the text of the article with “an appropriate graphic indication and a narration of the exchange” the site had with the person who raised an issue.

Headlines have significantly overstated the conclusions of scientific research referenced in articles. A February 2019 story titled “Those who cry while watching movies are psychologically stronger” (“Quelli che piangono guardando i film sono psicologicamente più forti”) cites two sources that do not back the claim made in the headline. The first was a reference to unnamed “studies” that the article claimed have shown that if people cry while watching a movie, they are capable of empathy (not strength, as stated in the headline). The second was a 2002 study conducted by psychologists from Tilburg University, which the article claimed found that sad movies can improve a person’s mood. It did not determine that crying during movies made individuals “psychologically stronger,” as the headline claimed.

The site has also used speculative headlines that are contradicted within the body of a story. A September 2018 article was titled, “Silvio Berlusconi seems to have been urgently hospitalized at San Raffaele in Milan. ‘His condition appears critical. Maybe a stroke?’” (“Silvio Berlusconi sarebbe stato ricoverato d’urgenza al San Raffaele di Milano. ‘Le condizioni sarebbero critiche. Un ictus?’”). It covered a report by Business.it, another news site owned by Luciano, that former Italian
Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi had been hospitalized, saying he “seems to be in critical health condition.” The article later states “The cause seems to be a stroke,” according to Business.it. The end of the article, however, acknowledges that “just an hour after the news broke” a senator close to Berlusconi denied the claim he was very ill via Twitter, but the original headline was not changed.

For these reasons NewsGuard has determined that CaffeinaMagazine.it does not avoid publishing deceptive headlines.

Asked by NewsGuard about the site’s approach to headlines, and its overall editorial standards, Luciano stated: “I don’t want to torture you on the work you guys are doing, but rules are set by algorithms, not by publishers, not even the big ones anymore. It’s as if there were nine criteria dictated by social media. I need to respect each of them to become viral on social platforms and on Google News or Search. We write based on what they want.” (“Non ti voglio tormentare sul lavoro che state facendo, è che qui le regole non le dettano gli editori, neanche quelli più grandi ormai, ma gli algoritmi. È come se ci fossero nove criteri dei social. Io devo riempire ciascuno di quei nuovi criteri per diventare virale sui social e su Google News o Search. Noi scriviamo in funzione di quello che vogliono loro”).

Caffeina Magazine discloses its ownership by Caffeina Media Ltd on its Masthead page (Gerenza). The Masthead page names the editor-in-chief, Filippo Rossi, who is also artistic director of Fondazione Caffeina Cultura. However, the site does not reveal who owns Caffeina Media Ltd, and thus does not meet NewsGuard standards for disclosing ownership and financing in a user-friendly manner.

A general email address and the editorial leadership are provided in the Masthead page, as well as in a Cookie Policy and Privacy Policy pages.
Articles on Caffeina Magazine do not identify their author and the site does not provide a list of its journalists. Caffeina explained to NewsGuard in an email that articles are the result of “continuous discussion among staff members” (“confronto continuo tra i membri dello staff”). In this sense, articles are “participatory” (“partecipati”) and thus not attributable to a single person.

Advertising is distinguished from editorial content and sponsored content is clearly labeled.

History

The CaffeinaMagazine.it domain name was created in 2014. Luciano told NewsGuard that the Caffeina brand was introduced to promote World Book Day (“La Giornata del Libro”), a UNESCO event designed to encourage reading, but that by the end of 2014, Caffeina Magazine turned instead toward emulating tabloid-style news publishers.

Editor’s Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on March 5, 2020, to include new examples of plagiarism and description of the site’s publication of the unsubstantiated theory that the coronavirus was engineered in a Chinese military laboratory. The label was also updated to reflect that the site now discloses information about its editorial leadership. The criteria checklist has been adjusted accordingly.

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Sources

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