Ownership and Financing

ImolaOggi.it is owned by Armando Manocchia, the president of Una via per Oriana, an organization founded in memory of the late Oriana Fallaci, a renowned war reporter and Italian correspondent based in New York, who in the last years of her life expressed anti-Islamic views in books such as “The Rage and the Pride,” written after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.

In 2009 and 2010, Manocchia represented the right-wing political party Northern League (Lega Nord), currently known as The League, as a city councilman in Borgo Tossignano, a small town in the Emilia Romagna region.

The site publishes advertisements and solicits donations. Manocchia told NewsGuard in a 2019 telephone interview that he thinks the site’s overall donations have amounted to fewer than 3,000 euros. “I don’t get rich from donations as is believed,” (“Non mi arricchisco con le donazioni come si crede”), he said.

Content

Imola Oggi, which retains the name of an online newspaper that covered news in the northern Italian town of Imola, primarily publishes news and opinion on Italian politics and immigration.

The site prominently features stories on crimes where migrants or other foreigners are the suspects. Typical headlines include “Islam, sex outside marriage: girl whipped in Indonesia” (“Islam, sesso fuori dal matrimonio: ragazza frustata in Indonesia”); “Austria, Church: No Islamic headscarf ban on schools” (“Austria, Chiesa: No divieto velo islamico nelle scuole”); and “Rovigo, 11 years old at school: ‘I will blow myself up in the name of Allah’” (“Rovigo, 11enne a scuola: ‘mi farò saltare in aria in nome di Allah’”).
Credibility

Imola Oggi has repeatedly published false and misleading content, especially on immigration.

A September 2019 article titled “Kalergi students” ("Gli allievi di Kalergi"), claimed that the Italian government’s ruling coalition support the “Kalergi plan,” which is “working to destroy the vestiges of European white civilization” and to “replace the population” with African and Asian residents. ("sta lavorando per distruggere le vestigia della Civiltà bianca europea” e per “sostituire la popolazione”).

The Kalergi plan, also known as “the great replacement” theory, is a discredited conspiracy theory backed by right-wing and white supremacist movements that claims there is a plot to substitute the white population of Europe with non-whites.

The theory is not supported by immigration data. According to the Warsaw-based European Border and Coast Guard Agency, also known as Frontex, illegal immigration in 2018 was 92 percent lower than it was in 2015. Data from Eurostat, which compiles statistics throughout the European Union, shows that 825,400 people immigrated to a European Union member state in 2017, a 17 percent decrease from the year before.

Other Imola Oggi articles advance unproven conspiracy theories without evidence. For example, in an April 2019 article, “Quousque tandem abutere patientia nostra?” (a Latin sentence that means “How long will you abuse our patience?”), the author claimed that a “planned invasion” ("una pianificata invasione") of migrants was coming and that Italy would become a “fetid open sewer” ("fetida fogn a cielo aperto").

Manocchia, responding to a NewsGuard inquiry in 2019 on the article, said the article’s claim is true. “If one
doesn’t see it, it means one is blind,” he told NewsGuard in a telephone interview. “It’s a policy that starts from the top, from the new world order, from the United Nations and its Chinese boxes, and that for years now have been organizing what I call an ethnic substitution” (“Se uno non la vede, significa che è cieco. È una politica che parte dall’alto, dal nuovo ordine mondiale, dalle Nazioni Unite e le sue scatole cinesi, che da anni stanno organizzando quella che io chiamo una sostituzione etnica”).

In a February 2018 article, “Macerata: who really shot the migrants?” (“Macerata: chi ha davvero sparato ai migranti?”), Manocchia cast doubt on the identity of the shooter of six migrants from Africa, a day after neo-Fascist suspect Luca Traini had confessed to the shootings. Manocchia’s story claimed that the media covered up news of a second suspect, writing, “As often happens, the first news, those not yet censored, speak of the hunt for two men, aboard a dark Alfa 147” (“Come spesso accade, le prime notizie, quelle non ancora censurate, parlano della caccia a due uomini, a bordo di un’Alfa 147 scura”). Manocchia included screenshots of early news reports that had reported that there were two suspects, and a photograph that showed a second man other than Traini. Italian media initially reported that a man had been stopped by the police while driving a car similar to Traini’s, but updated the reports after police said that that man was not a suspect. Traini, who briefly ran for office under the Lega Nord party, was sentenced to 12 years in prison for the shootings in October 2018.

Asked about the Macerata article, Manocchia told NewsGuard in a telephone interview, “I’m not defending this idiot, there are no doubts on this. I raised doubts. It takes more than this to be a conspiracy theorist, which I’m not” (“Lungi da me difendere quell’imbécille. Su questo non ci sono dubbi. Ho sollevato dubbi. Ci vorrebbe di più per essere un complottista. Io non lo sono”).

In early 2020, the site also promoted conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 virus outbreak.
For example, a February 2020 article headlined “Tgcom24: Chinese virus born in a military laboratory by mistake” (“Tgcom24: virus cinese nato in laboratorio militare per errore”), cited an op-ed by Paolo Liguori, Tgcom24’s editor in chief, who claimed that the virus was likely engineered in a military lab in Wuhan, China, where the virus first emerged. The article did not provide any evidence to back Liguori’s assertion, which has been denied by biologists, fact-checkers, and major health organizations.

In a March 2020 article, ImolaOggi.it published an interview with Italian scientist Stefano Montanari, who falsely claimed that the coronavirus “is one of the many viruses made in the laboratory” (“è uno dei non pochi virus fatti in laboratorio”).

According to a February 2020 report by the World Health Organization, “increasing evidence demonstrates the link between the 2019-nCoV 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.”

Because ImolaOggi.it’s news stories and headlines have repeatedly misstated facts and advanced theories without evidence, NewsGuard has determined that the website repeatedly publishes false content, does not gather and present information responsibly, and publishes deceptive headlines.

The site does not state a political orientation, although its stories are predominantly critical of migration, Muslims, and Islam. ImolaOggi.it occasionally labels opinionated portions of news articles in bold red text. However, most news articles include unlabeled opinions.

For example, a December 2019 article published in the section News Politics (News Politica) titled “Luigino Iscariot” (“Luigino Iscariota”), said of Italy’s minister of Foreign Affairs, Luigi Di Maio, “Luigino Di Maio Iscariot’s betrayal with turnaround is shameful and represents the very low level into which this country is falling” (“Il tradimento con giravolta di Luigino Di Maio
in Iscariota è vergognoso e rende la cifra del bassissimo livello nel quale sta precipitando questo paese”.

In the March 2019 article, “Banking Commission and Hard Brexit: chances of an ITALEXIT are increasing” (“Commissione Banche e Hard Brexit: ITALEXIT sempre più vicina”), the author argued that Italy’s exit from the European Union member states that use the euro is “necessary for the decay of the Single Global Government which is carried out by the elites” (“necessario per il disfacimento del Governo Unico Globale esercitato dalle elite”).

Because ImolaOggi.it articles mix opinion and news, and because the website does not clearly disclose its nationalist, right-leaning orientation to users, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

In 2019, Manocchia acknowledged to NewsGuard that the site does not label opinion in a separate section, but said, “Imagine the sort of critiques I’d have received, had I created an editorial by the editor in chief. I don’t want to appear as if I’m showing off pretending to be a journalist, a term I abhor. Obviously, we publish point of views and not only news.” (“Immagina le critiche che avrei ricevuto se avessi fatto un editoriale del direttore. Non voglio apparire come quello che si vanta di essere un giornalista, un termine che aborro. Comunque è ovvio. Pubblichiamo non solo notizie ma anche punti di vista”).

Imola Oggi does not generally publish corrections and does not post a corrections policy. Manocchia provided NewsGuard with an example of a correction published in June 2015. He provided three other examples of content that were not corrections. Manocchia said, “If I publish a story from a certain source, I trust it. But if that source had made a mistake, I wouldn’t know it.” (“Se pubblico una storia da una certa fonte, mi fido. Ma se quella fonte ha fatto un errore io non lo posso sapere”). Manocchia did not respond to an additional email in January 2020, seeking comment on the site’s current corrections practices.
Transparency

The website does not disclose Manocchia’s ownership, although it lists him as its editor-in-chief (direttore) under the site’s logo and in the Imola Oggi page. Asked about the site’s lack of ownership disclosure, Manocchia told NewsGuard in a 2019 interview, “Why should I do it? I believe it’s wrong doing it. It’s something that’s usually not done. The public is not interested in knowing that Armando Manocchia is the owner.” (“Perché dovrei farlo? Credo sia sbagliato farlo. Non è qualcosa che in genere si fa. Il pubblico non è interessato a sapere che Armando Manocchia è il proprietario”).

The site does not name any other content creators besides Manocchia. Articles rarely have bylines, and when they do, they do not provide author contact or biographical information. When asked by NewsGuard why many stories lack bylines, Manocchia said, “This is because they are often attributed to the newsroom. I’m not interested in putting my name everywhere” (“Questo perché sono della redazione. Non sono interessato a mettere il mio nome ovunque”).

Advertising is distinguished from editorial content.

History

The site was founded in 1997 by Radio Logica, a local radio station that no longer exists. Until 2011, when Mannocchia bought the site, Imola Oggi covered local news in the town of Imola.

Manocchia ran in the 2013 Italian general election to become a Chamber of Deputies member, under the “Io Amo l’Italia” movement. The conservative movement was founded by Magdi Cristiano Allam, a journalist and former member of the European Parliament, known for his controversial comments on Islam.

Editor’s Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on March 25, 2020.

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