

The website of France-Soir, a former national newspaper that relaunched online in 2015, and that has published unsubstantiated claims about the COVID-19 pandemic.



Proceed with caution: This website fails to adhere to several basic journalistic standards.

Score: 44.5/100

Ownership and Financing

France-Soir is owned by Shopper Union France, a subsidiary of the publicly traded, Paris-based company France Soir Groupe, traded under the name Mutualize Corp. Mutualize specializes in online content and financial services. Formerly known as Cards Off, Mutualize Corporation also owns the online brokerage firm ITPrêt.com. Xavier Azalbert, the site's publishing director, is an entrepreneur who specializes in financial technologies, according to the website Liberation.

France-Soir generates revenue from advertising and sponsored content.

Content

FranceSoir.fr covers French and international news, social issues, and entertainment. The site divides content into sections including politics, society, economic trends, culture, and lifestyle. It publishes a breaking news feed, which is often based on stories from Agence France-Presse.

A section called "En Coop" features articles written by contributors including a military specialist, a medical expert, and animal rights activists. Some articles are written in English.

The website had employed four full-time journalists until October 2019, when the journalists said in a statement that they were dismissed "for economic reasons." Since then, the website has featured work by contributors, some of whom are anonymous.

The website's mission, according to a Manifesto published in May 2020, is to "offer its readers a new experience that is informational, entertaining, and delivers services." ("proposer à nos lecteurs une nouvelle expérience à la fois informationnelle,



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.](#)

servicielle et divertissante”). The website continued, “We promise to speak with everyone with an open mind, and not to restrict ourselves to an ideological and activist vision of the world, or to a ready-to-think collection of ideas that could be divisive and dangerous to us, but also to you.” (“Nous nous engageons à parler à tout le monde sans sectarisme, et à ne pas nous enfermer dans une vision du monde orientée et militante ou dans un florilège de prêt-à-penser clivant et dangereux pour nous comme pour vous”).

Credibility

France-Soir publishes a mix of original reporting by contributing writers and articles that are based on news from reliable news sites such as Radio Europe 1, weekly *Le Journal du dimanche*, and daily newspaper *Le Monde*. Headlines generally reflect the content of articles. Images are generally attributed.

Before its full-time staff left in October 2019, the website generally published accurate, well-sourced content. However, a NewsGuard review of the website in June 2020 found several articles that made unsubstantiated claims about the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, in June 2020, France-Soir published an interview with Silvano Trotta, a French YouTube personality, that advocated a mix of two antibiotics called macrolides and C3G to treat COVID-19. Trotta, who has promoted conspiracy theories about the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, claimed in the France-Soir article that a French family doctor named Sabine Paliard Franco successfully treated all of her patients with a mix of the antibiotics.

The article quoted Trotta saying that Paliard Franco had “noted a 100% recovery, including with very old patients, with tight chest.” Trotta went on to say, “What’s true is that Doctor Paliard Franco’s treatment works like a charm.” (“Elle avait 100% de guérison y compris de personnes très âgées avec les poumons de pris ...Ce qu'elle a de vrai est que le traitement du Docteur Paliard Franco fonctionne à merveille.”)

The World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the French Health Ministry have all said that as of June 2020, there was no specific treatment for the coronavirus strain responsible for the 2020 outbreak.

The France-Soir article did not include that information, however, in its interview of Trotta,. The article's unnamed author only asked Trotta about why YouTube had removed an April 2020 video that Trotta had published that promoted the same claims.

In a June 2020 email to NewsGuard, Paliard Franco said that she had asked Trotta to remove the YouTube video, saying that while "the content was true, and reason for great hope," her research was not yet ready for formal publication. "This is not a validated scientific study," she told NewsGuard.

In another June 2020 article, France-Soir suggested that countries with more stringent lockdown measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 actually increased their citizens' chances of contracting the disease. The article noted that Belgium, which had reported more cases of coronavirus than the Netherlands as of late June 2020, had adopted stricter lockdown measures. For example, Belgium had closed schools and public places, while the Netherlands had allowed larger gatherings, with some limitations.

"The comparison between Belgium and The Netherlands suggests that a strict confinement accelerates contaminations," the article said. ("La comparaison entre la Belgique et les Pays bas permet de suggérer même que le confinement strict accélère les contaminations").

A study published in June 2020 in scientific journal Nature, which looked at 11 European countries' efforts at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, found that "major non-pharmaceutical interventions and lockdown in particular have had a large effect on reducing transmission." The study added, "We find that, across 11 countries, since the beginning of the epidemic, 3,100,000 ... deaths have been averted due to interventions."

In June 2020, France Soir published an article titled “A man-made COVID virus highly pathogenic for Humans was created by the Wuhan Virology Institute and by the USA,” (“Un virus COVID synthétique hautement pathogène pour l’être humain créé par l’institut de virologie de Wuhan et les USA”). The article, which primarily reported on a 2015 study about a different strain of coronavirus unrelated to COVID-19, suggested without evidence that the COVID-19 virus could have been bioengineered.

“In its statements to the press, a French expert in virology denied that such manipulations could have happened in Wuhan or elsewhere. But what about research in secret military laboratories? ... We understand better why Americans and Chinese accuse each other of having been the origin of the SARS-Cov2 pandemic,” the article said. (“Dans ses déclarations à la presse un expert virologue français a nié que de telles manipulations aient pu avoir eu lieu à Wuhan ou ailleurs. Cependant quid de la recherche dans les laboratoires secrets militaires ? ... Nous comprenons mieux pourquoi Américains et Chinois s'accusent mutuellement d'avoir été à l'origine de la pandémie du SARS-Cov2”).

Scientific research suggests that the COVID-19 virus originated in bats, and no evidence supports the theory that it was bioengineered. A study published in the journal Nature in February 2020 found the new virus’s genome is “96 percent identical” to a bat coronavirus. A March 2020 study published in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that the virus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.”

In an April 2020 statement, the U.S. intelligence community said that it “concur[s] with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified.” It later said that the intelligence community “will continue to rigorously examine emerging information and intelligence to determine whether the outbreak began through contact with infected animals or if it was the result of an accident at a laboratory in Wuhan.”

Because France Soir has published unsubstantiated claims about the COVID-19 pandemic, NewsGuard has determined that the website does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for gathering and presenting information responsibly.

The website has an opinion section, and labels some of its articles as such. However, opinionated articles also appear in sections that are labeled as news, which does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for handling the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

For example, a June 2020 article titled “Covid-19: Randomized trial is Big Pharma’s new media-friendly weapon against ethics” (“L’essai randomisé la nouvelle arme médiatique de Big Pharma, contre l’éthique dans la Covid-19”) said, “It is now difficult to captivate readers with a subject like conflicts of interests in the pharmaceutical industry since they have become such a common pathology of our society.” (“Il est à présent difficile de captiver le lecteur avec un sujet sur les conflits d’intérêts dans l’industrie pharmaceutique tellement ils sont devenus une pathologie banale de notre société”). It was not labelled as opinion and was tagged in the categories Society and Health.

Another June 2020 article labeled Politics and World stated that “the UK therapeutic strategy against COVID-19, which does not treat people in the early stages of the disease, is profoundly wrong.” (“La stratégie thérapeutique COVID-19 au Royaume-Uni, qui ne traite pas les personnes dans la phase précoce de la maladie, est profondément erronée”). It was not labelled opinion.

Francesoir.fr does not explain how it handles corrections, and NewsGuard did not find corrections on the website.

The site did not respond to two messages sent via its online form, requesting comment on the articles cited above, the website’s approach to corrections, and its unlabeled opinion in news stories.

does not make clear that the company is owned by Mutualize Corporation. The Legal Notice page lists the name of the website's publishing director.

Most France-Soir articles are attributed only to FranceSoir. Some articles are attributed to a group calling itself "The Citizen Collective." In most cases, no biographical or contact information is provided for the authors whose names are listed.

The website did not respond to two messages sent through its online content form seeking comment on the lack of information on its owner and content creators.

Users can reach the site through a generic contact form.

Advertisements and sponsored content are distinguishable from editorial content. A shopping section on the site publishes articles promoting products that users can purchase through links within the stories. Each article contains a note at the end identifying the content as sponsored, and explaining that France-Soir receives commissions if users purchase the products.

History

On July 14, 1941, French resistance members Robert Salmon and Philippe Viannay founded the first issue of the newspaper *Défense de la France*, the predecessor of France-Soir. The publication was printed in the basement of the Sorbonne university in Nazi-occupied Paris. The newspaper changed its name to France-Soir in November 1944.

The media group Hachette purchased the newspaper in 1949. Led by the celebrated publisher Pierre Lazareff, France-Soir became one of the most widely read newspapers in the country, publishing the work of such acclaimed writers as novelist Joseph Kessel, war correspondent Lucien Bodard, and the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, the newspaper featured the slogan, "the only French daily printing more than 1 million copies" ("le seul quotidien français tirant à plus d'un million d'exemplaires").

After the death of Lazareff in 1972, France-Soir's print circulation dropped considerably, and the newspaper changed ownership several times. The newspaper's circulation fell to fewer than 50,000 copies by 2006. It printed its last issue in 2011.

In 2012, the company CardsOff paid 510,000 euros to acquire the newspaper's remaining assets, and relaunched France-Soir as an iPad publication. CardsOff changed its name to Mutualize Corporation in 2014, and France-Soir re-launched as a website in 2015.

As noted, in October 2019, after a monthslong strike, France-Soir's four full-time journalists said in a statement that they were fired for economic reasons. "But it's not the end of France-Soir. Our employer has indeed decided to continue publishing this newspaper, which used to be one of the biggest ones in France after the war. With which framework? To do what? Everyone should remain attentive," the staff wrote in a press release at the time. ("Pour autant, ce n'est pas la fin de France-Soir. Notre employeur a ainsi décidé de continuer à éditer ce qui fut l'un des plus grands journaux français de l'après-guerre. Avec quel cadre ? Dans quel but ? Il appartiendra à tous de rester vigilant").

Xavier Azalbert, the site's publishing director did not respond to a NewsGuard message in June 2020 seeking comment on the staff's departures.

Corrections: An earlier version of this Nutrition Label erroneously stated that the newspaper Défense de la France was founded on July 20, 1941. The newspaper was founded on July 14, 1941. An earlier version of this Nutrition Label also erroneously reported that Défense de la France changed its name to France-Soir in October 1944. The newspaper was renamed in November 1944. NewsGuard apologizes for the errors.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on June 26, 2020, to include new content. Its rating has changed to reflect NewsGuard's determination that FranceSoir.fr no longer meets NewsGuard's standard for gathering and presenting information responsibly

and for regularly issuing corrections, but does meet NewsGuard's standards for clearly labeling advertising and revealing who is in charge. The criteria checklist was adjusted accordingly.

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Send feedback to NewsGuard: [Click Here](#)

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Financing

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