An ultraconservative Catholic blog that has published false and unsubstantiated claims, including misinformation about vaccines and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ownership and Financing

LeSalonBeige.fr is owned by Paris-based media company GT Editions, which owns several far-right and Christian-oriented websites in France, including Nouvelles de France, Ripostecatholique.fr, InfoCatho.fr, and Christianophobie.fr. GT Editions is owned by Guillaume de Thieulloy, a former aide to former right-leaning French Senator Jean-Claude Gaudin. Gaudin fired Thieulloy in 2014 because of controversial positions he took on his websites and in an anti-Islam publication called Confidential Islam.

Thieulloy also owns the publishing house Les Editions Muller, which published the memoir of former far-right political leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. In 2013, Thieulloy launched the group Collectif Famille Mariage to advocate against same-sex marriage laws.

LeSalonBeige.fr is financed through advertisements, donations and an endowment fund, Le Fonds de dotation GT Editions.

Content

LeSalonBeige.fr is described on its homepage as a "daily news blog of secular Catholics." The website named itself Le Salon Beige (which means The Beige Salon) because it sees itself as a salon for discussions, according to the About page. "'Salon' because we sort of talk like in a salon; 'Beige' because a color is easy to remember and has no political connotations," the page states.

The site publishes news and commentary on topics including French politics, health, and immigration. Articles frequently promote traditionalist Catholic values and practices, such as the Latin Mass.

Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic journalistic standards.

Score: 20/100

- Does not repeatedly publish false content (22 points)
- 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.
“Faithful to the Pope, to the Magisterium of the Church, we want to work for the common good of society by keeping our readers informed on the news, through the perspective of the social doctrine of the Church," the site explains on its About page. ("Fidèles au Pape, au Magistère de l'Eglise, nous voulons travailler au Bien commun de la société en informant nos lecteurs sur l’actualité, vue au regard de la doctrine sociale de l'Eglise.")

Many stories are written from a right-wing perspective, often expressing strong stances against immigration and pro-LGBT policies. The website also covers bioethics, including issues related to the use of human tissue in research, euthanasia, and abortion legislation.

Typical headlines include “Republicans offer Marseille to the far-left. Can they continue to claim that they lean right?” ("Les Républicains offrent Marseille à l’extrême-gauche. Peuvent-ils continuer à se prétendre de droite ?"); “A new wave of religious intolerance forces Catholics to leave public life” ("Une nouvelle vague d’intolérance religieuse force les catholiques à quitter la vie publique"); and “3 anti-Christian acts per day in France (“3 actes antichrétiens par jour en France”).

Most articles are attributed to Michel Janva, which is apparently a pseudonym used by one of the site’s founders, who has not been identified, according to “La Fachosphère,” a 2016 book about far-right online groups by Dominique Albertini, who works for the left-leaning Liberation, and independent journalist David Doucet. Some articles are attributed to Le Salon Beige readers, although the website does not make clear how readers can submit stories.

**Credibility**

Le Salon Beige’s articles often attribute information to Catholic blogs, social media posts from Christian and conservative commentators, and right-leaning websites such as FDeSouche.com and Atlantico.fr.

The website frequently publishes articles that promote unsubstantiated or false claims, including about the COVID-19 pandemic.
For example, in June 2020, the site published an opinion column that falsely claimed that a technology being used to develop a COVID-19 vaccine called mRNA can modify a person's DNA. “In the case of COVID-19, several laboratories are using the mRNA technique, which consists of modifying the DNA of the vaccine recipient, a technology whose ban may be lifted as an ‘emergency,’ without taking a step back,” the article stated, without citing any evidence. (“Dans le cas du COVID 19, plusieurs laboratoires utilisent la technique mARN consistant à modifier l'ADN du vacciné, une technologie dont l'interdiction pourrait être levée au titre de ‘l’urgence’ et sans aucun recul.”)

There is no scientific basis to the claim that a COVID-19 vaccine can modify the DNA of its recipient. mRNA vaccines, which are being tested for COVID-19, use genetically engineered code to stimulate the body's immune response, according to a 2015 article from Harvard Medical School. A March 2019 review of existing scientific evidence on mRNA vaccines, published in the journal Frontiers in Immunology, found that the mRNA “cannot potentially integrate into the host genome and will be degraded naturally” after the body produces the antigen.

LeSalonBeige.fr also claimed in several articles in 2020 that people do not need to wear face masks to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

For example, a July 2020 article titled “Coronavirus: The Strategy of terror” (“Coronavirus : La stratégie de la terreur”) claimed that forcing people to wear masks “has to do with the same strategy aimed at maintaining collective hysteria” (“relève de la même stratégie visant à entretenir l'hystérie collective”). The article also quoted an Italian virologist as saying, “as Sars CoV2 is now practically dying and coming to an end, I renew my invitation to everyone to throw away their masks: they are no longer necessary.” (“... comme le Sars CoV2 est maintenant pratiquement mourant et qu’il touche à sa fin, je renouvelle mon invitation à tous de jeter leurs masques: ils ne sont plus nécessaires.”)
Multiple scientific studies, including a June 2020 study published in The Lancet, an April 2020 study in Nature Medicine, and a May 2020 study in BMJ Global Health, have concluded that the usage of face masks can curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Contrary to the article's claim that the virus is "coming to an end," infection cases in many countries, including France, were rising in July 2020. On July 24, 2020, the French Ministry of Health wrote in a statement, "Viral circulation is clearly increasing in France with a [reproduction rate] R0 of 1.3. With daily numbers above 1,000, we've gone back to levels comparable to those at the end of the lockdown period. We've wiped off a good part of the progress we made in the first weeks after the lockdown." ("La circulation virale est en nette augmentation en France avec un R à 1,3. Avec un nombre de cas journaliers supérieur à 1000, nous sommes revenus à des niveaux comparables à ceux de la fin de la période du confinement. Nous avons effacé une bonne partie des progrès que nous avions accomplis dans les premières semaines du déconfinement").

The site has also made false claims about vaccine safety. For example, in May 2020, the site published an article submitted by a reader that falsely stated some vaccines use DNA from fetal tissue, causing autism in children. “Different studies show the link between vaccines that use DNA from aborted embryos and autism cases,” the article said. (“Différentes études mettent en évidence le lien entre les vaccins utilisant de l'ADN d'embryons avortés et les cas d'autismes.”)

The author cited, among other sources, an open letter written in 2019 by anti-vaccine advocate and researcher Dr. Theresa Deisher, which claimed high levels of fetal DNA were present in vaccines. Other researchers have criticized Deisher’s open letter for misinterpreting studies to support her claim and not accurately citing sources, according to fact-checking site Science Feedback.

Some childhood vaccines, such as those that protect against rubella and chicken pox, were started using lab-produced cells descended from two fetuses aborted in
the 1960s, according to a January 2017 article in Science magazine. However, no actual fetal tissue is present in these vaccines. Vaccines do not have cells or pieces of DNA that are recognizable as human DNA, according to an article from the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

The National Catholic Bioethics Center, which consults with the Vatican and Catholics on medical ethics issues and opposes abortion, has stated that “one cannot accurately say that the vaccines contain any of the cells from the original abortion.”

Santé Publique France, French’s national public health agency, and many other health and science authorities, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.K. National Health Service and the World Health Organization, have repeatedly stated that there is no link between vaccines and autism, based on an abundance of scientific evidence.

In June 2019, the site published an article titled "The boats of shipwrecked migrants are shams staged by smugglers to move public opinion" ("Les bateaux de migrants-naufragés sont des mises en scène organisées par les passeurs pour attendrir l’opinion"). The website published a June 2019 video that it said was “proof” of its claim in the headline. The video showed migrants moving from a large fishing trawler into a smaller boat near the Italian island of Lampedusa.

While the video was legitimate, neither it nor the article and headline provided evidence that smugglers are purposefully stranding migrants in the open sea. A Frontex spokesperson told the German news organization Correctiv that smugglers sometimes transfer migrants to smaller, cheaper boats as an economic strategy, contrary to the article’s claim that the boats were staged shipwrecks.

Because Le Salon Beige has published false and unsubstantiated claims about COVID-19, the use of vaccines, and immigration, NewsGuard has determined
that the site repeatedly publishes false content, fails to gather and present information responsibly, and does not avoid deceptive headlines.

The site does not articulate a corrections policy. It sometimes publishes correction notes, but many false stories go uncorrected, such as the examples cited above, which does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for issuing corrections.

When asked about the website’s false claims in articles cited above, as well as its failure to issue corrections, Le Salon Beige publishing director Guillaume de Thieulloy told NewsGuard in an August 2020 email, “Our principle on the matter is very simple: unlike the subsidized press we don’t believe we’re infallible. If a reader informs us of an error, we in turn inform all readers. However, very often, accusations like the one you’re making don’t refer to errors, but divergence in analysis, which is quite different.” (“Notre principe en la matière est très simple: contrairement à la presse subventionnée, nous ne croyons pas être infaillibles. Si un lecteur nous signale une erreur, nous la signalons à notre tour à l’ensemble des lecteurs. Mais, très souvent, les accusations comme celle que vous portez ne concernent pas des erreurs, mais des divergences d’analyse, ce qui est tout différent.”) De Thieulloy did not address specific claims in the articles cited above.

The website’s About page discloses the site’s pro-Catholic perspective and views on several topics, such as its rejection of laws allowing abortion, euthanasia, and cloning. The page also claims that “none of the bloggers are members of a political movement.” (“Aucun des blogueurs n’est membre d’un mouvement politique.”) Its opinion stories are often labeled as opinion.

However, Le Salon Beige news stories often advance undisclosed nationalist and ultraconservative political views. For example, in May 2020, the site republished an article advancing nationalist views by far-right French politician Marion Maréchal, who is the granddaughter of far-right leader Jean Marie Le-Pen. The article initially
appeared on the website for the Institute of Social, Economic and Political Sciences (ISSEP), a school that she founded in 2018.

“We are paying for decades of political choices that have sacrificed national strength and sovereignty on the altar of a welfare state ruined by immigration, an oversized administration and the dogmas of the European Union,” Maréchal wrote. (“Nous payons des décennies de choix politiques qui ont sacrifié la puissance nationale et le régalien sur l’autel d’un Etat-providence ruiné par l’immigration, d’une administration pléthorique et des dogmes de l’Union européenne.”)

In a March 2020 article labelled “Islam in France,” Janva wrote that French President Emmanuel Macron “wants, he tells us, to regain control and to fight against foreign influences. But how can he not do anything against the prime foreign element constantly flowing into France, which is immigration?”

Janva added, “And this immigration is very largely made up of Muslims, given the countries of origin: the Middle East all the way to Pakistan, the Maghreb, countries of a largely Islamized Sahelian Africa... How can we think that this massive and continuous arrival cannot hurt the French culture and civility?” (“E.Macron veut, nous dit-il, reprendre le contrôle et de lutter contre les influences étrangères. Mais comment peut-il ne rien faire contre le premier élément étranger qui gonfle sans arrêt en France et qui est l’immigration ? Et cette immigration est très largement composée de musulmans à considérer les pays d’origine : Moyen-Orient élargi jusqu’au Pakistan, Maghreb, pays d’une Afrique sahélienne très largement islamisée... Comment penser que cette arrivée massive et continue ne puisse heurter la culture et la civilité françaises ?”).

Asked about the site’s undisclosed political views, Thieulloy told NewsGuard in an email that the website disclosed its Catholic views and denied any political perspective. “In terms of the site’s positioning, it is clearly mentioned -- and it’s not what you think you’re seeing there. Unspecified nationalism is -- at the
beginning at least -- a modern and even revolutionary ideology and we are clearly counterrevolutionaries (in the sense that we’re anti-totalitarian).”

Thieulloy added, “As you probably know, the Revolution wanted to end the Christian distinction between spiritual and temporal. ... Our position is simple: we are Catholics, attached to the social doctrine of the Church (SDC) -- and therefore both anti-state and anti-individualism. Of course, our attachment to the SDC leads us to criticize the current European Union which violates the principle of subsidiarity.”

(“S’agissant du positionnement du site, il est clairement mentionné -- et il n’est pas celui que vous croyez y voir. Le nationalisme, sans précision, est - à l’origine au moins -- une idéologie moderne et même révolutionnaire et nous sommes clairement contre-révolutionnaires (au sens exact où nous sommes anti-totalitaires). Comme vous le savez sans doute, la Révolution a voulu en finir avec la distinction chrétienne entre spirituel et temporel... Notre positionnement est simple : nous sommes catholiques, attachés à la doctrine sociale de l’Eglise (DSE) -- et donc à la fois anti-étatistes et anti-individualistes. Naturellement, notre attachement à la DSE nous rend critiques de l’Union européenne actuelle qui viole le principe de subsidiarite (sic).”)

Thieulloy’s explanation above of the site’s perspective does not appear on the website’s About page.

Because Le Salon Beige frequently publishes articles that reflect an undisclosed ultraconservative perspective, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

The Legal Notice page of Le Salon Beige states that the site is owned by GT Editions and identifies de Thieuloy as its publishing director. It lists the website’s address and phone number. Readers can also contact the site via an online form. The About page includes an email address for its editorial staff.
Although articles generally include author names, the site does not provide contact or biographical information for its content creators. And the site’s main author, who writes under the pseudonym Michel Janva, does not disclose his real identity, which does not meet NewsGuard's standard for providing the names of content creators.

“Michel Janva, like almost all of our authors, writes under a pseudonym because writing for Le Salon Beige isn’t his main job,” Thieulloy told NewsGuard. “Incidentally, it is very common, even for professional journalists, to use a pseudonym (at least, it was in the XIXth century when the French press thrived better than it does today.)” (“Michel Janva, comme la quasi totalité des rédacteurs, écrit sous pseudonyme car la rédaction du Salon beige n’est pas son principal métier. Au demeurant, il est très commun, même chez les journalistes professionnels, d’user de pseudonyme (en tout cas, ça l’était au XIXe siècle où la presse française se portait mieux qu’aujourd’hui).”)

Advertisements are distinguishable from editorial content.

History

The website’s founder, who goes by the pseudonym Michel Janva, launched LeSalonBeige.blogs.com in 2004, along with a group of friends, according to the book “La Fachosphère.” De Thieulloy acquired the site in 2010, according to the book.

In 2015, Thieulloy was convicted of libel and fined 800 euros for publishing images comparing the treatment of anti-gay marriage activists to the fate of Jewish children under Nazi occupation. Although Thieulloy lost an appeal of the conviction in September 2016, the Court of Cassation, France’s highest-ranking criminal court, overturned the ruling in 2017.

The site moved to the domain LeSalonBeige.fr in 2018.

Written by: Sophia Tewa
Edited by: Amy Westfeldt, Chine Labbe, Yves Clarisse

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Vaccine stories: