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# TELEVISION AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE HISTORY OF CONSUMPTION AND HEALTH:

## THE MORHANGE TALC AFFAIR (1972–1981)

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**Abstract:** The Morhange talc affair was mediated by television from 1972. The health scandal brought to light issues of consumerism and cosmetic products in France, after baby talcum powder was accidentally contaminated with hexachlorophene. This article presents a diachronic study of the television coverage between 1972 and 1981. Indeed, the coverage and the development of the scandal is taken as a case study in the role and influence that television can have on current affairs.

**Keywords:** television, mediatization, consumption, cosmetics, public health risks, health scandals

### 1 Introduction

This article examines the impact of the television coverage of the Morhange talcum powder scandal between 1972 and 1981 in France. The Morhange laboratory, a company specialising in perfume and toiletries, had sold baby talcum powder since the mid 1950s. The baby powder scandal began in 1972 as a result of a manufacturing error. A barrel of hexachlorophene, a powerful anti-bacterial agent, was accidentally mixed with talc at the Setico factory, in Aulnay-sous-Bois. A batch of contaminated talcum powder was sold in the north of France, resulting in the deaths of 36 children within a few months. Morhange baby powder was quickly identified as the cause of death after an investigation by the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (INSERM). In some cases, the doses of hexachlorophene were six times above what adults were estimated to tolerate. This tragic event introduced a new term to the economic and political equation of the time, namely, the health risks associated with mass consumption.

In comparison to other scandals, like the case of Baumol baby powder, television coverage played a key role. Baumol baby powder, singled out in Annick Le Douget's work as "France's first health disaster",<sup>1</sup> caused the death of 80 children in 1952. The powder had been accidentally mixed with very high doses of arsenic during the manufacturing process. In terms of French health disasters, the Baumol case is not as well documented or recalled as the Morhange one, even though Baumol resulted in twice as many deaths as Morhange. In his book about the global

beauty industry, historian Geoffrey Jones connects the nationwide scandal sparked by the Morhange baby powder case with the emergence of consumer movements.<sup>2</sup> Talcum powders have been sold over the counter in pharmacies and supermarkets for well over a century, with no monitoring by public authorities.

By 1972, France was embracing mass consumption socially, economically, politically and culturally.<sup>3</sup> The population had extended access to goods and services and citizens were becoming “consumer-citizens”.<sup>4</sup> Consumption was a core concern of the political and economic policies initiated with the country’s fifth and sixth Plans.<sup>5</sup> The cosmetics industry played a key part in this, largely due to its economic vitality, yielding 3.5 billion Francs in profits in 1972 and supplying 40,000 jobs in France.<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s, the workings and configuration of this industry were still little known.

The Morhange baby powder case and its television coverage emerged in this context in August 1972. Television would play a key role in how it unfolded, granting coherence to the media movement that brought the case to the public eye. Since 1968, television was a key medium for the advertisement of hygiene and toiletry products, such as deodorant, toothpaste and personal care products in the same category as talcum powders.<sup>7</sup> Concurrently, some tele-magazines and news broadcasts adopted a different discourse to discuss the marketing of these products. With the first channel’s evening news attracting 17 million viewers in 1972, many of whom were female consumers, the television coverage of the Morhange baby powder case became a salient phenomenon of the 1972–1981 decade, providing an excellent case study of the impact of media productions on current affairs. In this article I consider the nature, effects and evolutions of the televised mediatisation of the Morhange baby powder case. Through what televisual channels did the mediatisation operate? What was the chronology? What was the interaction between the televisual coverage and the actual proceedings of the case between 1972 and 1981?

Over the 1972–1981 period, several narratives on the case were mediated on television, and I have studied the combined effect of the circulation of these narratives. The main corpus of sources for this study comprises daily news broadcasts, ads for hygiene and beauty products and tele-magazines. These are in effect the three main routes through which discourses circulated and influenced the progress and outcome of the case. These sources were all collected in the archives of the French National Audio-visual Institute (*Institut National de l’Audiovisuel*, **INA**), which holds archived television programmes from 1945. I was able to search these archives with the online database, the **Inathèque**. I collected 69 television sources by entering the main three keywords “*talc*”, “*Morhange*” and “*cosmetique*”. I complemented this initial corpus of news broadcasts, tele-magazines and advertisements with a written source from INA’s print archives.<sup>8</sup> Various French and European stakeholders in the case (representing consumers, public authorities and industrialists) had convened in a conference to discuss and debate the issues raised by the case.

To characterize this coverage, I borrow the concept of “pseudo-event” developed by sociologist Jean Baudrillard,<sup>9</sup> despite its diachronic dimension. This notion refers to the substitution of a reality by its television-mediated image. Discussed by Daniel Boorstin,<sup>10</sup> it allows us to analyse how the coverage of the case came to supersede the reality of the events. In the field of the history of consumption, the case is seen as a historical landmark in the domestication of consumption, and as one of the reasons for the rise of anti-consumerism in 1970s France.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the case has remained under the radar as an object of research in its own right. To help fill this gap in the literature, I have relied on Ludovic Tac’s investigative report for television: “L’affaire du talc maudit” [The Case of The Cursed Talc],<sup>12</sup> in which stakeholders in the case are interviewed. This additional source proved essential to this study.

The approach adopted here is chronological, and borrows from Claude-Marie Vadrau, a reporter for the weekly paper *Le Canard Enchaîné* in 1972, a division of the coverage of the case into three “times”: a time for information (August–September 1972), a time for debate (September 1972–1975) and a time for outrage and justice (1977–1981). Television coverage of the case was not entirely regular, as attested by the frequency in reports in the daily news broadcasts (the best represented source in this study). There were three peaks: the last week of August 1972, the enactment of the Veil law on cosmetics in 1975, and the opening of the trial in 1977 to the conviction and subsequent acquittal of the defendants in 1981. The troughs between each of these peaks were actually interphases during which the effects of the television coverage made themselves felt, with consequences such as the 1973 study session on cosmetics, beauty and hygiene products, the transformations of the advertisers’ selling points over the entire period,

the increasingly regular appearances of consumer groups in tele-magazines on hygiene and beauty, and the evolution of the approaches and sensibilities that were given airtime.

## 2 A Time to Inform: When Television Replaces State Action (August-September 1972)

Extensive coverage of the case began in the last week of August 1972.<sup>13</sup> This first period of coverage can be characterized by its informational value. The facts of the case were described, and the symptoms observed in the young patients were brought to the attention of the public. It concluded and drew from the study conducted by the national health institute INSERM since April 1972 on unexplained cases of **encephalopathy** in the north of France.

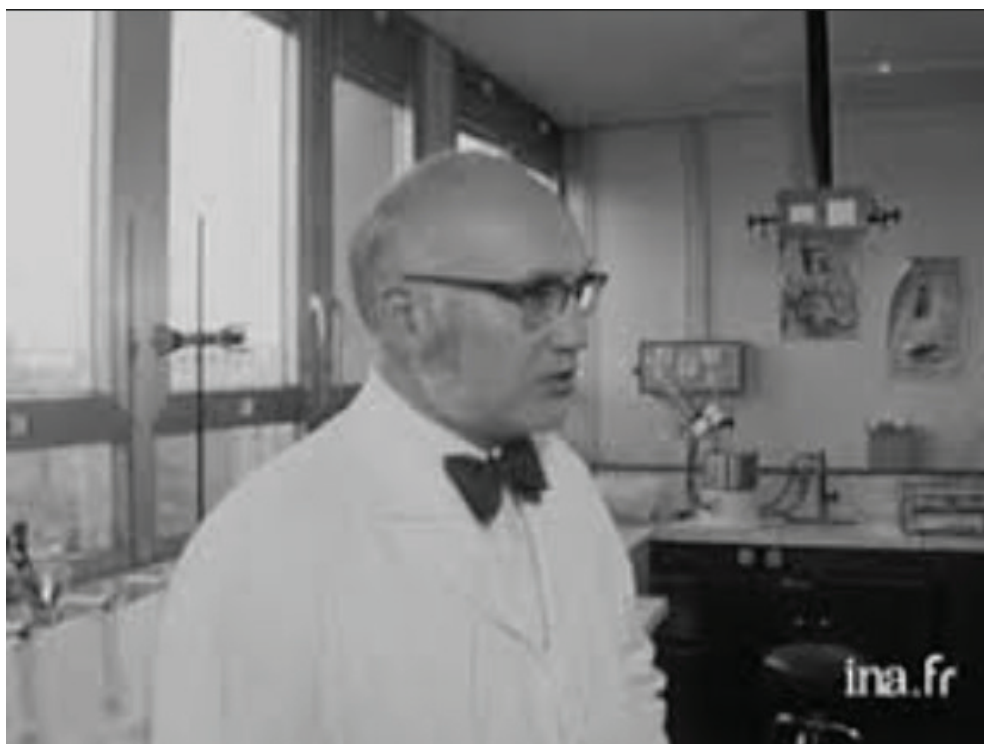
This mediatization was deployed through the news broadcasts of regional (FR3 Champagne Ardennes, FR3 Bourgogne, FR3 Franche-Comté, FR3 Lorraine and FR3 Auvergne) and national channels (first and second channels).<sup>14</sup> For instance, on 28 August, the second channel's evening news featured an explanation of the case by an employee of the social services administration, followed by an interview with Mr Floch, the father of one of the victims.<sup>15</sup>



Video 1. 'Affaire du talc Morhange' JT 20H, 28 August 1972, Deuxième chaîne. (INA) Commentary by an employee of the social services administration stating that tests have confirmed that all the children had been exposed to the contaminated Morhange baby powder. This is followed by an interview with a father of one of the children, who had only purchased Morhange brand of baby powder the one time and whose daughter reacted to it immediately and died 2 days later.

Between 25 August and 1 September, similar reports regularly appeared in regional and national news broadcasts. Regional channels tended to offer more practical details about attitudes to adopt and new developments in the case, whereas national channels focused more on explanations of the handling of the case. The government's actions were prominently featured, with regular progress reports on the proceedings launched in April. The work of the INSERM teams, epidemiologists and health officials was foregrounded. Here, the principal goal was to inform consumers.

Indeed, the monitoring of goods on the market was quite different from what it is now: batches were not numbered, and after-sale service was virtually non-existent. Television coverage of the case became a means to limit the adverse effects of these talcum powders. Health professionals were turned into experts on the problem, explaining symptoms and steps to take in the event of a suspicious case. On 30 August, in the FR3 Lorraine regional news, for instance, Doctor Lebeau gave a detailed description of the clinical signs of poisoning and what to do. Further, the government's response was underlined. For instance, the talcum powder's withdrawal from circulation was the subject of an extensive report in the Reims regional news on 30 August:<sup>16</sup> the decision by the public prosecutor's office in Pontoise, where an investigation had been opened, and its quick implementation were presented. A police captain gives a detailed account on the number of seized boxes, and assures the reporter that the risk posed by the talc had been brought under control. Unlike the events surrounding the Baumol powder twenty years before, the combination of television coverage and of a quick governmental response made it easier for consumers to identify the problem and be informed. However, a different discourse, conveyed by the toxicology experts of the Fernand Widal centre, also emerged in the context of this coverage.



Video 2. 'L'hexachlorophene, affaire du talc morhange, interview du doyen Fournier', *Journal Télévisé du 20 Heure*, 28 August 1972, Deuxième chaîne. (INA) Scientists from the Fernand Widal centre stating that hexachlorophene might be dangerous, like any chemical ingredient, if not used properly.

In this excerpt from the second channel's evening news on 28 August 1972, reporter George Leclere asks Étienne Fournier, dean of the Widal centre, about the risks of using hexachlorophene. Here, the danger posed by the circulation of the Morhange baby powder takes a backseat to a discussion on the sector of hygiene and beauty products as a whole. Fournier points out the need for standardised, systematic monitoring of these products. A new course was underway: scientific discourse, along with broad mediatisation, favoured the transformation of an alert into a recognised risk.<sup>17</sup> This first period of mediatisation proved essential: not only did it bring the facts of the case to the public's attention, but it also pointed out shortcomings in the monitoring of the hygiene and beauty industry, particularly regarding health control.

### 3 A Time to Debate: The Cosmetics Industry Dissected on Television (September 1972–1976)

Between 1972 and 1976, the coverage can be characterised as a period of debate, broken down into two phases. The first began in September 1972 with the opening of debate on tele-magazines. After a few years of silence in news broadcasts, a second phase followed in 1975, when the Veil law on cosmetics was enacted. News reports recalled the facts and commented on the legislative procedures that had been under way since 1972.

A few weeks into the first phase of mediatisation, a first transformation occurred. The case was discussed in detail in the 15 September episode of *Aujourd'hui madame* [Today madame],<sup>18</sup> a daily tele-magazine geared toward women at home with an emphasis on debate of current events. The following prominent guests were present on the set: Jean Michel Hautefort, president of the national perfume union (*Syndicat National de la Parfumerie*); Henri Nargeolet, director of the Health Ministry's pharmacy and drug department (*Service central de la pharmacie et des médicaments du Ministère de la Santé*); Marie-Louise Eftymiou, medical professor and toxicologist; François Custot, director of the National institute for consumer affairs (*Institut National de la Consommation, INC*); Mrs. Bontemps, Veyrune and Galazzo, guest viewers who also spoke with the panel (Mrs Galazzo also represented the consumer advocacy group LORGECO). This period of debate thus began with an expanded dialogue, now including consumers, consumer advocacy groups, beauty and hygiene industry representatives, and health officials.



Video 3. 'Affaire talc Morhange' *Aujourd'hui Madame*, 15 September 1972, Deuxième chaine (INA) ['Morhange talcum affair' *Today Madame*, broadcast on France's second channel]. This was the first televised debate on the Morhange scandal.

The excerpt from the episode shows the programme's first ten minutes, chiefly dedicated to discussing the causes of the scandal, with many themes and viewpoints broached and conveyed. Consumer advocacy group representatives stress that they were not being heard, despite having warned the government years earlier. They draw particular attention to the fact that issues with hexachlorophene had been brought to the attention of the United States Food & Drug Administration in the mid 1960s. The guest viewers denounce the lack of information on the subject, and point to



the responsibility of advertising, citing an ad for Signal toothpastes that had used the product's hexachlorophene content as a promotional argument since 1969.



Video 4. *Signal: Dentifrice: bactericide* [Signal: toothpaste: bactericide], Elida & Gibs, Unilever, 01 January 1970 (INA). Advertisement for Signal toothpaste that used hexachlorophene as a selling point.

Take for example the 1970 ad above, which shows two young children brushing their teeth, and discussing the benefits of the bactericide contained in the toothpaste: hexachlorophene.<sup>19</sup> The brand Signal was widely known at the time for its red stripes, associated with its hexachlorophene content.<sup>20</sup> In the debate, Hautefort remarks that hexachlorophene is not an ingredient in talcum powder, and that its presence was the result of a manufacturing error. He adds that the product is safe when used responsibly. Nargeolet and Eftymiou stress the logistical and financial challenge posed by the need to systematically monitor these products.

To summarise, the debate revolves around a few key points: consumer information, the introduction of product monitoring and the limitation of the risks incurred by consumers using these products. Ultimately, the programme turns the Morhange baby powder case into a far broader debate on the domestication of mass consumption in France in the 1970s. Until 1975, tele-magazines and news broadcasts stopped covering the Morhange baby powder case directly, but occasionally references to its impact came up: the safety of products was systematically addressed in reports on the beauty industry; the 1973 study session on the control of these products was covered, and consumer groups regularly discussed these issues in their own shows, such as *50 millions de consommateurs* [50 million consumers] on the first channel.<sup>21</sup> Some participants in these debates received considerable media exposure, including the dermatologist Aron Brunetière, who was regularly invited to speak and was mentioned in reports on beauty and hygiene products. In 1974, Brunetière published a book entitled *La santé et la médecine* [Health and Medicine], in which he harshly criticised the beauty industry.<sup>22</sup>

When the 10 July 1975 law on cosmetics was passed, the baby powder case resurfaced in the news,<sup>23</sup> described as the starting point of the legislative process. The law enacted by Simone Veil, then Minister of Health, was the first law to regulate the cosmetics trade in France, and the first of its kind in Europe. It was included in the Code of Public Health and clearly established the allocation of responsibilities, it differentiated cosmetic products from drugs by proposing an official definition (still in force in 2020) and obligated manufacturers to make technical information on their products available.<sup>24</sup> On this occasion, the televisual narrative presented in news broadcasts conflated the facts of the case with the way the beauty industry worked as a whole, depicting the hygiene and beauty business as a risky

sector in general. In these broadcasts,<sup>25</sup> talc was used only as a starting point for a debate on the monitoring and supervision of the production of cosmetics in France. Personalities like Hautefort and Nargeolet, mentioned above, were once again invited to participate in televised debates. The regional news broadcasts also played their part by publicising the reactions to the enactment of the Veil law and its impact in Brittany, Normandy and Franche-Comté between 9 and 22 January 1975.<sup>26</sup> The risks incurred and the death of children took a backseat to a discussion on product monitoring. Reporters no longer discussed how to elucidate the case or lower its effects in the short term, focusing instead on how the measures taken by the government and beauty industry representatives would help avoid another disaster. The law was presented mainly in relation to this health risk, even though it most importantly came as a response to a major economic issue for France and Europe: the harmonisation and regulation of the cosmetics market.

This second phase in the coverage of the case introduced a systematic association between the cosmetics industry and health risks. However, a summary glimpse into the longer-term history of this risk suggests that the problem was far older. Catherine Lanoë, for instance, in her research about cosmetics between the Renaissance and Enlightenment eras (Lanoë, 2008)<sup>27</sup>, found that medical professionals raised similar alerts concerning various preparations and their compositions. Yet, none of them were similarly publicised or remembered. The television debates that began airing in September 1972 raised the stakes of the case, and changed perceptions of its facts and implications. During the same period, prominent corporations such as L'Oréal responded to the case by defining new norms and health standards for cosmetics in France and Europe.

In 1976, another event resulted in a further transformation of the nature and effects of the media coverage – namely, the environmental disaster at Seveso, Italy.

## **4 A Time to Bring Justice: David vs. Goliath (1976–1982)**

After 1975, coverage of the Morhange case continued. The investigation had opened in 1972 and had yet to culminate in a trial, and victims' families were still awaiting compensation. In short, three years later, the justice system had yet to establish accountability.

In July 1976, the Seveso environmental disaster gave new momentum to the process and changed the course of its mediatisation. An explosion occurred at the ICMESA chemical manufacturing plant, located north of Milan, Italy, causing severe pollution in the area. The plant was part of the production chain of hexachlorophene for the cosmetics industry in France and Europe. This chain was now revealed: the Morhange laboratory subcontracted the manufacturing of its talcum powder to Setico, which also handled other products – some of which included hexachlorophene. The refined hexachlorophene came from another subcontractor in Switzerland, Givaudan, which was supplied by the ICMESA.

The media exposure granted to this disaster led to the acceleration of the opening of the Morhange talc trial. In the wake of the Seveso accident, Givaudan's requests for counter-expertise studies to the INSERM report on the danger of hexachlorophene were denied. As the last company still standing, Givaudan ended up in the line of fire at the trial, alongside the former directors of the Morhange laboratory, of Setico, and the employees responsible for accidentally mixing in the hexachlorophene. The coverage intensified in 1977 as legal proceedings progressed. The case became a scandal, playing out on television as a fight between powerful industrialists and helpless families. The inability of the justice system to come to a ruling, despite the enactment of the 1975 law on cosmetics, heightened the phenomenon. Once again, televised news broadcasts were the leading sources of coverage of the tensions.<sup>28</sup> However, this time, health experts, consumer advocates and health industry officials were no longer in the limelight: victims' families took centre stage.





Video 5. 'Talc Morhange', *Le journal de 20H*, 12 July 1977, Antenne 2 (INA). Victims take centre stage in news broadcasts, such as this one.

In the segment above, excerpted from the 12 July 1977 Antenne 2's evening news,<sup>29</sup> it is a personal testimony of the case that is initially brought up. Then, a family of victims is interviewed about what they had experienced since 1972. The mother speaks about being accused of poisoning her two children; one died and the other remains disabled. The father insists that they have received no assistance to meet the needs of their severely handicapped son.

This third period of media coverage turned the case into a full-fledged scandal. The conditions for this to take place<sup>30</sup> were all there: innocent victims, extensive coverage, and hidden aspects of reality revealed to the public.

This period of scandal, between 1977 and 1981, gradually morphed into a televised battle for justice. It also saw a resurfacing of questions pertaining to the ethical supervision of consumption and consumer protection on the media agenda. In a 1978 speech given on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the creation of the INC, President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing called for consumer empowerment in the market-based economy.<sup>31</sup> That same year, the programme *6 minutes pour vous défendre* [6 minutes to defend yourself], produced by the INC, mentioned the Morhange baby powder case, which at the time was ongoing and bridging bigger and broader issues.<sup>32</sup> The case herein contributed to a shift in the power relations surrounding consumption in France. It was at about this time that the historian and philosopher Michel de Certeau commented on the conflict between the consumers' unpredictable "tactics" and business strategies.<sup>33</sup> He argued that the freedom to consume or to abstain from consuming clashed with the industrialists' efforts to boost consumption.



Video 6. 'Emission du 19 octobre 1979', *Journal de 20 Heure*, 19 October 1979, Antenne 2 (INA). The Morhange baby powder trial on television.

This segment from Antenne 2's 19 October 1979 evening news reports on the opening of the trial.<sup>34</sup> It is divided into two parts. In the first, journalists take a critical look at the trial, pitting Givaudan, which is presented as a multinational corporation, against victims' families, in a position of weakness. In the second, the families' lawyers express their dissatisfaction with how the trial is going. Most victims are absent; only the few families who did not accept the compensation offered by Givaudan are present in the courtroom. The news report expresses outrage at the fact that most victims' families ended up opting for monetary compensation to cover the costs of their children's medication since 1972. A strong message is conveyed here: seven years after the case first made the news, the government and the justice system were still unable to protect consumers. The television coverage of the complex process of attributing responsibility contrasted with the public's moral outrage at the deaths of these children and their impacts on the families. On television, officials like the assistant director of scientific and technical affairs at the Ministry of Health's pharmacy directorate, Mr. Cordonnier, acknowledged that a mistake had been made in 1972 and assured that the legal provisions introduced in 1975 would prevent such errors from being made again.<sup>35</sup> However, at the same time, tele-magazines like *L'événement*<sup>36</sup> [The Event] (TF1) aired testimonies of victims' families. Once again, the simultaneous circulation of contrasting points of view on the case created dissonance. This favoured change in perceptions and approaches to the regulation of consumption in France and forced companies to address consumers' concerns.

The coverage of the trial continued until 1981. In 1980, the six defendants were convicted, including the presidents of Givaudan, of the Morhange laboratory and of SETICO. A year later, they were all granted amnesty, and merely mentioning the case was made liable to prosecution for defamation. The families were only compensated by the state ten years later.

Television archives do not have any entries related to the case after 1981, but by then it had made a lasting mark on the business of cosmetics and its by-products.



Video 7. 'Sois Belle et Achète', *Le Nouveau Vendredi*. A look at consumption and cosmetics in the early 1980s.

The programme *Sois belle et achète* [Be pretty and buy], which initially aired on Swiss TV in 1981, was rebroadcast by France 3 in 1982 in the tele-magazine *Le nouveau vendredi* [The New Friday]. Its tone is clearly informed by the nine years of coverage of the Morhange baby powder case.<sup>37</sup> The reporters give a highly critical presentation of the beauty industry in 1981 following a template that reflects the themes debated during the coverage: how products are made, how advertisements are made and what informational value they have, how safety is controlled, etc. It also includes personalities like Aron Brunetière, who was still fuming against the industry.

The characterisation and examination of these three periods of television mediatization clearly shows that we can distinguish pre- and post- Morhange talc eras in France and in Europe. Although the facts of the case did not make it stand out from other previous similar cases, its impact was made considerably greater by its television mediatization in the 1970s.

## 5 Conclusion: The Legacy of the Coverage of the Morhange Baby Powder Case

There are several lessons to be learned from this study of the television coverage of the Morhange baby powder case between 1972 and 1981. First, the coverage lasted a considerable length of time, changing over the years depending on the social, political and economic context in France and Europe. It allows us to understand precisely how television, through different means – news broadcasts, tele-magazines, ads – circulated very diverse discourses pertaining to the same reality. In this case study, it was the capacity of television to open, and broaden the reach of debate surrounding a scandal. The broadcasting of these debates (which were often televised), and their offshoots, had many effects. In addition to having helped turn the case into a scandal, television coverage also informed its legacy.<sup>38</sup>

Health safety subsequently became a key selling point in advertisements for these products. Ads changed: hexachlorophene was no longer mentioned, and discourses were adjusted, relying either on humour and satire, or on edification. The “-free” trend in advertising dates notably from the 1970s-1980s: “hexachlorophene-free”, “paraben-free”, “carbon-dioxide free”, etc. The cosmetics sector changed its image to appear more conscious, more scientific and more technical.

Cosmetic talc powders have figured repeatedly in public health discussions and consumer rights over the twentieth century; from pneumoconiosis in talc miners and millers in the 1930s or the late 1960s correlation between carcinogenic asbestos and talcum powders.<sup>39</sup> The recent Johnson & Johnson lawsuit with regard to asbestos, which led to the discontinuation of talc-based products in 2019, is reminiscent of the 1972 Morhange talc lawsuit. Although the Johnson & Johnson case is not a one of adulteration, it is a case study of regulations and risk management. The media frenzy surrounding these events, the chronologies of their deployment and the effects of their media coverage have many common points; regardless of period, geographical era concerned or brand, the health and media stakes around the cosmetics trade are still as important in the twenty-first century.

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## Notes

- 1 Annick Le Douget, *Enquête sur le Scandale de la Poudre Baumol, 1951–1959: La Première Catastrophe Sanitaire Française* [Investigation into the Baumol Powder Scandal, 1951–1959: The First French Health Disaster] (Fouesnan: Le Douget, 2016).
- 2 Geoffrey Jones, *Beauty Imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 277.
- 3 That is, France was adapting to the changes induced by the fact that in the 1970s consumption was a point of social, economic, political and cultural reorganisation. Herein, sanitary risks and their legislative management were two corollaries of the adaptation or acculturation of consumption.
- 4 Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel, *Histoire de la Consommation* [History of Consumption] (Paris: La Découverte, 2012).
- 5 France's fifth (1966–1970) and sixth (1970–1975) economic plans were designed to stimulate competition between market sectors; by extension, they made consumption a key lever for development.
- 6 See comments by Jean-Michel Hautefort in "Session d'étude sur les produits de cosmétologie, de beauté et d'hygiène" [Study session on cosmetics, beauty and hygiene products], 21–25 May 1973, folder 26, Fonds du Comité d'Histoire de la Télévision (CHTV), Institut National Audiovisuel (INA) Archives.
- 7 Monique Sauvage, Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, Géraldine Poels and Jean-Noël Jeannenay, *Histoire de la Télévision Française: De 1935 à Nos Jours* [History of French Television: From 1935 to Today] (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2012); Jean-Noël Jeannenay and Agnès Chauveau, *L'Écho du Siècle: Dictionnaire Historique de la Radio et de la Télévision en France* [Historical Dictionary of Radio and Television in France] (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2001).
- 8 "Session d'étude sur les produits de cosmétologie, de beauté et d'hygiène" [Study session on cosmetics, beauty and hygiene products], 21–25 May 1973, folder 26, Fonds du Comité d'Histoire de la Télévision (CHTV), Institut National Audiovisuel (INA) Archives.
- 9 Jean Baudrillard, *La Société de Consommation* [The Consumer Society] (Paris: Idées/ Gallimard, 1970), 196–8.
- 10 Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*, (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2012).
- 11 Alain Chatriot, "Qui Défend le Consommateur? Associations, Institutions et Politiques Publiques en France (1972–2003)" [Who Defends the Consumer? Associations, Institutions and Public Policy in France (1972–2003)], in *Au Nom du Consommateur. Consommation et Politique en Europe et aux Etats-Unis au XXe Siècle*, eds. Alain Chatriot, Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel and Patrick Fridenson (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), 165–81.
- 12 'L'affaire du talc maudit' [The Case of the Cursed Talcum], *50 ans de faits divers* [50 Years of Crimes], Ludovic Tac, 15 April 2007 (2006).



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- 14 The Première chaîne [first channel] became TF1 in 1975; the Deuxième chaîne [second channel] became Antenne 2 from 1975 and France 2 from 1989; and the regional channel FR3 was founded in 1972 and became France 3 in 1989. See Jeannenay and Chauveau, *L'Écho du Siècle*, 175–89.
- 15 'Emission du 28 août 1972,' *Le Journal du 20 heure*, Deuxième chaîne, 28 August 1972.
- 16 'Emission du 30 août 1972,' *Journal Télévisé de Reims*, 30 August 1972.
- 17 Francis Chateauraynaud and Didier Torny, *Les Sombres Précurseurs: Une Sociologie Pragmatique de l'Alerte et du Risque* [The Dark Forerunners: A Pragmatic Sociology of Warning and Risk] (Paris: Éd. de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1999), 12.
- 18 'Affaire du talc Morhange,' *Aujourd'hui Madame*, Deuxième chaîne, 15 September 1972.
- 19 This is one of 12 spots for Signal toothpaste between 1969 and 1981 in the INA audiovisual archive database. *Signal: Dentifrice: Bactéricide* [Signal: Toothpaste: Bactericide], Elida & Gibs, Unilever, 01 January 1970.
- 20 Hexachlorophrene was one bactericide used in toothpaste before fluoride was adopted. Signal's slogan, "Ses rayures rouges contiennent de l'hexachlorophène pour nettoyer et protéger les dents" [Its red stripes contain hexachlorophrene to clean and protect teeth], was changed after the Morhange scandal. This was similar to the American 'Stripe' brand toothpaste, which had also advertised that it contained hexachlorophrene in its red stripes.
- 21 See for instance 'Journal télévisé, les cosmétiques' [TV news, Cosmetics] *Journal de 20h*, Deuxième chaîne 28 May 1973; 'A Fleur de Peau' [Thin-skinned] *Vie pratique* [Practical living], 24 September 1973; 'Talc pour Bébé, Couche pour Bébé – Consommateur 50' [Baby talcum, baby diapers – Consumer 50] *50 Millions de Consommateurs* [50 million consumers], 17 October 1972; "Session d'étude sur les produits de cosmétologie, de beauté et d'hygiène".
- 22 Aron Brunetière, *La beauté et la médecine* [Beauty and Medicine] (Paris: Stock, 1974).
- 23 'Emission du 8 janvier,' *Journal Antenne 2 Dernière Edition*, Antenne 2, 8 January 1975.
- 24 For more on the law on cosmetics of 1975, see "Produits Cosmétiques et Produits d'Hygiène Corporelle. Discussion d'un Projet de Loi" [Cosmetic and Body Hygiene Products. Discussion of a Law], *Journal Officiel de la République Française* [Official Journal of the French Republic], no. 37 (21 May 1975), 2874–88, available at <http://archives.assemblee-nationale.fr/5/cri/1974-1975-ordinaire/2/039.pdf>
- 25 For example, "Les cosmétiques après le conseil des ministres" [Cosmetics after the council of ministers], *Journal Antenne 2 18 h 30*, Antenne 2, 8 January 1975; 'Emission du 9 janvier 1975,' *FR3 dernière*, FR3, 09 January 1975.
- 26 'Emission du 9 janvier 1975,' *FR3 Dernière*, FR3, 09 January 1975; 'Emission du 9 janvier 1975,' *Bretagne Actualités*, FR3 Bretagne, 9 January 1975; 'Emission du 9 janvier 1975,' *Normandie Actualités*, FR3 Haute Normandie, 9 January 1975; 'Emission du 22 janvier 1975,' *Bretagne Actualités*, FR3 Bretagne, 22 January 1975.
- 27 Catherine Lanoë, *La Poudre et le Fard: Une Histoire des Cosmétiques de la Renaissance aux Lumières* [Powder and Foundation. A History of Cosmetics from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment] (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2008), 163–70 and 327–30.
- 28 That is, news was the dominant television format to take this on, more than tele-magazines or current affairs programmes. For instance : 'Emission du 12 juillet 1977,' *Antenne 2 le Journal de 20 Heure*, Antenne 2, 12 July 1977; 'Emission du 13 février 1978,' *Antenne 2 le Journal de 20 Heure*, Antenne 2, 13 February 1978; 'Emission du 30 septembre 1979,' *Antenne 2 le Journal de 20 Heure*, Antenne 2, 30 September 1979; 'Emission du 01 octobre 1979,' *Actualités Régionales Ile de France*, France 3 Paris Ile de France, 01 October 1979; 'Emission du 2 octobre 1979,' *Antenne 2 Midi*, Antenne 2, 2 October 1979; 'Emission du 2 octobre 1979,' *Antenne 2 le Journal*, Antenne 2, 02 October 1979, amongst others.
- 29 'JT20H — Talc Morhange,' *Antenne 2 le Journal de 20 Heure*, Antenne 2, 12 July 1977.
- 30 Emmanuel Henry, "Du silence au scandale. Des difficultés des médias d'information à se saisir de la question de l'amiante" [From Silence to Scandal. Difficulties for the News Media to Take Up the Asbestos Issue], *Réseaux* 122, no. 6 (2003), 237–72.
- 31 Allocution by Mr Valéry Giscard d'Estaing on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the National Institute for Consumer Affairs, Monday 23 January 1978, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/131856-allocution-de-m-valery-giscard-destaing-occasion-du-xeme-annivers>
- 32 'Droit de la Consommation' *6 Minutes pour Vous Défendre*, TF1, 17 June 1978.
- 33 Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, *Arts de faire* [The art of doing] (Paris: Gallimard, 2010 [1980]), xlv–xlix.
- 34 'Le Talc Givaudan,' *Antenne 2 le Journal de 20 Heure*, Antenne 2, 19 October 1979.

- 35 'Emission du 9 octobre 1979,' *TF4*, TF1, 9 October 1979.
- 36 'Emission du 25 octobre,' *L'évènement*, TF1, 25 October 1979.
- 37 'Sois belle et achète,' *Le Nouveau Vendredi*, FR3, 19 November 1982 (1981, RTS).
- 38 Ludovic Tac's 2006 investigative report, for instance, draws heavily on excerpts from television programmes, press articles and advertisements to convey the recollection of the case. 'L'Affaire du Talc Maudit' *50 Ans de Faits Divers*, Ludovic Tac, France 5, 17 March 2007 (2006).
- 39 For example, David Rosner, Gerald Markowitz, and Merlin Chowkwanyun, "'Nondetected': The Politics of Measurement of Asbestos in Talc, 1971–1976," *American Journal of Public Health* 109 (2019): 969–74.

## Biography

Benjamin Coulomb is a PhD student in Contemporary History at the Laboratoire de recherche historique Rhône-Alps (LARHRA), Université Grenoble Alpes. His work focuses on the effects of television advertising of cosmetics on television in France between 1969 and 2000. He is particularly interested in the evolution of narratives and representations in the advertisements, as well as the debates that they provoked. This involves intersecting the histories and politics of television, advertising, beauty, hygiene and health.