

Ofcom Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin

Issue 402
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Loveworld News Your Loveworld

Type of case	Broadcast Standards
Outcome	In Breach and Sanction
Service	Loveworld Television Network
Date & time	7 April 2020, various times
Category	Harm and due accuracy in news
Summary	<p>Loveworld News featured potentially harmful statements about the Coronavirus pandemic and adequate protection was not provided to viewers. Additionally, statements were not presented with due accuracy. In breach of Rules 2.1 and 5.1 of the Broadcasting Code. We have imposed a sanction on the broadcaster, requiring it to broadcast a statement of our findings. We are considering whether to impose any further sanction.</p> <p>Your Loveworld featured potentially harmful statements about the Coronavirus pandemic and adequate protection was not provided to viewers. In breach of Rule 2.1 of the Broadcasting Code. We have imposed a sanction on the broadcaster, requiring it to broadcast statements of our findings. We are considering whether to impose any further sanction.</p>

Background

Loveworld Television Network (“Loveworld”) is a religious channel broadcast on satellite in the UK. The licence for Loveworld is held by Loveworld Limited (“the Licensee”).

This document sets out Ofcom’s Decisions on the above programmes, which were broadcast on Loveworld on 7 April 2020. At this time the [global number of confirmed cases of Coronavirus had reached 1.4million, more than 6,000 people had been reported to have died in hospital in the UK](#), and governments, including the UK government, had introduced ‘lockdown’ policies curtailing individual freedoms in order to prevent the transmission of the virus. In the UK, people were advised to stay at home except in specific circumstances and to remain socially distant from people who were not members of their immediate household. Additionally, no medicines were approved or licensed in the UK for the treatment or prevention of COVID-19.

Ofcom acknowledged that in these circumstances, many licensees were likely to want to broadcast content about the pandemic. This could include making audiences aware of different theories about the origins and spread of the Coronavirus. Reflecting the fundamental importance of freedom of expression in our democratic society, it is clearly legitimate for broadcasters to question mainstream thinking on a global crisis, and public policy on it and the rationale behind it. However, in doing so broadcasters must ensure compliance with the Code. In particular, they should be alert to the potential for significant harm to audiences related to the Coronavirus pandemic, which could include: harmful health claims; harmful medical advice; and misleading statements about the virus or public policy on it.

Ofcom is prioritising cases related to the Coronavirus pandemic which could cause harm to audiences. We therefore informed the Licensee that it was necessary for us to depart from our normal published procedures to expedite these investigations.

Ofcom's investigations

In Breach

Loveworld News, 7 April 2020, 14:00

Introduction

Loveworld News is a news programme featuring reports from news studios around the world.

Ofcom received a complaint that a news report from South Africa included inaccurate and unchallenged statements about the Coronavirus pandemic, alleging links to 5G technology. When assessing the programme, Ofcom identified an additional news item that included claims about the drug hydroxychloroquine as a potential treatment for COVID-19 (the disease caused by the Coronavirus).

Report One: 5G and Coronavirus

During the 30-minute news programme, a report from South Africa alleged links between 5G and the Coronavirus. This was followed by a conversation between the studio presenter and the reporter in South Africa that continued to focus on alleged links between 5G and the Coronavirus.

The report was introduced by the presenter with a banner across the bottom of the screen which read *"RSA LOCKDOWN: Why is 5G linked to COVID-19?"* This banner remained throughout the report.

Reporter: *"With the classification of a weapon, 5G technology is very dangerous. When it comes into contact with a human body it can provide some poisons to the cells...When it comes into contact with a human body, it causes cell poisoning because our bodies try to fight the radiation, kicking out some protein and some DNA cells in a form of a chemical, which is called a virus. This shows that what's killing people, it's not coronavirus, but 5G. The president of Loveworld incorporated: Reverend Dr Chris Oyakhilome explains".*

The report showed footage of Pastor Chris Oyakhilome ("Pastor Chris"), founder and president of Loveworld Incorporated,¹ speaking on a stage with a diagram behind him. The diagram was of a

¹ Loveworld Incorporated is also known as Christ Embassy. It is an Evangelical Christian denomination with a global network of churches. It runs seven television channels.

flowchart linking ‘fear’ (caused by the pandemic) and ‘embrace’ (5G) to a vaccine. The vaccine was in turn linked in the flowchart to “ID2020” and “NWO”.²

Pastor: *“So two-pronged attack: fear and embrace. So to give us something that would love and something that would fear. Both of them would produce the same result here [pointing to “vaccine”]. Now, how does this connect [pointing to “5G”] to here [pointing to “vaccine”]? Oh great. The signals from here [pointing to “5G”] produce a sickening effect that will make you want this [pointing to “vaccine”] this produces sickening effects. [pointing to “5G”] This is real. The power is so much that plants that were close to the cells that were already set up in certain streets burnt”.*

Reporter: *“We are witnessing the largest global cover-up in history. The impact of human beings based on technological advancement. This is not coronavirus, but cell poisoning. Remember 5G started in China. Wuhan is one of the provinces where 5G has been rolled out. Research proves that it takes six months for this to impact your body. Last year, Spain rolled out 5G, Italy followed suit. We are seeing a huge number of fatalities because it is densely populated with 5G and the old generation doesn’t have the immune system to fight it”.*

The report cut to footage of what appeared to be three engineers on a roadside, surrounded by wires they were working on. The reporter spoke with one of the engineers.

Reporter: *“What do you guys think about 5G though?”*

Engineer: *“I think about 5G personally?”*

Reporter: *“Yes”.*

Engineer: *“I think it’s- ah- going to see a lot of people die of 5G”.*

Reporter: *“Government is allowing this because of multiple agenda. Primary reason, this is satanic. Shutting global economies down because they want to introduce a new level of monopoly”.*

The report then returned to the studio presenter.

Presenter: *“Wow. Interesting report there...[addressing the reporter in South Africa] It looks like South Africa is actually moving in the direction of having 5G installed and we are moving, I mean, just judging from your report, I’m hearing the gentlemen that are actually installing fibre. They*

² The clip of Pastor Chris Oyakhilome did not include a verbal explanation of this part of the flowchart, but we understand “NWO” to be a reference to a New World Order, and “ID2020” a reference to a US-based not-for-profit company which online conspiracy theories have alleged is linked with the Coronavirus.

are saying people are going to die because you've asked them. What do you think about 5G?"

Reporter: *"Basically saying that people are going to die. But [presenter's name] you ask me what do I think about it? I think it's definitely satanic because they are trying to shut down global economies so that they can introduce a new way of monopoly. The health minister here in South Africa...when he was asked by one journalist, he said that he doesn't believe that technology has a relationship with a virus. So that really speaks to the ignorance of what is actually happening right now. But we've since heard from lots of people on social media streams, calling on EFF³ to actually intervene, they say that they want Julius Malema⁴ to organise a huge protest strike so that they take down the poles. Because before we went to lockdown, those poles were not there. I mean, all of a sudden they are there. So, it raises a lot of questions, but that gentleman is saying that if, indeed, we install 5G in South Africa it's going to be very catastrophic".*

Presenter: *"Wow interesting moments. Why is the government actually allowing this?"*

Reporter: *"Like I said, It's a new way of monopoly. Because it's not like they don't know it. They know it. Like the president of the Believers Incorporated, or rather Loveworld Incorporated, has explained it: this is a new way of monopoly really because they're locking you in your homes so that they can continue with what? Installing 5G".*

Report Two: Coronavirus and hydroxychloroquine

The programme also featured a report from UK *Loveworld News* presenters which included footage from an American news channel's interview with a woman who claimed to have recovered from COVID-19 following the use of hydroxychloroquine. The UK presenters discussed hydroxychloroquine as a "cure" for the Coronavirus:

UK Presenter 1: *"Now this is some good news. A Democrat Michigan State law maker has credited President Trump's publicising of the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine with saving her life after her health plummeted when she contracted the virus".*

Footage was shown of a Fox News interview with the person mentioned. The banner at the bottom of the screen read "LOVEWORLD NEWS: HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE 'saved my life'". The banner was placed on top of the "Fox News" icon.

³ The EFF stands for 'Economic Freedom Fighters', a South African opposition political party.

⁴ Julius Malema is the leader of the EFF.

Fox Reporter: *“Well many in the media just claim, ‘look there’s no evidence that this drug, which has been around for 60+ years, there’s no evidence it works against Covid’. What’s your message to them tonight?”*

Interviewee: *“Good evening, thank you for having me on this evening I really appreciate this. I really want to say that you know you have to give this an opportunity. And for me it saved my life and I can only go by what it is that I have gone through and what my story is and I can’t speak for anyone else so that’s not what I’m trying to do here...”*

Interviewee: *“...I went from zero to 100 in that time. it went from the headaches to the extremely severe, to fluid filling up in my lungs, to sweat breaking out, to cough, my breathing being laboured. It all happened in a matter of hours and I really didn’t have any time between my husband and myself to make a decision of whether: do I go to hospital? Which I honestly didn’t want to do. Which has nothing to do with the care that I would receive there or the first responders who are there. It had nothing to do with them, it’s the fact that the hospitals were full near my area and that I honestly believed that once I got into something like that I may not actually come out. And that was my biggest fear and I knew that this medication would possibly save me”.*

Interviewee: *“...you can imagine how terrified I was that, you know, I had to really beg and plead and go through a whole lot to try to get the medication. And my husband was able to take that prescription that night. And I was better within a couple of hours...”*

Coverage returned to the *Loveworld News* studio, where the presenters discussed the report.

UK Presenter 1: *“Good news of course. She managed to take the hydroxychloroquine and within a couple of hours, she was better...Of course in America there are various different states that have actually banned the use of hydroxychloroquine, even though it’s been proven to be working. You know we did take the story yesterday on the Jewish medical practitioner who has actually been testing patients of up to 500 patients, not testing sorry, he’s been giving them medicine basically, and up to 500 of them have actually recovered. He hasn’t had any fatalities that have been in his care because he’s actually been treating them. And then now we see this Democrat lawmaker who also was in the position where she actually said that when she was diagnosed, the moment she was diagnosed, her*

health plummeted. And it just reminds me of one of the things that was actually said from day one of 'Your Loveworld'⁵, where fear will actually stop your immune system working effectively. This is someone that from 12th March, I believe she said, she wasn't well. Then when she was diagnosed on the 31st her health plummeted, the moment she was told she actually had COVID-19...when she got it, she recovered within a few hours".

UK Presenter 2: "It's quite amazing, that's why it's very important for people to understand and then follow what has been said on 'Your Loveworld' with the man of God, Pastor Chris. On day one, like you say, it was said very clearly that fear reduces your immune system and Pastor began by saying: what are you feeding yourself? Are you feeding fear? Whatever you're feeding from – is it producing fear or is it producing faith? That's why it's important to listen to faith-filled words in this time that we're living. Don't just go onto the news and read any sort of thing because those things will definitely weaken your immune systems because they bring fear...it's important for people to tune in. So just now to mention on the cure of using that drug hydroxychloroquine, it's been working. It is working on the report we took yesterday: it showed that the Jewish doctor has been using that and it's working. Now, one thing is very important this time is that as Christians we need to pray because we can say that countries should cooperate and the health sectors should cooperate, but it seems as though we have to pray, our prayer would dictate this to happen because there's a cure for it. The man of God said the reason why people are dying from COVID-19 is because they are not being treated. Even when you're put under the ventilation, they are still relying on your immune system to fight the virus which means there's no cure for you, they're just helping you to breathe and that's why it's very important for us to pray. But it's also important to commend what president Donald Trump is doing. The fact that he came on to say 'we found this thing. Its working' and obviously it has its own challenges you know in making this thing established. However, it's looking like it's already working and our prayers are prevailing. But it's important for people to be informed and to also know, we're not saying go there and then you know medicate yourself and inject yourself with hydroxychloroquine or take it – no – you still need guidance for your health depending on, you know, the country that you live. But what we're saying here is very important for the world to understand that there's a cure and then whatever's being administered to those that

⁵ Your Loveworld is a programme on Loveworld featuring preaching from Pastor Chris.

have had the symptoms, those that you've seen for yourself it's working and that is a sign of hope for people to understand".

UK Presenter 1: *"And you know it's very key to note at this time, especially in the UK, just like in America, in different states they've actually been using the drug hydroxychloroquine and they've been getting the results. Not in all states, of course, it's been banned in some states. But I believe that at this time we know that the Prime Minister isn't actually well and we heard it clearly from the President of the United States that he is working with Boris Johnson's doctors. Now if there is something that they use to help him get better then I believe, and would like to believe, that this would be rolled out to every single person in the United Kingdom and various different countries can also follow suit on that".*

UK Presenter 2: *"Absolutely and that's where we also have to keep on praying and the man of God Pastor Chris is showing us to pray against the false vaccine because people that have common flu, obviously they have substances that they take – be it paracetamol, whatever they treat themselves with, that some people even get the flu and the flu just cleans itself by using [paracetamol based treatment] and such. Why does it really have to result to a vaccine?"*

We considered that the content raised potential issues under the following Code rules:

Rule 2.1: "Generally accepted standards must be applied to the content of television and radio services...so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion in such services of harmful and/or offensive material".

Rule 5.1: "News, in whatever form, must be reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality".

Ofcom requested comments from the Licensee about how the content complied with these rules.

Response

The Licensee provided initial representations in response to Ofcom's request for comments on *Loveworld News*. Subsequently, in response to our later request for comments in relation to *Your Loveworld*, the Licensee provided further representations, which it said covered both programmes. It asked Ofcom to treat these as superseding its earlier response.

In reaching our Decision in this case, we have therefore considered the second representations as superseding the first and representing the Licensee's considered position. We have summarised both sets of representations below for completeness.

First response

In its first response, the Licensee said that it believed both reports complied with Rule 2.1 and Rule 5.1 of the Code. It said that it was “in full observance of all precautions to be taken in order not to breach the code...[and] without any goal to cause any form of harm to the public”. It added that the programme’s news coverage “manifests its Christian orientation and background” and that Loveworld Television Network “is a Christian broadcast station and communicates its views based on the foresight of Scriptures”. It said that its news was presented “from a balanced Christian viewpoint” and that it “openly requested for everyone else to carry out their independent fact findings”. The Licensee expressed its hope that Ofcom’s investigation “does not lead to the suppression of our contrary opinion based on our Christian faith and beliefs”.

The Licensee also said that information in the reports “already existed in the public domain”.

The Licensee continued that it stood by its report on 5G that “suggests that there is a government cover-up of the harmful effects of 5G”. It said, “there is no proven report that absolves 5G of being harmful to the Human Body”. It referenced a European Parliament briefing document and a scientific report that discussed potential negative impacts on human health of 5G technology. In terms of alleging links between 5G and the Coronavirus specifically, the Licensee argued that symptoms referenced in the European Parliament report “are not indistinguishable from the known symptoms of COVID-19”.⁶

The Licensee argued that it was not alone in having concerns over health risks of 5G and that it, “only joined a list of other voices in demanding that governments all over the world conduct extensive independent research into the impact of 5G”. It said that its view on these risks being, “different from that believed by Ofcom or the mainstream does not in any way make [it] liable as having infringed the Code”.

On the report about the use of hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for COVID-19, the Licensee said it considered this was “factual and uncontradicted” and, at the date of the report, “no person had come forward to contradict” the statements made by the interviewee. It added that, if hydroxychloroquine was responsible for the interviewee’s “cure”, what Loveworld’s report did was to “re-echo the fact and generate hope and faith in people that it is possible to beat the virus”. The Licensee believed that research in scientific journals lent credence to the fact that hydroxychloroquine had been effective in the treatment of the virus and cited two reports in support of this.

The Licensee added that it also “stands by its report that a compulsory vaccination regime will not be in good faith”. It said that this was “guided by [its] belief inspired by Scripture” and a “Biblical injunction not to receive it”. It said that “any impartial observer should ask...whether the introduction of a vaccine is justified when alternative means have not been fully tested out”.

⁶ We understand from the context that the Licensee intended here to say “indistinguishable” or “not distinguishable” rather than “not indistinguishable”.

Second response

As set out above, the Licensee said that its second response superseded its first response, albeit that it was provided after the deadline in relation to *Loveworld News* and as part of the response to Ofcom's request for comments on a separate investigation, *Your Loveworld*.

In its second response, the Licensee said that Loveworld "supports the mission of the Church of Christ Embassy, which is an important global evangelical ministry founded by The Rev Dr. Chris Oyakhilome". It said that Christ Embassy had "well over 50 million faithful adherents" and that its mission was to "promote the word of Jesus Christ and to follow his example of good deeds". The Licensee added that the ministry was involved in "philanthropic and charitable projects".

The Licensee said that the "overall context here was that of...a religious news broadcast aimed at Christian evangelical believers, and seeking to interpret the present turmoil caused by Covid-19 in light of the Christian Scriptures". It said its programming "was not for one moment purporting to be a secular current affairs documentary, as for example might be seen on the BBC or Sky", adding that it considered this to be "an important distinguishing feature from [Ofcom's] other published decisions about Covid-19 to date, which [it had] indeed examined".

The Licensee's second response made no specific comments on the report about 5G and the Coronavirus. In relation to the report about the use of hydroxychloroquine, it noted that "President Trump was extolling the possible benefits of hydroxychloroquine in fighting Covid-19, at a news conference recently, in the presence of (and with no apparent dissent) from two of the leading epidemiologists in the United States (namely Dr Fauci and Dr Brix)".

The Licensee said that it accepted "in all the circumstances that [the] broadcast...could have provided better protection for members of the public" and "recognise[d] the importance of complying with the Code, particularly in the current acute circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic".

The Licensee said it was "anxious to remedy these problems" and "cooperate fairly with Ofcom". It included in its representations the following list of "remedial steps" that it said it intended to take:

- reviewing all of its broadcasts carefully in future to omit any potentially harmful claims in relation to COVID-19 and 5G, unless there is at the same time adequate protection for the public;
- 'live' parts of *Loveworld News* and "all other such programmes" would in future be monitored, and broadcast with a sufficient delay mechanism, to allow time for any potentially harmful claims in relation to COVID-19 and 5G to be omitted "unless there is in place adequate protection for the public";
- the programme subject to this investigation would not "appear" on the Licensee's website;
- it had taken "careful note" of Ofcom's published guidance and had "briefed its presenters" on:
 - Ofcom's guidance to broadcasters in relation to COVID-19;
 - Ofcom's recent published decisions covering programmes featuring COVID-19 discussions;
 - the use of "disclaimers in future if appropriate, advising viewers to consult qualified medical practitioners and official government advice, before making any decision

based on any broadcasts relating to Covid-19 or 5G". It said it would "recognise the need to assess whether any disclaimers or challenge provide adequate protection which are not overridden by the weight of contradictory material in the broadcast";

- making appropriate challenges in response to guests making unproven claims, or expressing views contrary to official government advice or mainstream science; and,
- taking account of the impact of "their role on viewers and the need for them to take particular care and act responsibly, in accordance with the Code, and giving due weight to official government advice and mainstream science".

The Licensee highlighted its history of compliance and the measures it said it would take for future broadcasts on Loveworld and requested that Ofcom "therefore...draw a line under this matter".

In response to Ofcom's Preliminary View that the programme was in breach of Rule 2.1 and Rule 5.1 of the Code, the Licensee said that it "accepts Ofcom's Preliminary View" and "offered its sincere apologies". It said that the case involved "isolated breaches which, though serious, will not be repeated". It also "highlight[ed]...the robust steps" that it said it would take in its previous representations, its "history of compliance prior to the breaches now identified" and its "speedy cooperation on this occasion with Ofcom". It also expressed its readiness "to broadcast such statement as may be directed by Ofcom in relation to its eventual decision".

Decision

Reflecting our duties under the Communications Act 2003 ("the Act"), Section Two of the Code provides protection for members of the public from the inclusion of harmful and/or offensive material. Section Five of the Code reflects the impartiality requirements of sections 319 and 320 of the Act and requires that news must be reported with due accuracy and impartiality.

Ofcom takes into account a broadcaster's right to freedom of expression and the audience's right to receive information and ideas as set out in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights ("ECHR"). Where applicable, we also have regard to Article 9 of the ECHR which states that everyone "has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion".

Rule 2.1

Rule 2.1 of the Code requires broadcasters to apply generally accepted standards so as to provide adequate protection for the audience from the inclusion of harmful material in programmes.

When considering a programme's compliance with Rule 2.1, Ofcom must assess the nature of the content and whether there is a reasonable likelihood of it causing members of the public actual or potential harm. Context is important and the extent of any protection required will depend on all the circumstances, including the service on which the material is broadcast, the degree of harm likely to be caused and the likely expectation of the audience.

The Code enables broadcasters to include challenging or contentious viewpoints in programmes. However, they must ensure they provide adequate protection for the audience from the inclusion of potentially harmful material. It is for the broadcaster to decide how to secure such protection where necessary. Ofcom has [published guidance](#) on this to assist broadcasters. This guidance reflects the

findings of Ofcom research⁷, which identified a range of factors affecting the potential for claims about health and wealth to lead to harm, including: the severity of the situation; whether material is targeted at a particularly vulnerable audience; whether claims are made by a speaker who is portrayed as having authority; the absence of a range of information or views, and advice based on limited information.

First, Ofcom examined statements made in *Loveworld News* to assess whether they were potentially harmful to viewers.

In our view, it was clear that topics covered in the reports described above were particularly sensitive given the global Coronavirus crisis. People in the UK, and in many other countries, were subject to severe restrictions on their lives with social and economic consequences for them. The number of COVID-19 cases and related deaths being reported daily was likely to lead people to be fearful for their own, and others' health and wellbeing. Within this context, we considered that viewers were highly likely to be seeking information about how to protect themselves and others from the virus and would therefore have been particularly vulnerable to any misleading or unsubstantiated claims that could be potentially harmful to them.

We took into account that Loveworld is a religious television service, but also that the statements appeared in news reports on that service. Viewers place a high level of trust in the news to help them understand what is going on in the world. Further, the news reporter and presenters related the reports to the teachings of Pastor Chris, who was portrayed as a figure of knowledge and authority. For instance, he was described as "*the man of God Pastor Chris*" and the reporter said, "*The president of Loveworld incorporated: Reverend Dr Chris Oyakhilome explains*" and "*Like the president of the Believers Incorporated, or rather Loveworld Incorporated, has explained it*". Ofcom's research indicates that if potentially harmful claims about health are made by a speaker who is perceived by the audience as having authority, there is more chance of the audience treating those claims as credible and making decisions based on them.

Content linking the Coronavirus to 5G

In addition to the contextual factors outlined above, the report on 5G was particularly sensitive because in the preceding days a number of attacks had been committed on mobile phone masts in the UK as a result of claims that 5G technology had caused, or was in some way linked to, the Coronavirus⁸. These attacks, and further attacks since⁹, caused serious and, in some cases ongoing, damage to communications links and therefore significant harm to the public at a time of national crisis.

⁷ [Health and wealth claims in programming](#): audience attitudes to potential harm, setting out audience views on the potential harm arising from programmes involving health or wealth claims.

⁸ [Mast fire probe amid 5G coronavirus claims](#).

⁹ [Coronavirus: 20 suspected phone mast attacks over Easter](#).

This report specifically linked 5G with the Coronavirus and included several statements that unequivocally attributed the global pandemic to 5G. These included the following assertions:

- *“When it [5G] comes into contact with a human body, it causes cell poisoning because our bodies try to fight the radiation, kicking out some protein and some DNA cells in a form of a chemical, which is called a virus”;*
- *“...what’s killing people, it’s not coronavirus, but 5G”;*
- *“This is not coronavirus, but cell poisoning”;*
- *“We are seeing a huge number of fatalities because it [Spain] is densely populated with 5G and the old generation doesn’t have the immune system to fight it [5G]”;* and,
- *“Why is 5G linked to COVID-19?”* (a banner across the bottom of the screen).

The link between 5G and harm to health was reinforced by footage of people who were described by the presenter as *“gentlemen that are actually installing fibre”* who said: *“I think it’s- ah- going to see a lot of people die of 5G”*. Ofcom considered that the presenter’s description of the people as telecoms engineers implied that they were knowledgeable about 5G and that this was likely to lead viewers to believe that people with expert knowledge had agreed that 5G was harmful.

Ofcom is not aware of evidence that supports these claims, nor did the Licensee provide any in its representations.¹⁰ There is no reputable scientific evidence to corroborate the claim that there is a link between 5G technology and the Coronavirus, which runs contrary to both the international and UK official position. For example, the World Health Organisation has [stated](#) that “5G mobile networks DO NOT spread COVID-19” and Full Fact, the UK’s independent fact checking charity, has published research articles analysing and debunking the theory and has [stated](#) that “[t]here is no evidence that 5G WiFi networks are linked to the new coronavirus”.

We considered the claims in this news report had the potential to cause significant harm because they attributed deaths, which public health authorities around the world had reported as being due to the Coronavirus, to 5G. The programme therefore contained uncorroborated claims that the source of the risk to health was the effect of 5G rather than viral transmission of COVID-19. This raised the risk that viewers’ trust in public health advice, such as social distancing and lockdown measures, could be undermined, with potentially serious consequences for their own and others’ health.

The report also asserted that there was a *“global cover-up”* about the cause of the pandemic and underlying reasons for measures being taken in response to it. It said:

- *“We are witnessing the largest global cover-up in history”;*
- *“[g]overnment is allowing this because of multiple agenda. Primary reason, this is satanic. Shutting global economies down because they want to introduce a new level monopoly”;*
- in reference to government awareness of the impact of 5G as described in the report, the reporter said: *“...it’s not like they don’t know it. They know it”;* and,

¹⁰ The Licensee’s first response cited research about the potential effects of electromagnetic fields on the human body more generally, but these did not allege a link between 5G and the Coronavirus. No other sources of evidence were cited in the second response, which superseded the first.

- *“this is a new way of monopoly really because they’re locking you in your homes so that they can continue with what? Installing 5G”.*

The conspiracy theory was reinforced by comments made by Pastor Chris and by the flowchart displayed on screen, implying an official conspiracy involving 5G and the Coronavirus to drive demand for a vaccine. In the footage of Pastor Chris describing a link between 5G, the Coronavirus and a vaccine, he said:

“So two-pronged attack: fear and embrace. So to give us something that would love and something that would fear. Both of them would produce the same result here [pointing to “vaccine”]. Now, how does this connect [pointing to “5G”] to here [pointing to “vaccine”]? Oh great. The signals from here [pointing to “5G”] produce a sickening effect that will make you want this [pointing to “vaccine”] this produces sickening effects. [pointing to “5G”] This is real”.

The flowchart behind Pastor Chris also referred to links between the vaccine, “ID2020” and “NWO”. These were not explained in the report, although we understand these refer to a US-based not-for-profit company which online conspiracy theories have alleged is linked with the Coronavirus, and to a “New World Order”.

We took into account that the references to the alleged conspiracy were made as assertions of fact rather than opinion. We were additionally concerned that the report linked the “cover-up” as being in place for “*satanic*” reasons. We considered that by claiming there was a “*satanic*” link to governments’ agendas, the statements were likely to have been afforded greater weight by the audience of a religious Christian service. In the case of comments by Pastor Chris in particular, they were presented as coming from an authoritative figure and a “*man of God*”.

In our view, this content had the potential to cause significant harm because it raised significant doubts about the motives of the public health authorities around the world, and therefore had the potential to further undermine viewers’ trust in public health advice, with potentially serious consequences for their own and others’ health.

Ofcom went on to consider whether there was adequate protection for viewers from this potentially harmful material linking the Coronavirus to 5G. It is an editorial decision for the individual broadcaster as to how adequate protection might be achieved and our [published guidance](#) states that there are various methods broadcasters can consider.

In its response to Ofcom, the Licensee highlighted that this was a “religious news broadcast aimed at Christian evangelical believers” which was “seeking to interpret the present turmoil caused by Covid-19 in light of the Christian Scriptures” and that this was an “important distinguishing feature” from Ofcom’s other published Decisions on content about the Coronavirus.

As set out above, Ofcom considers compliance with the Code in light of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion enshrined in Article 9 of the ECHR. Article 9 makes clear that freedom to “manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law

and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of...health...or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others”.

Ofcom does not seek to curb or limit the ability of a broadcaster to present programmes, including those covering news and current affairs, from a religious perspective. We acknowledge that viewers are likely to recognise that news and current affairs programmes on religious services may have a different focus from secular services and may bring a distinctive perspective based on religious texts and beliefs. We also recognise the Licensee’s right to hold and to broadcast views which diverge from or challenge official authorities on public health information and that may be considered controversial. However, consistent with Article 9, when transmitting material of this nature, broadcasters must ensure they provide adequate protection for their viewers from potentially harmful content.

In this case, the report contained statements about the impact of 5G on health, and the reasons behind this, as unequivocal assertions of fact. There was no challenge to these statements or other context or views reflected.

Ofcom acknowledged the Licensee’s acceptance that it “could have provided better protection for members of the public” and the “remedial steps” it intends to take to provide protection for viewers in the future. However, we were concerned that the Licensee appeared to have taken no steps to protect viewers from the potential harm arising from this report.

Content about the use of hydroxychloroquine to treat the Coronavirus

We then considered whether the report discussing the use of hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for the Coronavirus was potentially harmful. In doing so, we again took into account the contextual factors set out at the beginning of this section, including that the content was included in a news report, in which viewers are likely to place high levels of trust.

The Licensee’s second response said that “President Trump was extolling the possible benefits of hydroxychloroquine in fighting Covid-19, at a news conference...with no apparent dissent...from two of the leading epidemiologists in the United States”. We acknowledged that, at the time of broadcast, there was wide media coverage and interest in the actual and potential use of hydroxychloroquine as an option to treat the Coronavirus, in part as a result of President Trump’s statements on the subject. We also took into account the status of hydroxychloroquine as an option to treat the Coronavirus varied between countries (and in some cases within countries). For example, the US Food and Drug Administration had issued an Emergency Use Authorisation for its use in certain circumstances, whereas the drug had not been licensed in the UK to treat COVID-19 related symptoms or prevent infection¹¹. The UK Government had previously stated that clinical trials of hydroxychloroquine to treat the Coronavirus were underway, indicating an acknowledgement that while safety and effectiveness was unproven, there could be potential in use of the drug.¹²

¹¹ [Chloroquine and Hydroxychloroquine not licensed for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) treatment.](#)

¹² Ofcom is aware that since the broadcast, [recent clinical findings of hydroxychloroquine](#) do not support the view that it is effective in the management of COVID-19.

The report included a banner stating *“LOVEWORLD NEWS: HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE ‘saved my life’* and focused on the experience of a woman who reportedly took the medicine after experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and was better *“within a couple of hours...”*.

This outcome was supported by statements made by the reporters in the Loveworld news studio, including *“Good news of course. She managed to take the hydroxychloroquine and within a couple of hours, she was better”*. The report also stated that in some US States *“they’ve actually been using the drug hydroxychloroquine and they’ve been getting the results”*. It also said that it *“is very important for the world to understand that there’s a cure”*.

The report linked strong assertions about the effectiveness of treatments with claims about the necessity for and desirability of a vaccine. Discussing praying against *“false vaccines”* the presenters referred to evidence that hydroxychloroquine represented a *“cure”*, closing with the rhetorical question, *“Why does it really have to result to a vaccine?”*

Ofcom acknowledged that it is legitimate to report on potential treatments for medical conditions even if they have not been licensed for use in the UK. For the avoidance of doubt, Ofcom’s Code does not prohibit the inclusion of first-person accounts from people who claim to have seen beneficial effects after trying potential treatments.

However, we were concerned that the report presented hydroxychloroquine as a *“cure”*, without clearly acknowledging that this was an unproven claim about both the effectiveness and safety of the drug for treatment of the Coronavirus. At no point in the report was the UK’s current medical position on the use of hydroxychloroquine in the treatment of COVID-19 reflected¹³. Nor was it made clear that this was [a drug with potentially serious side effects](#). An exacerbating factor in this case was that the presenters made claims about the effectiveness of the medicine (e.g. *“even though it’s been proven to be working”*). As authoritative editorial voices of this programme, these statements were likely to have been afforded greater weight by viewers.

While acknowledging that the medicine is officially only available in the UK on prescription, we were concerned that, given the strength of the statements by the Loveworld presenters describing the drug as a *“cure”*, some viewers may try to source the medicine online and could potentially use it to try and treat COVID-19 symptoms as a result of seeing the report.

We therefore considered that this content had the potential to cause harm to viewers, and adequate protection was required for it to comply with Rule 2.1.

When assessing whether adequate protection had been provided, Ofcom took into account that, during the discussion, one of the UK reporters said *“we’re not saying go there and then you know medicate yourself and inject yourself with hydroxychloroquine and take it – no – you still need guidance for your health depending on, you know, the country that you live”*. While such advice may have provided some protection, Ofcom’s research on health claims has found that warnings can have

¹³ See footnote 11.

questionable impact if contradicted or undermined by comments made by an authoritative speaker¹⁴. In our view, the advice to not self-medicate and seek guidance was undermined by the unchallenged assertion of fact that hydroxychloroquine was a “cure” for the virus, and the subsequent statement made by the reporter: *“But what we’re saying here is very important for the world to understand that there’s a cure and then whatever’s being administered to those that have had the symptoms, those that you’ve seen for yourself it’s working and that is a sign of hope for people to understand”* as well as other statements in the news report suggesting people who had taken the medicine had been cured.

Ofcom stresses that there is no prohibition on broadcasting views which diverge from or challenge official authorities on public health information, but it is the responsibility of the Licensee to ensure viewers are adequately protected from potential harm by, for example, presenting content of this nature as views, and placing them in appropriate context, rather than as unequivocal facts, as was the case in these reports.

Again, we acknowledged that the Licensee accepted in its representations that “in all the circumstances that th[e] broadcast[s]...could have provided better protection for members of the public”. We also acknowledged the “remedial steps” outlined in the Licensee’s representations and reflected above. We did not consider, however, that the steps it said it planned to take in future mitigated the potential harm arising from the broadcast of the above material.

Ofcom’s Decision is that, in both reports, the Licensee did not adequately protect viewers from potential harm, in breach of Rule 2.1. We considered this breach to be serious.

Rule 5.1

The obligation under Rule 5.1 to report news with due accuracy applies to any matter covered in a news programme. In judging whether material complies with this rule, the Code makes clear that “due” means adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of the programme.

As with Rule 2.1, context is a key consideration when applying Rule 5.1 and we took into account the contextual factors outlined in the above section in our consideration of the programme’s compliance with Rule 5.1. We also had regard to the heightened sensitivity around information relating to the Coronavirus at the time of broadcast, and the particular need for news to be presented with due accuracy in those circumstances.

Under the Code, news programmes can cover topics that are subject to debate, including:

- the existence of conspiracy theories linking 5G with the Coronavirus; and,
- whether there are effective treatments for the Coronavirus, including whether hydroxychloroquine should be considered as a candidate drug for treatment of the virus.

However, in covering such topics, the Licensee is required to comply with the requirements of Rule 5.1.

¹⁴ See footnote 7.

In this case, we considered that the report on 5G went far beyond reflecting debates on the existence of conspiracy theories linking 5G with the Coronavirus and made specific and unsupported assertions that 5G was linked to the Coronavirus, as discussed in the above section on Rule 2.1.

We considered the claims were reinforced by unchallenged and unsubstantiated statements made by Pastor Chris, who was presented as a knowledgeable and authoritative figure.

As discussed in the above section on Rule 2.1, there is no reputable scientific evidence to corroborate the claims made in the programme alleging a link between 5G technology and the Coronavirus.

In Ofcom's view, the unchallenged statements in this report were likely to have been interpreted by viewers, particularly in the context of a news programme in which viewers have a high level of trust, as not merely explaining or acknowledging the existence of theories, but as statements of fact to the effect that 5G was harmful to health and had caused the pandemic.

This was a serious statement about a particularly significant topic at a time of heightened sensitivity, and it was not supported by any evidence or put into any wider context.

Ofcom therefore considered that the report on a link between 5G and the Coronavirus was not duly accurate, in breach of Rule 5.1.

Considering the accuracy of the report on the use of hydroxychloroquine, Ofcom took into account that the drug was repeatedly and unequivocally described as a "cure" in the studio discussion between Loveworld presenters. One of the presenters also said that the drug has "been proven to be working".

As reflected above, the status of hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for the Coronavirus varied between countries (and in some cases within countries) at the time of broadcast. However, the UK's position on the use of the medicine in the treatment of COVID-19 at the time was that "no conclusions have been reached on the safety and effectiveness of this medicine to treat or prevent COVID-19" and until "clear, definitive evidence that [hydroxychloroquine is] safe and effective for the treatment of COVID-19, [it] should only be used for this purpose within a clinical trial"¹⁵. We did not consider that it was duly accurate, at the time of broadcast, to describe hydroxychloroquine as a "cure" or "proven" as opposed to a candidate drug which was being tested.

There was some acknowledgement in the clip from the Fox News interview that alternative views existed on the use of the drug. In the excerpt from the American news report, the reporter said, "Well many in the media just claim 'look there's no evidence that this drug, which has been around for 60+ years, there's no evidence it works against Covid'". However, this was followed by an invitation to the interviewee to tell her story which appeared to contradict this statement.

Ofcom acknowledged the Licensee's representations that, around the time of broadcast, "President Trump was extolling the possible benefits of hydroxychloroquine in fighting Covid-19, at a news conference...with no apparent dissent...from two of the leading epidemiologists in the United States". The fact that the US President, who has emphasised in his press conferences that he is not a qualified medical practitioner, expressed some support for the use of the drug was clearly newsworthy but did

¹⁵ See footnote 11.

not, in our view, make it duly accurate to assert as fact that the drug was a proven cure for the Coronavirus. Nor did it remove the requirement for the Licensee to report on the potential use of hydroxychloroquine with due accuracy.

When reaching our Decision on the application of Rule 5.1 to both reports, Ofcom took into account that the Licensee said that this programme was a “religious news broadcast” and that this was an “important distinguishing feature” from Ofcom’s other published Decisions on content about the Coronavirus. We did not consider, however, that the overarching religious nature of the channel prevented *Loveworld News* from being subject to Rule 5.1 or justified a departure from the established application of this rule.

For the reasons given above, Ofcom’s Decision is that the Licensee failed to preserve due accuracy in both reports, as required under Rule 5.1.

Breaches of Rule 2.1 and Rule 5.1

For Sanction see page 28

In Breach

Your Loveworld, 7 April 2020, 19:00

Introduction

Your Loveworld was a broadcast of a two-hour sermon given by a Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (“Pastor Chris”). As previously outlined, Pastor Chris is the founder and president of LoveWorld Incorporated.

Ofcom received a complaint from a viewer who was concerned about statements made in the programme about the Coronavirus pandemic.

During the two-hour programme, Pastor Chris delivered a sermon on a range of topics. This included the following statements:

“So, we trust our governments, but then when our governments are being told what to do from someplace else, it becomes really dangerous. It becomes really, really dangerous. And that’s why I say every nation needs to do their own research. Do your own research. Get your local medical associations to sit down and ask them questions. I told you yesterday, the WHO [World Health Organisation] is not some form of organisation that represents the countries. No. It is more than 70% sponsored by private organisations with their self-interests because of the modus operandi - look at how it works. There are research papers on the WHO. Find them for yourself and do your own study. And see how the WHO is run”.

“And I have said that the lockdown is the most unscientific way to deal with viruses. There is nothing more bizarre and unscientific than this...The truth of the matter is, this whole thing is not because of the virus...First they told us this virus can be transmitted to someone else through your coughing or sneezing; then they said, so we must make sure since its on surfaces, it is on surfaces so whatever we touch we must wash our hands, so wash your hands. Ok we were washing hands. Then they said, it can live for more than four days on a dry surface. Uh-oh – these things don’t stick to the surface as we know. If they can stay on dry surfaces for four days and they’re not sticking there, and they’re not so heavy that they can’t be picked up, that’s simple: airborne. If its airborne, what are we doing inside the house?”

“With simple science, elementary science, we know that if you have been attacked by a certain type of virus, your body develops an antibody, right? To deal with the virus. That’s the way you become immune to the virus! Even these same scientists have told us that most people affected by the virus may not get sick. If that's true, then the scientific analogy is accurate. That if they got the virus and they didn't get sick, it means they have developed immunity against the virus. So, the best way to deal with the virus is to expose us to the virus. That is the most scientific thing to do. How can the world be so fooled? This is crazy”.

“One question that some people in the WHO and similar organisations...one of the things that they've been pushing for years is drastic reduction of population. As a solution to the world's economic and health problems. How can those, this is crazy, how can those with the ideology of a sharp and drastic and serious population reduction produce for us a vaccine to keep us alive? Have we become so stupid?”

“Because the plan, the sinister plan, is very very terrible. Imagine that you're at home, since there are more people infected than those not infected, it means the non-infected ones, the clean ones, are the ones that will be separated now...But think like this, they come to your house. And there are five of you. So, they're testing for those infected. Ok, two kids are not yet infected, so they take the kids - It's very simple, I can tell you what will happen. They won't take the parents; they will still take the children. And the younger ones that are strong enough for the formation of the new breed that is in the dream, the new breed, the new class of people that some scientists want to create for the world. While all others may soon have to perish”.

“So, my point is, with the 5G, there’s loads of beautiful things. But one of the things it does which you need to know, it provides the capacity to have a new creation of man. And you better understand this now, better get this: it is the final union between man and machines, where a human being becomes part man, part machine. What do I mean machine? His mind becomes twofold. A human mind and a computer mind. It brings the dream of science for so long, so many scientists have been dreaming of this for so long and that’s why some are so, they’re so excited about

it, they really want it. What do they want to do? Create the new man. Just like God has created his new man in Jesus Christ, Satan wants to create a new man. And because he can't do it like God, it is going to be part man, part machine. This is what this thing is capable of doing. It is capable of, and that's the reason for the vaccines. Because of what it can help to introduce into you - Listen, I'm not speculating. I'm telling you what is real, and I want to show you why, this is why God is against it".

We considered that the content raised potential issues under the following Code rule:

Rule 2.1: "Generally accepted standards must be applied to the content of television and radio services...so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion in such services of harmful and/or offensive material".

Ofcom requested comments from the Licensee about how the content complied with this rule.

Response

The Licensee submitted that "Pastor Chris and his worldwide audience...have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion under Article 9 of the ECHR, and also the right to freedom of expression under Article 10". It said "[t]hose rights include the right to think, to believe and to share ideas which on occasion derive from Scripture rather than conventional science". It said it "recognise[d] that the rights under Articles 9 and 10 ECHR are qualified rights, and that...Ofcom must by statute also balance the need to ensure that members of the public are adequately protected from any potentially harmful material being broadcast".

The Licensee said that Pastor Chris' "huge international audiences tend to watch his televised sermons as an integral part of the practice of their faith". It added that Pastor Chris "is an internationally recognised Bible scholar" and that "the points which he makes in this sermon are rooted by him into texts from the Old and New Testaments, which he quotes, cites and interprets". It said that the sermon included in the *Your Loveworld* programme was delivered live from Lagos to that worldwide audience.

The Licensee said that the recent COVID-19 crisis had provoked "the very widest possible range of medical, scientific, political, economic and no less importantly, theological and religious opinions and speculations". With reference to Rule 2.1, it said that in this context "it is difficult to say at any given point in time recently, what are the 'generally accepted standards'". By way of demonstrating that in "the current unprecedented turmoil, what was seen as orthodox wisdom or 'generally accepted standards'... is not infrequently reversed days later" it gave as an example that the advice on the use of facemasks in the UK had been "turned on its head". It added that "there are many other such examples".

The Licensee said, however, that it accepted "in all the circumstances that [the] broadcast...could have provided better protection for members of the public" and "recognise[d] the importance of complying with the Code, particularly in the current acute circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic".

The Licensee's representations outlined "remedial steps" it would apply in future (as reflected in the *Loveworld News* Decision above). These included one step specifically about this programme, which was as follows:

- "Pastor Chris...ha[d] generously agreed **not** to repeat the statements...identified or similar statements, during the course of any of his sermons...to be broadcast by the Licensee in future" (emphasis added by Licensee).

In response to Ofcom's Preliminary View that the programme was in breach of Rule 2.1 of the Code, the Licensee said that it "accepts Ofcom's Preliminary View" and "offered its sincere apologies". It said that the case involved "isolated breaches which, though serious, will not be repeated". It also "highlight[ed]...the robust steps" that it said it would take in its previous representations, its "history of compliance prior to the breaches now identified" and its "speedy cooperation on this occasion with Ofcom". It also expressed its readiness "to broadcast such statement as may be directed by Ofcom in relation to its eventual decision".

Decision

Reflecting our duties under the Communications Act 2003, Section Two of the Code provides protection for members of the public from the inclusion of harmful and/or offensive material.

Ofcom takes into account a broadcaster's right to freedom of expression and the audience's right to receive information and ideas as set out in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights ("ECHR"). Where applicable, we also have regard to Article 9 of the ECHR which states that everyone "has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion".

Rule 2.1

Rule 2.1 of the Code requires broadcasters to apply generally accepted standards so as to provide adequate protection for the audience from the inclusion of harmful material in programmes.

When considering a programme's compliance with Rule 2.1, Ofcom must assess the nature of the content and whether there is a reasonable likelihood of it causing members of the public actual or potential harm. Context is important and the extent of any protection required will depend on all the circumstances, including the service on which the material is broadcast, the degree of harm likely to be caused, and the likely expectation of the audience.

The Code enables broadcasters to include challenging or contentious viewpoints in programmes. However, they must ensure they provide adequate protection for the audience from the inclusion of potentially harmful material. It is for the broadcaster to decide how to secure such protection where necessary. Ofcom has published [guidance](#) on this to assist broadcasters. This guidance reflects the findings of Ofcom [research](#)¹⁶, which identified a range of factors affecting the potential for claims about health and wealth to lead to harm, including: the severity of the situation; whether material is targeted at a particularly vulnerable audience; whether claims are made by a speaker who is portrayed

¹⁶ [Health and wealth claims in programming](#): audience attitudes to potential harm, setting out audience views on the potential harm arising from programmes involving health or wealth claims.

as having authority; the absence of a range of information or views; and advice based on limited information.

First, Ofcom assessed whether statements made in *Your Loveworld* were potentially harmful to viewers.

In our view, it was clear that topics covered in the sermon were particularly sensitive given the global Coronavirus crisis. People in the UK, and in many other countries, were subject to severe restrictions on their lives with social and economic consequences for them. The number of COVID-19 cases and related deaths being reported daily was likely to lead people to be fearful for their own, and others' health and wellbeing. Within this context, we considered that viewers were highly likely to be seeking information about how to protect themselves and others and would therefore have been particularly vulnerable to any misleading or unsubstantiated claims that could be potentially harmful to them.

During the programme, Pastor Chris set out his theory that lockdown policies adopted by governments were not the result of the Coronavirus pandemic but instead were part of a conspiracy theory, involving the WHO, to reach "*the final union between man and machines*" because "*Satan wants to create a new man*". He said this would be achieved through the roll-out of 5G technology and vaccines.

In establishing this theory, Pastor Chris made claims about how the Coronavirus is spread and the ineffectiveness of lockdown policies. We considered the following statements suggested to viewers that they were being misled by official public health information on safety measures to curtail the spread of the Coronavirus:

- "*lockdown is the most unscientific way to deal with viruses. There is nothing more bizarre and unscientific than this...The truth of the matter is, this whole thing is not because of the virus*";
- "*If they [the virus] can stay on dry surfaces for four days and they're not sticking there, and they're not so heavy that they can't be picked up, that's simple: airborne. If its airborne, what are we doing inside the house?*"; and,
- "*With simple science, elementary science, we know that if you have been attacked by a certain type of virus, your body develops an antibody, right?...So, the best way to deal with the virus is to expose us to the virus. That is the most scientific thing to do. How can the world be so fooled?*"

Pastor Chris also made claims about the roll-out of 5G technology and the use of vaccines that implied they were linked to a conspiracy theory he described in the programme. He said 5G "*provide[d] the capacity to have a new creation of man*" and that "*you better understand this now, better get this: it is the final union between man and machines*". He then suggested a link between the alleged capabilities of 5G and the motives behind vaccination:

"Satan wants to create a new man. And because he can't do it like God, it is going to be part man, part machine. This is what this thing [5G] is capable of doing. It is capable of, and that's the reason for the vaccines. Because of what it can help to introduce into you – Listen, I'm not

speculating. I'm telling you what is real and I want to show you why, this is why God is against it".

In addition Pastor Chris implied vaccines were part of a plan to carry out a “dramatic reduction of population” orchestrated by the WHO and “similar organisations”.

“One of the things that they've [WHO and “similar organisations”] been pushing for years is drastic reduction of population as a solution to the world's economic and health problems...how can those with the ideology of a sharp and drastic and serious population reduction produce for us a vaccine to keep us alive? Have we become so stupid?”

Pastor Chris suggested that governments were following instructions from the WHO, which he considered to be motivated by nefarious objectives, rather than to protect public health:

“So, we trust our governments, but then when our governments are being told what to do from someplace else, it becomes really dangerous. It becomes really really dangerous...I told you yesterday, the WHO is not some form of organisation that represents the countries. No. It is more than 70% sponsored by private organisations with their self-interests because of the modus operandi – look at how it works. There are research papers on the WHO. Find them for yourself and do your own study. And see how the WHO is run”.

“Because the plan, the sinister plan, is very very terrible. Imagine that you're at home, since there are more people infected than those not infected, it means the non-infected ones, the clean ones, are the ones that will be separated now...They [WHO and “similar organisations”] won't take the parents, they will still take the children. And the younger ones that are strong enough for the formation of the new breed that is in the dream, the new breed, the new class of people that some scientists want to create for the world. While all others may soon have to perish”.

Ofcom considered that the statements made in the broadcast had potential to cause significant harm in several respects.

Firstly, the programme made unchallenged and unevidenced assertions about how the Coronavirus is spread, casting serious doubt on the necessity and effectiveness of social distancing and other measures widely implemented by governments, including in the UK, in response to medical advice. While it is legitimate to represent the existence of a debate on alternative approaches, we were concerned Pastor Chris was presenting as fact and without challenge a highly controversial theory of airborne transmission over longer distances (as opposed to via droplets over much shorter distances

consistent with distancing advice). This presented a risk of harm because it could have led viewers to disregard official health advice.

Secondly, the programme made unchallenged and unevidenced assertions about the motives underlying official health advice both in relation to the Coronavirus and 5G. In particular, Pastor Chris preached that people were being misled and that the lockdown measures, the roll-out of 5G and potential future vaccines, were in fact part of a plan to establish a new class of people. Ofcom considered that these statements had the potential to cause harm by undermining viewers' confidence in the motives of public authorities, and leading them to disregard current and future advice (including on any future vaccine) intended to protect public health.

The potential for harm was increased by being set out, without challenge, by a person presented to viewers as having particular knowledge and authority.

Ofcom went on to consider whether the Licensee provided adequate protection to viewers from this potentially harmful material. As set out above, it is an editorial decision for the individual broadcaster as to how adequate protection might be achieved and our [published guidance](#) states that there are various methods broadcasters can consider.

We took into account that Loveworld is a religious television service and that the statements were made in the context of a live sermon to a worldwide audience (including those watching the programme on Loveworld). In its representations, the Licensee said that Pastor Chris' "huge international audiences tend to watch his televised sermons as an integral part of the practice of their faith" and that "he is an internationally recognised Bible scholar" and that "the points which he makes in this sermon are rooted by him into texts from the Old and New Testaments".

We acknowledged that Loveworld's viewers would have expected the programme to bring a religious perspective to the current issue of the Coronavirus pandemic, but also considered that Pastor Chris' position as the founder of the Church of Christ Embassy would be likely to lead viewers to place a high level of trust in the sermons he delivered. The programme did not include any challenge, context or other views and Pastor Chris was presented as the sole voice of knowledge and authority within the programme. Pastor Chris made several unequivocal statements that asserted his claims as the truth. For example, "*The truth of the matter is...*", "*It's very simple, I can tell you what will happen*" and "*Listen, I'm not speculating. I'm telling you what is real*". Ofcom's research¹⁷ indicates that where potentially harmful claims about health are made by a speaker who is perceived by the audience as having authority, then there is more chance of them treating those claims as credible and making decisions based on them.

We acknowledged the Licensee's representations that the recent global pandemic had provoked "the very widest possible range of medical, scientific, political, economic and no less importantly, theological and religious opinions and speculations" and that much of this "is new and untested". In Ofcom's view, while this was clearly the case, it did not in itself provide any kind of protection to

¹⁷ See footnote 16.

viewers of *Your Loveworld* as the statements made in the programme were articulated as facts and direct interpretations of religious texts by a highly respected and renowned preacher.

The Licensee's representations set out that Pastor Chris and the viewers of Loveworld,

“have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion under Article 9 of the ECHR, and also the right to freedom of expression under Article 10. Those rights include the right to think, to believe and to share ideas which on occasion derive from Scripture rather than conventional science, and which might even occasionally challenge official government policy of the day”.

The representations also recognised that the rights under Articles 9 and 10 of the ECHR are “qualified rights” and that the Licensee “accept[ed] in all the circumstances that this broadcast could have provided better protection for members of the public”.

The Licensee also said that “Pastor Chris...ha[d] generously agreed **not** to repeat the statements...identified or similar statements, during the course of any of his sermons...to be broadcast by the Licensee in future” (emphasis added by Licensee).

As set out above, Ofcom considers compliance with the Code in light of the right to freedoms enshrined in the ECHR. Ofcom does not seek to curb or limit the ability of a broadcaster to present programmes from a religious perspective, or to transmit programmes which express views that may be considered controversial and challenge established thinking. In particular, while the Licensee itself sought Pastor Chris' agreement not to repeat the same or similar statements in its programmes, it is important to make clear that it was not the intention of this investigation to prohibit Pastor Chris or the Licensee from including these subjects in its programmes.

However, when transmitting material of this nature, broadcasters must comply with all relevant rules, including ensuring that viewers are adequately protected from potential harm. Depending on the nature of the content, potential measures to provide adequate protection could include, for example, placing the conspiracy theory in context, by challenging it, making clear that a conspiracy theory is not a matter of fact and that other explanations could exist, and including the views of others.

Ofcom acknowledged the Licensee's statement that, in this case, it could have provided better protections for its audience. We also acknowledged the steps it said it intended to take to protect viewers going forward. However, we were concerned that this programme provided a platform for uncontextualized views that had the potential to cause significant harm to viewers and that the Licensee appeared to have taken no steps to provide its audience with adequate protection from that material.

Ofcom's Decision is therefore that the Licensee did not adequately protect viewers from potential harm, in breach of Rule 2.1.

Breach of Rule 2.1

Sanction

Given the serious breaches in these cases, and in order to remedy the potential harm caused as quickly as possible, Ofcom directs the Licensee to broadcast summaries of Ofcom's Decisions in a form and manner to be decided by Ofcom.

Ofcom is also considering whether to impose any further sanction in addition to these directions. Whilst the Licensee expressed a readiness to broadcast a summary of Ofcom's Decisions, it submitted that any additional sanction would be unnecessary in light of its cooperation and previous compliance record.

The Ofcom Sanctions Panel will consider the matter further, following due process which provides for the Licensee to make written and oral representations to the Panel before reaching its decision.