[GB] BBC’s Panorama documentary "*Gaza: How to Survive a Warzone*" in violation of the Broadcasting Code

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Ofcom determined that an episode of BBC’s, a public service broadcaster, current affairs series *Panorama*, entitled "*Gaza: How to Survive a Warzone*" and produced by the independent production company HOYO Films (HOYO), was misleading and breached Rule 2.2 of the Broadcasting Code. This was due to the fact that the father of the 13 year old narratorheld a significant position in the Hamas administration.

The Programme was broadcast on terrestrial TV on 17 February 2025 and made available on the BBC’s streaming service, BBC iPlayer, on 17 and 18 February 2025, before being made unavailable to viewers.

The programme followed four children and several adults, capturing their experiences of living through the war in Gaza. Currently, international journalists cannot access Gaza, which Ofcom recognised presented significant challenges to broadcasters wishing to report testimonies on the area. Broadcasters often relied on local freelance crews and producers to depict the impact of the war on those who were experiencing it, in the public interest.

This programme relied on children and adults to comment on their experiences. The footage and accompanying narration included descriptions of Israeli attacks and of people seeking shelter at the local hospital. The narrator occupied a unique and prominent position in the programme and acted as a trusted guide to viewers.

The programme received complaints due to some incorrect interpretations, for instance, like "Yahud" being translated as "Israelis" rather than "Jews". However, the predominant complaint was that it did not declare that the main narrator's father was a deputy minister of agriculture in the Hamas administration.

Initially, Ofcom gave the BBC the opportunity to conduct its own investigation into the programme and to do so "as thoroughly as possible, and with the full scrutiny of the BBC Board". The BBC’s Director of Editorial Complaints and Reviews (the Editorial Review) conducted a fact-finding review of the programme while the broadcaster’s Executive Complaints Unit (ECU) considered the complaints.

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On 14 July 2025, both the Editorial Review and the ECU concluded that the BBC had breached rule 3.3.17 of its Editorial Guidelines, which concern the avoidance of misleading of audiences. Ofcom started its own investigation to determine whether rule 2.2 of the Broadcasting Code had been breached: “Factual programmes or items or portrayals of factual of factual matters must not materially mislead the audience.”

Ofcom’s investigation revealed that HOYO knew that the narrator’s father was a Hamas deputy minister prior to broadcast, but did not inform the BBC. However, Ofcom considered that the BBC should have provided HOYO with more guidance and adopted a more proactive approach to risk management.

Ofcom was nevertheless not critical of the programme, considering the production team had ensured that the Israeli government had an opportunity to respond to the programme, and that their responses were included in the documentary.

In order to determine whether there had been a breach of Rule 2.2, Ofcom considered two questions. Firstly, did the omission of the information about the narrator’s father cause the programme's content to be misleading? Secondly, did the omission of this information cause, or have the potential to cause, harm to audiences?

Although HOYO had not intentionally misled the BBC, ultimately, the broadcaster held editorial responsibility for what was broadcast on its platforms. Ofcom acknowledged that the BBC intended to improve its commissioning and compliance processes. Nevertheless, Ofcom concluded: “ (…) we considered the BBC’s failure to carry out rigorous compliance checks and provide adequate editorial oversight of a documentary (…) resulted in a serious omission, which had the clear potential to mislead viewers.”

Ofcom considered the context and issues surrounding the production of the programme, including the highly contentious subject matter and the lack of access to information by independent journalists, which made it difficult to verify information. The consequence of this was that the programme carried a significant editorial risk, which the BBC ought to have mitigated during production. The omission in the programme risked eroding audience trust, whereby the viewer "can participate in the democratic process" and be "informed citizens."

While Ofcom acknowledged the BBC’s apology and their commitment to tightening their processes and taking into account Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights regarding broadcasters’ right to freedom of expression, the regulator considered the viewers had been materially misled.

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https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/bulletins/broadcast-bulletins/2025/531/gaza-how-to-survive-a-warzone-bbc2-bbciplayer-17-18-february-2025.pdf?v=406297

Communications Act 2003

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/21/contents

BBC's Editorial Guidelines, 2019

BBC Editorial Guidelines

https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/documents/bbc-editorial-guidelines-2025.pdf

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