

When science and fiction collide

Professor George Claassen, director of Centre for Science and Technology Mass Communication at Stellenbosch University believes that the media has been so captured by the celebrity culture that an endorsement by a famous person or respected source lends credence to a product or cause which has no scientific backing.



Oprah Winfrey. ©SamAronov [123rf.com](https://www.123rf.com)

Discussing the ethical obligations of the media to report science accurately, he says celebrities - whether they are actors, TV presenters, sports stars or rock icons - are increasingly becoming favourite sources of news in the media. Their name and role model status offer a platform from which strange and dangerous ideas can be launched, he says.

They not only sell products, but also give medical advice, without a full understanding of the science. There are instances where they wage campaigns against vaccinations and other life-saving scientific discoveries. Here he cites the case where the queen of chat, Oprah Winfrey, referred to [Jenny McCarthy](#) as a "Mother Warrior" for her anti-vaxxer stance.