

# Oscar trial - Media circus or fair reportage?

 By [Marion Scher](#)

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As the world's media gathered today outside and inside the High Court in Pretoria, there are many questions in the public's mind. Is this fair? Is this not voyeurism of the highest order? Will it influence the outcome? Is it necessary?

Whatever your view, the chances are that in the last 24 hours you've tuned in to at least one online, print, broadcast or social media to check out what's happened so far.



## Trial of the century

Go online and type in Oscar trial and the world's leading media pop up. They're all there - England's Daily Telegraph, The Mirror, The Guardian, Sky TV and BBC, the USA's CNN and even New York Daily News as part of the 40 strong international media contingent. And they are all giving a blow by blow account of the proceedings, both editorially and pictorially. Each nuance of each witness's testament will be scrutinised and then thrown out for analysis

to the masses.

The reality is that people in the main **do** want to know just what's going down, on a minute by minute basis and the media are the channel through which they can do this. And the fact that the media will make bucket loads of money is also part of the picture.

In what's been dubbed the trial of the century, we'll see a tale unfold which would fit perfectly into a John Grisham novel. A beautiful young model dates a world renowned, handsome athlete. Not just any athlete - but one who's overcome enormous odds to win hearts and minds the world over. Her life is tragically taken by the athlete - not just on any old day, but on Valentine's Day! Could you write a better script?

Hollywood is already planning at least one movie, with Ryan Gosling and our own Charlize Theron tipped for the lead roles.

## Media ethics tested

So why is it that so many people are angry at the thought of the media drooling at the mouth over each juicy titbit that emerges from this trial? Where does the serious business of proving beyond a reasonable doubt that Pistorius knowingly took Reeva Steenkamp's life begin, and sensationalising the story to sell more copies or gain more listeners for their media companies end?

As Professor Anton Harber of Wits University's Journalism and Media Studies department recently commented, "Journalistic ethics will be stretched." Is this putting it mildly?

Instant celebrities will be made. I mean had you ever heard of Judge Thokozile Matilda Masipa before? By the time this trial ends she will be known internationally, not to mention prosecutor Gerrie Nel and defence lawyer Barry Roux.

Many people have also compared this trial to that of the 1995 O.J. Simpson trial where Simpson, another sports hero, was accused and found guilty of murdering his ex-wife and a waiter. This was the first trial in American history that went live on television and as in the Pistorius case, there were mixed feelings on the influence of this - especially in the USA which has a jury system.

Around 95 million viewers were said to have tuned in daily, over the months this trial took place, with some viewers commenting afterwards that they didn't know what they would do with themselves now the trial was over...

## Social media frenzy

The biggest difference perhaps between the two trials - with a 19 year span between - is that today we have social media. So not only will the media be reporting through official channels and social media, everyone and anyone who cares to, can also join the conversation. His fan base already has a name - the Pistorians!

In short, it's social media Oscar overload. To say the trial is trending is of course an understatement - but the interesting thing will be whether this will taper off over the next few weeks or build up?

Will your minds be swayed by what you hear in the media, by your friends and colleague's opinions or will you wait until that final outcome - guilty or not guilty? Only time will tell whether this historical trial will set a healthy or unhealthy precedent in reporting.

## ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher ([www.mediaamentors.co.za](http://www.mediaamentors.co.za)) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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