

BCCSA rules on "touch me on my studio" interview



By Herman Manson: @marklives

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A controversial interview on e.tv between AWB representative André Visagie and political analyst Lebohang Pheko shortly following the murder of AWB leader Eugene Terre'Blanche earlier this year has not contravened the Broadcasting Code of Conduct. [video]



The Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) received 19 complaints from viewers of the insert about Maroleng's handling of the interview. Some of these complaints were copies of one another in a rather obvious attempt to give more weight to the protest - a tactic the BCCSA ignores.

Welcoming the judgement, e.tv spokesperson, Vasili Vas commented: "The eNews Channel and Africa 360 welcomes the finding of the BCCSA with regard to Chris Maroleng's interview with the AWB's André Visagie and political analyst Lebogang Pheko. It is important for issues like nation building to be debated in the media with all views being aired.

"While we expect robust and lively debate, participants should use the platforms in a constructive manner. It is clear that Africa 360 and the eNews Channel offered fair opportunity to participants to present their views during the interview. Mr. Visagie decided to the end the debate, rather than participate."

Lost his cool completely

During the interview, Visagie stormed out of the studio before returning to threaten Pheko and anchor Maroleng. This followed Pheko asking Visagie a series of questions without giving him the opportunity to respond. The flustered Visagie, out of his depth and struggling to respond in English, lost his cool completely.

"Touch me on my studio"

After initially seeming intent on leaving the studio he returned to tell Pheko off, threatening Pheko and telling her that he wasn't done with her yet. Maroleng, seemingly unable to steer the original interview, finally tried to save his reputation by defending the 'poor woman' [she seems pretty tough to me actually] from Visagie. The confrontation between the two men

turned into theatre and a Internet meme when Maroleng tried to tell Visagie and Visagie's hugely embarrassed bodyguard [I'm here for show and fear-mongering, not an actual fight!] to back away from him with the words "touch me in my studio and you will be in trouble... Touch me on my studio and... Touch me on my studio" to which Visagie responds "I will touch you on your studio..."

"Touch me on my studio" quickly became a viral hit and meme on the Internet, spawning a website www.donttouchmeonmystudio.co.za, remixes and imitations around the South African web.

BCCSA adjudicator Prof Henning Viljoen writes that "the gist of the complaints is that the anchor was biased in the sense that he allowed Ms Pheko to interrupt Mr Visagie, thereby not ensuring balance in presenting different viewpoints."

Clause 36 of the code

Viljoen didn't attempt to find on whether Maroleng did his job properly as only Clause 36 of the code could have been breached on the insert in question. The clause states that a broadcaster needs to provide opportunity for a balanced discussion that fairly represents both sides of the debate. Viljoen would therefore only rule on whether or not Maroleng "succeeded in presenting opposing points of view in this debate on a controversial issue of public importance".

Viljoen found that viewers would have a reasonably good idea of the points of view held forth by both parties. Visagie supports and Afrikaner "state" while Pheko rejects this viewpoint.

"Whether Mr Visagie was 'fairly' allowed to put forward his view, might be a matter of difference of opinion," Viljoen states. "In this type of debate on nation building in South Africa, it could be expected that emotions would run high and viewers would judge the programme subjectively."

Viljoen found that "despite the interruptions, the heated debate and the fiasco at the end, I think that each party had the opportunity to put its viewpoint on this controversial matter to the viewing public." As such, the broadcaster did not contravene clause 36 or any other clause of the Code of Conduct and the complaint was dismissed.

Some of the parodies

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ABOUT HERMAN MANSON: @MARKLIVES

The inaugural Vodacom Social Media Journalist of the Year in 2011, Herman Manson (@marklives) is a business journalist and media commentator who edits industry news site www.marklives.com. His writing has appeared in newspapers and magazines locally and abroad, including Bizcommunity.com. He also co-founded *Brand* magazine.

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