

Media's Malema dilemma

 By [Chris Moerdyk](#): @chrismoerdyk

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When [Julius Malema](#)'s myriad appeals eventually run out and assuming he decides to sit out his time in the ANC's sin-bin, it is going to be fascinating to see how South Africa's news media treats him.

Will he continue to be headline news, purely by virtue of his penchant for inflammatory talk, or will the media decide that as he has become politically homeless, his rhetoric no longer constitutes news?

One also has to ask whether there is any depth to the increasing number of letters to the editor, online comments and radio phone-in programme listeners, calling for the media to stop giving Malema a platform. Is this what the news consumer in South Africa wants or is it just a tiny bunch of conservatives who don't like what he says?

The simple answer

I believe the answer is simple. No matter what Malema decides to do, whether he sits out his suspension quietly or forms his own political party or just keeps what he is doing right now and gate-crashing ANC functions and rallies, I do not believe for a minute that he will ever be anything but news.

Love him or hate him, I cannot see him stepping out of the media limelight. Whether what he has to say or what he does has anything to do with the political climate, social climate or any other kind of climate, the fact is that we live in an era of the celebrity. An era of the outspoken, the brash and those who push the envelope to breaking point. The era of triviality, shock tactics and the mass appeal of the superficial.

Reality TV has given rise to a massive consumer audience obsessed with fame, fortune and especially people who have become famous for absolutely no reason whatsoever other than being obsessive extraverts with big breasts or equally big balls.

Whether or not they make sense in what they say or do, it has absolutely no bearing on whether they will be followed, adored and envied.

Celeb-obsessed

Frankly, Malema is way ahead of any reality-show celebrity in terms of his news value. I would guess that, for every Malema detractor, there are probably a thousand or more ardent followers. One just has to look at how many ANC organs are deliberately ignoring the punishment that has been meted down to him. The ANCYL and ANCWL, to mention just two.

The next question, of course, is does the media have any responsibility to be circumspect in terms of reporting Malema's more inflammatory statements? I think not.

As long as we are a country that espouses free speech, Malema should be allowed to speak his mind and the media needs to report what he says. Because the more the media reports outrageous speech, the more this country will begin to separate the wheat from the chaff. The inflammatory rhetoric from the constructive criticism.

Intolerance is rife

Certainly, SA society has a long way to go in terms of tolerance for the outspoken. One just has to look at countries such as the US, where politicians, among others, are soundly castigated, lampooned and laughed at. They have gotten used to taking no notice.

So, hopefully, Malema will be around and shooting his mouth off as often as possible because, while he might not realise it, he is playing a huge role in helping our society get to grips with tolerance.

The media role

Those few people who are calling on the media to stop giving him so wide a platform are doing us all a disservice. It is not the media's role to censor anything or anyone. Society has to learn to allow all to speak their minds and to then to choose what they want to believe.

This is all vital to SA moving away from a society where political disagreement results in despotic laws and killing. That does not come about through gagging voices but rather encouraging discourse, no matter how inflammatory it may be.

Political correctness has never prevented social upheaval but, on the contrary, it tends to increase intolerance.

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Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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