

Brand, Ross and the BBC: criminal behaviour

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I am not usually someone who follows the [Mail](#) newspaper and headline-chasing backbench MPs in laying in to the media about 'offensive' material. Generally, I take the view that people can always turn off the telly or turn the other cheek. British mainstream media is largely innocuous compared to, say, the Internet. But I really do think that the Brand/Ross incident borders on the criminal, literally.



Under the 2003 Communications Act it is an offence to send over a public electronic communications network a message that is "grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character". This is a pretty good description of the phone message left for Andrew Sachs by those two stars employed by the BBC.

Worse still, the people in control of the programme didn't see how horrible it was. Worse still than that, a whole series of BBC bosses have waited until today to suspend the highly-paid comedians and launch an investigation.

As [Jeremy Hunt MP said today at Polis](#), this is out of character for the BBC which generally takes these things very seriously. Hunt said it sent a signal out that the BBC is careless about its impact and its social responsibility.

But what is typical about this story is the inability of BBC management systems to fire-fight these problems when they erupt.

Whether that confirms fears of a deeper problem with BBC editorial structures or an indifference to public sensibilities is another question. It is wrong to draw too many conclusions from one ghastly incident. So I won't.

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