Consumers, Markets and Audiences
Redefining segmentation in radio’s listenership:
A case study of SAfm.

by Maggie Stenhouse
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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Coursework) in the Faculty of Humanity, University of Natal, Durban. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

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Abstract

In this study, I attempt to examine the attempt by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) to re-segment its radio listenership in post-apartheid South Africa. A change in the political situation impacted heavily on the Corporation which redefined its public service role with new vigour. In line with its public service mandate, the Corporation undertook to serve citizens more effectively by redefining the national English radio station, Radio South Africa (RSA). Instead of targeting a ‘dying’ white, elite, elderly audience of 400,000, the Corporation sought to attract a new mass audience who understood English as a first, second or even third language. The result was the launch of SATV in March 1995. The ensuing ‘English backlash’ forced the Corporation’s Chief Executive: Radio, Govin Reddy, as well as the Station Manager, Jack Mullen, to defend the new station. The national English radio station had never had cause to appeal to a wider English audience in the past and there was no indication that the targeted audience would form in response to the station. The station’s listenership was down to 230,000 by September 1995, prompting the SABC to discuss its value to society.
List of Abbreviations

RSA  Radio South Africa
S Afrm  unabbreviated name of new radio station
SABC  South African Broadcasting Corporation
NP  National Party
M&G  Mail & Guardian
Amps  All Media Products Survey
LSM  Living Standards Measure
CE  Chief Executive
IBA  Independent Broadcasting Authority
PBS  Public Service
BBC  British Broadcasting Corporation
RJR  Rhodes Journalism Review
BRU  Broadcast Research Unit
CHAPTER ONE

Baby-snatching a radio station

Public reaction to the redefinition of the national public broadcaster’s national English radio station, Radio South Africa, to the new-look, SAfm has been described by the person largely responsible for the change as “tantalizing to baby-snatching”. The somewhat ‘battle-weary’ Chief Executive: Radio at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) who engineered the change has noted that reaction has “gone beyond regret at the closure of a radio station to become a national debate touching sensitive issues like language and cultural rights” (Business Day, 7/4/95:8).

Talking to anyone involved with SAfm immediately elicited an enthusiastic response of vehement praise or criticism of the programmes, the broadcasters, the accents and the new blend of voices. Management and SABC staff were invariably defensive, blaming any allegations of failure on the lack of training, the haste with which the station went on air, and a lack of cooperation between current affairs, news and station management. This study goes beyond these arguments and focus on the intended audience of SAfm. A radio station is its audience, programmes are driven by the people who listen to them, and their perceived expectations (Green et al, 1992:57). It is the concept of the audience that forms the core of the purpose and function of any communication. As Ong (1982:176) pointed out: “Even to talk to yourself, you have to pretend that you are two people.” He claimed that what is said is shaped by an anticipated response which depends on what ‘reality’ or ‘fancy’ is being addressed. James Ettema and Charles Whitney (1994:8) suggested that ‘audience images’ were very apparent “in organizational strategies and interactions within the overall arrangements of the [broadcast] institution”. The envisaged audience of SAfm is therefore an indication of how the SABC has perceived its role in society. An investigation into this audience will provide some insight into the Corporation’s ability to fulfil a function of any value in post-apartheid South Africa at a time of international crisis for public service broadcasting.

The ‘audience image’ which forms the focus of the broadcaster’s activities is highly problematic. It is in the formation of this ‘audience image’ that issues of language and cultural rights are brought into the debate. Language and cultural rights have always been a site of intensive struggle in South Africa, and the SABC has always been an active participant in the fray. As a result of the political transformation in the country, the SABC has been pressured into a programme of ‘fast-tracking’ change. Whether this
represents a change from a version of public service broadcasting suitably adapted to the needs of the apartheid government, to a newly defined, yet similarly corrupt version of public service broadcasting is a speculation requiring investigation. The SABC has redefined its mission in South Africa and has painstakingly demonstrated its value as a public broadcaster in submissions to the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA).

The problem under investigation in this study is the radical change that the SABC seemed to initiate in its mission. The provision of a service to citizens, instead of audiences to advertisers forms the core of this revamped motivation. It is the concept of the audience that forms the focus of this study. The audience has been a relatively unproblematised concept, it seems to be an accepted notion that audiences are researched and identified, their needs assessed, and that a suitable programming schedule flows from that. 'Unquestionable', 'objective' research results are routinely used to justify programming decisions. The case study of S4fm provides an example of the sensitive issues at stake in audience targeting and can be examined in order to understand the nature of public service and commercial audiences. Old RSR listeners reacted vociferously to the radio station's radical change to S4fm, fuelling acrimonious public debate. Station manager, Jack Mullen and CE: Radio, Govin Reddy have been taken to task in the press and on television by listeners incensed by poor English usage and the axing of old favourite programmes and broadcasters. It seemed that the Corporation has virtually made itself above public accountability by defining its mission in terms of both commercial and public service objectives. The abandonment of one audience in favour of another, yet unformed, was justified in terms of its public service mandate. Yet, the station's commercial failure was used as an argument for the station's closure. My personal suspicion was that the Corporation was desperate to gain credibility in post-apartheid South Africa and that it regarded the dumping of its 'elite' white audience in order to attract a nonracial mass audience, as an easy route. The SABC's task of segmenting audiences in the apartheid era was definitely easier. Differences in race, ethnicity, language and geographical area were exploited in order to keep groups insulated and distinct. What S4fm represented was a move away from using racial differences as lines of cleavage for radio audiences. It was an attempt to forge a new mass audience, characterising the new South Africa, in which race was not to be a factor and all those who understood English shared a radio station. Through this investigation, I hoped to find out how the SABC envisaged this new audience, whether it was forming and, indeed, what the prospects were of it ever forming.
**Historical overview**

The historic imbalances in the allocation of resources among radio channels has its origins in the history of the SABC. The SABC’s radio portfolio, particularly the public service divisions, is a direct inheritance of the failed mythology of ‘Grand Apartheid’ (Hayman and Tomaselli, 1989:51-3; Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1989:153-76 in Teer-Tomaselli, 1995:587). Under this vision, each of SA’s 11 languages would have its own radio service, located in the geographic area corresponding to the supposed ethnic divisions of the country. In effect, this meant that Tswana speakers would be served by *Radio Setswana*, Swazi speakers by *Radio Swazi*, and so on. Journalists and programmers based at these dispersed stations produced news bulletins in each of the different languages. With the exception of the larger stations (*Radio Zulu, Radio Xhosa*), chronic understaffing and low levels of training made this effectively impossible to do adequately and, for the most part, the news broadcast on the various African languages services were translated editions of news wired to them from the Johannesburg studios, on behalf of *Radio Sesotho, Radio South Africa and Afrikaans Stereo* (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995:587).

*Radio South Africa* began as the *A Programme*, later becoming *The English Service*. Initially a public service station in the BBC tradition, it carried no advertising and was to “reflect the fine, the noble and the enduring in the spiritual heritage of the community it serves” according to Fuchs (1969:241 in Tomaselli et al, 1989:103). It was the English component of the two white national stations which Fuchs envisaged as necessary to enable the English and Afrikaans white national cultures to express themselves on the air. Tomaselli et al noted that the configuration of the SABC’s station’s were to legitimise the ruling classes’ dominance within the social formation. This was obvious when viewed against the mission of, *Radio Bantu* which served as a model for subservience. Tomaselli et al (1989:103) noted that this was in contrast to the radio services aimed at white audiences which served to legitimise the ruling classes’ dominance within the social formation. The SABC’s policy has always been tied up with apartheid policy. In the second half of the 1980s, Teer-Tomaselli (1995:578) noted as particularly stressful time for South Africa. States of Emergency were proclaimed from 17 June 1985 to 2 February 1990, in terms of the government’s understanding that the country was facing a ‘Total Onslaught’, which could only be countered by a ‘Total Strategy’. Teer-Tomaselli asserted that from Annual Reports of the SABC, as well as internally circulated in-house documents, the philosophy of the Corporation during the mid-1980s was self-consciously based on the principles of national security, in order to combat the
expected Total Onslaught. The SABC’s role in this process was explicitly to support this Total Strategy.

The radio station’s change from the English Service to RSA had its roots in a change of focus by the SABC from news to finance. In January 1991, the SABC was reorganised into ‘Business Units’, each with its own financial responsibility as a profit making entity (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995:578). It was in line with the SABC’s move to become a more commercially oriented corporation, in January 1986 the English station was renamed Radio South Africa and commercials were accepted on the station for the first time. The station was thereby transformed into a commercial public service station. An SABC marketing document (SABC 1994:1) noted that financially the station never reached a break-even situation. Being a public service station, however, “satisfying the needs of the market takes precedence over breaking even or making a profit”. The nature of the station was to satisfy the needs of a full spectrum format which prohibited it from targeting a specific market with a narrow and consistent format. The station was therefore run along commercial lines but retained its public service mandate which implies a rejection of an entirely commercial agenda.

The ambiguous mix of both commercial and public service ethos characterised the SABC’s entire operation. In submissions to the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), it argued its case for support as a public service broadcaster, (Delivering Value I, II, II) delivering value to citizens. But, with 75% of its revenue coming from advertising, it must have been successfully delivering markets to advertisers. Corporation policy underplayed the opposing ideals which exist in the public service/commercial dichotomy. SABC Chief Executive, Zwelakhe Sisulu has been emphatic about the Corporation’s public service mission: “[Most South Africans] exist on the margins of our economy. They cannot and will not be served by a broadcasting system geared only to the delivery of consumers to markets ... Public service [radio] is about delivering service to citizens” (Leadership, (14) 1, 1995:68). Teer-Tomaselli (1995:581) asserted that the tensions between the factions - public service versus the market - remains an unresolved source of tension with the SABC, through to today. These tensions were evident in the formation of S Afrim and the closure of RSA. A study of the audience concept highlights these tensions.
The 'facts' of the matter - Why RSA had to change

To understand the controversy surrounding the radio station’s change, it was necessary to find out the official reasons given for the change. The SABC outlined a variety of factors which contributed to the decision to radically change the station. In response to a public outcry, Chief Executive: Radio, Govin Reddy, and the station’s manager, Jack Mullen, have had to justify the change in numerous public fora. It was argued that the continuation of RSA was untenable for the following reasons: firstly, the station enjoyed a disproportionate allocation of resources; secondly, it was serving a dwindling listenership; thirdly, although a commercial station, it ran at a loss; fourthly, the station was not ‘demand-driven by the larger English audience needs. In Reddy’s words, it was “an old fashioned radio station with a dwindling, ageing, predominantly white audience” (Business Day, 7/4/95:8). The station was the SABC’s best resourced with 126 transmitters and a staff of 53, according to Reddy (Business Day, 7/4/95:8). He compared the station’s listenership of 400 000 with that of Radio Zulu, which ran on only 20 transmitters and a staff of 31, but attracted a listenership of over ten times that size. Using Radio Zulu as comparison, Reddy also argued that RSA made a R20m loss in 1994, against Radio Zulu’s R32m profit. He argued that “no public broadcaster could justify running such an expensive and dying station that had little relevance to millions who use English as a first or second language”. The accessibility of the format of the station to the broader English speaking population was noted as requiring further analysis. In spite of the positive aspects in the station’s favour, it was clear that “drastic changes in both product and branding are imperative before the station can reposition itself to compete in a new deregulated dispensation” (SABC 1994:2). The main reason for the change was given that listenership figures showed no growth since the February/March 1988 AMPS* diary and, since the population had increased, it could be assumed that the station audience is in steady decline. It was proposed that from the stagnant demographic profile, the audience could not grow. 63% of the audience were over 50 years of age and 83% of the total listenership was white. It was, however, recognised that the station did address many opinion makers and decision makers in the business world and it did have credibility in this market.

*AMPS is the All Media Products Survey conducted biannually by the South African Advertising Research Foundation. It has been commissioned since the early seventies and is used extensively in the advertising and media industry to determine audience figures as well as product usage for the country’s main media.
As consumers, the audience showed attractive characteristics, 75% of the audience was in Supergroup A. As a station targeting the elite and wealthy the profile was "impressive", but as the National English Public Service Broadcaster with 130 transmitters, the profile was regarded as no longer acceptable. The SABC was saying that it was contrary to its public service mandate to use a disproportionate part of its resources to serve a minority audience which was in decline. A station marketing document noted that, "during the [previous] eight years, RSA has been able to satisfy the needs of current listenership but the station is not demand-driven by the larger English audience needs. Significant changes have been made in some areas but to the market at large the changes have been perceived as 'furtive' (SABC 1994:1). The SABC's new focus on 'serving citizens' would not be served by the existing station. Reddy claimed that "with an unacceptably small audience ... [RSA] simply would not be able to play a role of any significance in the new society" (Sunday Tribune, 9/4/95:8). It was therefore decided that the station had to change if it were to contribute to the Corporation's mission in society, it was a failure both financially and in terms of public service functions.

*Behind the 'facts' - possible motivations*

The SABC's explanation for the change has met with vociferous condemnation by former RSA listeners. Some regarded the change as an attempt by the SABC to be more politically correct. Others speculated that the explanation must be a political one. In one particular attack, John Kane-Berman of the South African Institute of Race Relations, a respected anti-apartheid institution, accused the SABC of imposing a new ideology of 'rainbowism' on the country "in a manner reminiscent of the way in which Christian National Education was foisted upon schoolchildren by the National Party" (Business Day, 31/03/95:8). It was his contention that the SABC was once again being "abused", in its use to promote an ideological agenda, "trampling in the process on the rights of minorities". It is interesting to note Eric Louw's recommendations for the SABC in a post apartheid scenario. Louw (1993:101) suggested that the incoming government should resist the temptation of "capturing" the SABC and using it as the National Party had done, as this would constitute a violation of the diversity of opinion ideal. Rather, he suggested that it should maintain the corporation as a centralised institution but ensure diversity. He included in his strategy, the creation of a 'national' channel on TV and radio which could consist of programming designed to 're-educate' people for a nonracial South Africa (1993:101). He continued that such a national channel should satisfy the demands of the new government's constituency for visible intervention
into the media world (Louw 1993:108). He suggested that this channel could broadcast simultaneously in different languages and suggested that nation-building non racial content would be the most effective the reach this sector in the long term. What Louw suggested is that the new government’s constituency would want a demonstration that the SABC had changed. In effect, a radio station change could be a public demonstration that the government was effective in bringing about change in the country. Coenie de Villiers (1995:203) commented on the changes to SAm as “inevitable if broadcasting democracy is to be more than just a fashionable catch-phrase”. Changes within the SABC’s operation were anticipated, the Corporation was expected to change because of its relationship with the previous government and its involvement in the Total Strategy. It is my concern that there are no mechanisms for critically evaluating changes made. In order to do this it is necessary to investigate the motivations for changes and to realise whether the new configurations better serve the objectives. It is my suspicion that there is disparity between the objectives set and those achieved, yet by focusing on what was before rather than what has become, the real issues are being ignored while a radio station slowly dies.

Methodology

In this research paper I attempted to construct research around the audience of SAm in order to evaluate the SABC’s apparent adoption of new audience segmentation criteria in post apartheid South Africa. A comparison between public service and commercial audiences was needed in order to ascertain whether these constructs were similar or different. This formed a basis for an investigation into the way in which the audience of SAm was constructed. As a starting point, a thorough investigation into the identification of radio audiences was undertaken, in order to understand the nature of a radio audience and the way in which it is constructed. It is the construction of the audience that forms the basis for this study. Audience research is the main tool used in audience construction and an investigation into this function problematises the concept.

A further construct requiring investigation was the notion of the public service audience. Being propelled by a “different logic”, the public service broadcaster has a mission to deliver public good to the community. This requires an audience concept which differs from the conventional commercial one. The public service audience has been relatively unproblematised in research and it was therefore important to highlight any contradictions identified in the literature.
I have undertaken to examine *SAfm* as a public service audience-generating exercise. The nature of the difference between a commercial and public service audience has been highlighted in the arguments for the change of *SAfm* as the need for a station to "play a role of any significance in society" in which a mass "citizen" audience is targeted. The identification of this ‘citizen’ audience is problematic.

This investigation undertook to assess the change from *RSA* to *SAfm* as an exercise in which the SABC reconceptualised its audience. In this study, I aim to identify the mandate obtained for the changes and how the new programming decision were justified in terms of audience generation. I have undertaken literature research in order to investigate the way in which public service broadcasters identify audiences. I wanted to find out whether there are any clearly defined parameters in place which serve to guide the public service broadcaster in its mission to serve the public good in terms of audience segmentation.

**Problems encountered**

The ‘*SAfm* issue’ was obviously very politically charged; added to this were the tensions within the SABC which made information gathering quite difficult. Employees were not eager to talk to me and I found the station's management very defensive and inaccessible. Trying to investigate how the *SAfm* audience was envisaged was more troublesome than I imagined. It was very difficult to isolate the initial identification of the construct. I could not understand why was it assumed that an English, broad appeal, national station was the way to go? A newspaper report quoted ‘an *SAfm* source’ as saying that many management meetings were “stormy” and described the internal battles as a “soap opera, with loyalties shifting and people stabbing each other in the back” (*Mail & Guardian*, 24-30/11/95:10). It was within this context that I tried to probe the way in which *SAfm*’s new audience was envisaged. Station manager, Jack Mullen, was too busy “fighting for his political life” to speak to me and possibly too anxious about the future of his position at the SABC to give me his time. I also found it difficult to extract information about audiences from my sources. It seemed that everyone had an opinion about *SAfm* and its problems but none of them concentrated on the way in which the new audience was identified. The abstract nature of audiences and the reliance on 'objective' research data also complicated attempts at evaluating decisions. It amazed me how significant the interplay of personalities was in decision-making. In fact, it fuelled suspicions that the high level decisions could be dominated by a single person's vision. I also found that a certain politically-correct paranoia prevailed. It was difficult to obtain
employees’ actual opinions when they are being quoted as SABC representatives. Some slips such as “people get bored with politically correct” and “it’s stupid that a station with 3% listenership even thinks it can try to forge a new South Africanness” were more enlightening than stock answers about the station’s mission. If more informants had been direct and, indeed, accessible, then this research could say much more. The Corporation’s operation as both a public service broadcaster and a competitive commercial station also complicated information gathering. I denied access to a much talked about “Ann Tonks Report” which was rumoured to be highly critical of the way in which S Afrim was conceptualised on the grounds that it was a strategic document which would be of strategic value to competitors.

There was also a contrast between the issues under discussion at the SABC and those in the international broadcasting debates. The SABC seemed to be affirming its public service mission wholeheartedly while the rest of the world questioned the value of its survival in modern society. The SABC still operates in a highly regulated environment. Although strategies (such as RSC’s change) are in anticipation of commercial competition, one wonders whether the Corporation is fully aware of the impact of commercial competition on public service institutions internationally. Indeed, the competitive environment has forced public service broadcasters to find new niches, while the SABC strategy suggests a ‘mass’ approach.
CHAPTER TWO
The Radio Audience

What is a radio audience

The conceptualisation of a radio station’s audience is the focus of this research. Due to radio’s unique characteristics, listeners form a special relationship with radio stations. This chapter includes a discussion of the relationship which develops between listeners and stations. Defining a station’s audience proves problematic. An initial exploration of the nature of radio audiences suggests that an ‘audience’ is often little more than an institutionally generated construct of statistical figures and demographic data. On these terms, ‘audiences’ are a product of research. It is also within the scope of this chapter to understand more about audience generation, or disintegration.

The significance of radio in South Africa

The power and appeal of radio in South Africa cannot be over estimated. Daily listenership figures are estimated at 16-million which represents 64% of the adult population (Amps 1995 quoted in Teer-Tomaselli, 1995: 585). Radio is an ubiquitous medium and, because of its affordability and orality, constitutes many South Africans’ only form of media exposure. With an estimated reach of 98% of households, in contrast to television’s 30% reach, it bears the responsibility of broadcasting to the majority of South Africans. The power and influence of radio is enhanced by the ease with which it is integrated into listeners’ lives.

Andrew Crisell (1986:3) highlighted the fact that radio relies purely on auditory codes for communication which limits broadcasters to the use of speech, music, sounds to convey their messages. Because of its reliance on auditory codes, radio is obviously very much about music. Paddy Scannel (1992:320) identified music’s dominance of radio output as the ‘worm’ in Lord John Reith’s ‘bud’ of a vision for the unifying role radio could play in society. The dependence of music producers on radio stations also gave some indication of the symbiotic relationship between the music industry and the medium (see Peterson, 1994:171-186).

Speech also has had a place on radio and, in his study of orality and literacy, Walter Ong (1982:9) identified “speech as being inseparable from our consciousness”. “Articulated sound,” he contested, “is paramount, not only to communication, but thought itself relates in an altogether special way to sound” (Ong 1982:7). The medium of speech and
sound is therefore powerful in its influence on consciousness.

The characteristics of a radio’s broadcast dictates the way in which it is integrated into the listener’s life. In his study of the medium, Crisell (1986:7) explained its appeal to the imagination, its flexibility and its potential to be used as a ‘secondary’ device.

Radio's relationship with the listener

There is the paradox that while radio is a long-distance mode of communication it is also an inward, intimate medium. The imagination is integral to the way in which we decode virtually all its messages, whether factual or fictional (Crisell, 1986:12). Due to the medium’s flexibility, the listener is left free to perform other activities while listening. Furthermore, radios are portable and listening is mostly a solitary activity. This presents another paradox of radio - although its audiences may be counted in millions, the medium addresses itself very much to the individual (Crisell, 1986:13).

In contrast to the Reithian notion of audience manipulation, it is the listener’s perogative to pay any level of attention to the medium. It can be sought as an object of concentration or simply be left on as ‘acoustic wallpaper’ (Crisell, 1986:17). Former BBC head of audience research, Robert Silvey, distinguished between the medium’s use as a source of entertainment and as an accompaniment to other activities (Silvey, 1974:209 in Crisell, 1985:16). While former BBC Director-General, Treshowan, distinguished between those who regard it ‘as an art form on its own remits’ and those for whom radio is mere backround, a ‘service element’ (Treshowan, 1970:7 in Crisell, 1986:16).

Graham Hayman and Ruth Tomaselli (1989:71) noted the important role that radio was afforded by Dr Piet Meyer, chairman of the Broederbond who became Chairman of the SABC’s Board in 1959. They suggested that through his experience of organising Afrikaans Christian National trade unions, Meyer realised that the greater shaping influence of broadcasting depended on the degree to which it connected with the ideological characteristics of the audience. To be influential it had to therefore “seem familiar and serve their needs”. Meyer told a ‘leaders course’ that:

Of all communications media ... the warmth, human spoken word is and remains the most powerful and influential. Whatever is carried in the other media, and however these media do it, the influence and effect depends in the last instance on whether (the substance) is taken up in human conversation, and how it is passed, processed and spread in living conversation. (Meyer, 1959 quoted in Tomaselli et al, 1989:71).
Meyer suggested that radio, being conversational, has tremendous influence and effect in society. The degree to which this purported influence has been overwhelmed by the power of television is debatable, but his point that the substance of radio is received in the same form in which it is processed and spread remains unchallenged by new communication technologies.

**The radio audience as a concept**

Among other things, it is accepted that audiences can be nurtured, lost, manipulated, enraged, educated, entertained, empowered and moved. The ‘reality’ of media audiences is seldom questioned. Is it possible for a ‘radio audience’ to be nothing more than an institutionally generated construct with little relation to actual listening behaviours? What is a radio audience and how is it constituted?

How can radio’s audience be defined? BBC audience researcher, Silvey (1974:179) argued that in the process of taking over the word ‘audience’ from the theatre, cinema, or concert hall, the fact that the term cannot be applied to broadcasting in a similarly precise way has been overlooked. In the broadcast environment, the audience was not ‘captive’ - forcing the researcher to make choices as to the audience’s constitution:

> You may choose to define it conservatively, confining it to those who have given the broadcast their full attention throughout, or you can define it generously, including all within earshot, or indeed you can choose any point along this continuum (Silvey in Crisell, 1986:209).

On one level then, the researcher must decide what indicator of the listener’s quality of attention is required before a person can be included in the ‘audience’ construct. Richard Peterson (1994:171) contended that social forces played an intrinsic role in fabricating the audience ‘realities’ so confidently bandied about in commercial reports. He identified two facets to media audience measurement - the media content to be assessed and what audience behaviours are to be recorded. In terms of content, the programmes listened to are of interest. The degree of attention, or the stipulation of what observable behaviour constituted a ‘response’ was also crucial to the ‘reality’ constructed. Finally, an audience characteristic measurement was often undertaken.

It was Miller’s contention that the final ‘reality’ of an audience for the researcher was always a trade-off between what the client demanded for information and, what could be done in a survey and at what cost (Miller, 1994:59). His investigation was concerned
with commercial, as opposed to public service, broadcaster's research - the difference or lack of difference between which is the subject of later examination.

Miller identified two popular forms of media research: custom research and syndicated research. He found that custom research was usually commissioned by one media client to focus on its own audience. Describing them as the media client's weapon in the struggle to document an economically meaningful audience, he found that custom research was used to "find a heretofore unmeasured audience, to correct a damaging impression of an audience, or to highlight a flattering new detail about an audience" (Miller, 1994:60).

Specifically targeted research were undertaken with some measure of success and Miller cited the use of audience estimates by new media as a testament to the "powerfully soothing role that audience numbers play in justifying media buys" (1994:60). Custom audience research illustrated the important collaboration of media clients and measurement firms in the creation of audience images. Resultant audience constructs were packages of information tailored by those with financial interests in the venture.

Packages of information resulted in a "cacophony of incomparable audience claims" which did not facilitate advertisers' media buying decisions. For such decisions, a 'standardised' audience was required and the syndicated study was therefore developed to provide the required end product (Miller, 1994:59). This standard package of information became a convention when both media and advertisers were satisfied that:

[it created] a sense that the service provides richly textured pictures of minds and bodies engaged with media content and [used] a practical measurement approach that is an acceptable compromise between the partially conflicting goals of these two client groups (Miller, 1994:67).

The media industry relied, to a large extent, on such research to gauge the popularity of outputs. There was the danger, however, that the data generated became integrated into the industry and was not questioned, although its credibility could be far from sound. What was often overlooked is that the research was done in particular interests and, unless these interests were jeopardised, the data provided remains unchallenged. Armand Mattelart (1991:157) stated that the root of the problem was that "people who use media research stats are not analysing them, they are quoting them". It was his
belief that the numbers users have been “sweeping details under the rug” because:

...the mistakes made as a result of this process may not hurt the advertiser, since his competitors are probably making the same mistakes, but they do have serious consequences for the mass media and for society (Mattelart, 1991:157).

Richard Peterson (1994:171) expressed similar concerns about the rather ‘incestuous’ way in which audience constructs were generated:

The ways that media and market researchers measure audiences pervasively shape the ways that people in the media and advertising view those audiences. And at the same time, the ways that these communicators wish to view audiences shape the ways that researchers measure them.

As a result of the limited inputs to this vicious circle, audience images were expressed and investigated with only the media, market researchers and advertising industries’ interests in mind. In her study of television audiences, Ien Ang (1991) expressed concern about the ease with which the audience as an institutionally generated construct are accepted, even within the public service ethos. She advocated the need for the reconstitution of a new ‘way of seeing’ audiences because “[radio] audience only exists as an imaginary identity, an abstraction constructed from the vantage point of the institutions” (Ang, 1991:2). She argued that audiences must not be viewed as an ontological given, but should rather be recognised as a “socially-constituted and institutionally-produced category” (Ang, 1991:3).

Ang undertook to re-conceptualise the understanding of audiences. She disagreed with the view that ‘the audience exists nowhere; it inhabits no real space, only positions within analytic discourses’. Ang suggested that it is more useful to accept that audiences were seen to “inhabit a real space: a crucial, institutional space which was installed as soon as the exploit of broadcast television became an institutional practice” (Ang, 1991:12). Instead of dismissing the media audience as a construct without foundation, she suggested that the forces that shape it should be recognised. It was more worthwhile to accept the construct, but with a qualification. Ang proposed that the theoretical distinction between two realities of ‘television audience’ as discursive construct and, the social world of actual audiences be made clear (Ang, 1991:13). This differentiation was an attempt to refocus on the ‘infinite, contradictory, dispersed and dynamic practices and experiences of [radio] audiencehood’ which were enacted by real life listeners. She also regarded the “permanent stability and final closure of ‘television audience’” as a discursive construct to be subversive. Quotiting Lull (1988:242), she stated that there is
the notion that if "television audience" exists nowhere, actual audiences are everywhere" (Ang, 1991:14).

Similarly, in their work on how the media create audiences James Ettema and Charles Whitney (1994) drew the distinction between actual receivers, the likes of whom exist in mass communication theory, and institutionally effective audiences. In the institutional concept of mass communication, active receivers are reconstituted as audiences possessing social meaning and economic value within the system (Ettema & Whitney, 1994:5). The focus on audiences as an institutionally derived construct, elevates an investigation into its nature as more than an inquiry into a "product of something like a manufacturing process". Ettema and Whitney (1994:16) proposed that audiences be seen as a "site of contestation among media firms, measurement services, advertisers interest groups, government, and other agents of institutional power".

The formation of new audiences

In the commercial media, audiences are often spoken of in terms of a collective persona possessing certain demographic and psychographic characteristics. The Radio Metro audience is, for example, described as black, English speaking and male with a good education. Physical fitness is a priority and the audience is socially aware, individualistic, progressive etc (Young & Rubicam, 1994). As previously discussed, audiences are defined by such criteria because it is on such information that media buyers make decisions. With this in mind, it would seem impossible for members of a radio audience to possess no commonalities, other than being listeners of the same radio station. Media audiences obviously only exist in relation to the medium - the medium is required for them to cohere into a group. It is possible for a medium to be the initial impetus for the formation of that group or, the group may exist in some form prior to the medium's creation.

From his extensive research into audience formation, Denis McQuail (1987:222) proposed a typology that accommodated audiences initiated with the 'media as source' and those that were formed from 'society as source'. McQuail (1987:224) emphasised that there was a degree of tension as well as simple differentiation involved in the contrast between society-origination and media-origination, which underlies the typology.
The sources of audience formation: a typology

A) SOCIETY AS SOURCE
   I) Existing public or social group membership (Group or Public)
   II) Individual need or purpose arising in social experience (Gratification set)

B) MEDIA AS SOURCE
   III) Content (Fan group or Taste culture)
   IV) Channel or medium (Medium audience)

(source: McQuail, 1987:224)

The ‘view from society’, or ‘society-as-source’ audiences, it was suggested, go with strong social and normative ties. In contrast, the media-sourced audiences, were associated with more individual choice in the free market for information and culture. These audiences were characterised by potential manipulation from above and self-interested calculation from below (McQuail, 1987:224). Making what he cautioned may be an inappropriate simple value judgement, McQuail (1987:224) commented that, although much of the normative social theory applied to the media favours ‘society-origination’, he felt that these values are “sometimes based on nostalgia for a lost community and solidarity”.

What McQuail seemed to be suggesting was that a medium, for example a radio station, may be formed as a result of a public or group in society which identifies a need to express itself. He used Dewey’s (1927) definition of a public to clarify what type of public could form, for example, a radio station:

   a political grouping of individuals brought into being as a social unit through mutual recognition of common problems for which common solutions should be sought (in McQuail, 1987:223).

McQuail included an ‘informed public’, a party public catered for by the party press, and local community audiences interested in local publications, in this category of ‘society-sourced’ audiences. Research into such audiences, he suggested tended to be more qualitative and required intensive methods and more study of social and political contexts.

The media-sourced audiences were groups formed with a particular content, or channel, as their common point of interest. In a way similar to that previously discussed, these audiences were institutional constructs. They were extensively marketed as the media
institutions needed to stimulate demand for their products. The research needs in respect of the media-originated audience were more easily satisfied by extensive quantitative survey research, in which precise behavioural measures of attention-giving played an important part.

**Conclusions**

Listeners form a close relationship with radio stations. An understanding of the audience concept requires insight into the interests that generate the construct, for the information package that is an audience is necessarily an institutionally generated construct which was fashioned for a particular purpose. As to the formation of audiences, it would seem that, although all media audiences exist in relation to the media, it is possible to classify their formation in response to an impetus from society or the one from the media. It is, therefore, plausible that a media audience will form in the absence of any existing group being identified in society. These media-generated audiences are usually associated with media which stimulate attention to their product for the purpose of generating profit.
CHAPTER THREE
The problem of audience identification

Fundamental to the task of audience identification is the definition of an audience. From the previous chapter, it is clear that an ‘audience’ as a concept is a site of contestation. The identification of an audience is largely the result of targeted research which comes about due to the interaction of specific interests. In this chapter, the identification of audiences according to the public service and commercial broadcasting forms are discussed.

Society as the source of audience formation

Exploiting existing distinctions

It is possible for audiences to develop in response to media, or out of independently existing social forces, or as a combination (McQuail 1987:215). But, all media audiences exist as a relation to the media institution. Radio discourse is shaped by the broadcaster’s image of his audience. Ettema and Whitney (1994:8) suggested that ‘audience images’ were apparent “in organisational strategies and interactions within the overall arrangements of the institution”. Although it may form the focus of the broadcaster’s activities, the construction of an audience ‘image’ is highly problematic.

The particular audience conceived is a direct result of the role which the media institution adopts in society. McQuail (1987:220) put it thus: “from a sociocultural perspective, an audience is addressed, if it is within the political sphere, the target is a public and, if commercial interests are involved, the audience is viewed as a market”. The dichotomy of the audience as a public (comprising citizens) and the audience as a market (comprising consumers) is a focal point of this study. This chapter examines what the public service model uses as criteria for segmentation, as well as the logic which propels commercial broadcasters to choose certain audiences.

Public service broadcasting - striving to serve citizens, and commercial broadcasting - functioning to deliver markets, exist at opposing ends of a continuum. Anthony Smith (1991 in Raboy, 1995:8) described the relationship as follows: “where commercial broadcasting is linked to the social world by means of markets, public service derives its legitimacy from the role its viewers play as citizens”. Public service broadcasting therefore functions in a political capacity. Concluding an in-depth study of audience con-
cepts, McQuail (1987:221) observed that “the widest gap lies between market and a public, since they diverge sharply in the way they attend to audience origin, to the degree and kind of audience identity, and to the purpose and function of communication”. It is therefore necessary, when examining the segmentation of listeners, to pay particular attention to the purpose and functioning of the broadcaster in society, as this is the key to the ways in which the audience is addressed. The SABC’s ambiguous role in society is problematic because it delivers both a service to citizens and markets to advertisers. The extent to which there is necessarily a difference in output, and whether both ends can be achieved will be discussed. If it is ‘serving two masters’, the criteria it uses to identify audiences are crucial to strategic decision making in terms of the commodity in which it deals. The difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of the corporation’s strategy to fulfil its public service mandate is also discussed. The key to these problems lies in the way the audience is segmented. A closer examination of the differences between the audience as consumers and audience as citizens is required, followed by a focus on what the broadcaster ‘delivers’ in terms of the public service or commercial model.

The audience as consumers, the audience as citizens

The sovereignty of the consumer has its roots in the traditional liberal theory of the free press which is based on ‘freedom’ being embodied in the rights of proprietorship. The freedom to publish and to direct media as a property right was regarded as a safeguard of freedom to express diverse opinion independent of the state. The freedom to buy newspapers in a free market ensures that the consumer ultimately controls the press, because how he spends his money determines which publications are profitable. In order to make profits, the proprietor must respond to public demand (Curran & Seaton, 1981:290). The underlying assumption behind this theory is that, left to market forces, a ‘marketplace of ideas’ which is both accountable and representative will develop. Public demand, however, is controlled by the consumers’ ability to purchase, thereby reducing the ‘marketplace of ideas’ to one which caters for those with material means. Another assumption is that this ‘freedom of expression’ will naturally result in a diversity of opinions. Material constraints could result in the ideas of the rich being the ideas that are published. The wealth of the consumer and his or her capacity to purchase newspapers, television channels, and other media is only one of two ways in which more attractive markets are favoured in a free market approach.

The ‘market’ audience has a dual significance for the media, according to McQuail (1987:220). He explained that the media product was offered to the audience who were
potential customers, in addition to providing an audience for advertising of products and services. The implications of this commodification are that the market audiences which have the ability to consume radio stations, as well as the products advertised are the only ones able to attract advertising revenue. The media, therefore concentrate on certain segments of the audience, to the detriment of others. Herbert Gans (1974:157) noted, that since “advertisers discovered that they could best sell their wares by reaching potential buyers rather than the largest number of viewers, they have been interested in programmes which appeal to specific age, sex and sometimes income groups in the total audience” (quoted in Cantor, 1994:163). An emphasis on the market aspect of the audience leads, therefore, to a media which panders to the needs of advertisers in the quest for revenue.

But, by serving the audience primarily as consumers, are citizens’ needs necessarily neglected? Murdock and Golding (1989:180) argue that citizens lose out when the press is left to market forces:

Where material inequality massively differentiates people’s access to goods and services, and those goods and services are themselves a necessary resource for citizenship, then political rights are the victim of the vicissitudes of the marketplace and its inegalitarian structure (Murdock & Golding, 1989:180).

By adopting the laissez-faire approach, the media amplifies the inequalities of the marketplace and further entrenches them in the political realm, politically marginalising those already materially marginalised. If the audience is to be addressed as citizens, Murdock and Golding (1989:183) identified two essential features of communication which needed to be included, namely, diversity of provision and universality of access. These authors contended that citizens needed information to know their rights, make informed political choices and to be able to recognise themselves in the representations. It is argued that if media is reduced to operating in the interests of segments of audiences which display characteristics of profitability, “the nominal universality of citizenship is undermined”. Ultimately, they concluded that political rights are the victim. The results of adopting the free press approach which relies on market forces for sustenance has proved inadequate in terms of providing diversity of provision, and universality of access.

Nicholas Garnham (1990:104) also expressed concern about the political limitations imposed on citizens as a result of media policy. He contended that “citizens require, if
their equal access to the vote is to have any substantive meaning, equal access also to sources of information and equal opportunities to participate in the debates from which political decisions rightly flow”. Neglecting citizens in the communication sphere is therefore tantamount to marginalising their vote.

Another aspect of the consumer/citizen dichotomy is explained by Dave Rushton (1993:xii) who believed that defenders of public service broadcasting have been addressing increasingly shallow and short term issues. He used an anecdote to illustrate the difference between a customer and a citizen. He argued that, when asked as a customer about his use for the local hospital, on his evidence of use it should surely be closed, as he had no cause to use it in twenty years. If a choice is presented between closing the swimming pool or the hospital, he would be obliged to keep the swimming pool, if asked purely as a service user or a customer. It would not affect him directly if the hospital were to shut, but it would if the swimming pool were to close. Yet, if asked as a citizen whether it is a good thing to keep the local hospital, he would answer believing that he might need hospital care in future, or by imagining the convenience to its current users, if not to other member of his own family. The difference, he points out is that, as a citizen he exists in a socially interactive form through time and space; in contrast, as a consumer he exists only at the moment of consumption (Rushton 1993:xii). Communicating to ‘citizens’ therefore requires an understanding of this existence as a ‘socially interactive form’.

Garnham (1990:110) similarly identified the site of the problem as “the fundamental contradiction between the economic and the political at the level of their value systems and of the social relations which those value systems require and support”. The focus in the political realm, where citizens abide, was on communal ends. The citizens’ definition within the political realm was in terms of their public rights of debate, voting etc, within a “communally agreed structure of rules and towards communally defined ends”. Within this context, the “value system is essentially social and the legitimate end of the social action is the public good” (Garnham, 1990:110). In contrast, within the economic realm, individuals were defined by production and consumption and act towards increasing their private wealth. The rights exercised were private and the individual’s actions were coordinated by the invisible hand of the market” (Garnham, 1990:110).

It is the same individuals, however, who occupy both the political and economic realms, as producers/consumers and as citizens. It is the extent to which these contrasting value system conflict that is of interest. The nature of this contradiction is probably similar to
the contradictions within a broadcasting corporation serving audiences in both capacities. Anthony Smith (1991 in Raboy, 1995:8) stated rather glibly that “broadcasting takes place in the public sphere and we come to it both as consumers and as citizens”. He aligned commercial broadcasting with markets and public service with functions with citizens’ interests. This may be true from the perspective of a president of an Oxford College whose patronage is valued by advertisers. But, as Murdock (1992:37) explained in Raboy (1995:23), marginalised consumers were excluded from participation in new communication forums by more than just the material barriers to entry. He claimed that the individuals' needs would not be met, since it was “overwhelmingly orientated to addressing people in their personae as consumers”. This suggested that if the media were segmented according to consumer behaviour and addresses audiences along such lines, it may alienate an alternatively classified segment of ‘citizens’. This suggests that consumers and citizens should be addressed differently. The personae of consumer is not too problematic as its indices of definition are generally quantifiable. But, the personae of citizenship is wrought with vagueness and requires further discussion.

Grappling with the concept of a citizen, Marc Raboy (1995:8) proposed that the concept is “political” and “can not be passive”. Drawing on Keane’s (1991, 1994) definition, he stated that it “evokes the image of Tom Paine and the unfinished struggle for ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’”. In this sense, citizenship is about the struggle for human rights. Introducing their book, “Communication and Citizenship” (1991), Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (1991:19) alluded to the intricate and broad issues which needed to be understood as a prerequisite to “not only [for] an enhanced theoretical understanding but also for concrete political involvement within - and with - the public sphere”. In what could be interpreted as a forewarning, they claimed, “Nobody promised that citizenship would be easy” (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991:19).

Citizenship should not be taken lightly and Raboy (1995: 8) identified the need to “decouple” public service broadcasting from the state when it is linked to citizenship. And yet, commodification of the media also undermines the serving of citizens. The difference between public service and commercial media, he stated, is:

not a question of principle but of purpose. The main point of distinction...is that the latter is only commercially-driven, while the former, despite the various shapes and forms it assumes from time to time and place to place, is necessarily propelled by a different logic (Raboy, 1995:8).
Being “propelled by a different logic”, and being addressed as primarily citizen personas, audiences are necessarily political constructs. Addressing a nation of citizens, the national public broadcaster is then faced with the task of how to use its resources to address the political audience. A scarcity of resources forces decisions to be made to address some sectors to the detriment of others. These decisions represent choices which can be interpreted as political. When the public broadcaster makes decisions with regard to audience segmentation, it is therefore making political choices. In a democratic society, these choices need to be made transparently and those who make the decisions need to be held accountable to the public.

*The media as source of audience formation*

**Creating new distinctions**

As an alternative to ‘society-as-source’ audiences in which existing groups within society formed a media audience, McQuail’s audience typology detailed ‘media-as-source’ audiences. These included audiences which cohere in response to the appeal of media content - as in fan groups and taste cultures; or those attracted to a particular channel or medium as a product. These audiences are “characterised by potential manipulation from above and self-interested calculation from below” (McQuail, 1987:224). When media are not spontaneously formed in response to a community’s recognition of a need to express itself, media-as-source audiences result. Clifford Christians *et al* (1993:39) noted a shift from the “empathetic understanding of social life and culture” to the “[attainment of] knowledge through scientific enquiry” as the core motivation for communication. In what could be regarded as commercial co-option of the media, the ‘needs’ of the audience were defined by ‘sales strategists’, instead of the community. There is an element of the ‘media-as-source’ in public service broadcasting in that, although public service broadcasters are obliged to be responsive to the needs of their publics, they do have to rely on ‘scientific enquiry’ rather than ‘empathetic understanding’ for audience information. What I would like to suggest is that in the public service environment, this rather calculated audience identity is motivated by communication strategists rather than sales strategists which operate in the commercial environment. By generating their own audiences, public service broadcasters can overcome the problem of segmenting audiences by isolating ‘citizen-groups’ existing in society. Instead of identifying groups sharing common media needs, public service broadcasters can generate their own audiences in terms of the communication needs of the community. It
should be possible, therefore, to define what the audience as citizens need to have broadcast to them and then construct broadcast output according to these needs. The theory is then that audience for such a radio station will be a 'citizen-audience' which was not an existing group.

Public broadcasters are often criticised for 'paternalism' and their strategies sometimes appear to be 'autocratic' when defining what the public broadcasting needs. Indeed, Raboy (1995:2) reduces the international crisis in which public broadcasting finds itself, down to one in which it is being asked what social and cultural goals does public service broadcasting achieve? Public service broadcasters are a specially mandated, non-commercially driven organisation, publicly funded if necessary and publicly owned so as to be publicly accountable. What the public wants to know is, what does public service broadcasting deliver and how does it benefit them?

The person around which the public service broadcasting ethic evolved was Director General of the BBC, Lord John Reith. In his 1924 book, Broadcast over Britain, he included 'the provision of the best and rejection of the hurtful', as fundamental to the Corporation. He conceived the BBC as having 'founded a tradition of public service and of devotion to the highest interest of community and nation' (Thompson, 1990:255). What was thought as appropriate to achieve these aims was:

Mixed programming...it included news, drama, sport, religion, music (light to classical), variety or light entertainment. Not only did it cater for different social needs (education, information, entertainment), but for different sectional interests within the listening public (children, women, businessmen, farmers, fishermen, etc) (Scannel & Cardiff, 1982:167-8 quoted in Crisell, 1986:24).

The rather paternalistic aim of the service was to “give the listener something a little better than she thought she wanted” (Crisell, 1986:24). There has been a move away from prescribing what the public needs. Curran and Seaton's research (1981:310) showed that the “assumption of commitment to an undivided public good [that] lay beneath all official thinking” was replaced by “a new principle of liberal pluralism”. They contended that the “ideal ceased to be the broad consensus - the middle ground upon which all men of good sense could agree”. Rather it became,”... a free marketplace in which balance could be achieved through the competition of a multiplicity of independent voices” (Curran & Seaton, 1981:310). It was not the public service broadcaster’s duty to prescribe public needs, but to ensure that the public was afforded a variety of voices from which to choose. Back in 1981, Curran and Seaton perceived "crisis and
confusion” as the result of the changed thinking and could not identify any new received doctrine. This reinforces Raboy’s argument previously stated that it was the value of public service’s contribution which was at the heart of its crisis. It is necessary therefore, to gain more insight into what it is that public service broadcasting aims to deliver to the audience.

“Public broadcasting is first of all a public good”, according to Garnham (1994). But, what is a public good? Berger (1990:128 in Raboy (1995:9), defined public goods as “those goods which cannot be appropriated privately”. A further qualification he stipulated was that “if such a good is supplied, no member of the collectivity can be excluded from its consumption”. In order that public goods remain such, he concluded that they “must be produced by institutions other than a market economy and distributed by a mechanism different from markets”.

Public service broadcasting, according to Raboy (1995:17), should contribute to cultural development and democratisation. Cultural development, he explained as being the “process by which human beings acquire the individual and collective resources necessary to participate in public life” (Raboy, Bernier, Sauvageau & Atkinson, 1994:292 in Raboy 1995:22). Public service programming should, therefore, deliver these resources to the public.

Similar in some aspects to Reith, Ang (1991:102) noted that the public service model required some effort from the listener to change. Instead of catering to consumers needs and wants, she asserted that the public service model was an interventionist institutional practice with the aim of constructing “quality” citizens. By paying attention to public service stations and channels, individuals should, therefore, improve in “quality”.

Scannel defended public service broadcasting as an “important citizenship right in mass democratic societies”. He placed value on its provision of a “crucial means - the only means at present - whereby common knowledges and pleasures in a shared public life are maintained as a social good for the whole population”. In a rather emotive statement, he argued that “As such it should be defended against its enemies” (Scannel, 1992:344).

He vaguely defined the value of the public service broadcaster’s (mainly the BBC) contribution to society as its success at creating a new public life by virtue of its content. In the external context, he argued, broadcasting relays public events into people’s
homes and, internally, it allows for forums such as studio debates, to be accessed. He also considered the audiences, the new kind of general public on whose behalf this public life is routinely accessed and produced. He attributed "an interactive relationship between public and private life has helped to normalise the former and socialise the latter" to public service broadcasting (1992: 341). The public broadcaster should therefore undertake to provide such things as 'public good', 'resources necessary to participate in public life' and to 'share common knowledges and pleasures'. In terms of segmenting audiences, these broadly defined somewhat vague objectives appear to provide public service broadcasters with a carte blanche to interpret 'audience needs'. The lack of measurable objective and performance criteria with which public service broadcasters can demonstrate their 'success' has become a major concern in public service broadcasting. Penny Young, Research Group Head of Network Radio at the BBC stated at a recent conference that the Corporation should differentiate its services from those of commercial media by broadcasting programmes which "are of unusually high quality and that are, or might be, at risk in a purely commercial market". She recognised that the Corporation should serve as many people as possible but stressed the need to "[place] the greatest importance on services and programmes of distinction and quality, rather than [attract] large audiences for its own sake" (Young, 1995). They way in which public service broadcasters are held accountable and measure the success of their strategies will be examined in the following chapter.

**Conclusions**

The media creates an output to serve an audience and that output is determined by the role the broadcaster has chosen to fulfil in society. The difference between addressing the listener as a consumer or as a citizen has been discussed. It would seem that there is a tension between the two and that by broadcasting to consumers, the listeners' needs as citizens can be neglected. It seems feasible that audiences can be generated by impetus's from both society and from the media. In the first case, there is a distinction between the public service and commercially motivated broadcaster which either focuses on the 'citizen' needs or the 'consumer' value of the audience. It is also possible for public service broadcasters to generate audiences of citizens by determining common needs which are within its mandate to meet. Determining what needs public service broadcasters should be serving is being debated. Closely connected to this debate is the notion of broadcasters' public accountability, their right to public funds and their obligation to provide evidence of their ability to provide something of value to society.
CHAPTER FOUR

The problem of accountability

Public service broadcasters rely on the support they receive in terms of a mandate to
fulfil a specific communication function in society. The difference between commercial
and public service broadcaster’s conceptions of an audience has been discussed in
previous chapters. It is within the scope of this chapter to investigate the ways in which
audience research is used by public service broadcasters to allocate resources. The
allocation of resources to a particular station or channel can be regarded as the imple-
mentation of corporate strategy. It is important that public service corporation’s activi-
ties be evaluated in terms of their stated missions as they are not given carte blanch to
spend public money without being publicly accountable.

Measuring the success of a public service broadcaster

Back in 1981, James Curran and Jean Seaton noticed that “the press and broadcasting
[had become] less accountable” (1981:12). They traced the disintegration of structures
of accountability within the BBC model, to find that by the Annan Report in 1977, “the
IBA claimed that accountability was only a minority interest”, while they commented
that Annan “apparently believed that accountability was a purely abstract idea - one
which includes no reference to the public” (Curran & Seaton, 1981:316). Furthermore,
they observed that the public means of monitoring performance was wholly incapable of
coping with growth and technological change in increasingly complex industries. Thus,
they concluded that the press and broadcasting exercised a massive power, but that it
was more than ever a ‘power without responsibility’ (Curran & Seaton, 1981:12).

The BBC’s lack of responsibility and accountability were further stressed by Scannel
(1992:340). He complained that communicative rights (the right to speak freely, for
instance) were enshrined in the written constitutions of some countries, but not in Brit-
ain. He stated that a minimal notion of guaranteed communicative rights is a precondi-
tion of the forms of democratic life in public and private. It was his contention that if
one party (the state, the police, [public broadcaster], parents, husbands) refused to be
answerable for their conduct to the other party (the electorate, suspects, [listeners],
children, wives), not only was this unreasonable - it denied a communicative entitlement
and nullified a right (Scannel, 1992:340). What he advocates is that the right to commu-
nicate should be withdrawn from a public broadcaster in the event that it refuses to be
answerable to the audience.

27
The success or failure of commercial media depend on their popularity, as reflected by research data. The importance given to this research data was recognised by Leo Bogart of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau of New York. He wrote, in the *Harvard Business Review*, (1976) that:

Changes in the media, ... are not made by popular request. They do not reflect the 'democracy of the marketplace'. Rather they result from the decisions made either directly by advertising buyers or by media management...they are decisions made by the numbers (in Mattelart, 1991:157).

The media environment is ultimately shaped by numbers. It is on the basis of ratings scores, and circulation, listenership and viewership figures that radio programs, television stations and the like that media buyers decide which media to support. Smith (1986:7) has called it the “extension of roulette into culture” (in Ang, 1993:14). If research shows that a program is not watched by the audience which the advertisers demand, then, the station or program will die. Commercial media have dictated the need to construct audiences in terms of a tradeable product with value. The commercial media’s continued existence is dependent on their ability to attract large audiences and score high ratings.

Audience research is playing an increasingly important role in public service broadcasting as the media environment fragments and becomes more competitive. There has also been a tendency for the development of political economies, in Britain for example, which is not favourable to publicly supported institutions. By competing with commercial broadcasters, public service broadcasting confines itself to the same performance indicators. Raboy (1995:20) laid the blame at the door of legislators and policymakers who have obliged broadcasters to compete with private broadcasters on their terrain. He observed that, in the quest for mass audiences, public service broadcasters have flattened the difference. He argued that in cases where commercial broadcasters have been “obliged to compete with public broadcasting on the terrain of quality programming, the overall quality of broadcasting service has been raised” (Raboy, 1995:20). A requirement for such a situation is the rating of programmes on a quality index, not popularity.

Criticism is not being levelled at the way in which the commercial media operate. Ang (1991:55) expresses no undue concern that research into the audience as a commodity is undertaken to fulfil the need to “convert an elusive occurrence into an object for transaction”. Advertisers need some idea of what they are getting for their money. Finding
ratings, shares and demographic data to furnish advertisers with some idea of what they are getting for their money is not problematic. It makes advertisers feel more comfortable with the ability of radio to deliver audiences. Ang recognised that “radio is providing a vehicle for the transmission of sales messages to markets”, and that the advertisers “require information with regard to those markets”. Ang (1991:56) did express disillusionment with the public service paradigm’s inability to provide an alternative to the commercial way of knowing the audience.

Studies by Ang revealed that the BBC model of public service broadcasting is battling to hold on to its ‘disciplined’ audience. The Dutch model has failed to attract its ‘natural’ audience in the face of commercial competition. The BBC’s failure has been ascribed to its elevation of the empiricism of market thinking over normative theory. The fine balance of the ideals of diversity, quality and popularity was compromised by the way in which these elements were measured. Ang accused the BBC of opting out of the public service model by providing the listener with another ‘free choice’ option, an option in which there is not much difference between consumers and citizens (Ang, 1991:120).

The vastly different Dutch model, on the other hand, was based on “pillarisation” which formalised diversity along lines other than social class (Ang, 1993:122). By being society-sourced media, stations did not research their ideologically segmented audiences. But, with the introduction of commercial competition which started giving the audience what it wanted, the airwaves became a sight of struggle. Research showed that audiences were independent in their programme choice. (Stations no longer broadcast to pre-existent groups). It was only the advent of competition that showed the pillarized audience to be more of a convenient fiction than a social fact (Ang 1993:131). So, began the station’s fight for an audience and, in Ang’s estimation, its demise. By admitting that “it is not [their] identity that is [their] first problem, but [their] popularity” (VARA 1984:23), Ang suggested that the formerly progressive station ‘sold out’ to market ideals. No longer a station for ‘ordinary people’, it started to rationalise, formalise and objectify the people out there. The station was reduced to a “generalised, but detached ‘journalistic attitude’ (Van Dam 1987:6), in the assumption that it is more important to raise the right questions rather than imposing the right answers” (Ang, 1991:138).

What Ang lamented was the fact that, as these cases illustrated, ideological, normative, philosophical knowledge which defined audiences in terms of what the audience needs, has been replaced by “empiricist, factual and informational modalities of knowledge,
pre-eminently demonstrated by the mounting prominence of audience research, and audience measurement in particular” (Ang, 1991: 154). By integrating market thinking into the functioning of public service broadcasting, the ideal of public service broadcasting has been thwarted at source because of a “crisis of imagination” in which the public service broadcasters have not been able to conceptualise an alternative to commercial ways of knowing the audience.

Ang concluded that to understand the television audience, it was necessary to go beyond the institutional point of view and that point of view of actual audiences need to be considered. In doing this, emphasis was placed on the context of viewing and the multiple and mobile identities of the viewers are accounted for as they fluctuate from situation to situation (Ang, 1991:162). In an effort to eliminate the need to compete with commercial media ‘on their terrain’, Ang (1991:169) proposed a relativist pragmatism endorsed by ethnography as the only way to create a democratic element in the organisation of our television culture. The value of ethnographic discourse, she argued, lay in its antithesis of the abstracted empiricism of taxonomised audience information. By using this ‘relativist pragmatism endorsed by ethnography’, Ang suggested that the ‘static muteness of audiencehood’ could be overcome (Ang, 1991:170).

The rejection of the use of popularity ratings as a measure for public service broadcast evaluation is echoed by Rushton (1993:xii). He favoured evaluation in terms of the “breadth of its portfolio as a comprehensive public service fulfilling that wider sense of duty. He concluded that the question of public service broadcasting was in need of new approaches that look beyond the obvious and do not shrink from challenging received wisdom (Gustaffson, 1992). He continued that the challenge is not to defend any particular institutional territory, as it is often framed. It is rather how to invent something new, remembering that broadcasting service is a public good (Raboy, 1995:22). From his point of view, the public service model is therefore inadequate and in need of a fresh approach. But, a fresh approach requires imagination and Garnham (1990:128) believed that the root of all public service broadcasting’s problems is “a crisis of the imagination”. He defined the problem as

an inability to conceive of an alternative to broadcasting controlled by profit-seeking private capital other than as centralised, bureaucratic, inefficient, arrogantly insensitive to the people’s needs, politically subservient to the holder of State power and so on. This crisis has its real material roots in the actual conduct of so-called public service broadcasting.
In other words, Garnham felt that the blame for public service broadcasting’s lack of impact is its inability to do anything other than compete with commercial broadcasters. Public broadcasting needs to offer an alternative to the ‘static muteness of audiences’ by ‘inventing something new’ but, to do this it needs to overcome a ‘crisis of imagination’.

There is pressure on public service broadcasters to provide indicators of their contribution to society in terms of value for money, forcing them to scramble for credible evidence. The BBC has recognised the important of listening to audiences and to be seen to be doing so and to be accountable, according to Penny Young, Head of Network radio research at the Corporation (1995:2). She further stated that the Board of Governors’ role has been clarified - “to act as trustees for public interest and set the Board of Management a well defined set of objectives against which they can be held accountable”. She concludes that the new culture within the Corporation “stands the BBC in good stead for an increasingly competitive future”. It is her contention that audience research is being used more and more to understand the audience’s needs and behaviour and that fewer decisions are being made “on instinct” (Young, 1995:5). Graham Mytton, head of audience research and correspondence for the BBC’s worldwide service stressed the importance of audience research in programme planning, broadcast strategy and public accountability (1995:2).

In a discussion of the controversial “Producer Choice” system of resource allocation engineered by BBC Director General, John Birt, Michael Svennevig and Michael Morrison (1995:2) noted that “there is a feeling that money spent is public money that is held on trust and not a treasure chest for unaccountable production”. Svennevig and Morrison document harsh criticism of the system and the effect it has had on staff morale and the operations of the BBC. They do, however, highlight the motivation behind the implementation of the system. The BBC’s existence was at stake, the primary pressures for change were not internal but external. “Put bluntly, it was change or be dissolved” (Svennevig and Morrison, 1995:31). Against this background, Birt’s imposition of ‘commercial’ pressures on the BBC has been “an undoubted success” as its Charter was renewed and it has “escaped for the time-being the mauling that it thought it might receive in terms of reduction of resource and channels” (Svennevig and Morrison, 1995:31). Echoing Ang’s findings, they claim that public service remained the BBC’s rationale for existence “but that language has been drawn not from past civic values but the managerial language of the business school”. They further claimed that “much has been done within the BBC is as much political as it is financial, indeed finances and costs have become political” (Svennevig and Morrison, 1995:31).
Acting on the public's behalf

As a criticism of public service broadcasting, Scannel (1992:343) stated that, because broadcasting still operates within a particular definition of democracy established back in 1918 by the Representation of the People Act, the limits are the same - power accrues to the representatives, not those whom they represent. Which lead him to suggest that more forms of politics and broadcasting are required if people were to play an active part in public life and decision making. This may be interpreted as a suggestion that only ‘community’ media are capable of fulfilling a public service function and that only media produced as a result of an impetus within society are worthwhile.

It is this principle of representation that Curran and Seaton (1981:315) criticised as inadequate. In their examination of the BBC’s operation, they concluded that the Governors, supposedly the ‘trustees of national interest’ were turned by Reith into creatures of the Director General. They found that in both commercial television and the BBC, the Boards of Governors depended for their information upon the organisations they were designed to supervise, and they had no independent secretariat or research function. It was their contention that the Governors remained relatively powerless, and did not see their job as one of representing external interests or views. In what may be construed as a conspiracy, Curran and Seaton (1981:315) also found that the role of the advisory committees was ingeniously reinterpreted. Reith ensured that these acted as specialists (whether music, speech, or religion) who merely offered their advice over particular policy issues to the Corporation, rather than experts in broadcasting as such. The suggestion here is that the BBC was ultimately controlled by the Director General, Reith, because other decision makers were rendered powerless - either through lack of resources, or lack of power to veto. In this sense, the imposition of systems such as "Producer Choice" have simply replaced autocratic decision-making with financially justified decisions, which Svennevig and Morrison suggest are political.

Funding

The motivation behind these calls for increased transparency and accountability has been in response to pressure put on broadcasters to justify their use of public funding. The public service broadcasting crisis has been precipitated by crisis of funding and a political economy which does not favour public institutions. The funding crisis is not a focal point of this study but it needs to be mentioned that public service broadcasters’ nominal notion of independence has been severely undermined by models of funding.
An independent institution requires political will on the part of the government and the broadcaster for an independent broadcaster. The system malfunctions if one or more parties fails to recognise the importance of this independence. In other words, the government should realise that public broadcasters have no obligation to be their mouthpieces and the institutions themselves need to recognise that they serve public, not government interests. In terms of public service, it would be ideal if public broadcasters could be supported by direct public funding (for example through licence fees) but, this system has not proved successful in countries such as South Africa where some households cannot afford the price of a licence. The SABC faces a financial crisis, forcing it to rely on commercial patronage as well as government subsidies. In such cases the highest priority is given to editorial independence in an attempt to maintain standards of credibility and to fulfil a public service function.

Conclusions

Effectively fulfilling a public service function appears a daunting task. Not only is the mission difficult to define, but the extent to which objectives have been met is problematic. From the literature, it can be concluded that public service broadcasters use the same ‘tools’ of audience research to ascertain their levels of effectiveness. In one sense, public service broadcasters have been forced to compete in a commercial environment and thereby been squeezed into the same mould. From another perspective, external pressures placed on public service broadcasters to justify their mandate, have forced them to turn to audience research in a quest to provide evidence of their contribution to society. Both these pressures have compromised the public service mission of broadcasters.
CHAPTER FIVE
A case study of SAfm

In this case study, I attempted to identify how the SAfm audience was conceptualised. Various inputs were made into the process, as the SABC consulted with its in-house research unit, advertising agency and research house. What resulted was a concept launched amidst much criticism and complaint. The performance of the station was evaluated in terms of its ability to attract listeners and deemed a failure. Subsequent debate has brought the SABC’s function in society into question.

Constructing the audience image

Adapting an old audience

The public service broadcaster’s task of identifying segmentation criteria within a nation of citizens is not easy and there no solutions readily proposed in the literature. The SABC has had to deal with a similar dilemma allocating resources to television channels. SABC Board member, Ruth Teer-Tomaselli (Interkom, 1995:14) noted the difficulties facing the Board in its endeavours to find a practical way of serving all its audiences within the limited resources available. She observed that:

the Corporation and the Board realised that it could not divide the audiences in language, race or class, since all of these reverted back to race. The only workable solution was to divide the audience into interest groups - a more neutral option than the racial connotation.

This exercise saw the SABC segmenting viewers according to the priority given to various interests - Sport, Information, Nation-building and Drama. The theoretical foundations of audience construction along these lines was somewhat hazy. The use of both language and genre as segmentation criteria resulted in a "confetti schedule" lacking in predictability and audience accessibility. Irate Afrikaans speaking viewers pointed this out to the Board which chose to revert back to language as a basis for television channel configuration.

In terms of radio audiences, the primacy of language choice remained the main criteria for station distinctiveness. It was decided that RSA would remain an English station. Dr Anina Maree, senior researcher: Radio at the SABC’s Broadcast Research Unit (BRU) explained that the new station was not a total reconceptualisation of how to meet new objectives with the allocated resources. It was rather an attempt to adapt the existing station to appeal to a broader racial spectrum in the higher LSM* groups of 5 and 6.

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*Living Standards Measures (LSM) categorise individuals according to an eight point scale based on the possession of a range of durable household articles, access to reticulated water and electricity supplies, use of the various media and a wide range of demographics including income and others. Race is excluded. Information is taken from the All Media Products Survey (Amps).
Much was said about the opportunity that English as an ‘international’ language provided for unity among South Africa’s linguistic medley. Govin Reddy explained in the media that “it was important to provide a service in a language that could appeal to everyone, so we had to reposition [RSA]”. Allaying suspicions that the Corporation was refocussing the English station in an attempt to build a commercially viable ‘mass’ audience, Reddy claimed that as “the primary factor, not the money; the extra revenue was incidental.” Although he did claim that “we wanted to double the audience in two years and have a better racial balance,” the motivations were, he claimed, firmly in line with the SABC’s aim to “provide a service to the public” (Marketing Mix, 1995:40).

Tony Leon, leader of the Democratic Party, accused the SABC of maliciously devising SAfm to "deprive its English-speaking listeners, particularly the elderly, of both entertainment and enjoyment" (Sunday Tribune, 23/4/95:23). Jack Mullen, station manager, responded to such criticism by reinforcing Reddy’s ambitions for the SAfm, claiming that “the rich diversity of South African cultures, unified by an international language offers an opportunity for us to deal with the cultural differences, learn about one another, and discover commonalities” (Sunday Tribune 9/4/95). From these comments, the impression is given that a uniquely South African, mass audience (Reddy wanted 1 million by 1999) representing South Africans’ disparate interests was envisaged. But, some old RSA listeners felt that ‘their’ English station had been unfairly appropriated for the masses. In effect, a niche audience of 400 000 had to make way for a mass appeal station.

The wisdom of ‘changing’ the old RSA into SAfm has been questioned. A common question was put forward by George Mazarakis in the Rhodes Journalism Review (July,1995:40) in which he questioned the wisdom of the Corporation’s changing of “something that, though limited, still worked, instead of rather putting resources into building Radio Metro and serving its 3.08 million listeners?” He suggested that the SABC should have "shrunk RSA, giving its listeners a little less, but keep it as a market niche for that particular group of white people, while still introducing them to the broader South African picture.” It was his contention that the objectives of the change could have been better met by re-allocating resources to Radio Metro while catering for the old RSA niche with a more representative proportion of resources. Instead of trying to build on the old RSA audience and imposing a ‘rainbowism’ on a conservative niche, he proposed that the compatible Radio Metro format could have been built on to the same ends. “Metro is something an audience can relate to: who can relate to SAfm as it is now?” (RJR, July 1995:5). Comments such as this bring the new station’s capacity
to meet citizens’ needs into question. Similar in sentiment was the resentment expressed by David Leach in a letter to the editor. He questioned Reddy’s motives for changing RSA, “if [Reddy] was genuinely interested in creating a cross-cultural English language station he would have chosen another station such as Radio Metro or Radio Lotus as the base for that move, as these stations are closer to the ideal he is supposedly advocating” (Business Day, 11/4/95). Leach further claimed that the SABC should be “catering to each of the country’s cultural groups” in terms of its public service mandate. He regarded the change to SAFM as a statement that “English speaking South Africans should not exist as a cultural entity”. Indeed, in one marketing document for the new SAFM, Radio Metro was identified as a ‘threat’. Notice was taken that “Radio Metro has successfully created a cross cultural appeal that may impede RSA in the process of becoming the preeminent cross cultural station in SA” (Young & Rubicam), this suggested competition amongst SABC radio stations and it could be suspected that the SABC was guilty of isolating RSA for change without considering other options which were closer to fulfilling the functions stipulated. Pietie Lotriet, Special Assistant to the Chief Executive: Radio at the SABC, commented that RSA had always been a public service and not commercial station. It broadcast a full spectrum of programming and was essentially audience driven.

The inadequacies of the old RSA in terms of the SABC’s public service mission as perceived by Govin Reddy have been mentioned in the Chapter 1. The envisaged new audience of SAFM had to serve a public service purpose more effectively to in order that the Corporation could justify allocating resources away from English speaking white South Africans. Maybe the comment made by Mike Ford, Marketing Manager for SAFM that much of the disgruntled RSA audience’s moans could be disregarded in the light of the fact that their rather colonial, very BBC type radio station was the only thing that had changed for elite whites since the 1994 elections. In his opinion, the loss of RSA represented a disregard for the colonial values onto which many South Africans still held. The merit of utilising the best resourced radio station which broadcast in the most accessible language cannot be denied.

One proponent of public service broadcasting, Nicholas Garnham (1990:113) stressed the need for citizen participation in national debate and the importance of including as many of the existing views in society on the relevant issues as possible "if democracy was to be taken seriously". It was his opinion that such debate could not be provided by "sectionalised, ghettoized media talking only to a particular interest group or the party faithful”. Garnham’s insights can be taken in support of the SABC’s justification for the
national English radio station, Garnham suggested that this debate "must take place at a national level and is undercut by a multiplication of simultaneous viewing and listening options". He proposed that: "It is this that is the rational core of the argument mobilised in favour of the existing public service duopoly in Britain. Namely, that the existence of a national focus for political debate and information is important to the national political process" (Garnham, 1990:113).

The South African situation varied a great deal from that in Britain. Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli (1994:50) considered the public service broadcaster's role in the formation of a new nationalism. They identified a strong belief which endorsed the idea that in the special circumstances in South Africa's move from apartheid, the national broadcaster needed to contribute to the establishment of a national sentiment, to build a "collective identity" (citing Schlesinger, 1991). In their opinion, "taken together with the gross disparities in wealth, education, living standards, and the denial of access to social resources which have caused by an active process of underdevelopment through apartheid, the possibilities of a single post-apartheid consciousness seemed slim". They stated that "apartheid, more than any other factor, prevented the development of an even minimally homogeneous audience in terms of media consumption" (1994:51), concluding that if PBS was to continue to play a part in national reconstruction, it had to do so largely in the context of its contribution to the local, the regional and specific language requirements of the country. These suggestions appeared to be in contradiction to the SABC's vision of a mass audience.

**Identifying a new audience**

The public could not stretch its imagination to conceptualise this 'phantom' audience which had not been targeted before. The absence of an existing, identifiable group brought the SABC's resource allocating strategy into public debate. John Kane-Berman, for example, questioned the SABC's use of the old English service to "cater for 'members of the rainbow nation', whoever they might be" (Business Day, 31/3/95). Other letters to the editor expressed dismay at the market Reddy was aiming at, "whoever they are". Gordon Muller, Media Director at one of the country's leading advertising agencies noted that the "hopelessly artificial melting pot is disorientating for listeners" (Business Day, 9/5/95:17). What was the SABC trying to do and who was the target for this radio station? A discussion of radio audiences in previous chapters suggested that radio audiences are dynamic constructs which "are nowhere, yet exist everywhere". Listenerships develop in response to stations. Every station therefore creates an actual
audience. Yet, it was also suggested that audiences are “institutionally derived constructs” which are largely predetermined products of research. With this in mind, the derivation of the SAfm audience construct was interesting.

In terms of the envisaged audience of SAfm and in line with the theory discussed, I would like to categorise the new station’s audience as society-generated or media-generated according to McQuail’s typology (see Chapter 3). It is difficult to imagine the SAfm audience as one which was society-sourced, that is formed in response to a group in society recognising a need to express itself. The types of audiences included by McQuail (1987:224) in the society-sourced group were either: an existing public or social group or; a “gratification set” formed to service an individual need or purpose arising in social experience. Reddy made it clear that the SAfm mission was to use a radio station to create a new social group. He rejected Kane-Berman’s criticisms as a “subtle case for separate development, albeit without Verwoerdian coercion”. His following statement made his ambitions for the radio station quite clear: "Apparently ours is a society with noting in common. Thank God SAfm is here to fill the void as a bridge-builder for race relations" (Business Day, 7/4/95:8).

The challenge and value of the new SAfm was that it would serve, in Reddy’s terms, as a “bridge-builder” where no interaction existed and, could be used, according to Mullen, to “discover new commonalities”. There was no existing group which sought access to the airwaves and the audience was not a group which formed in response to an identified need. It is interesting to note that McQuail (1987:224) usually found the society-sourced media associated with “much of the normative social theory”. Research was more qualitative and required intensive methods and more study of sociopolitical contexts. In terms of McQuail’s typology, the SAfm audience would be classified as mediagenerated. In the absence of an existing group in society which could serve as a target audience, the SABC constructed its own. It is feasible for the media to generate audiences but McQuail mentioned that these audiences whose only shared characteristic was similarities in media consumption, were more commonly linked to “manipulation from above and self-interested calculation from below”. In contrast to society-generated audiences, these audiences form entirely in response to the ability of the media owner to attract media consumers to the product. In other words, the attraction is not spontaneous, marketing is required to attract users. With SAfm, the SABC sought to generate its own audience but, in contrast to commercial media which do so to generate profits, the SABC, as a public service broadcaster, sought to do so in terms of citizens’ expectations and media needs.
Research into the new station’s audience would therefore focus on identifying needs which the public service broadcaster could successfully fulfil with a single radio station. The tools of audience identification are usually audience research which have been shown to reduce the audience to some measure of “static muteness”. Commercial stations, broadcasting to consumers, identify their audiences by using market research to ascertain the financial viability of programming packages. Consumption characteristics of the audience are the focus of commercial media audiences. Empiricist thinking is therefore suitable. The shortcomings of using empiricist tools of market research in the public service realm were highlighted by Len Ang in her study of the BBC’s shrinking audience and the Dutch model’s disintegration (see Chapter 4). Tension between commercial and public service ideals was evident in research identifying the new S Afr i m audience. According to Dr Maree, the BRU within the SABC researched the needs, media behaviour and possibilities of listeners to convert to S Afr i m. The research was undertaken within the scope of building on an existing audience. The sights were set on a target group within LSM 5 and 6 and from a broader racial spectrum. She described it as ‘probability’ research, the main focus being on the probability of the audience developing.

Australian Ann Tonks and “other international experts” also made recommendations to “help ease the transition from RSA to S Afr i m” just after the 1994 elections. Funding for the report was facilitated by the Australian Embassy. Although this report was not confidential, the Mail & Guardian (5/10/95:11) reported Reddy’s office as having “mislaid” the recommendations. At the time of the station’s change, Reddy had claimed that changes were made in line with Tonks’s suggestions. As one disgruntled “letter to the editor” noted, “[Reddy’s] only defence was that the Australian consultant had said it was the way to go” (Sunday Times, 9/4/95). In August 1995, Tonks returned to South Africa to compile a follow-up report, the contents of which were the topic of much speculation. The Mail & Guardian (5/10/95:11) reported that the document “criticises change management at S Afr i m” and that “Tonks expressed disappointment that few of her recommendations had been implemented and has suggested more”. Reddy claimed that the report was “not unduly critical” but was keeping it confidential. He said that some of Tonks’s initial recommendations “were not implemented because they would have cost too much” (M & G, 5/10/95:11). The point to note here is that research does not necessarily translate into action, suggestions were selectively implemented. This selective process highlights the need for mechanisms which maintain transparency and accountability.
The marketing point of view ...

A quantitative assessment of the size of the market was undertaken and documented in a "Draft marketing plan for RSA". The market was broadly defined as: "Satisfying the needs of people who desire to be entertained or receive information in the English language on radio" (SABC; 1994:3). More investigation of Amps data showed that the potential audience who can read and understand English and listen to radio was roughly 11.3 million. (SABC 1994:3 quoting Amps 1993). From this data, it was found that these listeners were tuning into the following stations:

| African Language Stations (ALS) | 48% |
| Regionals                      | 22% |
| Metro                          | 17% |
| 5FM                            | 7.3% |
| 2000/Pulpit                    | 5.4% |
| RSA                            | 4.2% |
| Afrikaans Stereo               | 4%  |
| Radio 702                      | 3%  |

This audience's racial constitution was estimated as (in millions):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloureds</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

74.3% were in the LSM range of 4 - 8. When the "potential market targeting" was taken into account, Blacks who understand English in LSM 4 - 8 were quantified at 5.7 million. Further documented is the "fairly strong core audience" of RSA listeners, who do not listen that often to other radio stations.

Further information regarding the potential audience's comprehension of and preference for English was noted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LSM4</th>
<th>LSM5</th>
<th>LSM6</th>
<th>LSM7</th>
<th>LSM8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehension of English</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prefer to hear English</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Radio (total)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As 1st choice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In '000</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>1039</td>
<td>833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Any number of conclusions could be drawn from this data. One of them being that the potential listenership already listened to the radio, 48% of them to African Language Stations (ALS). The SABC was therefore not trying to reach new listeners but rather trying to attract listeners from other stations. Another point to note is that the majority (69%) of RSA listeners did not listen to any other station, in other words RSA was their only radio station. It can be seen from a purely language perspective, 11,367 million listeners could understand English and only 400 000 listened to RSA. It was argued that, as a national English station with 130 transmitters, the 4.2% of national radio listenership RSA attracted was not sufficient to warrant such a disproportionate share of resources.

From the LSM data, it would seem that the majority of the potential audience which was favourably disposed to English (Comprehend, prefer to hear, frequently listen to) were in the higher LSM categories, while the majority of listeners in the lower LSM categories were less favourably disposed to English. News, Talk and Education showed across the board popularity in terms of English listening while 'Wanting to learn' the language tended to score higher in the lower LSM categories. What was concluded from this was that an English station would appeal to the higher LSM categories and that programming for such a station should concentrate on news, talk and education. The target market was then defined in the light of the “research” undertaken. The broader target market should be defined, according to the marketing document, as listeners between the age of 30 and 55 who desired to be entertained or receive information in the English language. A narrower demographic group to be specifically targeted was defined as those between the ages of 35 and 49 (SABC 1994:6).
For SAfm research purposes, LSMs 4 - 8 were targeted. It was proposed that LSMs 6 - 8 would at first be the most accessible but programming would attempt to encourage the entry of LSMs 4 and 5. Satisfying the radio needs of LSM's 4 - 8 meant that very little programming would be directed at the rural market (LSMs 1, 2 and 3). It was noted that the necessity of keeping transmitters in the rural areas should be reassessed from a cost point of view (SABC, 1994:6). Thus the use of RSA's infrastructure to serve this audience is questionable. It seems suspicious that the radio's station's infrastructure was appropriated to reach a group whose geographic dispersion did not require such coverage.

The marketing document compiled by RSA, and now SAfm, Marketing Manager, Mike Ford, described the target market as males and females between the ages of 30 - 55 years of age who preferred to be entertained in English. "The new format must be accessible to the white, black, Indian and coloured communities in LSM 4 - 8 between the ages of 30 and 55" and it was the commonalities between these four racial groups and four LSM groupings were considered important. (SABC 1994:6) In addition, a fifth group, the South African Business community, was identified as a target that should be catered for regardless of age or ethnic origin. To be more representative, business news/information should address all the needs of LSM 4 - 8. Ford identified accurate and accessible business information as an important factor in the station’s competitive analysis. The non-white audience in this sector was expected to become equal to or larger than the present traditional white audience in three to five years time. A non-racially segmented niche business news and information station would therefore be viable at such time.

As is customary in most marketing strategy documents, the brand's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were itemised. Although many were mentioned, it is noteworthy that the "interest of Chief Executive Radio" was under strengths and "Expectations of CE Radio - 1 million audience" was again mentioned under threats. The change of RSA to SAfm has been a development close to Govin Reddy’s heart and one which he has had to defend repeatedly in public. In the light of the station as one with a PBS format, it seems incongruous that the 'weakness' of advertising was not regarded as a weakness with "new target audience" (SABC, 1994: 11). Obviously written from a marketing point of view, the commercial opportunities of the station included: "more potential sponsors but format must be more market driven" and "contribution to nation building". From this "Draft marketing plan", it seems that strictly commercial criteria were taken into account. The advertising opportunities presented by targeting an additional 5,7-million black listeners to RSA's dwindling audience must have been an attractive option.
The advertising agency's contribution...

The radio station's advertising agency, Young & Rubicam undertook additional qualitative research to "find areas of commonality to try to get a clearer picture" for a marketing strategy at this stage. Young & Rubicam conceptualised S4fm as a brand to be marketed, and presented a comprehensive 'brand building' strategy with regards to the redefinition of RSA. A section entitled "building RSA into a power brand" was couched in 'Adspeak' and began with a "medium term draft action plan" headed "Gearing up to win the battle for people's time". This plan involved a four point analysis, after which a brand strategy summary was proposed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gearing up to win the battle for people's time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A medium term draft action plan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. People Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define &amp; describe the available radio audience around a 24 hour clock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. People/product relationship analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse existing radio programming to determine what pulls whom and when.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Trend analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse how the best players around the world compete around a 24 hour clock i.e.o.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programming, scheduling, product packaging, on air marketing, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Evolve the air marketing plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimize the augmented product by adding value at every moment, creating a better bond with the changing audience across the day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Towards redefining Radio South Africa - A working document prepared by Young & Rubicam, 14 Sep 1994).

The advertising agency provided a brand summary strategy as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Radio South Africa - Brand Strategy Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capturing the best of radio entertainment and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: "Towards redefining Radio South Africa - A working document prepared by Young & Rubicam, 14 Sep 1994).
The advertising agency provided a strategy which station management could use to market its product in the competitive broadcasting environment. The Report focused on the desired audience in terms of programming and branding. This exercise illustrated the way in which public broadcasters use the same tools as commercial media to guide their operations. It is also useful to remain cautiously sceptical of 'research' data in the light of the questions raised in Chapter 2. The advertising agency undertook to "create a new brand identity, launch the new identity to the trade and public and to promote the brand's long term success" (Young & Rubicam, 1994). It investigated mainly Amps data in an attempt to understand how to position the SABC conceived product in the market.

Box The research company's contribution...

To assist in formulating a programme schedule, marketing research company, Kaufman Levin Associates was commissioned to conduct research into the new audience. Its brief was to "examine the needs of the defined target audience in respect of public broadcast radio" and secondly, "to highlight strategic direction for the newly styled RSA, by determining areas of commonality". Through 18 qualitative group discussions it evaluated the SAFM concept and investigated aspects liked and disliked as well as extracted "ideal radio" concepts from respondents within the identified target group. The sample interviewed were regular radio listeners with a non-music exclusively orientation and a minimum understanding of verbal English. Stratification was on the basis of region and most often according to radio station and education. The sample was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAMPLE</th>
<th>Johannesburg</th>
<th>Durban</th>
<th>Cape Town</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less sophisticated</td>
<td>1x Radio Sesotho</td>
<td>1x Radio Zulu</td>
<td>1x Radio Xhosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1x Radio Metro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2x Radio Zulu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophisticated</td>
<td>4x Radio unspecified</td>
<td>2x Radio unspec.</td>
<td>2x Radio unspec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White listeners</td>
<td>2x Radio South Africa</td>
<td>2x Competitive users</td>
<td>2x Radio unspec.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


"Not a lot of common ground" was found. In terms of tonality and delivery, divergent target market needs were identified. It was also noted that within the context of the total radio package, the importance of the announcer in terms of personality, content, tonality
and approach could not be overlooked, especially in the black market. Station Marketing Manager, Mike Ford, emphasised the challenge of attracting both black and white listeners. He said that they had found that black listeners were attracted to radio primarily for lifestyle identification, the audience was presenter driven and radio listening was a collective experience. In contrast, white listeners were more interested in programme content and a good presented was ‘expected’. Ford credited Radio Zulu’s success to the way in which it was “totally in sync with the listeners’ lifestyles”. What SAfm was trying to do was find ways in which it could accommodate these divergent expectation with one radio station.

Kaufman and Levin proposed three broad areas of commonality: newstalk, music and phone-ins. In terms of niche interests, only ‘women’s interest’ was common to all three groups. Even in the ‘common’ area of phone-ins, the ‘sophisticated’ group valued the ‘broader society’ and ‘what do the people think’ while the white respondents were more concerned with ‘specialist debatelike issues’ and a call for ‘limited and disciplined participation’. So, even in the ‘common’ areas of interest, there were divergent expectations in terms of programming. The research was intentionally biased towards finding similarities “rather than focusing on the many differences” which were far more obvious.

The institutionally derived audience construct for SAfm was already a foregone conclusion, the research was only undertaken to find ways in which to best serve the audience and to stimulate demand for the new brand. A synthesis of the marketing approach, the advertising agency's contribution and the research house's findings, resulted in an overall strategy. This included the inadequacies of RSA, ways in which SAfm could successfully market itself as a 'power brand' and areas of commonality which programming could emphasise in an attempt to build the mass audience targeted.

To determine the extent to which the targeting of SAfm was contrary to the public service ethos which revolves around serving the public good, it is first necessary to assess the extent to which SAfm was conceptualised to serve the public good.

**Fulfilling a public service mandate**

In terms of generating its own audiences, public service broadcasters should function differently to commercial stations. Public broadcasters are "propelled by a different logic" and fulfilling a public service function should be their primary objective. Referring to Chapter 3, some of the goals of such broadcasters are to fulfil cultural and social goals, to equip citizens to participate in public life, to provide something that would not
be provided were it left to the commercial media, to take uncommercially viable risks and to give priority to programmes of quality and distinction. Within debates around public service broadcasting, a school of thought has suggested that it is acceptable for public service broadcasting to be ‘unpopular’ and not to chase large audiences or high ratings (see Unesco Report, July 1995:1). But, such broadcasters must prove that they fulfil some public service function with their programming.

In the case of SAfm, a nation-building objective could be classified as within the realm of public service. Reddy and Mullen’s vision of a radio station “building bridges” and “fulfilling a significant role in society” are congruous with public service ideals. In terms of audience generation, this approach relies on the participation of citizens and their being attracted to non-commercially viable, quality programming. If SAfm’s target audience was conceptualised in these terms of broadcasting to citizens’ needs, it is feasible that the Corporation identified needs that it should be fulfilling in society and that a broadcasting strategy developed around that. This would appear to be the case with SAfm. It was decided that the station RSA was not fulfilling a potential as a public service station and that it should change to serve citizens better. The question is whether it is possible to successfully attract listeners in their personae as ‘citizens’ and ‘consumers’ to the same station. It would seem that the SABC faced this dilemma when covering the historic 1994 elections. Teer-Tomaselli (1995:581) noticed tensions in the planned television coverage of the elections. She reported that a proposed ‘corporatist’ approach - as opposed to the marketing of individual channels - was met with opposition by Quentin Green, Head of television. He claimed that by not marketing single channel identities, commercial success would be difficult, if not impossible. In retrospect, Teer-Tomaselli (1995:581) noted that:

ironically, when the [corporatist] approach proved to be both feasible and popular, the commercial lobby basked in the sun of the election success, which provided both the SABC and its advertisers with the largest audiences ever, and sustained this for 14 days. The commercial value of good, well produced public service broadcasting was proved.

The election period represented a time when broadcasting primarily appealed to a politically active ‘citizen’ audience. This atypical appeal of broadcasting will possibly not be repeated. Public service broadcasting offered an alternative approach (one not evident in American election coverage). As a public service broadcaster, the SABC was able to take the risk of prioritising citizens’s needs over commercial needs. In the same way, SAfm could be used to serve a non-commercial purpose. The SABC could take the risk
of using the station to "fill the void as a bridge-builder" and to attempt to "redefine what it means to be South African". A commercial station relies on the 'bottom line' to keep its operation focused. But, as a public service corporation's mandate differs, so should its evaluation criteria for the 'success' or 'failure' of broadcast efforts be different. As Len Ang (see Chapter 3) showed in her study, broadcasting propelled by a different logic requires different evaluation criteria to maintain its propulsion.

**Evaluating the change**

Being a public broadcaster, the SABC was accountable to the public who called for some evidence that the SABC was acting within its mandate. In a letter to the editor, GFC MacQueen, for example, wrote that “Mr Reddy and his Board are extremely fortunate, for had they been in the private sector, he and the entire SABC Board would have been replaced at the first general meeting of shareholders” ([Sunday Tribune, 23/4/95:21](https://example.com)). Daniel Leach speculated that “with broadcasting owned and operated by the private sector, it is less likely to become politicised, particularly since privately owned broadcasting will cater to the diversity of SA values and culture ...” ([Business Day, 11/4/95](https://example.com)). Within the scenario of international crisis, public service broadcasters are under increasing pressure to demonstrate their worth to society. In Chapter 4, the BBC’s policy of 'Producer Choice' was discussed as an attempt by the Corporation to set commercial standards for the BBC in a "change or be dissolved" situation. The BBC severely compromised its ability to provide a public service by restricting itself to commercially acceptable practices. As the report on Producer Choice by Svennevig and Morrison (1995) showed, the strategy has been subverted and the Corporation emphasis on quality and distinctiveness undermined as well as its capacity to take risks.

What the SABC has done with *SAfm* was take a risk. There was no real indication that a new audience would form. Govin Reddy accepted that he was taking a risk. He argued that the radio station was an opportunity for a common South Africanness to develop. A spokesperson for *SAfm*’s advertising department is quoted in the press as saying that they had found a lack of commonality among listeners “...but that’s probably true of South Africa as a whole. **What’s worrying is that there’s no guarantee a commonality will develop**” ([Sunday Argus, 16/7/95](https://example.com)). It is within the public service broadcasters's mandate to take risks, to do things other than the commercially acceptable but then the qualifier is that they must serve the ‘public good’. The ‘public good’ delivered or 'public interest' served by public service broadcasters is broadly defined and possibly open to misappropriation.
In a discussion around the differences between the new public service model and market liberal models of broadcasting, Teer-Tomaselli (1994:21) noted that the public service model "rejects the notion of state sovereignty and the right of states to dictate the 'national interest' in so far as it impinges on the content or form of the national broadcaster". The ease with which 'state interest', or even 'party interest', could be substituted for 'national interest' has been well illustrated by the SABC's past performance. Previous close alliance with the National Party (NP) and domination by the Broederbond and Afrikaner intellectuals had blurred the distinction between government and party policy. Arric de Beer and Elanie Steyn (Louw, 1993:212) commented on the relationship between the SABC and the NP. They quoted the SABC's admission that it was difficult to distinguish between government policy and NP policy (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989:85; Phelan, 1987:57 in Louw, 1993:214). As a result of these blurred distinctions, 'blank replay of government views' (Nieuwoudt et al in Louw, 1993:214) often formed a large percentage of airtime, leaving the news NP dominated. Teer-Tomaselli (1994:19) also used the SABC to illustrate how

the transposition of an institutional model - public service broadcasting - based on one particular set of ideological assumptions - liberalism - [took] on a different content when established under the dominance of quite a different set of ideological assumptions - Afrikaner conservative culture - while at the same time, maintaining its outward form and character (Teer-Tomaselli, 1994:19).

The ease with which the public service broadcasting model can be appropriated and exploited makes it imperative that high levels of transparency and accountability are present at every level of operation. Adopting a public service model does not imply that the output is necessarily of any public benefit. The output is not shaped by the model itself, but by the ideological assumptions which form the base of its operation. More recently, the SABC acknowledged that it is a product of the history and experience of South Africa's apartheid-based history. It has proclaimed the need to "re-invent" itself in terms of delivering value which is of public benefit to the society (Delivering Value, 12/1994:4). The 'problem' of public interest broadcasting has been covered extensively in its submissions to the IBA. In Delivering Value (SABC, 12/1994:9), it stated that

'public interest', for all purposes, cannot be found in a statute; nor even in all learned dissertations of courts and commentators. It does not divide the audience into the 18-to-24s; or the two-income family; or the A-type socioeconomic; or 'up-market' or 'down-market'. The 'public interest' aims to 'discover, evoke, foster and satisfy, at some time, all those interests that are mixed into each of us and which give us our precious individuality. It aims at what has been called the 'whole person'.

48
Public service broadcasters are required, therefore to address more than the ‘consumer’ or ‘citizen’ facet of the individual. Their concern is the ‘whole person’ and it has the challenging task of arousing responses with subject matter from ‘all interests’. Concepts such as ‘national unity and democracy’, in terms of the need for an informed citizenry; ‘socioeconomic development’, and accessibility to broadcast services; are stipulated as central to ‘public interest’ in the foreseeable future. (Delivering Value, June 1994:17)

The value of these principles were recognised but, the document further continues that these guidelines are “only meaningful when given concrete expression in terms of the particular needs of the South African community and within the context of [the] country’s broadcasting heritage” (Delivering Value, June 1994:18). A number of ‘specific national challenges’ serve as a focus for the SABC’s own transformation process over the next decade and beyond. These are:

- redefining cultural identity;
- meeting basic needs;
- developing human resources;
- building the economy; and
- democratising the State and Society.

It is pertinent to highlight a few points made which will also aid in an evaluation of SAfm.

In seeking to redress past imbalances, the SABC’s mission went further than merely acknowledging “multiple identities of South African society”. The need for an accompanying “process of redefining the dominant culture from that of the white minority, emphasising divisions, to one that is inclusive and representative of the wider society” was stipulated. In its envisaged contribution to public life, the SABC stated that its most important transition will be in the expression of core values, the way in which broadcasting and other culture industries give symbolic representation to the people and issues of this society, and in the public information agendas whose relevance extend beyond the particular interests of individual community groups (SABC, 6/94:18).

The Corporation identified helping to redefine cultural identity as a primary responsibility and sought to fulfil a ‘cultural leadership’ function. In terms of ‘democratising the State and Society’, the SABC accepted that a democratic system of government and
administration was based on concepts of equity and access which may help provide an underlying sense of cohesion in a diverse society. As justification for its continued existence as a national public service, the SABC stipulated that the “promotion of an informed citizenry [that] is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy and a competitive economy”. The SABC defined knowledge (its commodity of trade) broadly and included an ability for it to act as “a force of change and representation of core societal values”. The SABC therefore includes in its mission, the use of knowledge to ‘impose’ what it has defined as ‘core societal values’ on society.

To fulfil its ‘primary role’ in ‘nurturing democratic values’, the SABC stated that it must represent diverse opinions, stimulate responsible debate and act as an instrument of accountability for the performance of public institutions and the nation’s leadership elites in the public and private sectors (SABC, June 1994:20).

How the SABC aims to serve its public can therefore be seen to include a mission to change the way South Africans identify themselves culturally and to try to use knowledge to entrench core societal values. This assumes that there is public consensus that there should be change and in what direction that change should occur, as well as that the values to be projected are, indeed, ones which the public support. In terms of changes to Safm, the SABC has been criticised for taking it upon itself to change the country.

It was acceptable that, as a public broadcaster, the SABC could mandate to target commercially ‘unpopular’ audiences and broadcast what it deemed public ‘needs’ rather than ‘wants’. But, as a public institution, it was accountable to the public and had an obligation to explain to a disgruntled former RSA listener, for instance, why Station Manager, Jack Mullen’s believed that “we cannot deviate from what we believe is the only way forward” (Business Day, 14/04/95:8). In a letter the editor, Enos Magubane praised Govin Reddy’s courage for going on radio and television to face the public, something, he commented, that no-one from the old SABC ever did (Sunday Times, 23/4/95:22). Although given the opportunity to take risks, it was important that the SABC be kept in check by mechanisms of accountability so that it could prove that it was not the "lethal cocktail of government propaganda, unprofessionalism and xenophobia" that Tony Leon accused it of being (Sunday Tribune, 23/4/95:23).
Similar to the BBC (see Chapter 4), the SABC has recognised the importance of showing measurable indications of its success in the delivery of services of value to the community. According to the SABC, its contribution could be measured according to: both quantitative and qualitative criteria; its publicly accountability for its performance and its commercial viability in a new competitive environment (June 1994:3). Collins (1993:79) also put accountability to citizens high on his goals for the ideal public service broadcaster in South Africa. This, he suggests can be achieved through research and market mechanisms. Being a public asset, it is essential that mechanisms are in place that keep the corporation operating in the public’s best interest. The SABC developed the following criteria and indicators which it proposed as guidelines for its accountability:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Benefit</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of local culture</td>
<td>Volume/proportion of local production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships with cultural industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of programming</td>
<td>Audience appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial independence</td>
<td>Individual case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audience opinion / complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of prog mix</td>
<td>Mix at prime time (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audience appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal to specialist audiences</td>
<td>% of targeted programmes in schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to national goals</td>
<td>Project targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation profile</td>
<td>Staffing profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training and development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirmative action achievements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language mix</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Direct value</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Audience share (%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Audience reach (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audience appreciation (qualitative)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic contribution</td>
<td>Revenue generation/surplus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Value of production</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Co-production activity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Balance of exports trade</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contracts with independent producers</td>
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<td>Cost effectiveness</td>
<td>Cost/hour of programming</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Resource allocation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Productivity trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to national goals</td>
<td>Value of contracts for development of broadcasting projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(source: SABC Delivering Value Submission of SABC to the IBA, June 1994, 22.)
These criteria represent a progressive approach to broadcast evaluation and suggest that the Corporation has considered the implications of using only audience size as a measure of a station’s success or failure. Govin Reddy had stated that an initial audience loss was expected. It was reported that he said the loss could be as much as 180 000 but that he was confident that this loss would be regained within 18 months. In practice it would seem that these evaluation ideals were not followed through. According to Dr Maree, the SABC BRU undertook two research projects following the launch of S Afrfm. The first involved the analysis of listener responses sent to the Corporation. Dr Maree said that the majority of these were negative and that very few new listeners responded because there were very few new listeners. The responses were mainly from old RSA listeners who were "terribly unhappy with the new station" (1995). A quantitative study was also undertaken to gauge the target audience’s reaction to the station. Specific objectives were to determine the incidence of listenership to the new S Afrfm and to determine whether listener behaviour had changed and to which stations listeners had moved. According to the Amps figures for radio listenership in the ‘past 7 days’, in July/August 1994, 643 000 listened to S Afrfm, this fell to 577 000 by February/March 1995. The research house, Markinor, estimated the ‘past 7 day’ audience to be 559 000 by June 1995. Minister of Telecommunications and Broadcasting, Pallo Jordan quoted the Amps figures in Parliament in June 1995 as showing that the listenership of S Afrfm had dropped from 393 000 to just over 300 000 (Natal Mercury, 22/6/95:3).

In terms of audience size, the station was not successful. In terms of audience appreciation, the SABC’s quantitative study found that 40% of respondents were of the opinion that the new S Afrfm compared unfavourably with the old RSA, the response to this came mainly from the white respondents. The black respondents conversely maintained that the new S Afrfm was better than the old RSA but this was from a very low base and S Afrfm had not gained any black listeners for the period under review. No new listeners were being attracted and the existing audience was unhappy. Respondents felt that there were too many talk shows, that the English was unacceptably bad, they listened less and scored shows low on popularity ratings. Dr Maree said that the station had tried to build on its old audience but was, in fact, losing them. She concluded from the quantitative survey that the station was in “an extremely difficult position as far as its strategic positioning is concerned” (SABC, 1995). It would appear that the core audience (white English speakers) and the potential audience (black English speakers) had conflicting programme preferences. The report concluded that the station should develop the news and actuality programmes to build a new audience as these programmes were scored
favourably by both black and white respondents. Pietie Lotriet was sceptical with regard to news and current affairs programmes as he believed that these different racial groups tend to have a “different frame of reference” (1995). In contrast to the SABC’s findings, talk station competitor Radio 702 claimed that a survey undertaken in the Gauteng region showed that SAfm had won back most listeners it lost when it changed its name and format (Sunday Argus, 16/7/95). The newspaper article suggested that listeners had returned “probably reluctantly, perhaps because there is no alternative in most areas to SAfm. Or else SAfm has got better - or the listeners have got used to it”.

It would be interesting to see how SAfm would be evaluated in terms of the criteria outlined as it has been shown that public service broadcasting is largely in a state of crisis because it competes with commercial broadcasting on its terrain. These criteria that the SABC has laid out are progressive in the sense that they take into account the objectives of the Corporation in society and provide an opportunity for commercially inviable programming to be aired. These guidelines do not seem to be implemented in practice. Even Reddy commented that "the ultimate test will be the growth or decline in listenership" (Business Day, 7/4/95:8). Even though the Corporation had laid out guidelines for alternative measures of success, it would appear that they were not used. I was unable to source the results of such an evaluation from the Corporation and the lack of accessibility of much of this data suggests that no investigation is indeed done into these measures.

**The demise of SAfm**

failed. Its listenership shrunk to 231 000 by September 1995. The Mail & Guardian (24-30/11/95:10) pointed out that this was the size of Radio Venda's audience and only 1,9% of South Africans speak Venda as opposed to 8,8% who speak English. What journalist Marion Edmunds termed "damning" figures, have "pushed the embattled management against the wall". The article quoted SAfm sources as saying that managers "could no decide whether they should target a 'rainbow-coloured' audience or the 'decision-makers in the new South African society’” (M&G, 24-30/11/95:10). SAfm never seemed to have a chance. Its launch was disastrous with many new voices foregoing training as management went on air in haste.

Lotriet suggested that the “product was not right” when the station launched. A policy whereby news readers read their reports on air proved disastrous as their training did not extend that far and much of it was done “on air” (1995). A practice which Lotriet had
found over many years in broadcasting to be very unsuccessful. Ford complained that
the marketing plan was truncated in response to management’s haste to get the new
station on air. He also mentioned the difficulties encountered within the Corporation
which was in a state of transition. One newly-appointed senior manager, for instance
claimed that using “SAfm” as the name for the English national station was racist and
totally arrogant. Ford claimed that this argument stalled the crucial decision about the
new station’s name when his department was under pressure to implement the market-
ing campaign (1995).

The acrimonious furore which ensued was a source of concern for Chris Mann, opera-
tions manager of the Grahamstown Foundation, who believed that the exercise could
have been more constructive, had it been implemented differently. He expressed interest
in the new station’s provocation of a “sectarian backlash from first language English
speakers” when, he claimed they supported “albeit with differing levels of enthusiasm,
the potential of English as a ‘bridge-builder’ for race relations” (Business Day, 11/4/
95:8). He suggested four main reasons for the creation of an “angry, self-conscious
language group where one hardly existed”. He regarded the “hasty and undemocratic
process by which the station was planned and launched” as the primary reason for the
backlash. He suggested that by inviting suggestions, written contributions and staging
public hearings, the SABC could have included English first and second language users
in the formation of the new station. Secondly, he described the programmes as “banal
and humourless” and thirdly, he identified the quality of the language as problematic.
His final reason concerned culture. He expressed the English-speakers’ concern that
“classical music and programmes that draw on the profounder elements of the western
heritage [would] be replaced by popular culture found on other stations”. He suggested
that SAfm “should not try to compete with them” and rather maintain its niche of “excel-
lencc of language and quality of coverage” (Business Day, 11/4/95:8).

Mann’s observations suggested that the station could have worked but that the plan was
doomed by its implementation. He proposed an “interactive process of consultation with
first and second language English speaking South Africans” so that Reddy would not
have to “adjust his programmes in response to negative criticisms induced by precipi-
tous decisions” (Business Day, 11/4/95:8). Perhaps such a broader process of consulta-
tion could have saved the station from its “[slide] back into the past” as the Mail &
Guardian (12-18/5/95:7) termed its about turn on its bridge building mission. An “out-
cry from conservatives and threats to cut advertising” were cited as the reasons which
“forced the SABC’s hand”. Justin Pearce reported that “staff loyal to the new SAfm
[felt] that they [had] been abandoned by radio chief Govin Reddy, who previously stood up to harsh criticism as the most staunch defender of *SAfm*" (*Mail & Guardian*, 12-18/5/95:7). Pearce reported that staff were concerned that the station was being changed to adapt to the needs of former RSA listeners “in the absence of any feedback from *SAfm*’s much wider target audience”. He also quoted employees as being “concerned with the autocratic manner in which these changes have been implemented”. The impression is given that rifts within the SABC Board and Reddy’s “[not] being universally liked by the Board” had a great deal of influence in decision-making. Curran and Seaton (1981) identified a similar lack of accountability in terms of the BBC’s operation - see Chapter 4.

Drawn for an opinion on the station’s failure, Dr Maree suggested that “race is still an issue in terms of radio station preference and it will take a long time to change” (1995). When Black listeners who understand English can choose between an African Language Station, the slick English second language *Radio Metro* or *SAfm*, there is no apparent reason to choose *SAfm*. In terms of the radio station’s ability to generate a group in society around its audience, the SABC had appeared to give up on its mission to build a mass audience. Reddy reported that the SABC “would consider targeting a clearly ‘identifiable audience’”. The *Mail & Guardian* (1-7/12/95) speculated that “this could be the new South Africa’s intelligentsia and decision-makers”. The newspaper also reported that a number of proposals had been put forward, including “shutting down the station altogether or firing a number of managers”.

The *SAfm* debacle has called the SABC’s ability to function as a public service broadcaster into question. What was envisaged as the SABC’s “flagship” radio station and the implementation of a revised mission in post-apartheid South Africa, has lead to internal battles of “soap-opera” proportions (*Mail & Guardian*, 24-30/11/95). Deciding who should be the target for the radio station continued to be a subject of “stormy” management meetings. A “source close to Sisulu”, SABC Chief Executive, reported that “discussions in *SAfm* [were] related to a wider discussion in the SABC about the values of the Corporation. Top managers [were] discussing the need to strike a balance between commercial viability and the public service mandate” (*Mail & Guardian*, 24-30/10/95:10).
Conclusions

The *SAfm* affair has brought the SABC's operation under public scrutiny. The tensions between operating partly as a commercial Corporation while purporting to fulfil public service functions have been evident. The *SAfm* case could be seen as an example of the crisis in which public service finds itself internationally. Public service broadcasting is labouring from a "crisis of imagination" and there is the need to "invent something new". Public service broadcasters are necessarily "propelled by a different logic" and the require different tools of audience research and performance evaluation in order to maintain this propulsion. In its identification of a target audience, *SAfm* never successfully overcame the "static muteness of audiencehood". It never entered into a broader consultation with its citizen audience but analysed figures and commissioned research to ascertain the chances of an audience forming while trying to identify some way of drawing the targeted individuals to the radio station. A fundamental flaw with the conception of *SAfm* was that the SABC undertook to generate its own national audience without a broader process of consultation. Media-sourced audiences tend to be commercial and can be formed through vigorous marketing and through stimulating similar media consumption behaviour by using commercial criteria and consumer characteristics. What *SAfm* tried to do was generate an audience by appealing to citizens rather than consumers. I would suggest that this cannot be done by using the same tools as the commercial media. What resulted was a radio station conceived in the public service ethic but operationalised in the commercial mould. It was doomed to fail because the SABC could not stimulate demand for the product. The product was not popular because of the lack of demand and because of the product's inferior quality. The SABC is now facing a similar crisis to the one which the BBC faced. There are external pressure which are demanding "change or be dissolved". The BBC chose to become more commercially oriented through the implementation of the "Producer Choice" strategy and its mandate was renewed.

The SABC is being forced to make a similar choice. If the commercial route is chosen it must compete with independent broadcasters and has no claim to public funding. If, on the other hand, the public service route is taken, a revised system of resource allocation is required. If the Corporation serves to meet the needs of citizens in their socially interactive form, not as consumers, then it must overcome the limitations of focusing on media-sourced audiences. In order to do so, it has to find an alternative to audience
research - to overcome the static muteness of audiencehood, perhaps broader consultation and interaction could serve this purpose. It also needs to find ways of being accountable, of proving that what it does is of public good, this need not be in terms of audience size or profitability, but the public demands some 'proof of delivery'. Mechanisms of accountability and increased consultation should alleviate the autocratic decision-making associated with public bureaucracies. Society’s needs can only be met when society is the source of the medium. The Safm concept suggested that the SABC was the source and quite possibly open to "manipulation from above". When society is the source of audience formation, Corporation management cannot reallocate the station's resources on instinct, the Board cannot dictate change and transparency is no longer a problem and the target for the communication as well as preferred content are issues that need not be debated.
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