

Name of organisation:
Qualification
Duration

University Of The Witwatersrand
:
MA (Journalism and Media Studies)
:
2000 February — March 2001

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
ADVERTISING AND TELEVISION PROGRAMMING AND
PROGRAMMES ON SOUTH AFRICAN TELEVISION**

Mongezi Andrew Sikhakhane

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Journalism and Media Studies

Johannesburg, 2001

To Liz, and my son Thabiso for their love, patience and support during the writing of this report.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Journalism and Media Studies in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____ Day of _____ 2001

Table of Contents	Pages
Introduction	1
Chapter One	9
1.1 Television as a significant part of the publicsphere: theories and expectations	9
1.2 The Pitfalls of the advertiser-media relationships: current debates and Claims	17
Chapter Two	30
2.1 News as a commodity: an analysis of the SABC and E-TV news programs	30
2.1 (a) SABC News bulletins	30
2.1 (b) E-TV news bulletins	40
2.2 An investigation of advertising influence on SATV drama programming	45
Chapter Three	54
Denying the obvious: an analysis of interviews with the SABC Officials	54
Conclusion	63
References	65
Bibliography	67

Preface

This research report forms part of current debates in media studies around the rapidly increasing commercialization and privatization of public broadcasters around the world. It investigates the impact of this commercialization and privatization on the role of these broadcasters. It looks at some impacts that the dependence of public broadcasters on advertising has on their roles public service roles. South Africa is not immune from these global trends that are mentioned above. As suggested by the ICASA, the government reduced its funding of the public broadcaster (SABC). This forced the SABC to rely more and more on income from advertising and various forms of sponsorship in order to sustain and fulfill its goals. This research provides an investigation and findings of the nature and extent of the impact of advertising influence on both the SABC and to some extent E-TV programming and programmes. This study is important because it covers an important area since it looks at the rapid changes taking place in the funding and the content of local television (South African Television). It will make both a theoretical and empirical contribution to the understanding of trends and developments that are taking place in South African Television. It is comprised of three chapters with each treating its own theme ranging from policy and literature analysis, news and drama programme analysis and finally a case study, which provides an analysis of first hand information from the SABC officials from both the programming and the advertising department.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are due to my supportive family. Special thanks to my aunt Mrs. Christina Mngoma and my cousin Andries for the support they gave me throughout my studies and during the writing of this report. My thanks are also due to my university friends, together with my lecturers. Acknowledgements are also due to my supervisor Professor Tom Lodge. Special thanks are also due to Ms Clara Nzima, Mr. Kefuoe Mohobane and Mrs. Ntabiseng Sambo of the SABC. Thank you for your cooperation and information, which made this report, possible.

Mongezi Sikhakhane
March 2001

An investigation of the relationship between advertising and television programming and programme on South African television

Introduction

McQuail (1994: 121) argues that The media are both a product and also a reflection of the history of their own society and they have played a part in it . When tested against the South African media this statement becomes valid in the sense that South African media played a role both during the apartheid and the transition era. South African media, [especially broadcasting] of the apartheid era was used by the apartheid government to manufacture and spread propaganda, which was aimed at furthering discrimination of non-whites. Berger (1999: 96), puts this well when he writes: South African media was a factor in the production and reproduction of a racist authoritarian system that ended in political terms in 1994 . The South African media [during the transition period] also played a role and contributed a lot to the democratisation of the country.

As implied by the above statement, the media has a role to play in society. This role can either be positive or negative depending on who owns and funds it [the media]. Concentrated ownership tends to work against the democratisation of the country and can also lead to the manipulation of media for evil purposes as it happened during the apartheid era. Berger (1999: 86) writes: One of the most critical factors for the role of media democratization and socio-economic transformation concerns ownership and

control. As was graphically evident under apartheid, concentrated ownership works against these roles. By these roles he refers to the democratization and socio-economic transformation of the country. As indicated earlier South African media as a result of state ownership was used to further the apartheid government's evil purposes.

In order to avoid history from repeating itself, the new [ANC] government had the responsibility to transform the South African media to suit the new dispensation. The discussions concerning the transformation of media were started between the National Party and the opposition parties, in the early 1990s before the 1994 election so as to allow the new government, which was to succeed the apartheid state to start a new chapter with a transformed media. Radical journalists especially black journalists and the ANC argued that the media served apartheid and need to be transformed to serve the new order after 1994. Since the role of media is dependent on and also affected by who owns and funds it, the new government had to cut its subsidy of the SABC, as this was believed to be going to reduce its control and influence over this media.

While trying to liberate SABC from control and domination by the government, the deregulation process and the reduction of the subsidy opened another loophole, which was also going to affect the public broadcaster's role. Unlike the old SABC, the newly transformed SABC was expected like many public broadcasters around the world to inform, educate and at the same time entertain the public or the citizenry. The Independent

Broadcasting Authority¹, which was established to monitor the broadcasters operations and functions saw it as a responsibility of the South African television to contribute towards the consolidation of democracy and the education of the citizenry. The ICASA has the responsibility of checking whether the broadcasters are compliant with the broadcasting act and policies or not. When necessary it is expected to take some disciplinary action against the guilty party but the problem is that it is also dependent on information from the same broadcasters in order to establish whether they are complying with the act or not.

While the reduction of the government s subsidy was an initiative taken for a good cause, the problem, which emerged was where was the money to supplement funding and sustaining the public broadcasting services was going to come from. The SABC needed additional money in order to sustain its services. As a consequence it was forced to sell some of its radio stations and also turn others into commercial radio stations. But the money from the selling of the stations did not provide a regular or an ongoing source of income for the SABC. In order to fulfill the mandate, the SABC had to find another additional source of income. Consequently the public broadcaster (SABC) was forced to rely more and more on advertising revenue. This was not a new thing for the SABC but the difference was that advertising revenue was now going to be its largest source of income. This kind of dependence comes with its own pitfalls. It is always argued that it disturbs the public broadcaster s commitment to serving citizens. Although the authority disapproves this kind of dependence of the public broadcasting

¹ The IBA is now called the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). This follows its merger with the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA).

service (PBS²) on advertising revenue, it remains the largest source of income for the SABC.

Currently the SABC draws fifty five percent of its revenue from advertisers. A consultation of the ICASA s website reveals that the SABC s advertising revenue is the largest percentage in the entire Commonwealth since most Commonwealth broadcasters that rely on advertising have kept the figure below fifty five percent (<http://www.iba.org.za>). This is one factor that raises concern about the integrity of the SABC s programming. This concern reflects the popular argument that too much dependence on advertising revenue is antithetical towards the nurturing of the media as a part of the public sphere. By the public sphere it is meant, All the places and forums where issues of importance to a political community are discussed and debated, and where information that is presented, is essential to citizen participation in community life , Herman and McChesney (1997: 3). The media as result becomes important in the sense that: A democratic society depends on an informed populace making political decisions (ibid.). This role of media according to media critiques is hindered by the dependence of broadcasters or media in general on advertising and other economic interests. The media is believed to ignore or compromise its social responsibilities and focus its services towards satisfying the advertisers.

The ANC government reduced its subsidy and control of the SABC in order to allow it to have integrity in its servicing of the public. It wanted to ensure that all citizens irrespective of race, gender and age are served and catered for equally by the SABC. But the dependence of the SABC on advertising

² PBS refers to Public Broadcasting Service.

revenue has left some unanswered questions. How will the public broadcaster balance the interests of the public and those of the advertisers at the same time? It is not clear how the SABC will avoid its dependence on advertising revenue from influencing its programming and the content of its programmes. This paper concerns itself with the investigation of the relationship between advertisers and television programming and programmes on South African television. It investigates how much influence do advertisers have over broadcasters. It investigates how much integrity do broadcasters have over the content of their programmes. It also investigates, what kind of influence do advertisers have on television broadcasters.

Methodology

This research has employed several kinds of information collection. First, this study is based on a hypothesis from current debates and literature on advertising and media studies. Empirical evidence in this study included the analysis of certain television programmes and also the analysis of first hand information from interviews with three of the SABC's officials. Since there is also E-TV, which also has some public service obligations I also analysed the content and nature of news and drama programmes by the SABC and the free- to air E-TV. This I did to establish what impact does dependence on advertising revenue have on these two different broadcasters. The analysis included analysing the way in which these programmes are presented or transmitted by these two broadcasters. The analysis of news programmes is important in the sense that it indicates whether advertisers do influence television programming or not. This applies mainly to news bulletins [as an end product] unlike other television genres are assembled and manufactured by the broadcasters themselves. In my analysis of drama content by both

broadcasters, I have taken a look at what topics or issues do these dramas treat. Using the Monitoring and Complaints Unit's report I undertook a quantitative analysis of both local and foreign drama. This I did to establish whether these broadcasters are complying with the local content quotas or not. The results helped in verifying whether the argument that broadcasters in order to attract large audiences and lucrative advertisers tend to schedule foreign programmes at the expense of local programmes is true or not.

In order to establish whether the SABC and E-TV are compliant with the ICASA policies, I also consulted the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa's discussion paper on the Review of Local Content Quotas. I also checked the SABC's Rate Cards³; the rate cards help advertisers with information about the audiences and the programmes they watch. The rate cards become important to advertisers because they have to know what size of audience can be expected to watch a particular programme and what the audience might be like since they are charged for running commercials during given programmes.

In verifying the actual and the nature of the relationship between the advertisers and broadcasters I also conducted interviews with three SABC officials. These officials were interviewed in January/February 2001. Namely they are: Clara Nzima [who was by that time an acting manager at SABC One; she is currently the same channel's drama commissioning editor], Mr. Kefoue Mohobane, the drama commissioning editor at SABC

³ The Rate Cards contain the program schedule of the SABC. They also contain the number of audience, which watch a particular show or program and it is through them that the SABC charge advertisers who want to buy airtime in a particular program. They also contain the estimation of the prices that are likely to be charged.

Two and Mrs. Nthabiseng Sambo, the brand manager of the SABC's Action Station⁴. Since there is always a tendency for informants to hide information or the truth, the information from the interviews was also analysed and tested against the actual broadcasters' programmes as I have stated before.

It was my intention to make a detailed comparative analysis between the SABC and E-TV but that wish was hindered by the E-TV officials' refusal to avail themselves for interviews. They also failed to answer the questionnaires I sent them as an alternative. The same thing happened with SABC Three's Eddie Manzingane; his secretary said he is always busy and he would not be able to talk to me at all. That prevented me from making comparative analysis but the programme analysis I did revealed no huge difference between the broadcasters in terms of their operations. The SABC has tended to operate more like a private or a commercial broadcaster thus compromising some of its public service roles.

While this type of study has been done elsewhere, there is little detailed work on the relationship between advertisers and South African television. This research aims to contribute to current debates in media studies around the rapidly increasing commercialisation and privatisation of media and also the influence that economic interests [like advertisers] might have on the content of media products. It also makes a theoretical and empirical contribution to the understanding of the current trends and developments in South African television.

⁴ The Action Station is the SABC's external sales department. It is this department that deals with advertisers. The Rate Cards that I mentioned earlier are also made there.

This paper consists of three chapters. Chapter One conceptualises South African television as a significant part of the public sphere. Chapter Two provides an analysis of SATV programmes, namely news and drama programmes. Chapter Three provides an analysis of the interviews with SABC officials.

Chapter One

1.1 Television as a significant part of the public sphere: theories and expectations

The media are both a product and also a reflection of the history of their own society (McQuail, 1994: 121).

South African media was a factor in the production and reproduction of a racist authoritarian system that ended in political terms in 1994 (Berger, 1999: 96).

Drawing on the aforementioned statements again I would like to rationalise and conceptualise SATV as a significant part of the public sphere. As implied by these statements, media is always part and parcel of any development that takes place within a particular society. As it is historically true that the South African media was used in the production and reproduction of a racist authoritarian system, as Berger's statement says, I want to argue and suggest that, the same media can also be used to correct some atrocities and division that was created by the apartheid government. In countries like South Africa, where a majority of the population is illiterate, broadcasting plays a crucial role towards the education, entertainment and information of the citizens about the events and developments that take place in their society and the world around them. Television is the second most accessed medium after radio in terms of the number of people it manages to reach. As a result of illiteracy, the majority of South Africans cannot rely on newspapers for their information. Sinclair (1999: 148) confirms this when he writes: South Africa is a television-viewing nation. Television viewers have in home entertainment since there

is no effort required in watching television and that the medium has an aura of reliability.

It appears from Sinclair's statement that South Africans spend most of their free time watching television. This condition, if well appropriated can turn SATV into a most crucial instrument in the consolidation of democracy and also towards a creation of responsible citizens. Television has become a most crucial instrument in the lives of people in this television age to use Esslin's words. According to Esslin (1982: 2), Most people spend a significant part of their leisure time in front of the television. It supplies most of their news of the world. He goes on further to say: Through television, the old, infirm and lonely can be made to feel that they are in touch with other fellow human beings, that they remain in touch with events around them Esslin (1982: 77). SATV as well is supposed to provide the public with all the information that is crucial to exercising their citizenship rights. The exercising of citizenship rights and the success of democracy depends on the informed citizenry.

A consultation of the authority's website reveals its recognition of the importance of media in the democratisation of the country and the exercise of citizenship rights. It says: The authority functions in the context of the identified national goals of democracy, development and nation-building. While these goals overlap considerably, they emphasise different aspects of society and its needs. The national goal of democracy provides a political focus, and development focuses on economic challenges, while nation building is primarily concerned with cultural issues. It is important that broadcasters, collectively address and play an appropriate role in furthering

these national goals within the context of a healthy and vibrant industry (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>). Seeing the SABC as a national resource, Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburi [the SABC board Chairperson by then] also stated that the SABC is in the first instance a public broadcaster and secondly commercial even though the Corporation was largely funded through advertising (Manhando, Mpofu and Tomaselli, 1996: 29). This means that the SABC has to take as its priority the interests of the public before it considers those of advertisers. The aforementioned national goals recognise and acknowledge the influence of broadcasting in society and also make it a key part of the public sphere. They confirm the social responsibility theory that, the media have obligations to society.

Hamelink (1992: vi) writes: Civil society needs information and communication networks that enable its citizens to exercise their right to citizenship. This means that those networks should provide the vital pre-requisites of citizenship, like freedom of expression and access to information. Also sharing the same notion are Herman & McChesney (1997: 3,4) when they write: Media are the pre-eminent vehicles of communication through which public participation in the political process and the quality of their contribution to the public sphere is an important determinant of the quality of democracy. As implied by these statements, media has a crucial role towards the consolidation, the development of democracy and it also appears that the key to success of democracy concerns the availability of information and communication networks that value public participation. The South African media was transformed to ensure that these goals are fulfilled since is through media that the citizens can learn of their rights and how to protect them.

The authority says: In relations to democracy, the media plays a crucial role in providing the citizenry with information to make informed choices. In countries with high levels of illiteracy like South Africa, the role of broadcasting is all the more important in providing information so that people can participate in the process of development and nation building. In relation to development it ranges from the provision of human rights, housing, public health, and agricultural guidance to literacy and formal education, economic and financial analysis. In relation to nation building, the role of broadcasting is to nurture a common sense of citizenship, reconciliation and tolerance while reflecting the rich cultural, language, religious and regional diversity of the South African population (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>). Both the SABC and E-TV since its inception are in principle committed to these goals but their desire to make profit tend to prevent them from committing themselves fully. Local drama programmes like Khululeka, Soul City, Justice for All and recently Deadline on SABC One and Backstage, Save Our Souls, Madam and Eve to name the few on E-TV are some public service programmes aimed at serving the aforementioned purposes. Proportionally these public service or public sphere programmes are given less emphasis than the international or foreign programmes that are shown on South African television.

Pertaining to the democratic role of media let us consider the role that SA media plays during the elections. Consider the role it played during the first democratic elections in 1994, for example. The media [both print and broadcasting] contributed a lot in the education of citizens and the first time voters on how to vote. According to the Media Monitoring Project (MMP),

The liberation election news although not informative was characterised by a justified and important emphasis on the historical nature of the event and by balanced reporting (MMP, 1999: 5). It is a result of information by media that people went to polling stations in large numbers. It is through media that the majorities learnt and realised the significance of voting. It is through media information that people realised how voting was going to change their lives and the political situation in South African. People were indeed equipped with relevant information in order to make informed political decisions.

A traditionalist liberal view says: The primary democratic role of media is to act as a public watchdog overseeing the state. This is usually defined as revealing abuses in the exercise of state authority, although it is sometimes extended to include facilitating a general debate about the functioning of government. This watchdog role is said to override in importance all other functions of the media and to dictate the form in which the media should be organized Curran (1992: 84). This is what the act stands for. The object of the act is to provide for the regulation of broadcasting activities in the Republic of South Africa in the public interest through the authority and for the purpose to: Promote the provision of a diverse range of sound and television broadcasting services on a national, regional and local level which when viewed collectively, cater for all language and cultural groups and provide entertainment, education and information (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>). In principle this is where the viability of South African Television Broadcasters rests.

Murdock (1992: 21,37) writes: Full and effective citizenship depends mainly on the availability of information and access to communication networks. In order for the people to exercise their full rights as citizens, they must have access to the information, advices, and analysis that will enable them to know what their personal rights are and allow them to pursue them effectively. They must have access to the broadcast of possible range of information, interpretation, and debate on areas that involve public political choices, and they must be able to use communication facilities in order to register criticism and propose alternative course of action. By the time of the interviews or research the SABC had only one investigative news programme [Special Assignments] to deal with current affairs, which are of serious concern to the public. The South African public needs more of these programmes.

In order for this to be effective the South African television [both E-TV and the SABC] must increase the number of investigative news programmes. These news programmes must be as adequate and informative as possible for this particular purpose. Branston and Stafford (1992) confirm this when they write: As long as investigative documentaries are funded, audiences have another source of information on which to form new judgments. This, with regard to SATV can help supplement news bulletins, which have tended to be less informative. Actually there is a need for South Africa to increase the number of local content programmes. Branston and Stafford (1996: 33) in support of the social responsibility theory say: One of the objectives defined for public broadcasters in terms of their social responsibility refers to empowerment of the people through the expression of their life

experiences. Such expression is seen to be achieved through local content production.

Diversity⁵ of opinion and information is also very crucial in order to achieve this goal. According to the authority, there are at least five dimensions of diversity that are significant for broadcasting regulation. They are: diversity of media functions (information, education and entertainment), diversity of content within these (programming), diversity of representation of groups and people in society, and diversity of geography or locale (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>). Television must or should be representative of all the members of the society it operates in. It must make sure that the aforementioned dimensions become a guideline for everyday programming. McQuail (1994: 144) observes this when he argues: Media should reflect in their structure and content the various social, economic and cultural realities of the societies (and communities) in which they operate in a more or less proportional way. Media should offer a more or less equal access to the voices of various social and cultural minorities which make up the society. Taking into account the history of SATV and its marginalisation of certain language groups, the abovementioned expectation [diversification of opinion and information] is key to the re-incorporation of the former marginalised ethnic groups. Both the SABC and E-TV has so far failed to fulfil this expectation in terms of the languages they use. They tend to be biased towards the majority and well off ethnic groups. This, I will discuss in detail in Chapter Two where I analyse the news and drama programmes by both broadcasters.

Before bringing this section to an end, I would like point out some of the main features that an ideal broadcaster is supposed to have. As outlined by McQuail (1994: 172), Public service broadcasting in a fully developed form generally has main features that are supported by policy and regulations. They are:

- * A provision of universal service (a full service to all).

- * The system should be financed by payments from all citizens (not just the consumers).

- * There must be a public control of access as a sender, in greater or less detail, to ensure fairness, political neutrality and independence from vested interests and the state.

- * A public broadcasting service must be democratically accountable to the society (or nation).

- * A public service broadcaster must seek to achieve various goals of quality of service, as determined according to local cultural and social priorities. These features and expectations apply mainly to the SABC in relation to this study. Although E-TV is not a public broadcaster, it is not immune from these expectations since it also has a semi-public service mandate. The main difference between SABC and E-TV is that E-TV is not dependent in any form from public financing.

⁵ Diversity relates not only to the range of information, education and entertainment available to the public but in heterogeneous societies like South Africa, also relates to access to a diverse range of language,

In conclusion, I would like to state that in order for South Africa's new democracy to flourish, SATV must provide the platform to all citizens to exercise their right to citizenship. This includes the incorporation of the former television alienated Ndebele, siSwati, TshiVenda and XiTsonga language speakers into the mainstream television programmes including news bulletins since there is a tendency to ignore them. Appropriating Keane's (1993: 3) words I would like to say, South African Television must serve as a device that is essential to representative government, in which reasonable, informed public plays a central mediating role between citizens and government institutions. This statement by Keane is an indication of how important media is for the development and enhancement of democracy. The same thing applies to SATV; it has a role to play towards nurturing democracy, development and nation building.

1.2 The pitfalls of advertiser-media relationships: current debates and claims

Drawing on the theoretical, political, socio-economic, radical and general media studies literatures, this section argues that the relationship between advertising and SATV have influence on their programming and on programme content as well. The following concepts: public opinion, public broadcasting service and public sphere frame the basis of my argument and analysis of the current South African Television programmes.

Public opinion refers to Opinions on matters of concern to the nation freely and publicly expressed by men outside the government who claim as a

right that their opinions should influence or determine the actions, personnel, or structure of their government, writes Jackall (1995: 27). Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) on the other hand refers to any broadcasting service provided by the South African Broadcasting Corporation, a broadcasting service provided by any other statutory body, or a broadcasting service provided by a person who receives his or her revenue, either wholly or partly from license fees levied in respect of the licensing of persons in relation to sound radio sets and in relation to television sets, or from the state, and must include a commercially operated broadcasting service provided by a person referred to in line (a), (b) or (c) of this definition according to the broadcasting act (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>). The public sphere as already mentioned according to Herman & McChesney's definition refers to: All the places and forums where issues of importance to a political community are discussed and debated, and where information that is presented is essential to citizen participation in community life. Broadcasting is one of the few opportunities for historically separated sectors of South African society to see and know each other and to learn to navigate the differences; the propagators of public broadcasting like to argue.

These concepts become important to this study because it is its main aim to investigate and establish whether the relationship between advertising and SATV has an impact on the broadcasters' roles or not. The nature [kinds of programmes] and the content of programmes that are broadcasted by the SABC and E-TV are closely related to this question and these concepts since it is through them that one can establish whether SATV serves the interests

of the public or those of advertisers. Their employment contributes towards a clear understanding of many issues that are involved in this study.

There is international evidence to demonstrate a link between the type of service provided and who has paid for it, though the relationship is not always clear-cut. Four linkages between types of funding and output of public broadcasters have been identified. As outlined by the ICASA those linkages are as follows: (a) substantial dependence on voluntary donations has fostered public service broadcasting which lacks a wide general appeal, (b) direct government grants tend to fail to keep up with broadcasting needs. This also has the potential to compromise the political independence of the public broadcaster. (c) License fee funding has been associated with good quality broad based broadcasting but throughout the world it is being substituted or at least supplemented by other funding as it becomes a less reliable and sufficient form of funding and (d) dependence on advertising revenue can create a conflict of interest that has the potential to compromise editorial independence.

While the other three linkages also need serious attention, this paper concerns itself with the impact of the relationship between South African television and advertisers. Many media critics have argued that in order for media to play its watchdog and a democratic role effectively, it needs to be freed from government control and influence by financial institutions, advertisers to name one. Curran (1992: 84) argues: Only by anchoring the media to free market that it becomes possible to ensure the media's complete independence from government. Berger (1999: 82, 96) as indicated before also shares this notion when he writes: One of the most critical factors for

the role of media democratization and socio-economic transformation concerns ownership and control. As was graphically evident under apartheid, concentrated ownership works against these roles South African media was a factor in the production and reproduction of a racist authoritarian system that ended in political terms in 1994.

That is one reason why the first step towards transforming South African media was dependent on freeing it from government control. With fresh memories of what media was used for during the apartheid era, the Broadcasting Authority by suggesting the reduction of the SABC's subsidy by the government was trying to avoid history from repeating itself in the new dispensation. As already stated earlier this came with some complications like too much dependence of the public broadcaster on advertising revenue. Advertising, like government control as indicated above is antithetical to the nurturing of the public sphere. This section concerns itself with verifying whether this argument is valid or not in its relations with South African Television.

Boyd-Barrett (1998: 23) argues that: The potential of commercial media as guarantors of the public sphere, is challenged by the fact that the public issues are compromised by their dependence on advertising in order to earn profit and satisfy the patrons, owners and shareholders. McQuail (1994: 169) in line with Boyd-Barrett argues: As far as market forces are concerned, commercial media are not so very much different from any other business, although difference do arise when mass media have a semi-public status and role. The media as a result is always caught in between serving two bosses, [the public and the advertisers]. There is a high possibility that

the latter usually wins the attention of the media because they provide working capital for the broadcasters. Jamieson and Campbell (1997:154) in support of the argument that advertising revenue influences media products and content have written: All social systems seek to survive, to maintain their stability and equilibrium. In order to survive, mass media must generate profits or adequate financing, which requires attracting substantial audiences. Ratings measure how well the mass media do this, and revenue depends on such ratings. The SABC, although publicly owned is also subject to the same situation since the largest amount of its working capital comes from advertising. Both the media structure and its economics are key to the types of programming decisions that broadcasters take. These as a result become important in order to establish whether the media's relationship with advertisers have an impact on programming or not.

McQuail (1994: 172) argues: Although public broadcasting always involves some significant elements of financing from the public sources, there are often significant independent sources of revenue. As already indicated in the introduction, the SABC currently draws fifty five percent of its revenue from advertisers. It is the largest source of revenue for a broadcaster, which has a public service mandate. The remainder of its revenue comes from licence fees, co-productions, facility rentals and programme sales to the public. This obviously puts the SABC in an awkward position to be dictated [although not direct] by advertisers in terms of programmes it broadcasts. It broadcasts what will interest the public than what is in the public interest. Something is in the public interest if it serves the ends of the whole society rather than those of some sectors of the society, write: Curran and Gurrevitch (1992: 71). It also includes the

concepts of access, diversity, independence and unity according to the authority.

Although this is empirically difficult to prove, an analysis of some television programmes like news bulletins and dramas as I do in the following chapter reveals lack of commitment to the above mentioned by South African television broadcasters. The lack of diversity in terms of languages used gives some indication of the broadcasters' commitment to serving certain sectors of the population and the sidelining of others. This is a result of the fact that broadcasters have mixed feelings, to use McQuail's words.

McQuail (1994: 168) argues 'The media are typically hybrid or mixed in character. Often they operate in a dual market selling a product to consumers and services to advertisers. He goes on further to say: Most organizations have mixed goals and rarely are they all openly stated. Mass media are not different, and they may even be particularly ambiguous in this respect, given the unclear boundaries and internal fragmentation of media institutions (McQuail, 1994:192-193). The same thing is happening within the SABC. Although it is still a public broadcaster its channels have been separated into distinct business units and the desire of attracting advertising have a large effect on programme styles, languages and scheduling to use Bird's (1996: 68) words. It [the SABC] makes some [verbal air] claiming it is committed to public servicing but fails to live up to its promises in terms of programming. It is failing to recognise and broadcast to the entire nation. Some language or ethnic groups are still communicated to in languages they don't speak or hardly understand. Each channel targets certain sectors of the populations and ignores other because they are either a minority or don't

have money which can lure advertisers. The SABC gives priority to certain sectors of the society and compromises others.

This is in contrast with the Broadcasting Act where it states that: The first duty of the public broadcasters is to provide the entire territory of the nation, where there are inhabitants to be served (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>). It goes on to stipulate: Public service can be defined in relation to its ownership by, and accountability to the public and its commitment to a set of service principles. The public served by this form of broadcasting is the totality of all citizens irrespective of sex, gender, age, race or culture. It says the service provided should bring to the greatest number of homes the fullest range of programmes, including minority interests, and should address their needs as citizens primarily, rather than their preference as consumers (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>).

In principle and statements to the public, the SABC claims to be committed to serving people as citizens but its actual practices indicate the opposite. It divides its audience according to their living standard measures (LSM⁶). Consequently the SABC has up to now failed to serve the citizenry as expected by the ICASA. It is almost eight years since the inception of democracy in South Africa but the public broadcaster still discriminates against certain population groups. A close scrutiny of the public broadcaster's African language drama programming reveals the shortage of Ndebele, siSwati, TshiVenda and XiTsonga dramas as opposed to the

⁶ The LSM classifies South African society on an income earned basis, drawing on market research to establish the different types of media that different groups are exposed to or interact with cited from Bird (1996:62)

number of Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu language dramas. The same trend is taking place in relation to the news programme transmission.

Adversaries of commercialised media argue that the commercialisation and privatisation of public broadcasters threaten the contribution it can make to the sphere of public debate on important matters. With the reduction of the government's subsidy and its dependence on economic institutions like advertisers, the SABC has tended to function more like a commercial medium and therefore is categorised as such in this study. This is due to the fact that like private broadcasters, it is also largely dependent on advertising revenue. Although the SABC has not shed its public broadcasting status, it also needs to attract large audiences in order to get lucrative advertisers. As a consequence this study looks and treat the SABC like a commercialised media. Its funding mix qualifies it to be treated as such. An analysis of the SABC proposition to the Triple Inquiry and the ICASA reveals that: The SABC proposed that its mix must include a cap on advertising of 55% of its total operating revenue. It expects licence fee to remain at 20%, an increase of other revenue (programme sales, co-productions), up to 10% and 20 % of total revenue to be sought from government ([http://. www.ICASA.org.za](http://.www.ICASA.org.za)).

Louw (1993: 101) argues: As a capitalist society, South Africa currently has a media that is driven by commercial principles. This media has failed dismally to service all South Africans with the full range of information they need to make rational decisions about their world. This statement is apt with what the SABC is doing. In order to gain financially, this broadcaster tends to ignore the minority ethnic groups [with the exception of those with disposable income]. This confirms Ronning's (1994: 8) argument that: In

all societies the media actually cater for a variety of groups, some are better informed than others, and have more influence than others and not least more access to the media both as a means of expression and information. The same trend takes place in South African television. South African television tends to concern itself with serving the interests of the white population because they attract lucrative advertisers with their buying power. This is also due to the fact that they are the main media buyers.

They [South African Television Broadcasters] also concern themselves with serving the majority groups because advertisers are also interested in large audiences. Continuing his argument Louw says: As a commercially oriented media, South African media is controlled by advertisers and middle class interests to which they pander (ibid.). Berger (1999: 108) proves this when he writes: Early attempts to orientate the broadcaster towards carrying substantially more broadcasting in indigenous languages proved impossible due to loss of advertising support for these fragmented and generally low income audiences. To avoid bankruptcy and financial difficulties, the SABC was forced to reverse the process to regain and retain advertisers. It had to call in the McKinney consultancy company, retrench 700 staffers and cut back on the costly multilingual side of its public service role. This is one indication that the relationship between advertisers and television and also an interest to retain them has some negative influence on programming. This as I have indicated through Berger's statement is due to the fact that television needs advertising revenue to continue its services.

That is observable in Sinclair (1999: 63) when he argues: The media needs advertising. Quite simply, it pays for some of the costs of production, and

therefore makes the magazine or journal or newspaper or broadcasting service more possible to the public, because it lowers the price. Trowler also shares this notion (1988: 78); when he argues that: Where advertising money is being spent has had a number of consequences for different media. Advertising money has added weight to private rather than public broadcasting, giving better financial base. Although the SABC is not a private broadcaster, a substantial amount of its operating capital comes from advertisers and this makes it not so different from the private broadcasters. Pressure to attract large audiences has increased since the introduction the free-to-air E-TV. The SABC cannot afford to lose its audiences to this broadcaster because that would mean losing advertisers too. In order to compete effectively the SABC is also likely to do anything it can including following the pattern that private broadcasters use. If E-TV uses entertainment programmes to attract its audiences, it means the SABC has to do the same thing if it wants to retain it audiences. This as a consequence puts the public sphere programmes in jeopardy of diminishing.

A long-standing expectation that media should contribute to education, culture, and the act has come into conflict with actual or perceived imperatives of the media marketplace, under conditions of heightened competition for audiences writes McQuail (1994: 138). Faced with this situation most media including the public broadcasters tend to sacrifice their public service roles in order to survive financially. The integrity and the quality of the programmes that are produced and broadcasted become affected as a result of self or economic censorship by broadcasters themselves. Herman and McChesney (1997: 6-7) point out that: The media owners are concerned to provide a congenial media environment for

advertising goods. The result is the preference for entertainment over controversy, serious political debate and discussion, and documentaries that dig deeply, inform and challenge conventional opinion. That is, the media/advertiser complex prefers entertainment to cultivation of the public sphere. This statement is a true reflection of what is happening with the current SATV programmes. There are more entertainment programmes than public sphere programmes on both the SABC and E-TV.

Mr. Marcel Golding's, [CEO of E-TV] statement in E 24/7⁷ of September 2001 confirms Herman and McChesney's statement when he stated: E-TV will strive to grow audience share to become the number one television channel in South Africa, providing a service to the broadest spectrum of the population. In this respect we will continue to provide the most innovative and exciting programming, and the most cost efficient commercial opportunities to advertisers. Golding's statement clearly indicates that their main interest is to solicit advertisers by pulling large audiences using entertainment programmes. Although the SABC is publicly owned and there are no owners, shareholders to please, the competition for advertisers poses a serious threat to the public sphere programmes. In my interview with her, Ms Clara Nzima of SABC One, in response to the question concerning the abundance of entertainment programmes, she said: We have to be competitive because we don't want to lose our audiences to other channels and E-TV.

Since according to her their audiences are young people [between the ages of 16 and 24], entertainment programmes are very important if they want to

retain them. Clara Nzima's statement is a confirmation of McQuail's (1994: 154) argument that: Even where the media are run as public bodies, they are subject to financial discipline and operate in comparative environment. The SABC is not immune from this trend, its channels no longer compete amongst each other only but they now face heavy competition from the free-to-air E-TV. A failure to be competitive [in terms of programming] would mean losing their audiences to E-TV. While in McQuail's words: It is less easy to demonstrate that a particular advertiser can directly intervene to influence significant publication decisions in their own interest beyond what is already provided for in the system, it appears from spot check analysis of certain programmes [that I undertook], that SATV programming is indeed influenced by the television's relationship with advertisers. In order to succeed financially each broadcaster has to keep up with standards that advertisers see as attractive to the public. The advertisers' concern with audiences is evident in the submission to the Triple Inquiry from advertising industry. It argued that: For advertising to play a catalytic role in South Africa, it was vital that the broadcast media delivered both quality programming, which would attract divergent audiences and cost-effective advertising rates, which would encourage advertisers to use the broadcast media (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>).

The critical role that television is supposed to play is threatened by the broadcasters' interest to attract large audiences, with an aim of attracting and retaining lucrative advertisers. In order to attract large audiences both the SABC and E-TV are focusing more and more on entertainment and reality programmes. This, in Ward's (1995:146) words is a result of the condition

⁷ This is E-TV's programme guide. It is usually found in local newspapers like The Star, at given times.

that: Media outlets unable to assemble an audience of sufficient sizes or the desired demographics characters will be poorly placed to attract and retain lucrative advertising contracts. The desire to attract and retain such contracts overrides the public broadcasting services of both broadcasters that are studied in this research. The following chapter is an attempt towards investigating the effect of this advertisers/television relationship on programming. It analyses the content and the nature of news and drama programmes by the SABC and E-TV.

Chapter Two

2 News as a commodity: An analysis of the SABC and E-TV news programmes

2.1(a) SABC news bulletins

Before getting on with this discussion, I would like to first give a brief definition of what is meant by the concept of news. Currently there is no absolute correct answer as to what news is. Jamieson and Campbell in Interplay of Influence also observed this and wrote: Just what is news? Despite many efforts, no neat, satisfactory answer to that question has been found. Some deaths are news, many more, are not. Some strikes, draw headlines, others are ignored. Some protests become lead stories, others go unnoticed, still others are deliberately disregarded. The best answer seems to be that news is what reporters, editors, and producers decide is news (Jamieson and Campbell, 1997: 34). These critiques go on further to argue: News is gathered, written, edited, produced, and disseminated by human beings who are part of organizations, and who have beliefs and values. Organization, such as networks, have functions and goals as well as relationship to government, to regulatory agencies, to advertisers, to their parent companies, and to the vast audiences they seek to attract. These beliefs, values, functions and interests are bound to influence the messages these networks publish and broadcast Jamieson and Campbell (1997: 39).

Drawing mainly on the abovementioned statements and a definition of news, this section concerns itself with the analysis of the composition of both the SABC and E-TV news programmes. It looks at the nature and content of these broadcasters news programmes. This analysis looks what kind of themes or issues do these broadcasters treat or deal with. It also analyses the

significance of language choice in terms of languages that are used during news transmission. These measures are helpful towards establishing whether the relationship between advertising and broadcasters have influence on the content of the news that we watch or not. Both the SABC and E-TV have an obligation to inform, educate and entertain the public.

Starting with the public broadcaster (SABC), I would like to first give background information as to what is expected in terms of information dissemination. A consultation of the ICASA website reveals that: The Authority (ICASA) believes that the fundamental responsibility of the public broadcaster is to provide original programming of direct relevance to the public it serves. In this regard the Authority expects the public broadcasting service to provide viewers and listeners with access to regular and accurate news and information. This ranges from reporting of daily news to the examination of current concerns both local and national. The public service plays a central role in democracy (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>). By the South Africans or the public it is meant the entire citizenry not a certain sector of the populace. Mpofu (1995: 15) has written: Minority interests should be catered for. Minority should not only be classified in terms of race, but also in terms of gender, language and socio-economic status. At the cost of repetition I would like to quote a line from the ICASA Act which stipulates that: The first duty of the public broadcaster is to provide service to the entire territory of the nation, where there are inhabitants to be served (ibid.). This, the SABC has failed to accomplish; it has failed to fulfil this expectation firstly in terms of languages that it employs in its news transmission.

The SABC has failed to inform all South Africans in their own or languages that they prefer to be communicated to in. South Africa since the inception of democracy in 1994 has eleven official languages. These languages are Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Sotho, Pedi, siSwati, XiTsonga, Tswana, TshiVenda, Xhosa and Zulu. They all deserve to be treated equally at the national level. The constitution demands that these languages be developed, promoted and enjoyed nationally but the television industry has chosen its special languages. It is almost eight years since the inception of democracy but some ethnic groups still can't be informed in their own languages.

Currently the SABC broadcasts its news in seven languages. It caters for the information of the Afrikaans, English, Sepedi, Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa and Zulu language speakers. There are no news programmes for the Ndebele, siSwati, TshiVenda and XiTsonga speaking people. The speakers of these languages depend on the former languages news bulletins for their information. In political terms these marginalised language speakers are denied their constitutional right. They are deprived of the right to information that the constitution grants them. The language clause in the constitution is aimed at guaranteeing principles of democracy, equality and human dignity for all South Africans writes Mpofu (1996:49). This language bias by the SABC signals its disregard of this clause. The ignoring of the aforementioned ethnic groups is a result of the SABC's desire to attract large audiences and lucrative advertisers as a consequence.

According to Clara Nzima, the decision not to have news bulletins in Ndebele, siSwati TshiVenda and XiTsonga languages was a convenient agreement reached between the SABC channels. While the exclusion of

these languages is convenient for the public broadcaster, it has some negative impact on the language speakers. Mpofu argues: The exclusion of other languages might mean an imposition of external constraints on the potential contribution of speakers of those languages to society and limits the extent to which they get rewards from the society Mpofu (1996: 50). As business units, the SABC channels have each different target audiences, which they think suits and like the programmes they broadcast. She [Clara Nzima] pointed out that the latter ethnic groups are proportionally lower or fewer in numbers than the Sotho, Pedi, Xhosa, Tswana and Zulu language speakers. This according to her renders them unprofitable when it comes to attracting advertisers since news bulletins are one of the draw or pulling cards of advertisers because of the large and stable audiences they attract. She said these languages are seen as an economic nightmare by the SABC since news bulletins have large audiences and broadcasting in languages with fewer listeners would mean a decline in audience ratings and therefore lesser advertising revenue.

On the surface [since this is not openly stated] it appears as if they are catering for the interests of the majority, but in reality they are pushed by a desire for financial gains to ignore the minority ethnic groups. This act by the SABC validates McQuail's (1994:205) statement that: It is usually impossible to distinguish unacceptable pressure (the act of yielding to it) from the general tendency of the media to try and please as many of their audiences (and advertisers) as possible and to avoid hurting minorities or anchoring anti-social activities. This statement explains the current situation at the SABC concerning news or information dissemination. We are made to believe that the public broadcaster works according to the

majority demands while it is pushed by its economic desire to ignore other languages. The failure by the public broadcaster to disseminate information in all official languages signals some negative influence by advertising revenue when one takes into consideration what Nzima stated as mentioned above. Although advertisers don't have direct influence on news programming, market or economic censorship⁸ by the SABC serves the purpose and it threatens the information of the minority groups.

There is a logic in the advertising based media, which favours a convergence of media tastes and consumption patterns (less diversity). This is because homogenous audiences are often more interesting to advertisers than heterogeneous and dispersal markets (unless they are very large markets), writes McQuail (1994: 160). This is what is happening at the SABC. SABC One is biased towards the young English, Xhosa and Zulu speaking people. This is mainly due to the fact that young people are the majority in this country. Secondly the latter two tend to have or speak more or less similar languages. Xhosa and Zulu are both Nguni languages and are cost effective in terms of programming. The Xhosa speakers understand the Zulu content and the same thing applies to the Zulu with Xhosa content. They fit exactly into the homogenous category of audiences. SABC Two on the other hand broadcasts to the Afrikaans, Sotho, Pedi, and Tswana speakers. The Afrikaans-speakers, although not a majority have disposable income and are therefore attractive to advertisers. The latter three become cost effective since their languages are dialectic to each other. This channel

⁸ Market or economic censorship in this instance refers to internal evaluation of the profitability of the programme by the broadcasting institutions themselves.

like SABC One interchanges the use of these languages in its news programming.

SABC Three on the other hand is biased towards the Metropolitan English speaking people according to Mrs. Sambo. Its audiences rate between 7 and 8 LSMs (Living Standard Measures) according to the 2000 Consumerscope⁹ by the All Media Products Survey (AMPS). As a result they have more access to serious political and economical news. In addition to the ordinary or traditional news programmes, there is Special Assignments, which provides this channel's viewers with current affairs. In addition to this, these viewers have access to worldwide news through Cable News Network (CNN). They also have access to parliamentary news whenever there are serious issues. The latter shows and confirms that those with money have more access to news than the have-nots. This makes valid McQuail's (1994: 161) statement that: Aside from differences of content preferences and interests which may be linked with social class, the better off can (and do) normally pay more for media and are more interesting targets for high value consumer products. Although this is hard to prove, the claim that SABC Three gets a lion's share of advertising revenue seems to be true. This is also evident in the kind of programmes it brings to its viewers. SABC Three viewers tend to be more informed and catered for because this channel manages to attract lucrative advertisers, since there is more trust in the buying power of these audiences by advertisers. Clara Nzima also confirmed the scooping of lucrative advertisers by SABC Three.

⁹ The Consumerscope brings the LSMs continuum to life thus enabling marketers and advertisers to see beyond the statistics into the hearts, heads, homes and neighbourhood of their customers.

Another sign of advertising influence on SABC news bulletins can be witnessed in their content [or topics that they treat] and the way in which they are presented. Like many broadcasters who are dependent on advertising revenue, the SABC is not immune from the trend of selling news as commodity to advertisers. While news are not allowed to take sponsorship from any economic institutions, advertisers are allowed to buy airtime in news bulletins. This has led to the shifting of news values by the SABC in order to accommodate the advertisers interests. Since issues and controversial news [like mismanagement of public funds or white collar crime] are said to offend financial institutions, there has been a decline in investigative news in such matters. The SABC news bulletins have tended to include more and more sensational and less informative news.

Franklin (1997: 4) argues: Since the late 1980s the pressures on news media to win viewers and readers in an increasingly competitive market have generated revised editorial ambitions. News media have increasingly become part of the entertainment industry instead of providing a forum for the informed debate on key issues of public concern. The same thing is happening with the SABC news and the situation is worsening since the inception of news programmes by E-TV. The (1999) Media Monitoring Project report states that: There is a tendency in television to concentrate more on events than issues. Baker (1996: 215) commenting on the SABC news programmes argues: There is absence of investigative and fresh news on the SABC. He attributes this to the over-dependence on news wire services and the organisation's recovering events that have already been covered by some other news sources. Prediction also seems to be dominant. The public is always told of the things they almost know since they are told

a long time before they occur. Take the World Conference Against Racism for instance, the public was told about it some months before its actual happening in September 2000.

The SABC news has become some kind of a news magazine. The order and the presentation of news, which is always short, snappy, colorful and attention grabbing consequently simplifies and dramaticizes news and issues. News items usually consist of the headlines, little verbal content, and more visuals, which serve to make the news appear more factual (MMP: 2000). This statement by the MMP is a true reflection of what is currently happening with SABC news broadcast. It is true that pictures and visuals contribute towards making news stories more lively and real, but too much dependence on them can nullify the informative part of news, since they usually don't add anything new. This dependence on visuals [which is aimed at making listening to news more interesting or entertaining] flaws the purpose of news programmes. The informative part of news gets undermined. The public needs to know about the cause and issues surrounding events that they are told about. But unfortunately the reliance on visuals deprives them of that opportunity.

Besides the news bulletins dependence on the visuals, the SABC news values and the journalistic ethics seem to have changed. Personalities, crime and tragedy have become the main focus of news gatherers for the SABC. The reading of the MMP report also reveals that During the election period events that normally would not be newsworthy such as a walk about by a political leader suddenly becomes newsworthy (MMP, 1999: 28). While this is most noticeable during the election period, it does not start an end

during the elections, it has been happening before and continues beyond the elections. Broadcasting of non-news events has also increased to include the report of events like celebrity weddings and their personal problems. Crime and disasters are some aspects of news that get too much attention of the public broadcaster. The high news values of crime on television could be attributed to crime's dramatic nature and the negativity, as it is always bad news that make good news according to the MMP report.

This view is also shared by Branston and Stafford (1996: 137) when they state: If it's news, it's bad news, constructive events are much less likely to feature as news than a catastrophe. This is due to the fact that real news and issues take time to work while events don't. Crime and tragedy are easy to cover since there is no research required for something, which has already happened. There is no follow up into the reported crimes and tragedies unless if it is of international concern. Under situations where news have become a commodity and where time is the determinant of the media's success, issues stand no chance of being attended to. Sustaining their argument Branston and Stafford go on to say: News take the normal for granted, and as a result is driven to make stories out of the deviant, crime, dissidence, and disorder.

Another flaw with the SABC news bulletins is the lack of professionalism by journalists or reporters. There is too much dependence on ready-made news from the news agencies and the so-called reliable sources. Journalists appear to be failing to investigate stories for themselves and that sometimes leads to the broadcast of inaccurate news and uncertainty in terms of information dissemination. Take the broadcast of President Laurent

Kabila's death for instance. The public broadcaster didn't hesitate to report it even though there was too much uncertainty about his condition and whereabouts after the shooting. Even the reliable sources were not sure about whether he was dead or alive until a couple of days when he was confirmed dead. The premature report of Kabila's death signals the public broadcaster's commitment to be the one who comes with big news first. The SABC news has become a commodity and is also used to attract audiences and advertisers as a consequence.

However, pertaining to the structure and composition of news bulletins, the SABC is currently on following the procedure. There is some balance between the local and international, and priority is always given to local news [unless in the case of breaking news]. The news bulletins are structured in way that important news come first and least important comes towards the end of the bulletin before financial news and sport.

While there is a denial by the SABC that news has been commodified, the inclusion of news programmes and the number of audiences that watch them, in the rate cards indicates that news is indeed sold to advertisers. This is also proven by the fact that advertisers buy airtime in news programmes. Another sign of the news bulletins' commodification is the constant reminder [in a form of a promo] to the public to watch news. The promo encourages the public; giving some headlines of what news bulletins contain, to watch SABC news. E-TV news is [are] not immune from this tradition. Its news is [are] always advertised many times before the actual broadcast.

2.1 (b) E-TV news bulletins

The authority demands that the free to air [E-TV] private broadcaster must provide at least one hour of news every day. It expects it to at least provide half an hour of news packaged as a single programme during prime time¹⁰ every day. The broadcasting act demands that E-TV must include news and information programmes on a regular basis, including a discussion on matters of national and regional, and where appropriate local, significant and must meet the highest standards of journalism professionalism. Since the introduction of its news programmes in 1997, E-TV has been improving and shows some signs of compliance with the authority's expectations.

However, this does not mean E-TV has ideal news programmes. There is no huge difference between its news programmes and SABC news in terms of presentation. E-TV news like those of SABC has been commodified. Firstly, this is observable from the way in which they are presented, their nature and content, and from the amount of time of broadcast. E-TV since the 5th of February 2001 introduced hour-long news bulletin for every Monday to Wednesday. While the extension of time from thirty minutes to one hour has some positive effects, there is room to argue that this initiative was taken for economic benefits. According to Jamieson and Campbell (1994) [although referring to the American television] The increasing of local news programming was [is] motivated by the quest for advertising profits, especially to secure many sponsors, since news programmes attract affluent viewers. The introduction of an hour-long news bulletins have come up with both positive and negative effects.

Starting with the positive impact I would like to point out what the MMP's observation says. It has observed that: The decision to have an hour-long bulletin is a positive one and has potential to present issues in an in-depth and critical manner. This statement by the MMP is valid in the sense that the extension of time has led to the introduction of new items. There has been an increase in the emphasis and the increase in the number of national items too. There has also been an improvement in terms of structure. There is now a clear structural ordering of news items. The items of national and local concern are given prominence over items of international concern observed the MMP (<http://.web.sn.apc.org.MMP>).

The new items like the arts segment has come into being as result of the extended time. Arts, is one of the most ignored aspect of South African culture. The introduction of this segment has created opportunities to contribute to the development of arts and practices that have been ignored during the apartheid era. This item is significant in the sense that it discusses and promotes both local talent and locally produced programmes [especially music]. This popularises the most ignored works of art of South Africa and at the same fulfils the authority's expectation that broadcasters must contribute to the promotion of South African culture. The arts segment is important because it attends and deals with all kinds of artistic products.

The more things change is the more they remain the same, is a familiar phrase amongst transformation critiques. The same phrase is also apt with what E-TV new news bulletin are. The new E-TV news bulletins do not only

¹⁰ Prime time refers to the period from 17hoo to 23hoo in South African television.

include the extension of time but also features new elements, which are an enhancement of entertainment elements in these news bulletins. Franklin (1997: 5) writes: In television news bulletins, a commitment to newszak¹¹ is evident in programming formats in which one presenter talks to another, that reduces crucial events into a cozy chat show. The same thing characterises the E-TV news bulletins. This broadcaster's bulletins are always casually presented like an entertainment news magazine or a breakfast show. It is this channel's tradition for anchors to talk to each other and sometimes discuss issues during the course of news transmission. There is no formality in terms of the way the news anchors dress. The anchors are always on casual wear. The studio facilities like, the computers, desks and other newsroom equipment are always in full view during the course of the news transmission. While this is aimed at showing that the programme is live, these facilities have the tendency to disturb the viewers' concentration. Even the other studio or crewmembers can be seen moving up and down the studio. This too has the potential to disturb the viewer's concentration. When E-TV news starts, an anchor emerges from any where in the studio as if he or she is just arriving. Its anchors stand, lean against or sit on top of tables and desks. This is not traditional as opposed to the familiar situation where an anchor sits behind the table or a news desk.

Franklin (1997: 13) also argues: Another contemporary obsession is the live two-way, where the presenter in the studio gets the latest news from a correspondent live at the scene of the story, they are typically presented side by side on separate screens clearly and patronizingly labeled to avoid

¹¹ Newszak refers to news being turned in a commodity to attract advertisers. It's news turned into entertainment to attract a large audiences.

confusion. The suggestion implicit in the two-way is clear: this news programme is being up to date that the news is happening and unfolding even as the programme is being transmitted. This [E-TV] broadcaster's news bulletins are always characterised by too much dependence on the live two-way system. In addition to this [also signaling the commodification of news by E-TV] is its creation of the image that its news is always live not a recorded programme. This broadcaster has even created a phrase or a promo, which enhances the live nature of its news bulletins. It says: catch E-TV news live at seven, by eight o'clock it's history. There is a similar one for the ten o'clock news. This reminder I would like to call it, is aimed at attracting and drawing large audiences as possible since it is always accompanied by highlights of the forth-coming news.

Branson and Stafford (1996: 136) argue: Frenzied circulation and ratings wars between organizations have tended to accelerate the professional's emphasis on being the first with the big story rather than the one that got the story right. This trend is accentuated by new technology, such as digitalized cameras, which means a reporter can input a story with photos into a news-desk terminal as soon as it is written. E-TV news journalism indulges in this form of reporting. This broadcaster, as a result of indulging in the latter once fell a hoax victim. Early in 2001 E-TV was misled by its so-called reliable sources and the police, to broadcast police training exercise as a kidnapping case. The police at Wonderboom orchestrated a false kidnapping as an exercise for its novices but due to lack of research and verification it ended up being reported as real by E-TV. This could be attributed to this broadcaster's commitment to be the one who came with a big story, which is

also a commitment to newszak, to use Franklin conceptualisation of such acts.

E-TV news, like the SABC news are also characterised by the dependence on visuals, which while guaranteeing authenticity in a way that words cannot, also fail to provide detailed information on the causes and issues around the events that they are reporting. In addition the modification of economic and weather forecast news [which is characterised by a colourful screen], has turned these news items/segments into an ineffective silent segment. E-TV just shows the figures with less verbal explanation in background. This makes it difficult for someone who is not familiar with both geographical and economic figures to understand them. This broadcaster s news bulletins are also structured and presented in a way that makes watching news some kind of entertainment. The modification of news bulletins I would like to argue was undertaken with a mission to attract large audiences and therefore advertisers.

San Reddy, one of E-TV news anchors confirmed this in an interview with Phat Joe ¹². He said they want to make sure that watching news on E-TV will never be the same and that they want to make sure watching news is not boring for their audience. In addition to that Mr. Golding has recently stated in E24/7 [a newspaper supplement], September 2001, that: *E News Live* is one of the top performers in terms of pulling audiences. Pulling large audiences automatically means attracting large advertisers and it is a clear indication that E-TV news are [is] sold to advertisers.

Bringing this section to an end, I would like to state that while there is no empirical evidence showing advertisers' direct influence on SATV news, the modification and advertisement of news bulletins by both broadcasters indicates their obsession with attracting large audiences and securing lucrative advertising deals as a result. The language is also one indication that broadcasters are indeed controlled and influenced by advertising interests in their programming.

2.2 An investigation of advertisers' influence on SATV drama programming

Influence needs not to be direct before one can say it's there. It comes in many ways, as this section will try to show that. Influence can be indirect and still be able to bring about the required or intended results. The same thing happens between advertisers and television. While advertisers don't interfere directly with the programming process, knowing what interests the audiences by the broadcasters works to the advantage of the advertisers since it is what they buy from the broadcasters. Propagators of media freedom have always argued that media be freed from control by government and economic institutions. The impact of the latter is said to be negative pertaining to the nurturing of the local public sphere programmes. Ronning (1994: 18) referring to television in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region argues: Foreign programmes dominate local television because of the idea that advertisers don't like African programmes and production. This section by looking at both the content and making a quantitative analysis of SATV drama verifies the validity or invalidity of arguments such as the one by Ronning.

¹² Phat Joe is E-TV's talk show host. His show starts at 9hoo every Thursday.

Esslin (1982: 77) argues: Television is a technological miracle, a wonderful new instrument of communication, capable of widening and enlarging mankind's horizons. It has given each individual a powerful means of increasing his or her awareness of the world and of his or her fellow human beings. Drawing on the latter statement and taking into account the history of South African television, whereby a majority of South Africans were marginalised, I would like to argue that television drama can contribute a lot towards the incorporation of those who were marginalised. Bird (1996: 61) commenting about South African drama writes: Drama on television has a role to play in developing cultural self-images for all South Africans. This is a special important task because apartheid strove to maintain a negative and inferior self-image for the majority of South Africans. Local drama should be encouraged as part of any PBS because of the need to retell of those South Africans who under apartheid rule were largely excluded from television. This applies and refers mainly to the Ndebele, Tsonga, Swati and Venda ethnic groups as I have already shown before. Like in the case of news programmes there was and still not enough television drama in these languages on television during the apartheid era.

The need for television drama to incorporate those who were marginalised before is also realised by the ICASA. The ICASA says: For the entertainment component of the mandate to be met, the quality and the quantity of drama on public broadcasting services will need to be improved and increased so that there is a similar standard on different languages services (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>). This expectation applies to both the SABC and E-TV [although the output is not supposed to be equal] since they

both have a public service obligation and local drama is part of it. The only exception in relation to E-TV drama concerns language. Currently E-TV does not have a language obligation; but while it has no obligation, it is also expected to cover a wide range of programmes. It can use any language it likes. Drawing on my observation I would like argue that both broadcasters still need to improve the contribution in this aspect of their public service role.

Starting with the public broadcaster, I would like point out that the public broadcaster has met the minimum local drama requirements in terms of quantity but still needs to improve on that and the quality of programmes it broadcasts. According to the 2000 Monitoring and Complaints Unit (MCU) report [which I used for my quantitative analysis], the SABC has fulfilled its drama requirements. By the time of monitoring, The entire public broadcaster was expected to have achieved at least thirty percent local television content during the South African television performance period. Each channel was expected to achieve at least twenty five percent local television content (<http://.www.ICASA.org.za>).

The Monitoring and Complaints Unit report reveals that SABC One has achieved 32%, SABC Two 57,6% and SABC Three achieved 49, 8 % local content. But these figures don t mean or that the SABC drama programming met the required percentage because it has managed to escape the influence of advertising. Too much could have been achieved if the advertising industry contributed positively. Although not directly stated, it appears from my interview with Ms Clara Nzima, Mr. Kefuoe Mohobane and Mrs Ntabiseng Sambo that the majority of local dramas that we watch depend on

the backing/support of advertisers. According to these SABC officials it is always difficult to get advertisers to buy airtime in African language dramas or to get sponsorship for them. Advertisers and media buyers tend to use language as an excuse to avoid buying airtime from local television content¹³. Sambo (2001) said media buyers are very reluctant to support African language drama claiming that they can't buy something they don't understand.

It is programmes with large audiences that usually enjoy support of economic institutions. *Yizo Yizo*¹⁴ is a classical example. Despite the controversy, which followed the broadcast of part one, the public broadcaster managed to make a sequel. This, the public broadcaster did because the first *Yizo Yizo* enjoyed a huge viewership and it also emerged from the research [which was conducted after its broadcast] that there is still a need or a demand for this drama amongst the youth. That is why the public broadcaster went on to make a sequel Clara Nzima pointed out. They were sure it was going to make profit since it is the audience ratings that determine the price to be paid by the advertisers for airtime.

Concerning the quality of drama programming and its content, the public broadcaster has up to present failed to improve the standards. The SABC is currently falling back to broadcasting and repeating old poor quality dramas of the 1980s and those from the early 1990s. The content of these dramas

¹³ Local television content means a television programme (excluding transmissions of sports events and compilations thereof, advertising, teletext and continuity announcement), which is produced by a broadcasting licensee, or by a person who is a citizen of and a permanent resident in the Republic of SA (<http://www.ICASA.org.za>).

¹⁴ *Yizo Yizo* is a Zulu/Xhosa drama that portrays the current problems facing the schools and the communities around township schools. Crime and drugs seem to be the main problems.

hardly deal with the post-apartheid situation. This is due to the fact that they were written during the apartheid era when no one ever taught freedom would be achieved in South Africa. In addition to that the government of that period did not allow any literary or art work that contains political connotations to be published. As a result these dramas are characterised by many anti-black stereotypes, which were aimed at brainwashing blacks and make them feel inferior about their past. Currently there are few post-apartheid dramas that deal with the current social issues. To name the few they are: *Soul City*¹⁵, *Khululeka*¹⁶, *Isidingo*¹⁷ and *Justice for All*¹⁸.

According to Murdock (1992: 21), Citizens must be able to recognise themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations on offer within the central communication sectors and be able to contribute to developing and extending these representations. The SABC has failed to accomplish this goal and it can be attributed firstly to its language bias. For financial gains, the public broadcaster tends to ignore broadcasting or taking certain ethnic groups dramas. There are many Afrikaans, English, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Pedi and Tswana dramas than there are siSwati, Ndebele, TshiVenda and XiTsonga ones in their programmes. These are a result and sign of market censorship by the SABC. The latter ethnic groups are ignored because they are proportionally low in number and in addition to that they have no disposable income. They have lower chances of attracting lucrative

¹⁵ This is a local public sphere drama that frequents on SABC one. It treats a lot of societal issues ranging from education, unemployment, crime, health and human rights in general.

¹⁶ Like *Soul City* this drama is also concerned about educating people about their rights and address a whole range of societal issues.

¹⁷ This is one of South Africa's local soaps at SABC three. It shows the South African race relations and is set in the post apartheid era. It reflects the life experiences of the South African mines. In addition to that it is an SABC project.

¹⁸ *Justice for All* looks at the current South African race and court relations.

advertisers. The English and Afrikaans speakers get much recognition than any other language because they have disposable income, which is what advertisers want. In addition to that they are the ones who control the advertising industry. This confirms McQuail's (1994: 138) argument that: Commercialization has been associated with manipulation, consumerism, lack of integrity and lack of originality and creativity. It is said to lead to homogeneity and neglect of minorities who do not provide profitable audiences or advertising.

The SABC officials deny that advertising revenue influences the choice of programmes that they broadcast. They argue that it is audience popularity and programme demand, which influences their programming. This according to Bird is not in any event an ideal guide according to the public broadcasting policy. Bird's argument is important because it highlights the disregard of the broadcasting policy in order to gain financially by the SABC. While the public broadcaster does not admit this, the message implicit in the statement is that they are controlled by the demand is that audience and programme popularity means the attraction of advertisers. This is in conflict with the ICASA's expectation that people must be treated as citizens than as consumers.

Ward (1995: 146) argues: Programming decisions directly affect the commercial validity of media organizations which rely on advertising. The one basic rule which governs the mainstream media is that they must attract audiences or readers. This statement is apt with what is happening on E-TV programming. While E-TV is showing some commitment to improving its local content programming, it has failed to meet the required ten percent of

local content drama. It has put too much effort on reality programmes and comedies. According to the MCU report, E-TV has only achieved 2% of local content drama. This, I would like to attribute to this broadcaster's keen interest in comedies and actuality or reality programmes since they are cheaper to produce than drama. Although E-TV has some important local content drama like *Backstage*¹⁹, *Madam and Eve*²⁰, and *Save Our Souls*²¹, which deal mainly with the post-apartheid issues, it still needs to extend its boundaries and accommodate more local content dramas and employ more African languages. The aforementioned drama programmes reflect and appropriate the current race relations [creating humour thus creating racial tolerance between different races in the new South Africa].

However, the desire to attract advertisers weakens this channel's potential to nurture and increase its public sphere programmes. It is mainly interested in imported or foreign entertainment programmes and movies. This is due to the fact that as outlined by Herman and McChesney that: Media owners are concerned to provide a congenial media environment for advertising goods. The result is the preference for entertainment over controversy. Entertainment programmes as opposed to public sphere programmes are believed to draw a large number of audiences. It becomes logical for the broadcasters to go for large audiences since Audiences as measured by ratings determine the success or failure of programming or content ,

¹⁹ *Backstage* is a local youth drama. Its content evolves around the life in a dance school. This drama has a very significant role towards the development and cultivation of South African talent, culture and arts. It also deals with societal problems like drugs use by the youth, rape, and women abuse.

²⁰ This locally produced comedy shows South African race relations; playing with the stereotypes thus trying to create racial harmony and tolerance amongst South African races and ethnic groups.

²¹ This locally produced comedy reflects the life and interaction between university students of different races.

according to Jamieson and Campbell (1997: 153). Audience research is also fundamental to the broadcasters' decision of what to broadcast or not.

In conclusion, I would like to state that, since broadcasters engage in audience behaviour [meaning what is listened to, watched, read and bought] and audience norms research [meaning what entertains or offends the audience] indicates that there is advertising influence on what the public watch. Advertisers are willing to pay for a stable, reliable and predictable audience. This pushes TV programmers into populist areas as soap operas, situation comedies and variety programmes. These programmes have a universal appeal and they tend to displace serious documentaries, current affairs programmes and the like to use Trowler's (1988:78).

Programming on TV has been affected as channels seek to deliver a large and predictable audience to attract advertisers. Scheduling strategies are used to manipulate audience numbers. One is to transmit light entertainment programmes early in the evening, following them with a sequence of programmes that expand and consolidates mass audiences (Trowler, 1988: 79). SABC One's daily programming is a typical example of what Trowler is talking about. After youth educational programmes which end at five in the afternoon, the public broadcaster starts the prime time with light entertainment usually in a form of foreign soaps like the *Days of Our Lives* and *The Bold and The Beautiful*, comedy or variety programmes like *Jam Alley* on Fridays, preparing the audience for news bulletins. After the news bulletins comes *Generations*, which is followed by entertainment

programmes up until the end of the South African Television Period²². The same thing applies to E-TV programming. After the youth programmes [Craze-E], follows a talk show [Oprah Winfrey], comedy, drama [Backstage], news and the entertainment in the form of movies onwards. E-TV usually has three movies that are separated by infomercials or other movies trailers after ten in the night. This has become a routine for these broadcasters.

²² This refers to the period between six in the morning until the dead hour where every program stops and music starts.

Chapter Three

Denying the obvious - an analysis of interviews with the SABC officials

One may consider the media as a system in a broader sense as not only interacting with the political regulators, the media producers and distributors, but also as interconnected, with the industries of advertising, public relations, marketing and often opinion and audience research as well writes Mcquail (1994: 57). As implied by this statement, media as a social system is very complex to understand. The same thing applies pertaining to the understanding televisions relationship with the advertisers. Many things need to be considered in order to come up with a sensible conclusion as to whether this relationship poses any threat to the nurturing of the public sphere or not. One needs to understand very well the nature of the advertiser-media relationship [advertiser-SATV relations in this case]. This chapter drawing mainly on first hand information from interviews with some of the public broadcaster s officials, provides a cross section/examination of the actual relationship between advertisers and broadcasters.

According to McQuail (1994: 112), The decline in strength of the public broadcasting model has been marked by the increasing tendencies towards privatization and commercialization of broadcasting. He goes on further to say: This has involved most notably, the transfer of media channels and operations from public to private ownership, increased levels of financing from advertising and the franchising of new commercial competitors for public broadcasting channels (ibid.). The SABC is going through the same process and it has led to its dependence on advertising revenue. That is why

it is important for this chapter to investigate the impact that the relationship with advertisers have on the public broadcasting service role.

There is a tendency for Those in official or establishment positions in the media to argue that advertising has no effect on its nature and content argues Trowler (1988: 74). The same thing happened to me during my interviews with the SABC officials as I mentioned earlier. Although individually interviewed on different days, they all denied the presence of advertising influence on both the public broadcaster s programming and the content of the programmes they broadcast. They [all] argued that the SABC programming is guided by its commitment to and compliance with the ICASA s public broadcasting policy. They claimed the public broadcaster is committed to the mandate obligations. Mr. Kefuoe Mohobane, the drama - commissioning editor at SABC Two stated in my interview with him: We are committed to the ICASA regulations. Before making anything else we make sure that the mandate obligations are fulfilled. Everyday programming must have local content programming (Mohobane: 2001). A close analysis of the actual SABC programmes reveals some contradictions between what Mohobane and his colleagues say and the actual public broadcaster s operations and programmes. While the SABC officials argue that they are committed to the mandate, the actual programmes as I have indicated through the analysis of news and drama programmes reflect the opposite.

It emerged from my interview with the SABC officials that advertisers have no direct influence on the SABC programming process and its programme content. This according to them is because advertisers don t form part of the programming and decision-making teams. They argued there is no direct

communication between the programmers and the advertisers. By advertisers it is meant both commodity sellers and the agencies that arrange advertising deals/contracts for them. The SABC according to Nzima²³ leaves the advertising negotiations to the Action Station²⁴. She also stated that the programme and the commissioning editors have autonomy to do programming independently. It is after the programming is finished that they hand the rate cards or programme schedules over to the Action Station to be sold to advertisers. The important thing to note in this statement is that there is some interaction between the broadcaster and advertisers. The key word in this statement is that there are some sales going on between these two parties. It is also important to note that it is advertisers who make the final decisions concerning buying or not buying airtime in a particular programme. Advertisers cannot be made to buy into something they don't like and it makes logic that the public broadcaster makes all it can to attract advertisers. Ward confirms this when he writes: Advertising agencies also produce the ads, choose the media in which they will run, and purchase the broadcast slots or print media space required to sell their client's products and services to the audiences they have targeted (Ward, 1995: 148).

Drawing on the abovementioned statements by the SABC officials and the one by Ward, I want to restate that, influence needs not to be direct in order for it to have impact. Considering Ward's statement one realises that indirect influence is at play between the advertisers and the SABC. The SABC conducts audience research before it introduces new programmes. Jamieson

²³ Nzima is the current SABC one's drama commissioning editor and she was the acting Channel Manager by the time of an interview.

²⁴ The Action Station is the SABC external sales department. It is responsible for negotiating and selling the public broadcaster's audience and program to the advertisers.

and Campbell's (1997: 153) statement is a confirmation of this when they write: Advertisers and programmers are interested in psycho demographics- The study of the interests, attitudes, and activities of specific population groups, because they may be better predictors of viewing habits and consumption pattern than age, sex, income and location. They are supposed to know how does the public feel about the issues that are contained in that particular programme. This gives them a clue how many people are likely to watch that programme. Since according to Jamieson and Campbell (1997: 153): The price of an ad is determined by the size and the make up of the audience, the research department has an obligation to find out what interests/entertains and offends different kinds of audiences, so as to know what programme suits which audience. The SABC as a result knows very well what programme is suitable for what audience and also know what to do in order to attract large audiences; which are a draw card for advertisers. The making of the Yizo Yizo sequel is one example that research influences programming. The research by the SABC research department indicated that there is a huge demand for this drama. The public broadcaster seeing that did not hesitate to make a sequel. It didn't take into consideration that people were divided on this issue. It only looked at its own gains and overlooked the moral concerns of the other viewers who felt the drama was not good for the children and the entire society.

A consultation of the SABC One 2001 March's rate cards indicates that Yizo Yizo enjoys a viewership of 62 000 people per episode. These figures were the largest for the SABC One by the time of the Yizo Yizo Two's broadcast. The advertising price was very high as a result. Showing commitment and keen interest on advertising revenue by the SABC is its

refusal to withdraw this drama when the public started complaining that it promotes crime and violence. Defending the channel's continuing with the broadcast of this drama, Nzima said in her announcement to the public: Yizo Yizo is educational to the young people and they won't stop showing it since it's in this broadcaster's mandate to educate the public. While this is true, also covert in the public broadcaster's refusal to withdraw this drama was the nightmare of losing their biggest advertising revenue draw card/puller. The demand and supply became a rhetoric used by the SABC to justify continuing with controversial drama. It claimed it was responding to the viewers demand. The disregard of the public's complaints and refusal by the SABC to stop broadcasting this drama is one indication that advertising influences their programming.

Although the SABC officials deny that advertisers have an impact on what we watch, the repetition of old programmes is one indication of the advertisers' influence. The public broadcaster says it does not have money to sponsor and produce or buy new programmes. According Nzima, it is cheaper to use the ready-made products since one goes to the shelf and there is no money to go out. In addition to that the production of local programmes is expensive and takes a long time. Before the public broadcaster accepts any production it has to send its briefs to all producers both black and white for evaluation. The failure of the public broadcaster to broadcast new programmes is also due to the lack of funds or support for these programmes by the financial institutions, Nzima also pointed out. This confirms Jamieson and Campbell's statement that: Producers of content (including sub-systems of reporters, actors, camera crews, labor unions, and publishers) are financed by advertisers or backers who in turn depend on

advertisers for their money. The Action Station's Mrs Sambo contradicting their statement that advertisers don't influence the programming confirmed this when she stated that: "Media buyers are always reluctant to buy airtime in African language programmes."

She stated that: "advertisers [including media buyers] are themselves audiences. They prefer supporting something that they will also watch. They also watch television and the same programmes that the SABC broadcasts. That is why they prefer buying into foreign or locally produced English and Afrikaans programmes. It is all about affinity to these languages since the advertising industry is still dominated by whites. This statement alone accounts for the shortage of African language dramas in SABC channels. Nzima also confirmed this when she stated that: "Many workshops have been tried in vain to change the advertisers' attitude towards local African language programmes. This also makes valid McQuail's (1994: 207) argument that: "It's obvious that the structure of much of the mass media industry in most capitalist countries reflects the interests of advertisers, something that has developed historically along with other social and economic changes. This means that the content of South African television depends on those who have money. Tomaselli (1997: 149) commenting on transformation of South African media argues: "The public sphere largely remained under the control of property-owning people, whose new-found autonomy is rooted in the sphere of commodity exchange. Implicit in this statement is that it does not matter that some blacks are now in the forefront of some media institutions including the SABC. Economic interests always prevail."

Mr. Mohobane, although not giving in to the argument that advertising shapes the public broadcaster's programming confirmed that the advertisers are always bias. He pointed out that too much money comes from Afrikaans speaking people and therefore goes to white oriented programmes. My argument based on the abovementioned information, is that the relationship between advertising and SATV [especially SABC] has a negative impact on programming and the nature of the programmes we watch as the public.

According to my informants, all the public broadcaster's operations are based on and are guided by the ICASA policies. Sambo stated: Our actions are always monitored by the ICASA. The viability of our broadcasting licence is dependent on our fulfilment of the public service mandate (Sambo 2001). While this is true, there is no guarantee that the SABC will always perform as expected. Confirming this is a consultation of the 2000 MCU report, which reveals some loopholes in the monitoring methods.

The MCU conducts regular programming spot checks in an attempt to ascertain the degree to which information by broadcasters match the actual broadcasts. However, this system is open to abuse since the MCU relies on the honesty and goodwill of broadcasters to provide accurate information. Already there is a trend among some broadcasters to merely copy the same information every week (MCU: 2000). This is well put by McQuail (1994: 163) when he writes: The existence of checks and balance cannot, however, obscure several facts of life of media operations. One is that, ultimately, commercial media have to make profits to survive, and this often involves taking decisions, which directly influence programming Publicly owned media do not escape an equivalent economic logic. Since no one gets to

check whether the data that is presented by the SABC to the MCU, one cannot boast and say the SABC fulfils all the requirements.

Nzima also denied that advertising has some influence on the content of the SABC programmes. She pointed out that the public broadcaster has autonomy and integrity in terms of the editorial content. She pointed out that the SABC does not allow product placement²⁵ and when they do, it always closely watched to avoid interference with the programme content. But the placement of the Pap Mix²⁶ in the recent past nullifies their denial. The mentioning of this product interferes with the content of Generations. Nzima also stated that advertisers and sponsors only know of the content when the programme and the idea have already been conceived. Advertisers or possible sponsors are given a synopsis or the flashes of the programme together with the Living Standard Measures (LSMs) in order for them to know what the programme contains. It is from these that they can decide whether they buy airtime or sponsor that particular programme or not. While this might be true there are some signs of conforming or of prioritising the advertisers' interests by the SABC, such as the promotion of PAP Mix that I have just mentioned.

Conformity can also be seen in Mrs. Sambo's statement where she stated: Rate cards are given to advertisers three months ahead of the actual month of broadcast. This according to her is done to give advertisers enough time to plan. This three-month period in my opinion does not only give the advertisers a chance to plan but also gives the public broadcasters time to

²⁵ This refers to the situation where by the advertisers negotiate that their product be made part of the program content; especially allowing it to be shown during the course of the program as part of it.

consider making some changes in case there is some dissatisfaction or request from the advertisers side. Taking into account that Mrs. Sambo also stated that advertisers do come to the Action Station for further discussion and advice on how best can they sell or advertised their products, I would like to argue that this three-month period is convenient for both parties. It allows them to reach a more or less mutual consensus. To substantiate my argument concerning this, I would like to use Mr. Marcel Golding's statement [although referring to E-TV] when he stated [in E24/7, September 2001] that: Significantly the channel has posted dramatic increase in advertising volumes with many of the more popular slots booked months in advance. This statement indicates that attracting many advertising deals is the motive behind giving long-time allowance. It shows some similarity in the way both SABC and E-TV negotiate advertising deals.

Sponsorship, unlike in the case of classical advertising does not include buying of airtime but is characterised by the negotiation of the ways in which the sponsors want the exposure of their products to be. Implicit in the aforementioned statement [and also indicating the influence of advertisers and sponsors] is that the success of a particular programme depends on the advertisers and sponsors willingness to support its production or broadcast through sponsorship buying airtime or sponsorship. A failure to impress them means its failure to be broadcasted. This means that economic institutions like advertisers and sponsors usually have things done their own way since broadcasters need their money to sustain their services to the public.

²⁶ Pap mix is the newly introduced spice that is used to add taste in porridge or pap as they say.

Conclusion

South African television has emerged from the Mandela era more diverse than before, both in terms of its content and programming. The introduction of E—TV also helped towards the enhancement of diversity. Its introduction increased the points of view and angles from which the public can see the representation of their life experiences and also receive diverse information. However, there is no revolution without casualties since the transformation of South African television, which included the commercialisation of SABC [in the first phases] and the reduction of government subsidy, also brought with it some negative impact. Bringing this paper to an end, I would like to state that the commercialisation of the public broadcaster (SABC) has some negative impact on its role as a watchdog for the public. The same thing applies to E-TV programming. I therefore state that the relationship between advertising and South African television poses a threat to the nurturing of the public service programmes and the public sphere as a consequence. Both the SABC and E-TV are concerned with pleasing advertisers thus sacrificing their public service obligations. This paper through the analysis of both the content and the nature of both E-TV and SABC news and drama programmes has indicated how these broadcasters through economic and self-censorship lead to the ignoring of the public sphere programmes in favour of entertainment. This is a result of the fact that entertainment programmes have the potential to attract large audiences, which is the broadcasters draw card for advertising. It has also shown that the SABC tends to ignore certain sector of the population because they are a minority or don t have disposable income. It tends to give preference to majority groups because they are attractive to advertisers. While both broadcasters have some public sphere programmes, there is an everyday increase in

entertainment programmes. There is also a modification of news bulletins, which includes some entertainment elements as we see in the case of new E-TV news bulletins. This channel's news programmes have been extended from thirty minutes to a full hour of news. This was done to allow the inclusion of entertainment elements in news. The arts segment is one of those entertainment elements. These entertainment elements in news were introduced to attract large audiences. The SABC on the other hand sidelines certain ethnic groups in its news or information dissemination e.g. there are no news programmes in Ndebele, siSwati, TshiVenda and XiTsonga languages. There are very few local drama programmes in these languages. E-TV also follows the same trend. Both broadcasters give preference to the same ethnic languages that are catered for in news broadcasting. All these acts of conforming to the economic interests contribute to the maintenance of the pre-1994 status quo. I therefore conclude that the advertiser/media relationship is antithetical towards the nurturing of the public sphere and derails television from fulfilling its watchdog and democratic roles.

References

- 1 Berger, G. Towards an Analysis of South African Media transformation 1994-1999 , Transformation , vol.38, 1999.
- 2 Branston, G. and Stafford, R. (1996), The Media Student s Book, London: Routledge.
- 3 Bird, E. (1996), Drama Programming and the Public Broadcaster , Public Service Broadcasting: Policy Directions Towards 2000, Mpofu, A., Manhondo, S. and Tomaselli K. (eds.), Johannesburg: Anthropos Publishers.
- 4 Boyd-Barrett, O. & Rantanen, T. (1998), The Globalization of News, London: Sage.
- 5 Curran, J. and Gurrevitch M. (eds), (1992), Mass Media and Society, London: Edward Arnold.
- 6 Emdon, C. (1998), Ownership and Control of Media in South Africa , Media and Democracy in South Africa, Duncan, J. &Seleoane, M. (eds.), Johannesburg &Pretoria: HRSC &FXI.
- 7 Esslin, M. (1982), The Age of Television, San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company.
- 8 Franklin, B. (1997), Newszak & News Media, London &New York: Arnold.
- 9 Herman, E.S. & McChesney, R. W. (1997), The Global Media, London: Cassell.
- 10 Holt, A. (1996), Advertising and Public Service Broadcasting Outlines For Charting A New Relationship, Public Service Broadcasting Policy Directions Towards 2000, Mpofu, A., Manhondo, S. and Tomaselli, K. (eds.), Johannesburg: Anthropos Publishers.
- 11 [HTTP://WEB.SN.APC.ORG.MMP](http://WEB.SN.APC.ORG.MMP)
- 12 [HTTP://WWW.ICASA.ORG.ZA](http://WWW.ICASA.ORG.ZA)

- 13 Jamieson, K.H. and Campbell, K.H. (1997), The Interplay of Influence: News, Advertising, Politics and The Mass Media, London: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- 14 Keane, J. (1993), Media in Transition: From Totalitarianism to Democracy, Johannesburg: Anthropos Publishers.
- 15 Louw, P. E. (1993), Restructuring The Media: Can Socialist and Liberation Principles Be Combined , Louw, P. E. (ed.), South African Media Policy, Belleville: Anthropos.
- 16 Media Monitoring Project: So What s New In the Elections, Johannesburg: Media Monitoring Project 1999.
- 17 McQuail, D. (1994), Mass Communication Theory, London: Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: Sage Publishers.
- 18 Mpfu, A. (1996), The Role Of The Public Broadcasting In A Future South African Broadcasting Policy Research: The Framework Report , Public Service Broadcasting: Policy Directions Towards 2000, Mpfu, A., Manhondo, S. and Tomaselli, K. (eds.), Johannesburg: Anthropos Publishers.
- 19 Murdock, G. (1992), Citizens, consumers, and public culture , Media Cultures: Reappraising Transitional Media, Schroder, C. and Skovmand, M. (eds.), London & New York: Routledge.
- 20 Ronning, H. (1994), Media and Democracy: Theories and Principles With Reference to An African Context, Harare: Sapes Books.
- 21 Sinclair, R. (1999), The South African Advertising Book, Johannesburg & New York: International Thomson Publishing.
- 22 Trolwer, P. (1988), Sociology in Action: Investigating The Media, London: Unwin Hyman.
- 23 Ward, I. (1995), Politics of the Media, South Melbourne: Macmillan.

Bibliography

Broadcasting Act of 1999 (document downloaded from the ICASA website)

Consumerscope 2000:Bringing LSMs to life, Langschmidt & Chipps,
Compiled by Privest Integrated Marketing Information.

Independent Communications Authority of South Africa, Discussion Paper
on the review of local content quotas, December 2000.

Media Monitoring Project elections 2000 update, Johannesburg: Media
Monitoring Project, 2000.

E-24/7, August 2001, Issue Number 2.

E-24/7, September 2001, Issue Number 3.

Interviews with SABC officials, January/February 2001