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ABSTRACT

Cultural and educational functions of public service broadcasting come at a fortuitous time, as the changing environment of broadcasting is on various agendas. At the heart of this is the question of the present and future status of public service broadcasting. Major changes have taken place in the political economy of the media and the world economy at large, technological advancement has resulted in privatization and commercialization of the media. In most societies where these changes have taken place, public service broadcasting has been threatened by the rapid rise of commercial institutions, resulting in stiff competition for audiences.

This study will examine the extent to which the adoption of the Commercialization Act (No 26) of 2001 in Zimbabwe has affected Radio Zimbabwe’s role as a public broadcaster. The study is based on the hypothesis that with the adoption of the Commercialization Act, Radio Zimbabwe is no longer playing its public service role effectively. The current nature of programming at Radio Zimbabwe as the research hopes to show will highlight tremendous changes towards a commercial logic. The study uses a combination of document analysis, secondary literature and qualitative interviews.
DEDICATION

To my beloved parents:
The late Amos Saurombe and Gladness Saurombe
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to a lot of people for making it possible for me to undertake this study. I am so grateful to my supervisor, Dr Murej, Mak’ Ochieng, for his encouragements and tireless efforts. I also want to thank the following individuals who contributed in many ways towards the completion of this work: Abigail Machoka, for your wise words always, Willie Chinyamurindi, Lefhuko Kesamang, for your encouragements and giving me resources; Hatikanganwi Mapudzi, for friendship and your tireless efforts to provide relevant information and sharing of archives. This thesis would not have been possible without the support of my classmates, Yudaya Nabukeera, Bernadette Mukonyora and Abeolong Ramakhula. Thank you for keeping encouraging me to continue. My family deserve special mention for encouraging and praying for me when I thought it best to quit. I wish to thank my mother, Gladness, brothers, Raymond, Witness and especially Amos for being there for me through it all. My sisters, Rudo, Dianah and Munya, for your sacrifices. I am also grateful to my beloved friend Eldry for your encouragements and prayers always. Above all, I wish to thank God, ‘Ebenezer’, thus far you have brought me. Several other individuals have also contributed to this work, though I’m unable to mention their names. May God bless you all.
# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AIPPA</td>
<td>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</td>
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<td>BAZ</td>
<td>Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>MDC</td>
<td>Movement for Democratic Change</td>
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<td>Public Order and Security Act</td>
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<td>PSB</td>
<td>Public Service Broadcasting</td>
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<td>RBC</td>
<td>Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>ZANLA</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army</td>
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<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front</td>
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<td>Zimbabwe African People’s Union</td>
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<td>ZBC</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings</td>
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<td>ZIPRA</td>
<td>Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army</td>
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study will investigate the impact of commercialization on public service broadcasting. The broadcast media are among the most important sources of information and culture in the society and most people especially in the Western countries spend more than half of their free time with the radio and television, more than they spend on anything else except work and sleep. However, broadcasting is not only important on an individual level: the broadcast media have also come to occupy a central position in the collective processes of social, political and cultural life (Scannell, 1989:157). Radio and television define social issues, orchestrate political debates and set cultural standards. The roles of broadcasting are constantly in transition. Particularly over the last decade, there has been an indisputable upheaval in the global broadcasting scene: while satellite dishes are becoming an integral part of the scenery and the number of commercial outlets are multiplying in the Western countries, one of the key questions has come to be: what is happening to national public service broadcasting (PSB) in this era of commercialization? (Raboy, 1996:28).

Cultural and educational functions of public service broadcasting come at a fortuitous time, as the changing environment of broadcasting is on various agendas. At the heart of these is the question of the present and future status of public service broadcasting (Raboy, 1996:79). Major changes have taken place in the political economy of the media and the world economy at large, technological advancement has resulted in privatization and commercialization of the media. In most societies where these changes have
taken place, public service broadcasting has been threatened by the rapid rise of commercial institutions, resulting in stiff competition for audiences.

Against the background set out above, this study aims to investigate the extent to which the commercialization of media services in Zimbabwe has affected Radio Zimbabwe’s programming. The study is based on the hypothesis that with the adoption of the Commercialization Act of 2001, Radio Zimbabwe will not play the public service role effectively. The current nature of programming at Radio Zimbabwe, as the research hopes to show, will highlight tremendous changes towards a commercial logic.

1.1 Background to the study

Broadcasting service was started in the then Southern Rhodesia in the 1930s when a radio transmitter was installed at the airport in Harare (then Salisbury) to provide guidance and weather reports to airplanes flying from England to South Africa (Amienyi and Igyor, 1996). What is peculiar about the beginning of broadcasting in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), though, is its focus on the white settler community at the exclusion of the majority black population (Moyo, 2006:200). As in most British colonies, broadcasting began as a service to connect the settler population to the mother colony; hence initial broadcasts were mostly retransmissions of the British Broadcasting Corporations programmes. Broadcasting was used as a tool for divide and rule: there was the English service, the African service which broadcasted mainly in Shona, and Radio Mthwakazi which broadcasted entirely in Ndebele. Radio Harare, the African service of the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation (RBC) was used to fan tribal hatred between Shona and Ndebele-speaking people. As Moyo (2006:205) noted, clashes between ZANLA and ZIPRA, real and imagined were emphasized to give the picture of an incoherent nationalist movement. To downplay the significance of the
liberation movements, mentioning names of nationalist leaders was banned on all broadcasts (Windrich, 1981; Zaffiro, 1984).

Broadcasting and press policies during the colonial era were designed to complement one another in such a way that they together ensured continued white dominance on the Zimbabwean political landscape. In both information sectors, the Rhodesian authorities strove to keep out the voices of the black majority, only carrying them when they did not challenge the status quo. This forced liberation movements to seek ways of countering the propaganda churned out in the Rhodesian press and the RBC. Liberation movements also extensively used broadcasting as a tool for disseminating information on the progress of the struggle. Both Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) were granted free airtime on Radio Tanzania as far back as 1963. By 1967, they were able to broadcast from Zambia, then from Mozambique following the coming of independence in 1975.

The Rhodesian government responded by coming up with measures to frustrate the efforts of the liberation movement. They jammed the national frequencies, banned shortwave receivers, and instituted control of battery sales (Mosia et al., 1994:18). In 1965, the government passed emergency regulations making it criminal to turn on a radio station in a public space ‘if it picks up broadcasts that endanger public safety or interfere with the public order’ (Zaffiro, 1984:73). To encourage people to listen to the government-controlled RBC, FM-only radio receivers were heavily subsidized, and even distributed for free to the chiefs (Windrich, 1981; Zaffiro, 1984).

The restructuring of the media was high on the agenda of the new Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) government at independence in 1980. The new government was faced with the task of transforming the media system established to serve the interests of a minority
into one that would address citizens of an entire nation. One of the early steps taken to reform broadcasting was to re-organize the various stations of the renamed Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). Radio Harare, the African Service and the Bulawayo-based Radio Mthwakazi were merged to create Radio Two. The English Service became Radio One, while Radio Jacaranda became Radio Three (Khumalo, 1997). The emphasis placed on development, nation-building and reconciliation meant that the media were to be harnessed in pursuit of those deals.

The coming of independence presented “a sufficiently strong political force” to deflect broadcasting policy from its traditional path of operating as a monopoly tightly controlled by the ruling elite (Peters, 1999). But the perceived threats to the stability of the new government, from both internal and external enemies, led to continuity with the past policies of tight control of monopoly broadcasting. The threats gave ZANU PF the necessary pretext to consolidate its stranglehold on the mass media. Moreover, the threats were used to justify the continued existence on the country’s statute books of most of the repressive laws that were passed during the colonial era, including the notorious Law and Order (Maintenance) Act, the Emergence Powers and the Official Secrets Act (Moyo, 2006:209). Programming on both radio and television was explicitly in favour of the government and conformed to its agenda of creating a socialist country (Zaffiro, 1984).

Thus the electronic media in Zimbabwe remains the preserve of the government though from its establishment by an act of Parliament, was, from independence in 1980, a public broadcaster. While ZBC, for years after independence, was universally accepted as a relatively independent broadcaster, the format and controlling power has changed. ZBC is now the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings, established by two Acts of Parliament- the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001 (Chapter 12:06), and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Commercialization) Act of 2001 (Chapter 12:01).
Under the new dispensation, ZBC had to undergo a transformation - from a state funded public media, to a commercial public broadcaster, a Holding Company with nine subsidiaries- ZTV, Newsnet, On-Air Systems, Channel C, National Television (Bulawayo) and the four Radio Stations - Radio Zimbabwe (Mbare Studios, Harare), Power FM (Gweru), National FM (Pockets Hill Studios) and SFM (Montrose Studios).

This study will examine the impact of commercialization on media programming. The study views the role of radio in the public sphere as an essential vehicle of communication. Like in many other developing countries, radio is critical to the lives of many in Zimbabwe. For the rural communities, radio remains the main, and in some cases the sole source of mass communication. The media, especially public service broadcasters have a key role to play in development and in enhancing public dialogue (Curran and Gurevitch, 2000; McQuail, 2000). This view stems from Habermas’ (1989:303) concept of the public sphere. He contends that “media institutions on the one hand are the source of symbolic production and may be used as a means of social control; on the other hand, the media have emancipatory potential owing to their ability to enhance public dialogue about important social, economic and political issues”. The adoption of the market paradigm, even in a limited way, has diminished public service broadcasting’s potential role in development and national building.

Though some critics argue that a commercial broadcaster can play the public service role, it is difficult to balance the two such that in most cases public service broadcasting suffers. Raboy (1996:31) noted that commercial and public service objectives are wholly incompatible and cannot be combined within a single service. He also noted a second view in which he noted that they can coexist and public and commercial broadcasting can compete in the advertising marketplace to the mutual benefit of both. Without seeking to resolve the dilemma, he suggested a third conceptual and structural approach
to this question: assuming that certain activities of broadcasting can be financed commercially and others cannot, why not redistribute the benefits of the commercial sector to finance the non-commercial sector. Indeed, the leaders of the global broadcasting industry have turned the idea of public service broadcasting on its head by claiming that the product they are selling is a public service. Murdock (1994:1) stated: “Anybody who, within the law of the land, provides a service which the public wants at a price it can afford is providing a public service.” To the extent that ‘the public’ is just another way of describing the aggregate consumer market for broadcasting. Meanwhile, the idea of public service broadcasting has been undermined by the erosion of the public commitment to the service that has been provided by actually existing public broadcasting institutions. In many cases, this erosion has been egged on by the abuse of the term by national governments seeking to use broadcasting for a higher national purpose, claiming that this is in the public interest (Raboy, 1996:32). In this instance, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings is state owned yet it is said to be a public broadcaster.

Keane (1991b:524) argues that state organized and state-protected media, especially in the fields of broadcasting and telecommunications, are roundly condemned as undemocratic. If communications media are to be defended as a public good; against both state control and the privatizing initiatives of market liberalism, then their role and significance must be clearly and plausibly stated. Unfortunately, the contemporary case for public service media is trapped in a profound legitimation problem. Like trade unions, political parties and legislatures, public service media have become deeply uncertain about the scope and nature of their contemporary role in representing their constituents in the state and civil society (Keane, 1991a:116).

Public service broadcasting is by definition broadcasting that is owned, funded and carried out as a service to the public and it stands in contradiction to commercial broadcasting which is carried out for profit (Eko, 2000:83). If
public broadcasting is aimed at promoting public interest, welfare or well-being, it goes without saying that it should be responsible to the public, not to commercial or political interests, and that it should be carried out at public expense. However, some critics like Keane (1991b) noted that a broadcaster can mix public and commercial broadcasting such that the profits generated from commercial broadcasting are used to cater for the costs of public broadcasting. This view is supported by Fourie (2005:31) when he suggests that public service broadcasting should be in the form of a specific programme genre to be offered by all broadcasters. Such a genre could embrace the values of PSB and could be used as a cornerstone. It is important to note that such type of broadcasting would call for strict regulation lest public service broadcasting suffers at the expense of commercial broadcasting. Given the rather diverse nature of broadcast ownership and philosophy around the world, the concept of public service broadcasting means different things in different countries.

Broadcasting in Africa is so diverse and the diversity reflects the different political, socio-cultural and linguistic environments on the continent. As Eko (2000:85) notes, it also reflects the diverse relationships between governments and broadcasters in the different countries and regions of the continent. As a result of dramatic political changes that have taken place since the 1990s, African broadcasting is in a state of flux characterized by a complex combination of funding, ownership or control and content. He further argues that indeed, in most African countries, public service broadcasting is a mixture of commercially-sponsored and non-sponsored educational and cultural programming, political neutrality, avoidance of controversial issues, and journalistic restraint. This means deliberately refraining from ‘attacking’ politicians or institutions even in the context of news (Palmer, 1997).

However, three main public broadcasting models can be identified in Africa. They are: state owned and controlled broadcasting services sustaining
authoritarian governments; statutory independent public service broadcasters and private ‘independent’ commercial and or community broadcasters whose mission is public service programming (Eko, 2000:85). With the new development at ZBH, the issues of universal accessibility, universal appeal, particular attention to minorities and distance from vested interests, to mention but a few, have changed and as a result of the Commercialization Act, the minorities have been denied access and the broadcaster has inclined to the interests of the political class.

1.2 The Objectives of the Study

The study aims to investigate the impact of commercialization on media programming and whether with the adoption of the Commercialization Act, Radio Zimbabwe still plays its role as a public service broadcaster.

1.3 The Delimitations

The researcher’s main focus is solely on Radio Zimbabwe although the Act commercialized the whole of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings which includes Zimbabwe Television (ZTV).

1.4 The Definitions of Terms

Public Service Broadcasting – There have been numerous attempts at defining the concept of ‘public service broadcasting’, however, the definition of what is precisely meant by the concept remains unclear. An ideal model of public service broadcasting as Garnham defines it is, “a means of providing all citizens, whatever their wealth or geographical location, equal access to a wide range of high quality entertainment, information and education, and as a means of ensuring that the aim of the programme producer is the satisfaction
of a range of audience tastes rather than only those tastes that show the largest profit” (Garnham, 1983:13-14). The concept will be discussed in detail in chapter 2 (Section 2.1, pp11-13).

**Commercialization** – “A process by which media structures and contents come to reflect the profit seeking goals of media industries and are governed by market considerations” (McQuail, 1994). The concept will be discussed in detail in chapter 2 (Section 2.3, pp32-37).

**Public Sphere** - The public sphere in this study is defined as “a space where all interest groups interact with one another to discuss issues concerning the society as a whole. It is a public space for interaction among citizens in the political processes” (Curran, 2000). This concept will be discussed in detail in chapter 2 (Section 2.2, pp26-27).

**1.5 Assumptions**

This study is guided by the assumption that Radio Zimbabwe remains central to the development possibilities in Zimbabwe: its infrastructure is broadly spread, covering over 90% of the country, and the diversity of its programmes in different languages underlines its importance in ensuring the population’s universal access to information.

The study will also be based on the assumption that with the adoption of the Commercialization Act of 2001, Radio Zimbabwe is slowly drifting away from its public service mandate to broadcasting that is commercially oriented and as a result cannot play its public service role effectively.
1.6 The Importance of the Study

The need for public service broadcasting has never been greater. The proliferation of channels has fuelled many wants and fulfilled some needs, but has left gaps which should be filled by a public service broadcaster. This is because commercial television broadcasting conducted by privately owned satellite channels target the relatively affluent urban market as they can only air their programmes through a cable operator. Similarly the private radio stations would target the up market, more than urban radio listener. The private channel must primarily deliver an audience, rather than being a vehicle for delivering new ideas, information and education to its viewers and listeners.

One of the basic objectives of the public broadcasting system should be to strengthen the democratic process by providing information, promoting debate and discussion on all vital issues and providing a platform for interaction between the common man and policy maker. Market forces cannot be expected to take care of these objectives. This reinforces the need for a public service broadcaster which would take care of these objectives and also promote a common national outlook by providing shared experiences. In addition, such a broadcasting system is also expected to promote and foster a diverse culture of the country.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the objectives of this study and gave a background of how the broadcasting media was introduced and used in Zimbabwe in the colonial era and the changes introduced after its independence in 1980. A brief introduction of the role of public service media and how commercialization impacts on the public service media have been outlined also. The following chapter is the review of related literature.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

When broadcasting, originally in the form of radio, was invented, many leaders of the Western societies marveled at its promises and at what this extraordinary instrument could do for the culture, education and information of the people. Today, the will to make the proper use of these technologies has weakened. Policy makers in all countries have allowed radio and television to often become trivial and shallow and more of a marketing vehicle. Having started in the First World countries, this development has spread quickly and developing countries have not been spared, despite their need for a kind of broadcasting that pays attention to the cultural, social, educational and economic needs of the people. This literature review will start by trying to explicate the meaning of public service broadcasting after which I will look at its control structure, its principles, the public sphere, to mention but a few, in a bid to bring out the impact of commercialization on public service broadcasting.

2.1 What is Public Service Broadcasting?

The idea of public service broadcasting is partly rooted in the enlightenment notion of the public and the public space in which social and political life democratically unfolds (Habermas, 1989). There is no ideal definition of what public service broadcasting is, different scholars have attempted to define what it is. McQuail (1994:126), for instance points out that there has never been a generally acceptable version of the theory of public service broadcasting, and the diversity of form is now greater than ever before. He
asserts that emphasis in describing the concept should be on the general notion of ‘the public interest’ which should also deploy some notion of diversity.

In view of the various debates in regarding the nature of the definition of public service broadcasting, Syvertsen (1992:18-19) writes, “To anyone who bothers to compare the different definitions present in the debate, it becomes apparent that these vary tremendously in shape and form.” Some use the concept in order to describe a national system as a whole, others to describe certain institutions and others again to describe a mixture of programmes. There are substantial disagreements at which precise characteristics should be included in the definitions. From the above assertion, it is clear how problematic and inexplicit the description of public service broadcasting remains. However we can consider the definition of public service broadcasting from McQuail (2000) and McChesney (1997) who define it as a system of broadcasting that is publicly funded and operated in a non-profit way, and required by law to meet various informational needs of all citizens. The above definition nonetheless, shares the perception of public service radio as one aimed at providing a service to the public.

For the purpose of this study, public service broadcasting mandate is carried through by the state owned television and radio establishments, that are not only financed by the state through the tax payers funds and or partly by viewers and listeners through compulsory licence fee, but are also owned by the state (Opoku-Mensah, 1998). This is the most common form of public service broadcasting in most African nations. In the Zimbabwean context, public service broadcasting refers to television and radio stations owned, financed and controlled by the state. Both Zimbabwe’s public broadcasters, Radio Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Television, fall under this category and have made a mandate to inform, educate, mobilize and entertain the populace.
The BBC was the first pre-eminent public service broadcasting institution to embrace the principles of public service broadcasting, under the guiding hand of its first director general John Reith (Tomaselli, 1994, Fourie, 2001). According to Reith, public service broadcasting should seek to inform and enlighten the people of the nation as well as entertaining them with programmes of “high standards and good taste.” Traditional public service values under the Reithian model includes: programming for diversity, citizenship, minority and national identity. It is essential to note that the general idea of organizing broadcasting as a public service is not unique and particular to Britain. The public broadcasting service model has been transplanted with varying degrees of success from its originating country Britain, to numerous other social formations. At this point, I will critically review two cornerstones of public service broadcasting namely: principles and the control structure.

2.1.1 Principles of Public Service Broadcasting

As noted earlier the definition of the concept of public service broadcasting is a matter of controversy amongst different scholars and the same applies to the principles. Different scholars came up with different principles of public service broadcasting and there is no agreement about the number of the basic principles. However, according to a number of scholars, (Tomaselli, 1994; McQuail, 2000; Dahlgren, 1995; Murdock, 1994; Thompson, 1990; Curran, 1996 and Fourie, 2001), a number of principles and expectations are entrusted upon public service institutions. An attempt was made by the United Kingdom’s now defunct Broadcasting Research Unit to present those elements of public service broadcasting which should be retained within whatever systems are devised to provide broadcasting as new technologies come into use. These are: universal accessibility; universal appeal; particular attention to minorities; contribution to sense of national identity and community; distance from vested interests; direct funding and universality of
payment; competition in good programming rather than for numbers; and guidelines that liberate rather than restrict programme makers (Raboy, 1996: 29).

To begin with, public service broadcasting should be universally accessible. Geographic universality should be regarded as a fundamental axiom for a public service broadcaster. Public service broadcasting as Mpofu (1996:9) notes, must aim to be available to every member of a society regardless of their remoteness and inaccessibility. A genuinely national broadcaster with a relationship to the members of a society as citizens and not just consumers has to be available even to those who live outside the cities and towns. Opoku-Mensah (1998:2), while analyzing the state of broadcasting in Southern Africa, notes that the public’s right to be informed on all matters of public interest is a fundamental right, the exercise of which ensures that all citizens can participate in all matters related to their social, political and economic life and thereby make an informed contribution to the development of their country. This gives prominence to the idea that public broadcasters should provide a universal service.

However this is problematic when issues like disposable income and location come into play. As Scannell (1989:137) noted, the principle of universal availability has technical and economic components. The full establishment of broadcasting presupposes a society that has, for the great majority, risen above the level of necessity. To enjoy the services people need at least a marginal surplus of disposable time and income. Considering the economic hardships in Zimbabwe many people give first priority to things like education, health and food more than obtaining a radio set.

Moreover, the principle of universality states that a wide range of programmes should be broadcast so as to service a diversity of public needs. This means universality appeal should be ensured. A national broadcaster cannot aspire to
the title of public service broadcaster unless the tastes and interests of the whole population are adequately addressed. The legitimacy of the national broadcaster as a public service is severely threatened if it opts to compete and schedule predominantly mass entertainment programming. Although it cannot afford to ignore it, a public broadcaster cannot become obsessed with its audience share due to its commitment to focus on wider national priorities, serve minorities and whenever possible, to be innovative and challenging. It is precisely for this reason that independence from advertisers is so often stressed. At the same time, the public broadcaster should be striving to be popular to the extent that it effectively services the broadcasting needs of the population.

Commercial broadcasting on the other hand encourages competition amongst broadcasters. According to Murdock (1992), the consumer market place offer an array of competing products, but it does not confer the right to participate in deciding the rules that govern either market transactions or the distribution of wealth and income that allows people to enter the market in the first place. It provides choice at a price, but without empowerment, thus compromising the aspect of the public interest. Moreover, competition does not mean that the public have access. Most competing commercial broadcasters are in towns and target the urban public and those in the rural areas do not access their services.

A public service broadcaster should be detached from vested interests and government. Mpofu (1996:12) notes that any definition of a public broadcaster should be underscored by the need for independence from the paymaster, whoever it is. This is, of course difficult in practice. The history of PSB all over the world, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, is one of constant political interference from ruling parties and media owners. In fact, it is in the area of political interference that the concept of PSB encounters its greatest test. For instance, ZBH is a public broadcaster yet it is controlled by the state,
as a result it is now perceived as an agenda setter for political debate and as
having influence on the public profile of political parties. Beyond this
example there are an abundance of instances to illustrate the susceptibility of
public broadcasters to political interference, especially from the state. On the
contrary a commercial broadcaster cannot distance itself from vested interests
especially considering its funding. The dependence on advertising revenues
makes them susceptible to the views of the advertisers. This also impacts on
the principle of impartiality. Commercial broadcasting cannot be impartial
because their source of funding leads them into promoting the views of those
who have resources to offer in exchange for their service.

The central question here is the relationship between the broadcasting
institution and the state, and the ways in which the latter is able to
circumscribe the agenda and autonomy of the former. According to Tomaselli
(1996:12), the success of the claim to political independence depends on the
willingness of politicians to abstain from interfering with the day-to-day
running of the broadcaster and the ability of broadcasters to resist political
interference by remaining in control of the reporting and analysis of news and
current affairs. The independence or impartiality couplet is a particular
ideological construct of the public broadcasting ethos and has never been
applicable to all countries, even those in Western Europe (Mpofu 1996:13).

The principle of impartiality is important in that it ensures that the broadcaster
does not represent only one set of interests. To strengthen the public
broadcasters’ ability to balance conflicting views, it may seem advantageous
to legislate for such impartiality. But it is possible for governments to legislate
in such a way that the edicts of accuracy and impartiality come to mean that
no opposition or criticism of government can be aired. Though this has always
been a requirement, impartiality has rarely been seen as impartial as it might
appear, in part because the broadcasters subscribe to values they see as
entirely natural, but which in fact primarily serve the interests of the dominant
classes, in part because when the pressure is on, the broadcasters cave in to government pressure. In addition, Tomaselli (1996:13) notes that with the inevitability of political pressures, it is essential to have independent boards which can act as trustees of independent broadcasters and protect them from the grasp of unprincipled political forces. Independence from vested interests must include independence from political as well as commercial paymasters. A successful PSB system must therefore have similar safeguards for its independent sector to ensure that no undue commercial pressure is brought to bear on programme scheduling and commissioning practices.

Furthermore, particular attention should be paid to minorities. Minorities should not only be classified in terms of race, but also in terms of gender, language and socio-economic status. This is not dissimilar from the principle of universal appeal, though this would include also racial and sexual minorities. It is of great importance for public broadcasters to represent all members of the society and do away with discrimination. It is important to note that public service broadcasters pay attention to minorities because they regard them as citizens. Commercial broadcasters regard people as consumers who have to buy products at a price. They pay attention to those who are ready to get the service at a higher price and in most cases the informational needs of the minority groups are usually disregarded (Murdock, 1992).

In addition, public service broadcasters should contribute to a sense of national identity and community. It is important to note that services received universally throughout the whole country give audiences a source of shared interest and inclusion in major cultural experiences. Programmes should enhance development in the society and promote unity. It is therefore incumbent upon the national broadcaster to cover political events of importance, for example, general elections; state occasions for instance, the opening of parliament and sporting events. These are truly national in scope and interest. In times of national crisis, for instance, the national broadcaster
should provide a focus of, and a voice for, national concerns, while still retaining its independence. Media are key components in forging a nation-building ideology. The objectives of nation-building are additionally made problematic in Africa where the arbitrary division of the continent by colonial powers in the middle of the last century, still accounts for examples of unresolved political tensions. As Bourgault (1995:234) notes, efforts to forge a national identity should not mean that sub-national identities can be ignored. What is important is for those responsible for the structure and programmes of PSB to deliberately re-imagine the diverse identities in the light of the demands for a wider unity. The public broadcaster must allow and acknowledge the symbols, rituals and social practices of the various sub-identities through a model that creates opportunities for their self-expression and spontaneous integration. Thus, while PSB will inevitably privilege dominant perspectives it will also have to provide space for dissent or minority opinion.

Contrary to the principle which spells out that public broadcasting should enhance national identity and community, McQuail (2000:106) noted that the commercial variant of a communicative relationship does not support the formation of ties of mutual attachment or lead to shared identity or community. What is fundamental is the profit motive.

In addition, a public service broadcaster must be funded by the public it serves specifically by a means of a compulsory license fee levied on all radio and television set owners who expect a good service in return (Dahlgren, 1995; Fourie 2001). The issue of universality of payment was rooted in the thinking that as everyone is capable of receiving the national public broadcaster, everyone should pay for it. It is however interesting that some places in Zimbabwe have poor reception such that most of the time they are not able to view or listen to their radio or television sets and as a result they are not willing to pay. The principle of universality of payment is thus
becoming more and more difficult to sustain, which poses a threat to national public broadcasting dependent on mechanisms of public funding. Issues related to public funding immediately raise the debates surrounding the sale of advertising on PSB. To some, the issue of public funding is seen as fundamental to the maintenance and survival of PSB. Some fund PSB through direct government grants which is often seen as anathema in terms of compromising the independence of the broadcasters and also hamper competition.

Public broadcasters are obliged to compete in good programming rather than for numbers. As noted by Tomasselli (1994), they are expected to transmit not only the more popular types of programmes considered to be of high value to society. Balanced programming goes with the obligation to broadcast in the national interest. This would help to strengthen national identity and national culture. Aspects like programme diversity and accountability are also useful in the African context. The goal of programme diversity implies that the broadcaster will not only attempt to represent the community to which it broadcasts, but that it will seek to cover a diversity of voices and news not simply government and boardroom spin. In the ideal model, the public broadcaster represents within programmes the cultural, religious and language diversities of the community. In reality, there is a tendency for public broadcasters serving a national audience, to concentrate on the capital city and its environs. Unlike public broadcasters, commercial broadcasters close many possibilities for innovation and creativity (Blumler, 1992). The fact that profit is the only motive that counts result in the repetition of programmes that generate income and as a result there is no diversity in their programmes.

Lastly, public broadcasters should have guidelines that liberate rather than restrict program makers. Their work should be protected from arbitrary interference and safe-guarded by the norms of media professionalism. Broadly speaking, this is the case: programming policies are regulated by guidelines,
rather than laws. However, those guidelines ultimately are backed by sanctions, the government has the power to freeze, reduce or remove the license fee. The real problem, however, is not how to improve the list but rather how to apply any such set of principles.

2.1.2 Public Service Broadcasting Control Structure

Public service broadcasting institutions are construed as self-governing and semi-autonomous, particularly in their day to day operations. In Britain, for example, a publicly appointed Board of Directors with a Chairman and a Director General ensures such autonomy in management matters (Syvertsen, 1992). The Board is ideally made up of members from varied social groups and associations guaranteeing a degree of diverse public representation. On a closer analysis however, a control structure underwritten in public legislation governs public service broadcasting. The control structure is explained by the way the broadcasting medium historically developed. Essentially the scarcity of electromagnetic resources in the past meant that ways of regulating the existing ones were adopted to ensure that they were utilized for the public “common good.” This entailed a number of measures from the state, for instance, the ultimate authority to broadcast came from the state, and it was to the state that the institutions were accountable. Moreover, those who controlled the corporations were publicly appointed. In addition, financial allocation and control resided with the state. Finally as Syvertsen (1992:82) stated, the state retained a measure of control over the content.

In Zimbabwe the government does not only finance and control public service broadcasting, but the entire staff is appointed by the public service commission, a body responsible for the appointments of civil servants. Garnham (1980) observed that state control of public service broadcasting institutions does not necessarily mean that this is the best method of serving the public. Two important questions are raised in this regard: firstly, can the
state be trusted to make judgements of national priority as how broadcasting should be used or the need of each individual citizen for maximum freedom of choice in their search for personal satisfaction, and the need for broadcasters to explain the world as they see it? Does the state represent people and should it therefore control broadcasting directly? Another question that he posed is whether broadcasters can be given freedom without “encasing them in an ivory tower subject to the temptations of cultural elitism.” From these questions it is clear that the nature and the mechanism of the control structure placed upon public service broadcasting is problematic.

Thus, it can be argued that public service control through bodies such as Parliament and Ministry of Information, as it is in Zimbabwe, aims at bringing broadcasting under control exercised in broader interest. However, in reality the control structures make public broadcasting vulnerable to the state itself, since the state might have its own vested interests outside public representation. For this reason, it is best that independent broadcasting associations or authorities are set up.

As McQuail (2000) argued, Independent Broadcasting Authorities aim at balancing the traditional control of the state. Their mandates often include carrying out broader consultations on protection and viability of public broadcasting, limitations on cross-media control and licensing conditions. They hold public hearings and comment on various aspects of public broadcasting. At most the state is reduced to being one of the actors rather than the ultimate controller of the process. Meanwhile, the basis of state control of broadcasting in general has been taken over by rapid technological changes. Therefore, former public service broadcasting monopolies are forced to exist alongside the monopolistic control of the medium by individual states ineffective and clearly indicating the possibility to broadcast outside the control structures imposed by the state.
Moreover, it is the government’s role to determine overall broadcasting policy and the structure of the domestic market. It has to decide how many players there will be in which technologies, and where they should be located. That policy is then given effect through legislation. Without legislation the regulator, be it a minister or appointed agent, works without structure, targets and accountability. Hence it is important that the legislation sets out not only the form of the regulatory agency, how it will be appointed, its powers and to whom it is accountable, but also the goals of that policy (Mpofu, 1996:51). To enhance competition and increase the number of broadcasters is not a goal in itself. A democracy requires something more. The aim must be that each citizen, however poor, should have access to broadcast information from which he or she can make choices. As clearly stated by Mbaine in Article 19, (2003) institutionally as part of the controls the state broadcaster in Zimbabwe is placed under a government ministry responsible for information. The ministry and the responsible minister act not only as policy makers but also regulators of broadcasting. This arrangement means that state broadcasters have no operational autonomy. The Minister in consultation with the President appoint the board of the broadcaster, which usually consists of party loyalists or people with known sympathies and leanings towards the ruling party’s political project. Thus, the state uses the media as instruments of maintaining power and hegemony at the expense of service to the public.

2.1.3 Public Service Programming

It is important to note that public service broadcasting by definition and function allows broadcasters to carry programmes which may not be of majority interest but are still essential for an informed citizenry. As McQuail (2000) noted, such programmes tend to be neglected in commercial systems since they do not attract advertisers. The whole notion of public service broadcasting as Habermas (1989:303) noted, is centered on having programmes that are strong on public issues, are rational, and representative
of the citizenry, without influence from private, commercial or political powers.

As already stated before, public service broadcasting in most societies has its roots in the broadcasting structure of the BBC, with the ideals namely to inform, educate and entertain. These characteristics were also pronounced in broadcasting institutions in post independent African states (Katz and Wedell, 1977). Opoku-Mensah (1998) argued that public service programming in African states is driven by two types of policy concerns. Firstly, the concern is that of political and national integration, aimed at building national and cultural identities. This is coupled with social, economic and educational development. Emphasis on programming therefore should be on locally produced programmes in indigenous languages on issues of culture and related aspects. Secondly, of concern is the pre-occupation of radio as a tool for national development. Hence radio programmes should be geared towards national development.

The perception of the audience as a public in comparison to the audience as a market is reflected in attitudes to programming and scheduling and underpins the sense of responsibility to the audience beyond the demands of a purely market relationship (Walker, 2000:67). In terms of programme content, this largely implies the provision of a diverse, informative and enriching range of productions rather than only that which attracts a mass audience. This concept of audience as citizen, and the responsibilities it implies, is central to the formation and affirmation of audience expectations regarding programming.

As Dahlgren (2002:203) notes, the role of public service broadcasting must stem from a considered sense of priorities. Partly this is due to the strains imposed on limited resources by ever-rising production costs. It is also inherent in the need to decide how best to differentiate a public broadcaster from its private competitors. Three models are provided, firstly prioritizing by
programme type. If commercial broadcasters concentrate on entertainment and topical news, public broadcasters should offer documentaries, plays, education, the arts and science. Another model would prioritize by audience target, presuming that if commercial and especially advertising-supported television concentrates on mass appeal programmes, public television should serve the neglected minorities. This does not go without objections because it also arbitrarily excludes the majority from the benefits of a public service approach. The equation between ‘public’ and ‘universal’ should not be lightly dismissed (Dahlgren, 2002:203). Only a third model would enable public broadcasting at one and the same time to be different, meet public needs and stay attuned to all viewers. It must be guided by a sense of qualitative priorities, differing from market driven television.

Moreover public service broadcasting should promote local content. Mpofu (1996:41) noted that research papers have indicated that most drama programmes and soap operas are imported. Sporting, religious and news programmes are mostly internally produced. In addition, the public broadcaster should have programmes in local languages. Mpofu (1996) argues that the use of local languages enhance the public’s access to the airwaves, diversify the life chances of, and promote creativity of, all citizens of the country.

Thus public service programming is a commitment to provide and protect mixed and complimentary programme schedules. It includes a commitment to minorities and to covering, as far as possible, different genres of programme making. Hence public service broadcasting is driven by higher aspirations than solely to provide entertainment. As noted by Keane (1991a:17), it is an attempt to make popular quality programmes; it does justice to human experience and adds to the quality of people’s lives, and its programme genres reflect the complexity of human beings.
However, the theory of public service broadcasting as Curran (1996:106) notes does not necessarily correspond to reality. One problem is that government can undermine the independence of public broadcasting institutions, and restrict the public debate conducted through their channels. Two ways of dealing with this problem have been suggested. One is the liberal corporatist model in which representatives from different social groups are appointed to broadcasting authorities and given real power. This pluralistic system of control is buttressed by institutional and legal guidelines, a constitutional guarantee both of freedom of expression and of audience access to diverse information, and the devolution of power (Hoffman-Riem, 1992; Porter and Hasselbach, 1991a, b). The other approach, exemplified by the British broadcasting system, is the civil service model in which ‘public trustees’ for the nation are appointed to broadcasting authorities, but in which broadcasters are given in reality a considerable amount of freedom to interpret public service guidelines within depoliticized institutions (Curran and Seaton, 1995; Tunstall, 1993; McNair, 1993).

The former incorporates diverse political pressures as a way of frustrating government control, while the latter seeks to insulate broadcasting from political pressure by emphasizing its independence and neutrality. Of the two, argues Etzioni-Halevy (1987), the latter is more brittle and vulnerable if exposed to a sustained government onslaught. One insulating device to limit government financial control is by index-linking the licence fee to the rise of national earnings; another is to remove the government’s power of unmediated patronage by ‘franchising’ representative organizations and broadcasting staff to elect or nominate people to broadcasting authorities.

Another problem is that public service broadcasting organizations tend to be unduly influenced by the political class (even if they offer more ideologically ‘open’ and diverse systems of representation than commercial broadcasters). In most countries the pluralistic pattern of appointments to broadcasting
councils is insufficiently representative. It needs to include fewer party nominees, and more representatives from social, cultural and other organizations including ‘guest workers’ and the new social movements (Curran 1996:107). This said, the fine-tuning of broadcast rules and structures, though desirable, is unlikely to transform the existing practice. This is because the nature of public dialogue conducted through public television for instance, relates to the wider public debate, taking place in society.

The third problem that can beset public service broadcasting is unresponsiveness to popular demand. Here, the comparative record of public service broadcasters varies considerably, and underlines the need for regulated competition. Public service monopolies and predominantly anti-market broadcasting systems controlled by organized groups that are no longer representative experienced a sharp loss of support once alternatives became available (McQuail, 1992; Ang, 1991; Hadenius, 1992). Thus Britain, the first major European country to introduce regulated commercial television, has a popular public broadcasting system that, despite intense competition from cable television and Murdock’s Sky satellite channels, still accounted in mid-1995 for 92 per cent of viewers’ time (Curran 1996:108). Having explored the ideal public service model and the challenges facing public service broadcasting, the next section looks at another theoretical perspective in this discussion, the public sphere.

### 2.2 The Public Sphere

Public service radio programmes have a key role to play in the democratic public sphere. As Curran (2000) noted, this theoretical perspective assumes that public service radio programmes are potentially crucial for democracy and development within a given society. He went further to define the public sphere as a space where all interest groups interact with one another to discuss issues concerning the society as a whole. It is a public space for interaction
among citizens in the political processes and Dahlgren (2002:195) notes that the public sphere ‘takes place’ when citizens, exercising their rights of assembly and association, gather as public bodies to discuss issues of the day, specifically those of political concern. A closer look at the previously discussed values, notions and principles of public service broadcasting will show that most discourses link it with the public sphere, seeing it as central to the creation and sustaining of democracy and development. The media in general, and in the context of this study, public service radio in particular, has a significant role to play in the public sphere. The central question from all this is whether public service broadcasting contributes to public life by presenting a diversity of values and perspectives on issues that affect the broad generality of the public, and if so, to what extent can we determine that it provides the public sphere.

2.2.1 The Media and the Public Sphere

A good starting point for rethinking the democratic role of the media is provided by a seminal study by Habermas (1989). For Habermas, in the 18th century Europe, political views and decisions in the public sphere were open not to the play of power, but to argument based upon evidence, and the concern was not private interest but the public good. The public sphere was thus constituted as the free space for rational and universal politics distinct from the economy and the state. The free space mentioned above, refers to the link between the private lives of people and their political, economic and administrative institutions. Habermas saw it as the “sphere of private people coming together as a public in a free arena” (Goldsmiths Media Group, 2000:38). Thus the media has the role of mediating between the two by giving people access to the means through which they can debate and decide on the core issues of their welfare, in a framework of democratic participation.
Habermas traces the evolution of the ‘bourgeois public sphere’- a public space between the private domain and the state in which public opinion was formed and popular supervision of government was established. Thereafter he argues that the public sphere came to be dominated by an expanded state and organized economic interests. A new corporatist pattern of power relations was established in which organized interests bargained with each other and with the state, while increasingly excluding the public. The media ceased to be an agency of empowerment and rationality, and became a further means by which the public was sidelined. Instead of providing a conduit for rational-critical debate, the media manipulated mass opinion.

The salient features of the public sphere according to Habermas (1989), included: protection from both power of state and church; sustainability by private individuals with alternative source of economic power and openness to all, in the same way access to the market was open to all. The ideal public sphere therefore is seen as being, a free unbiased space within society characterized by freedom from both the state and or corporate control. It is through the media that people can get to participate freely on equal basis in discussions relevant to the public good. Kuhn (1998:23-24) sees the public sphere as an institutional framework and set of practices which encourage wide and inclusive debate about issues of social and political importance. This view was supported by McQuail (2000:157) when he theorized that the public sphere is a rational space which provides a more or less autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate and where access to the space is free, and freedom of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed.

Scannell (1990) contented that mass media today are not based on the face-to-face conversational contact but on a system of communication at a distance whereby time and distance is compressed without the need for physical contact. Curran (1991) points out that by generating a plurality of understanding, the media should enable individuals to reinterpret their social
experiences, and question the assumptions and ideas of the dominant culture. A public sphere that functions well requires the institutional guarantee of a constitutional state with a goal to recreate the media as a public sphere in a form that is relatively autonomous from both the government and the market. However, examples from Africa, where the broadcasting sector is continuously controlled and dictated by governments and recently by the market, indicate the divergence of most public broadcasters from the idea of the public sphere. Moreover, the current trends of commercialization of the media, especially the broadcast media, have made the concept of public service broadcasting as a public sphere problematic and almost non-existent (Carver, 1995).

The role of the public service broadcasting as a public sphere is highly constrained by state control. There are several examples where public service broadcasters have acted as little more than mouth-pieces of governments (Downing, 1995; Curran and Seaton, 1988). This is typical of most African states. According to Opoku-Mensah (1998), the media in post-independence African states were expected and pressurized to support the rulers in what in reality was the establishment and perpetuation of a subservient media, which lack legitimacy, editorial independence and professionalism. These experiences reveal the variety of different pressures that have been applied. Public service broadcasters have been censored by restrictive laws and regulations, undermined by being packed with government supporters, squeezed by refusals to increase government funding, intimidated by private and public criticisms. Changes in the realm of news, programming and presentation as well as editorial policy are slowly taking a new shape.

2.2.2 The Role of Radio as a Public Sphere

The media is a crucial part of the society and can play a pivotal role as disseminators of information and debate that facilitate development and
functions of democracy; providing public arenas for political participation and promoting accountability of ruling elites (Curran 2000). However, for these roles to be accomplished, the media must be perceived as legitimate, independent, diverse and professional. Thus public service broadcasters and other media can be perceived as an essential part of the new public sphere. It is crucial to note that the media do not only transmit but also shape the form and to a certain extent, the context of the message or content. This means that listeners’ interests and informational needs should be represented in all aspects of programming.

The dimension of representation in the public sphere points to basic questions such as what should be selected for portrayal and how it should be represented. These choices have a bearing on the reception process itself, a socially interactive phenomenon. Hence in the terms of the public sphere, “there must be discursive interaction to permit and foster the processes of social interactionism” (Dahlgren 1995:17). Habermas like early enthusiasts of a free commercial press, was far too sanguine about the capacity of market competition to ensure the universal access of citizens to the media of communication and fails to examine the inevitable tension between the free choices of the investors and property owners and the freedom of choice of citizens receiving and sending information (Keane, 1995:39). Moreover, this historic public sphere was an essentially bourgeois space, which largely excluded the working class, women and ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, the idea of the public sphere is worth retaining, providing that it needs to be open enough that all groups in the society can recognize themselves and their aspirations as being fairly represented.

The issue becomes one of how to make the best use of public service radio representation for democratic purposes. From here, three key concepts in the liberal canon- the media as a public watchdog, public representative (fourth estate) and source of public information are discussed.
2.2.3 The Media as a Public Watchdog

Classical liberal thought argues that the primary democratic role of the media is to act as a public watchdog overseeing the state (Curran, 1996:83). 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 the government. This watchdog is said to override in importance all other functions of the media. In line with this Kelley and Donway (1990:7) argue that any reform of the media, however desirable, is unacceptable if it is at the cost of the watchdog function.

2.2.4 The Media as a Public Representative

As agency of representation the media provide a channel of communication between governments and the governed, which helps society to clarify, formulate policy, coordinate activity and manage itself. Curran (2000) contends that representation fosters channels of communication that link organized groups and social networks to the public arena. This is essential because it encourages broader participation of citizens in society. Thus it encourages wide participation in society. Public service radio broadcasters are obliged to foster and maintain citizenship rights to knowledge and information, for the democratic well being of society. Public service radio should therefore develop and maintain the existence of citizenship rights so that all citizens know and make use of them.

2.2.5 Informational Role of the Media

The informational role is usually portrayed in terms of facilitating self-expression, promoting public rationality and enabling collective self-determination. These different functions of the media can only be fulfilled
adequately; it is argued, through the processes of a free market (Curran, 1996:97). Murdock (1992) argues that the public must have access to, and be able to use communication facilities in order to register criticism and propose alternative courses of action. Newscasts, current affairs programmes, features and documentaries, educational programmes and other social or practical information have gained a particular emphasis in public broadcasters’ offerings (Ishikawa et al., 1996). Their specific mandate to provide information and education stems directly from the audience-as-public approach (Hellman, 1999:117). The public is regarded as a group of citizens that need to be informed in order to secure an enlightened public discussion on public affairs.

Thus public service broadcasting is obliged to address its audiences as rational citizens and to provide them with the information upon which alone rational debate can be based. The first duty involving public service is to support democracy by providing a wide variety of information, opinions and debates on social issues. A conviction that only information can help people to understand political and social processes is well expressed by the BBC, which justifies its news and information services by claiming them to ‘help people to understand national and international events’ (BBC, 1996:3). Hence, it is an idea of democracy; best maintained within an informed public sphere that justifies informative programming. Emphasis on information by public broadcasters and the popular appreciation of informative genres provides a practical counterargument to the entertainment-oriented supply of commercial channels, but, at the same time, information involves values that can be shared by all broadcasters.

2.3 What is commercial broadcasting?

Commercial broadcasting is the practice of broadcasting for profit. This is normally achieved by interrupting normal programming to air advertisements,
also commonly called ‘commercials’ in this context. This is the dominant type of broadcasting in the United States and other countries such as most of Latin America. It is also common elsewhere, but usually exists alongside public broadcasting where programming is largely funded by government or public donations. In an hour of broadcast time on a commercial broadcast outlet, typically ten to twenty minutes are devoted to advertising. Advertisers pay a certain amount of money to air their commercials, usually based upon the popularity or ratings of a station network. This effectively makes commercial broadcasters more answerable to advertisers than the public, which is a major criticism of commercial radio and television.

Programming on commercial stations is often more sensationalistic particularly during rating periods such as sweeps. Aside from an abundance of advertising matter (commercial propaganda), commercial content is likely to be more oriented to amusement and entertainment (escapism), more superficial, undemanding and conformist, more derivative and standardized (McQuail, 2000:106). In addition, it can be argued that commercial relationships in communication are intrinsically distancing and potentially exploitative. The commercial variant of a communicative relationship does not support the formation of ties of mutual attachment or lead to shared identity or community. This is against one of the principles of public service broadcasting which says that public service broadcasting should enhance national identity and community. The commercial environment of media production also provides a straitjacket which closes off many possibilities for innovation and creativity (Blumler, 1991). The fundamental problem is that profit becomes the only motive that really counts.

Commercial broadcasting is often controversial for a great many reasons. Chief among them is a lack of quality and risk in the programming much of the time and a perceived failure to serve the local interest due to media consolidation. Commercial radio in particular is often attacked for perceived
homogeneity in programming, covert politicized censorship of content, and a desire to cut costs at the expense of giving the station an identifiable personality. The financial viability of commercial broadcasting as Golding and Murdock (1996:16) noted depends directly on advertising revenue, while more and more of the other ‘sites where creative work is displayed’ such as museums, galleries and theatres ‘have been captured by corporate sponsors’ and enlisted in their public relations campaigns (Schiller, 1989:4).

The extension of corporate reach reinforces another major process; the commodification of cultural life. A commodity is a good that is produced in order to be exchanged at a price. Commercial communications corporations have always in the business of commodity production (Golding and Murdock, 1996:16). At first sight, advertising-supported broadcasting seems to be an exception, since anyone who has a receiving set has access to the full range of programming. They do not have to pay again. However this analysis ignores two important points. Firstly, audiences do contribute to the costs of programming in the form of additions to the retail price of heavily advertised goods. Secondly, within this system, audiences themselves are the primary commodity. The economics of commercial broadcasting revolves around the exchange of audiences for advertising revenue. The price that corporations pay for advertising spots on particular programmes is determined by the size and social composition of the audience it attracts.

Some of the severest criticisms of commercial trends are related to the issue of democracy. As McQuail (2001:106) argued, the general trend towards making news entertaining before it is informative has been criticized so much, as has the rise of a new media genre of ‘infotainment’ that is said to promote ignorance and also detachment from political participation. The problem has been accentuated in the eyes of critics by the willing co-operation of politicians for short-term ends in the general tendency of the media to popularize and personalize, at the expense of substance.
In prime time the premium prices are commanded by shows that can attract and hold the greatest number of viewers and provide a symbolic environment in tune with consumption. These needs inevitably tilt programming towards familiar and well-tested formulas and formats and away from risk and innovation, and anchor it in commonsense rather than alternative viewpoints. Hence the audiences’ position as a commodity serves to reduce the overall diversity of programming and ensure that it confirms established mores and assumptions far more than it challenges them (Golding and Murdock, 1996:17).

Indeed, the importance of quality appears to have increased along with the intensification of competition. It has become, as Ang (1991:167) puts it, ‘one of the spearheads of modern-day public service institutions’. In the arguments of the broadcasters themselves, quality has become a discursive differentiating strategy that serves to distinguish public service institutions from their commercial rivals. Hellman (1999:117) noted that commercial broadcasters also provide quality programmes with high production values. Thus it is quality as defined by programme makers and broadcasters that has dominated the discourse (Mulgan, 1990). On this note Keane (1991a: 119) argued that public service broadcasting makes a mistake of justifying itself publicly in the rhetoric of ‘quality’. Public service advocates frequently talk about ‘preserving quality programmes’- which normally are defined loosely as polished, stylish and challenging productions. Loose talk of quality is vulnerable to the retort that the concept of quality is riddled with semantic ambiguity. What constitutes ‘good’ or ‘quality’ media is now deeply controversial, even though everybody is generally in favour of it.

The word quality as Walker (2000:61) argued has no objective basis, only plurality of ultimately clashing, contradictory meanings amenable to public manipulation. Some defenders of the public service model, for example, view
quality in terms of the ability of the media to bind together disparate and fragmented audiences into a classless community of individuals who feel others to be their equals. In contrast, others think of quality in diametrically opposed terms: television in particular is praised for being at the cutting edge of the deliberately superficial ‘three minute culture’ and its dizzying swirl of disjointed and entertaining images (Keane, 1991a: 120). Yet another view of quality is proposed by pro-marketeers, who criticize public service devotees as snobs who arrogantly assume their freedom of expression to be the guarantee of quality, and who thereby deny publics what they often like best: a wide choice of fruit that is ripe and juicy (Tulloch, 1999:160).

Commercial broadcasting assume that audiences are sovereign consumers, and that the only workable index of quality is their pattern of choices, that is the degree of popularity of radio or television programmes, effective demand, the willingness of individuals to purchase a product, is the criterion of its quality (Keane, 1991a: 121). Murdock (1989:183) claims, for instance, that ‘quality is in the eye of the beholder or in the current debate … the propagandist. This leads him to a cunningly unconventional market oriented definition of the public service model: ‘anybody who, within the law of the land, provides a service which the public wants at a price it can afford is providing a public service.’

The alleged ‘balance’, ‘quality’ standards and universalism of existing public service media are routinely perceived by certain audiences as ‘unrepresentative.’ The totality of output of mixed programmes in nationally networked channels cannot add up to a complete world. Their repertoire cannot exhaust the multitude of opinions in a complex society in motion (Scannell, 1982:244). Public service media normally fail to satisfy enthusiasts of particular types of programmes. Music is a pertinent example. Different music appeals to different publics, whose dislikes are often as strong as their
likes, that is why the twentieth – century history of radio has resulted in a gradual fragmentation of mass audiences into different taste publics.

Public service media corset audiences and violate their own principle of equality of access for all to entertainment, current affairs and cultural resources in a common public domain (Keane, 1991a: 123). For reasons of a commitment to ‘balance’, government pressures and threatened litigation, the public service representation of such topics as sexuality, politics and violence also tends to be timid. Certain things cannot be transmitted, or not in a particular way. When they are transmitted, their disturbing, troublesome or outrageous implications are often closed off. Public service media, are no different from their commercial competitors, they too develop a cast of regulars- reporters, politicians, cultural authorities - who appear as accredited representatives of public experience and taste by virtue of their regular appearance on the media.

Dietz (1987:5) argues that while the exercise of citizenship presupposes collective action in pursuit of equality and fraternity as well as of individual liberty, the ideology of consumerism encourages people to seek private solutions to public problems by purchasing a commodity. It urges them to buy their way out of trouble rather than encouraging them to press for social change and improved social provision. It also redefines the nature of citizenship itself so that it “becomes less collective, political activity than an individual, economic activity - the right to pursue one’s interests without hindrance, in the market place”.

The consumer market place offers an array of competing products, but it does not confer the right to participate in deciding the rules that govern either market transactions or the distribution of wealth and income that allows people to enter the market in the first place. It provides choice at a price, but without empowerment, hence compromising the aspect of public interest.
Carver (1995:6) in his analysis of commercial stations supports this view. He contends that to meet their running costs, commercial stations are almost wholly dependant on limited and finite advertising revenue, and therefore are unable to invest in the expensive equipment needed to cover the entire country, or to employ sufficient staff to reach the multiplicity of language groups.

In relation to the above, McQuail (2000) observes that where media are run purely on commercial basis, their view of what is public interest tends to equate with what interests the public. Note should also be taken that historical trends in broadcasting indicate that this system was not an engine of profit making. According to McChesney (2000), vibrant political debates took place in various nations over how best to deploy broadcasting. In both America and Britain, for example, advertisers worked diligently to have the systems accept advertising. In Britain these campaigns were unable to generate even minimum public enthusiasm for commercialized programming. When reconciled to public service broadcasting principles, the very idea of selling audiences becomes very problematic. This, according to Curran and Seaton (1988), poses a threat to public service programming. For instance, what kind of listenership do advertisers want, and how are the audiences packaged to attract sales? Indeed how does the real purpose of providing audiences to advertisers affect the apparent purpose of producing programmes for public consumption?

2.4 Public Service Broadcasting in a State of Change

The 1990s saw two major changes in the world economy as well as in the political economy of the media; technological advancement and privatization. Significant shifts in media industries occurred when governments embarked on the exercise of re-regulating their airwaves permitting private satellite
transmission via both encryption and free-to-air, in addition to public service and private channels (Blumler 1992).

In most societies where the above changes have taken place, public service broadcasting has been threatened with the sharp rise of commercial institutions resulting in a stiff competition for audiences who increasingly seek to be diverted (through entertainment) rather than informed. In response, public service broadcasters have consequently opted for more entertainment programmes. To a greater extent this has weakened the informational dialogue and link that used to exist between the media and the public (Opoku-Mensah, 1998).

In relation to the above, Keane (1991b) and Murdock (1992) point out that the dominant forms of commercial broadcasting stations do less to enhance the public sphere. The reason behind this is that their operational goal is that of profit maximization. In any case, stations driven by commercial considerations are generally unlikely to be interested in broadcasting in remote communities with little spending power. The decline of public service broadcasting is a threat to public service functions of broadcasting as a public sphere, against which it may seem that the only remedy is the reintroduction of state regulated controls on private operators. However, such control would be disliked by governments which have dismantled public service broadcasting.

The public service broadcasters are in a dilemma. On the one hand, they have to adhere to public service obligations. On the other hand, if they fail to rise to technological and competitive challenges, they cannot afford their public service obligations and will lose their audiences in the process. As Steemers (2002:19) formulates the dilemma, if they seek to concentrate their efforts on popular programming, then they are bound to be accused of neglecting their public service remit, which also threatens their claim to licence fee funding. If
they occupy the cultural high ground to provide those things that commercial media do not, they risk marginalization and cutting themselves adrift from public support and ultimately adequate funds.

The future of public service broadcasting lies in obscurity. So many questions might be asked, for instance, what would a redefined, broadened and more accessible and accountable public service model look like in practice? What would be its guiding principles? How could a revised public service model legitimate itself more convincingly than at present? It is obvious that a renewed public service system of communications would need to be clear from the outset about its guiding principles and strategies.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, public service broadcasting is important not only because it represents one of the archetypal forms of broadcasting (commercial or market-driven broadcasting being the other), but because it has the capacity to play a pivotal role in the development of the country. Despite the acknowledged limitations of public service broadcasting, its commitment to the social, cultural and political needs of its audience rather than the economic imperatives of the market, presents a powerful argument for its continuing importance in the society. The discussion in this chapter has tried to bring out the debate surrounding public and commercial broadcasting, in the process mapping out the ideal-type obligations that are expected of radio offered as a public service. The notion of the public sphere as revealed in the discussion amplifies the importance of the various obligations facing public service radio and demonstrates how they are important for the democratic and developmental processes in society. The move towards commercialization is part of a much wider re-gearing of the regulatory environment.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

As already indicated from the beginning, this dissertation presents a case study of the impact of commercialization on public service broadcasting programming: the case of Radio Zimbabwe after the Commercialization Act of 2001. This chapter discusses the research methods that will be used in this study. The study will rely on a combination of methods with the aim of providing deeper insight into the subject under investigation. The methods that will be used include document analysis, qualitative interviews and secondary research.

3.1 The Case Study Approach

Many scholars have come up with different explanations of what constitutes a case study. As Ragin (1992:3) noted, these varying definitions owe to the fact that “a case may be theoretical or empirical or both; it may be a relatively bounded object or a process; and it may be generic and universal or specific in some way.” However, the conventional understanding among comparative social scientists, according to Ragin (1992:5) is that cases are defined by “boundaries around places and time periods.” Creswell (1998:61) defines a case study as an exploration or in-depth analysis of a ‘bound system’ (bounded by time and/or place) or a single or multiple cases, over a period of time.

In Babbie’s (2001: 285) view, there is little consensus on what may constitute a case or ‘bounded system’ as explained by Creswell. The case being studied can refer to a process, activity, event, programme or individual or multiple individuals. It might even refer to a period of time rather than a particular group.
of people. An almost similar explanation is given by Leedy (1993:149) who notes that in a case study, a particular individual, programme, or event is studied in depth for a defined period of time. For example, a medical researcher might study the nature, course, and treatment of a rare illness for a particular patient. Sometimes researchers focus on a single case, perhaps because its unique or exceptional qualities can promote understanding or inform practice for similar situations. In other instances, researchers study two or more cases, often cases that are different in certain key ways: to make comparisons, build theory, or propose generalizations; such an approach is called a multiple or collective case study.

A case study may be especially suitable for learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation. It may also be useful for investigating how an individual or programme changes over time, perhaps as the result of certain circumstances or interventions. Basing my research on these two definitions, this study is a case study in the sense that it seeks to investigate changes over time in radio programming as a result of certain changed circumstances or interventions. In this instance programming changes that have taken place at Radio Zimbabwe as a result of the adoption of the Commercialization Act of 2001. The changes will be analyzed within the larger historical, political and economic conditions of the case. The boundaries between the reform process and the context within which it is taking place are not easily distinguishable, as the changes are determined to a great extent by the context.

The focus on a single case approach, however, is not without its own weaknesses, which make it difficult for the carrying out of social scientific research. Its major weakness as noted by Leedy (1993:149) is that when only a single case is studied, we cannot be sure that it results are generalizable to other situations. In addition, the case study investigators have been accused of allowing equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of findings and conclusions.
3.2 Methods

As Hansen and colleagues argue, “Researchers should not only consider which is the most appropriate method for the study of their chosen topic or problem but also what combination of research methods will produce a better and deeper understanding of it” (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, and Newbold, 1998:1). For instance, Yin (2003: Chapter 4) lists and discusses what he considers to be the six major sources of evidence for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artefacts. In support of the above Leedy (1993:149) notes that in a case study the data often include observation, interviews, documents (for example, newspaper articles), past records (for example, previous test scores), and audiovisual materials (for example, photographs, videotapes). This study makes use of document analysis, qualitative interviews, and secondary research.

3.2.1 Document Analysis

A variety of approaches to the classification of sources for document study can be found in the relevant literature. Authors such as Bailey (1994:294), Baker (1988:270), Mouton (1988:21-22) and Neuman (2000:395) classify sources into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are seen as the original written material of the author’s own experiences and observations, while secondary sources consist of material that is derived from someone else as the original source (Strydom and Delport, 2002:322). For example, an autobiography is clearly a primary document, while a biography is a secondary document. According to Strydom (1997:227), this implies that a primary source should therefore be more reliable than a secondary one. Since secondary sources are always someone else’s interpretation of primary sources, they should be scrutinized for accuracy. Under document study the Researcher can make use of official documents. Bailey (1994:294) notes that official documents or non-personal documents imply documents that are compiled and maintained on a
continuous basis by large organizations such as government institutions. Such
documents are more formal and structured than personal documents. In addition,
there is also mass media, which includes printed and audio visual; newspapers,
magazines, journals and newsletters, television, radio, films and books. Lastly,
document study also includes archival material which comprises documents and
data preserved in archives for research purposes. Government documents,
including parliamentary debates, policy papers and draft bills and final forms of
new legislation pertaining to broadcasting and other media, reports and other
documents from interest groups as well as relevant articles from various
newspapers form part of the primary sources of information of this study.

Like all research methodologies, however documentary analysis has its pitfalls,
problems and disadvantages. On a general level, there are the classical problems
of reliability and validity. Since many of the sources used in documentary
analysis are gathered using other research methodologies, it risks recirculating
and replicating information which was not valid or reliable to start with. These
may seem like serious and disturbing problems for a documentary analyst;
however these problems are no different from those that any social scientist has to
face. Problems of interpretation, validity and reliability are common to all
research, and as other methods, documentary analysis has its ways of dealing with
these problems.

Two techniques in particular are important. The first is source criticism, which
means much more than just checking for ‘inaccuracies’ or ‘untruths’. As
Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:137) point out, all documentary sources need to
be viewed as social products, which have been created under specific
circumstances, in specific contexts and by specific people. The researcher must
therefore inquire into the motives and situations that induced their production and
interpret the sources in the light of who has written them. The second main
technique employed in documentary analysis is triangulation. Triangulation is
usually used to describe a process whereby information derived using one type of
methodology is verified through information derived using different methodologies (Erlandson et al., 1993). However, it can be used to describe a process whereby different documentary sources are combined, each to supplement and check upon the others. Documentary research is therefore not a matter of identifying the authoritative source and then exploiting it for all it is worth, but to amass many pieces of evidence from a wide range of sources, and use these to build a comprehensive account.

Because of the political tension in Zimbabwe, I had to rely heavily on documentary evidence. The political tension in Zimbabwe has made political actors, people who work for the media and those in the Ministry of Information uneasy to discuss issues that are related to politics and also media related issues. One of the basic advantages of document study is the fact that it is the only method where the researcher does not need to make personal contact with the respondents (Strydom and Delport, 2002:325). The accessibility of official documents is also a problem owing to legislation on the confidentiality of information. Thus, under such circumstances, written documents are more reliable than oral sources, as people tend to give what they consider to be politically correct statements when interviewed. Nevertheless, this need no imply that information obtained from documents is considered as inherently factual and objective, rather, source criticism is applied, since documents tend to depict the interests of their originators.

Several documents were selected for analysis and these include the Broadcasting Acts, committee reports, parliamentary debates, newspaper articles and conference papers on the changes that have taken place in the media due to commercialization. The Acts relating to broadcasting are obtainable from the Government Printers and newspaper articles are obtainable from various newspaper houses. From parliamentary debates, it is possible to get the nature of arguments advanced by both the government and opposition political parties in relation to broadcasting policy.
3.2.2 Qualitative Interviews

Key personnel such as those in the Ministry of Information, representatives of key interest groups will be asked to give their personal opinions and interpretations of how the Commercialization Act has impacted on public service broadcasting. The respondents will be selected on the basis of their knowledge of the subject by virtue of being involved in the process as well as the position of authority. The interviews will be used as guided conversations rather than structured queries as one would find in a survey (Yin, 2003:89). The interviews will be used to clarify or complement some of the issues arising from primary documents.

3.2.3 Secondary Research

This study will also rely extensively on information that will be obtained from secondary sources. Neuman (2000:395) refers to secondary sources as consisting of material that is derived from someone else as the original source. Likewise Steward and Kamins (1993:2) note that secondary information consists of sources of data and other information collected by others and archived in some form. These sources include government reports, archived data sets, and the traditional books and journals found in libraries.

The main advantage of using secondary research is that it uses information that already exists in some form, and hence is less expensive and less time consuming. Some of the information on commercial broadcasting and its impact on public service broadcasting needed for this study already exist in form of books, reports and journal articles that needs to be subjected to secondary analysis in the light of the current research focus. These secondary sources were useful in the formulation of the research problem, research hypothesis as well as research methods for this study. In this case, secondary research will become useful as a supplement to fill the gaps in the existing knowledge.
Primary and secondary research can, in some instances, be substitutes for each other, while in some instances they can be used to complement rather than substitute one another (Steward and Kamins, 1993:3). Likewise, in this study, these two source categories are used both to substitute and/or complement each other depending on a particular situation. While secondary information will be used mostly for the perceived reliability of these sources, it is important to stress that this will become the most efficient way of getting round the complications of carrying out research in tension-charged Zimbabwe.

Since secondary sources are always someone else’s interpretation of primary sources, secondary sources should be therefore thoroughly scrutinized for accuracy (Strydom and Delport, 2002:322). Thus the major problem with secondary research is that the researcher does not collect the information, hence he or she does not have control over the intended or unintended biases that it often carries. Some authors such as Arkava and Lane (1983:188-90), Denzin and Lincoln (1994:393) base their classification on the nature and structure of the source, whether it is personal or official document. Steward and Kamins (1993:17) suggest that secondary information must be evaluated carefully and weighed according to its recency and credibility. Such an evaluation, they suggest, must be based on the following six questions: “(1) What was the purpose of the study? (2) Who collected the information? (3) What information was actually collected? (4) When was the information collected? (5) How was the information obtained? (6) How consistent is the information with other sources?” these reflections will be made on the secondary information that will be used in this study.

3.2.4 The Internet as a source

The Internet has become one of the key sources of information in political and other research (Burham, Gilland, Grant, and Henry, 2004). With governments and organizations increasingly putting documents and other information online, this
has provided a cost-effective and timesaving way of obtaining important information which can be easily accessed and downloaded within minutes. However, as Burham et al (2004:89) caution, Internet sources suffer the same authenticity problems that any other archival sources do, and as such require a systematic approach. A considerable amount of information for this study will be obtained from the Internet, including newspaper articles, government documents such as the Parliamentary debates.

Government websites will also be used to access some of these key documents, for instance, important websites such as kubatana.org have emerged which provide information about civil society and the media in Zimbabwe. In addition, search engines such as Google (in particular scholar.google.com) is very useful in enabling access to certain academic articles which are not published elsewhere. One of the major challenges faced with using the Internet, especially in the case of Zimbabwe is that the government website is under constant reconstruction, with the information either changing or disappearing completely. In order to verify the information or deal with the problem of authenticity, the information considered suspect will be cross-checked with other sources discussed above.

### 3.3 Reliability and validity of document study

When documents are studied, it is of cardinal importance that the researcher evaluates the authenticity, or validity and reliability of the documents (Strydom and Delport, 2002:324). The reason for this is that the authors of documents sometimes harbour ulterior motives such as seeking money or prestige. Moreover, there is often a considerable time lag between the occurrence of the event and the writing of the document, with the delay leading to lapses of memory and inaccuracies (Bailey, 1994:317).

There are different ways in which the validity and reliability of documents can be tested. Babbie and Mouton (2001:285-286) recommend that it is sometimes
possible to compare the relevant document with other written documents or data collected in other ways. For instance, in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected I will compare the information I get from official documents with the information I get from the interviews. In addition, the data gathered from persons in authority will also be compared to the data gathered from activists from different groups to ensure that there is no bias. Furthermore, Babbie and Mouton (2001:287) suggest that another technique is to verify data by interviewing other informants, persons in the same roles or persons knowledgeable on the subject, or who were personally involved in the event. The content of the document is thus compared with an external source. In this study I will interview producers at Radio Zimbabwe and other people who were actively involved in the commercialization of programmes at the station.

According to Bailey (1994:318), the reliability of documents may be checked either, by similar documents at two or more points in time (instrument reliability) or by comparing the results of two or more researchers at the same points in time (analyst reliability). Thus, document study can be reliable and valid as a method of data collection since there are several ways of cross checking to ensure the authenticity, or validity and reliability of the documents.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the approaches and methods that are used in this study. The study make use of a case study approach to investigate the impact of commercialization on public service broadcasting, taking note of the changes at Radio Zimbabwe with the adoption of the Commercialization Act of 2001. Though there are limitations to the methods that are used in this study, the advantages of using the methods in this study outweigh the disadvantages hence; the methods are best suited to this study. The next chapter present and discuss the findings of the research.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This study set out to investigate the impact of media commercialisation on public service broadcasting: the case of Radio Zimbabwe after the adoption of the Commercialisation Act of 2001. The study was based on the hypothesis that with the adoption of the Commercialization Act Radio Zimbabwe will not effectively play the public service role. In this chapter I present and discuss the findings of the study. The interpretation and discussion are informed by the objectives of the study as stated in chapter one, and informed by the theoretical considerations and literature review in chapter two. The chapter combines findings from the interviews and documentary (primary and secondary) data. The findings are presented, illustrated and corroborated with quotations arising from the interviews and documents. The major themes in this section are: Radio Zimbabwe’s mandate, perceptions on public service broadcasting, perceptions on commercial broadcasting and issues of funding.

4.1 Perceptions of Radio Zimbabwe’s mandate

In this section I explore how the operators of Radio Zimbabwe understand their mandate. The respondents at the radio station admitted that Radio Zimbabwe is a public service broadcaster with reference to the definition of a public broadcaster in the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) of 2001. The BSA (2001) defines a public service broadcaster as “an entity established by law which is wholly owned or controlled by the State”. Radio Zimbabwe is responsible for providing and maintaining broadcasting services on behalf of the Government of the State. This was confirmed by the Senior Producer at the station who stated, ‘we are the
mouthpiece of the government’ (Chikosha, 2006: Personal Interview). In addition, he also confirmed their mission at Radio Zimbabwe as that of educating, informing and entertaining.

The workers at Radio Zimbabwe claimed that the station is modelled after the BBC public service ethos which includes accessibility to all people across the whole geographical space (Reith, 1924; Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994). This is supported by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ), which stipulates, as one of their functions, to make sure that the public broadcaster ‘provides sufficient broadcasting services throughout Zimbabwe’ (BAZ 2001). Moreover, as well stated the BAZ ensures the development of broadcasting systems and services in accordance with practicable and recognised international standards and public demand. This public interest role, ‘places on Radio Zimbabwe the responsibility of handling and publicising all government policies and actions. Thus, by publicising the activities of the government to the public, Radio Zimbabwe contributes to the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). However, Habermas (1989) argues that a public sphere is made up of elites and private citizens who use the medium to informally control the government (Curran, 1991). Therefore, for Radio Zimbabwe to have truly contributed to the public sphere it should, through its diverse programmes, also bring people together to express their views on government actions and activities.

The edict which establishes Radio Zimbabwe states that the Corporation should ‘ensure the role of broadcasting services and systems in developing and reflecting a sense of Zimbabwean identity, character and cultural diversity, and the provision of high quality and innovative programming’ (BSA, 2001). Producing good quality programmes places on Radio Zimbabwe the task of not merely keeping the public aware of the activities of the government but also inform the government about the public’s views since communication is a two way process. Therefore, it can be inferred that Radio Zimbabwe is set up as a medium to enable
people of Zimbabwe to reach out to the State and vice-versa. In this way it serves as a public broadcaster.

A public service broadcaster, which in Africa, is defined in terms of state ownership, financing and control (Opoku-Mensah, 1998) as outlined in the Literature Review in Chapter two, offers the people what they want through affordable and diverse output. This seems to be the state of the public broadcaster as section 3 of the BSA states that the broadcaster has to ensure that it should provide these services at rates consistent with the provision of an efficient and continuous service and necessity of maintaining diversity in its programmes. Thus, Radio Zimbabwe to some extent serves as a public service broadcaster with the aim of serving the public interest.

Through government use of Radio Zimbabwe to reach to the public, the station fulfils an enlightenment role, “by acting as an agent of persuasion of the people on major issues and activities of the State’ (Manyere, 2006: Personal Interview). However, public dialogue cannot be complete without people’s reactions to government actions and activities being taken to the government. In order to achieve this public dialogue, the Public Relations Officer said that Radio Zimbabwe ‘deploys some reporters in the local government areas to bring news about the local government and also news concerning communities and localities’ (Manyere, 2006: Personal Interview).

As a station owned and controlled by the State, the government has powers to appoint members of the Board of Directors. This is known as the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe. As stipulated in the BSA (Section 11(4)) ‘the Board shall consist of not fewer than five members and not more than nine members appointed by the Minister of State for Information and Publicity in the President’s office after consultation with the President and in accordance with any directions that the President may give him.’ Although the discourse of mode of appointment at the station was not the focus of my study, it is important to note that by
exercising powers over appointments, the government is indirectly interfering with the functioning of the station. This undermines Radio Zimbabwe’s independence and impartiality as a public service broadcaster. The appointment of the Board members by the Minister of Information and Publicity in consultation with the President runs against the grain of the principles of the African Charter on Broadcasting. Ideally, in a democracy, the people, through parliamentary public hearings should nominate individuals to sit in such boards (MISA-Zimbabwe, Alert July 2006). Transparency and accountability are guaranteed only if the board is well representative as opposed to the present set-up. One of the important tenets of public service broadcasting as Raboy (1996:29) noted is distance from vested interests. Thus, the edict stipulating that members of the BAZ be appointed by the Minister, without any kind of public screening, raises serious questions about the stations’ public service ethos. Curran (2000) notes that the frequent use of appointments into the Boards of public service broadcasting organisations as political patronage makes public service broadcasters vulnerable to government pressure. Thus, appointment of members of the BAZ by the government leads the station into compromising its role as a public service broadcaster, and of ensuring public interest.

At independence, the new government invited a team of BBC experts to evaluate the existing transmission, training, management, financial and editorial aspects of ZBC and recommended ways of expanding public service broadcasting to the entire nation (Moyo, 2006:212). It stressed the need to wrest broadcasting from partisan control, stating that:

…the first requirement for a broadcast service is independence from the government and proper insulation from party or other pressures. … ZBC should be recognised as an independent public service corporation (BBC Report, 1980, cited in Mano, 1997: 45; Zaffiro, 1984: 123-4).
This particular recommendation has gone largely ignored, as evidenced by continued state interference in the day-to-day running of the ZBC. As has been discussed before, state interference was made possible through the appointment of loyalists to the Board of Directors as well as the Corporations continued dependence on subventions from the state. The BBC had also recommended appointment of politically neutral individuals to the Board of Directors of the ZBC by the President, subject to approval by Parliament.

One other major area of ethical conflict confronting Radio Zimbabwe as a public service broadcaster is the issue of funding. As Moyo (2006:226) notes, the ZBC is funded mainly by the state, as well as by fees paid by the public. As a public broadcaster, Radio Zimbabwe has a duty to reflect a broad spectrum of views across the nation, and not just those of the government and ZANU PF. As I mentioned before, it is very important that the public broadcaster is independent from the government. If one may ask, how can the public broadcaster be independent from the government yet it gets its funding from the government. With these contradictions in its funding, Radio Zimbabwe is tied to the government’s financial disposition, which impacts on its ability to meet the radio’s public values.

The issue of the public broadcaster’s funding as the findings show really compromise the role of Radio Zimbabwe. For instance, the BSA requires that all licensees should make available one hour per week to the government of the day at its request to enable it to explain its policies to the nation (BSA, Section 11(5). This clause gives the government of the day unfair advantage over opposition political parties who are not provided the same access, particularly considering that the gap between the ruling party and government is very thin (Moyo, 2006:270). Because the broadcaster is funded by the government, it is not independent and to argue otherwise would be an exercise in futility.
Moreover, the BSA (2001, Section V11 (31) stipulates that every licensee shall pay the prescribed annual levy to the Broadcasting Fund. Getting funds from the license fees paid by the public is not guaranteed. There has been mounting public criticism of poor services in terms of programming and reception in certain parts of the country, culminating in various forms of resistance. Because of poor reception which can last for a long period of time in most parts of the country, viewers resist paying for their radio and television license. For instance, in Manicaland province (The Herald, 16 November 1993), viewers and listeners mounted a demonstration against the fees hike because they did not want to pay for poor services and subsidise viewers and listeners in Harare who received clear signals of all radio and television stations. Viewers and listeners from Masvingo, Beitbridge, Victoria Falls and Bulawayo also joined the protest, citing, among other things, the reduced viewing and listening hours owing to loss of transmission and poor quality programmes.

As announced on ZTV on the 6th of June 2006, the license fees were increased from Z$12 000 to Z$650 000. Many people are not willing to pay and those who pay do it because they are afraid of the threats that are always shown on ZTV that if one is caught without a license, one will be fined or arrested. In addition to this warning, the BSA (Section V11 (32) notes, “any person who fails to pay a levy due to the Broadcasting Fund shall in addition to any other penalty imposed for non-compliance with this Act, be liable to the suspension of his license; or pay the Fund an amount equivalent to double the levy due.” Moreover, some pay when they are caught at roadblocks when listening to the radio without having paid for the license. In an effort to make sure that the license fee is paid, these days they make people caught with car radios to pay at roadblocks, knowing that if they release them without paying, they will not pay at all. This problem of insufficient funds at the station eventually led to the adoption of the Commercialization Act of 2001 (Chikosha, July 2006: Personal Interview). Other respondents supported the above position that the corporation has been facing financial constraints and the funding from the government has not been regular.
Thus, Radio Zimbabwe is a government owned station, established to take information from the government to the public and from the public to the government. In this way, Radio Zimbabwe through its programmes, acts as a two-way communication channel between the government and the public, thereby fulfils the role of a public service broadcaster. However, the ability to fulfil its public service mandate is being seriously hampered by government control and funding.

4.2 Perceptions of public service broadcasting

The mission of a public service broadcaster as defined by Reith (in Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994) is to ‘educate, inform, and entertain.’ Respondents showed a general agreement with this theme. A public services broadcaster in this case has the role of entertaining, educating and informing the public for the organisation that establishes it. In this instance Radio Zimbabwe is owned by the government of Zimbabwe (Personal Interview with the Communications Officer at ZBH, Simango, 02/07/2006). Thus, the fact that Radio Zimbabwe is owned by the state and was established to promote communication between the government and the people makes it a public service broadcaster (Juuuko, 2002).

A public service broadcaster is supposed to be a station that caters for the interest of every member of the society. The ideal of impartiality ensures that the public service broadcaster as a common utility is available to everyone just as is other public infrastructure (Fourie, 2003). In support of the above statement, the key ideals of participation, public interest and cultural identity were emphasised in the Minister of Information’s presentation of the Broadcasting Services Bill in 2001. In that presentation Minister Moyo stated:

…broadcasting is a public service which utilises a scarce public resource and property called radio frequency and thus provide a service in the
public interest. To that extent, it is thus vital to ensure that the service itself is universally accessible and non-exclusionary while providing and ensuring diversity. Indeed access is a sine qua non of democratic media participation. Which communities should be given access to the airwaves and which voices speak for those communities are critical to broadcasting as it serves our democracy. Legislation must strive to ensure access to broadcasting services so communities can speak to themselves and to other communities…

Indeed the whole speech is full of references to principles and practises of broadcasting in both established and establishing democracies and locates the new broadcasting law within this trend. Moyo (2006:270) notes, ‘but while being a clone from several broadcasting laws around the world as claimed, the Broadcasting Services Act is in practice applied to achieve the complete opposite of what its international prototypes strive to achieve’. Most importantly, it makes it difficult for aspiring broadcasters to enter the market.

The BSA stipulates that access to the public broadcaster should be ensured in order to promote plurality of views. As Street (2001:16) notes, “in a democracy, no one group or set of interests is systematically preferred over another and the information available to citizens is accurate and impartial”. As such, Radio Zimbabwe, as a public service broadcaster is expected to give equal coverage to all contesting parties in national elections. While these guidelines state the Corporation’s commitment to impartial coverage, in practice, the coverage has always been heavily skewed in favour of the ruling party (Moyo, 2006:225). This is clearly illustrated by the Corporation’s letter, dated 16th March 2000, addressed to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In this letter the Corporation states that its broadcasting services are not accessible to advertisers who wish to promote voter education in Zimbabwe.
The letter further states that broadcasting services are not freely available to opposition political parties for the broadcasting of promotional issues pertinent to their parties (Auret, 2000, Founding Affidavit). Yet the BSA (2001, Section 11:2(1)) states that “during an election period, a broadcaster broadcasts election matter, the broadcaster shall give reasonable and equal opportunities for the broadcasting of election matter to all political parties contesting the election”. Thus, those with opposing views to the ruling party are denied access and this hampers freedom of expression. Surprisingly during the election times, for instance, the 2002 elections, the broadcaster played jingles and advertisements with threats and hateful messages if one would vote for the opposition party. This is against what is stated in the BSA (Section 11(8)), that a broadcaster shall not broadcast a commercial advertisement that contains any political matter. In other words, if the advertisement is from the ruling party, it can be broadcast, but if it is from an opposing party it is not allowed. Thus, on paper the public broadcaster respects universal accessibility and impartiality as important tenets of public broadcasting but practically, access is denied to those with opposing views.

Moreover, the principle of universality of accessibility has to do with the use of a language that all people can understand. The BSA (2001, Section 111(11) states that ‘not less than ten per centum of total programming content broadcast by any licensee shall be in any of the national aboriginal languages of Zimbabwe other than Shona and Ndebele. The public service broadcasters must ensure that particular attention is paid to the minorities. The languages that are used for broadcasting in Zimbabwe are Shona and Ndebele at Radio Zimbabwe, English at Radio 3, English at Spot FM and the other entire minority languages are used on National FM. This implies that a lot of people have access through the use of languages that they understand. However, Moyo (2006:287) notes, ‘the ZBC radio stations remain largely accessible to citizens living in urban areas who have the ability to phone in and participate in some of its programmes, leaving the majority of the population with poor or no reception, and hence unable to fully participate.
A public service broadcaster is not just like other broadcasters, but one with a specific mandate to produce programmes that are strong on public issues and representative of citizenry (Habermas, 1989). Thus Radio Zimbabwe has a role to play in providing a forum to interrogate the social, political, economic and cultural happenings that might have an impact on the society. This means that a public service broadcaster acts as a forum for debate and discussion in which all views; opinions and ideas that will improve understanding among people are presented. This integrative role enables the public service broadcaster to be involved in the empowering of individuals to participate in the political and social discourses of the society, enhancing the quality of life and fostering social cohesion. One reporter at Radio Zimbabwe said:

To a great extent, Radio Zimbabwe is not a public service broadcaster because the government has subtle control over the station.

The above assertion calls into question the performance of the public service mandate of Radio Zimbabwe. Like public service stations all over the world whose operation can no longer be clearly defined because of government control, Radio Zimbabwe cannot claim to be a true public service broadcaster serving the public interest.

4.3 Perceptions of commercial broadcasting

This section aims to capture the respondents’ views on what a commercial broadcaster is, how it functions and how it differs from a public service broadcaster. Since the focus of the study is to investigate the impact of commercialisation on public service broadcasting, it is important to know what the respondents think and understand about it so that I can position the findings within the context of the study.
Most respondents view the concept of commercial broadcasting as mainly carried out for profit. As the Communication Officer at ZBH puts it:

Commercial broadcasting actually has to do with the selling of the product that you have and in this situation that is airtime and the programmes that we generate. If what you are doing generate funds especially in radio where you have to produce programmes, present music, do educative, informative and entertaining programmes and these bring money into the organisation then you are a commercial broadcaster (Simango, 2006: Personal Interview).

The logic behind commercial broadcasting is that broadcasting is seen as a way of making profit. It can be argued that the increasing commercialization of public service broadcasting is aimed at making profit rather than informed by the desire to entertain, educate and inform the public and contribute to the discourse of the media as a market place of ideas. Commercial broadcasters’ emphasis on entertainment and sales of commercial space contradicts the importance of radio being used as a medium for effecting positive social change and participation in the developmental processes of a society.

Moreover, commercial broadcasting assumes that audiences are sovereign consumers, and that the only workable index of quality is their pattern of choices, that is the degree of popularity of radio or television programmes, effective demand, the willingness of individuals to purchase a product, is the criterion of its quality (Keane 1991a: 121). This view was supported by one of the respondents, who argued,

Commercial broadcasters have a lot of freedom in their programming. For instance, public broadcasters find it difficult to advertise hazardous things, for example cigarettes, and are obliged to tell the public that smoking is dangerous but commercial broadcasters argue that people are free to
choose what they want as long as they have the money to buy the products (Farai, 2006: Personal Interview).

In addition, some respondents showed that they prefer commercial programming to public service programming. For instance, one respondent said that commercial broadcasters offers more entertaining programmes unlike public service broadcasters where in some programmes people can talk for thirty minutes and as a result people get bored and switch off.

Moreover, as noted by the Senior Producer (Chikosha, 2006: Personal Interview), commercial broadcasters have more freedom in terms of choosing programmes as compared to public service broadcasters. He noted that, “commercial broadcasters do not rely on government funding and as a result they can easily broadcast what is against the government.” This is not the case with public service broadcasters, in this instance Radio Zimbabwe cannot criticise the government for fear that the government can withdraw its funding.

In short, these perceptions of commercial broadcasting by the respondents have helped to qualify the fact that the commercial broadcasting model is different from public service broadcasting.

4.4 The impact of commercial broadcasting on Radio Zimbabwe as a public service broadcaster

As it has been pointed out before in the previous chapters, the hypothesis is that with the adoption of the Commercialisation Act of 2001, Radio Zimbabwe has drifted away from its public service broadcasting to broadcasting that is commercially oriented, hence cannot play its public service role effectively. Having looked at what the respondents understand about public service and commercial broadcasting, in this section I will discuss the findings on the effects
of commercialisation on Radio Zimbabwe and how it has changed the public service broadcaster to one that is commercially oriented.

As noted by the *Zimbabwe Independent* newspaper, huge debts crippled the state-controlled ZBH. Quoting a report produced by its former Chief Executive Officer, Munyaradzi Hwengwere, the state-controlled broadcaster could not generate enough income to sustain its activities hence the adoption of the Commercialisation Act of 2001. Moreover, MISA-Zimbabwe, noted that the ZBH Executive Chairman Rino Zhawarara reportedly said that they were working towards turning the loss-making state broadcaster into a viable institution by commercialising it. As a result of financial instability MISA-Zimbabwe (2001: Alert, 26 October) notes, the Government approved the commercialisation of the ZBC into a public company wholly owned by the government. As *The Herald* reported (25 October 2001) the Bill intends to split the public broadcaster into two separate companies: one responsible for broadcasting and the other signal for transmission.

The rationale, according to *The Herald*, is to make the ZBC concentrate on its core business of providing radio and television broadcasting while the new signal carrier company will concentrate on providing signal transmission services for broadcasters to get efficient signal transmission services without prejudicing ‘national security’. The newspaper also stated that the Commercialisation Act would also give the ZBC an opportunity to make a profit and not rely on government subsidies. Thus from the onset, the Commercialisation Act was established for profit purposes as stated by *The Herald*. Surprisingly the report notes, “The ZBC remains the country’s sole public broadcaster even though a new Broadcasting Act was passed.” From the above statement one can deduce the fact that though the government adopted the Commercialisation Act, they still want the Corporation to play the role of a public service broadcaster. With this brief introduction on the adoption of the Commercialisation Act and the reasons that
led to its establishment, I am now going into the views of the respondents on how the Commercialisation has impacted on the public service broadcaster.

From the onset, as Moyo (2006:247) notes, it is evident that the government remained ambiguous with regards to its preferred path to broadcast reform – whether to privatise the ZBC or merely commercialise it while retaining control. However, it ensured that whatever course was taken would not prejudice its position of controlling the broadcasting sector. The ZBC Commercialisation Act means that ZBC has to operate as a commercial entity that is capable of realising enough revenue to sustain itself without resorting to government subventions. This Act does something that further distances the ZBC from the ideals articulated by civil society – notably that it be transformed into a true public service broadcaster. Thus as Moyo (2006:275) notes, instead of articulating ‘public interest’ and democratic citizenship ideas, the Commercialisation Act provides for the marketisation of the commons and legalises the ‘silent theft’ of the ‘common wealth’. Again, the contradictory interests of commercialisation and state control are apparent where the Commercialisation Act (Section 4(3) states, “In the performance of their functions, the successor companies shall give priority to serving the needs of the State, to the extent that it is compatible with sound business practice to do so.” Such a provision is open to Government abuse.

In an interview with the Senior Producer at Radio Zimbabwe, evidence shows that the adoption of the Commercialisation Act has impacted on their activities at the station as a public service broadcaster. However, he strongly argued that even though commercialisation has effects on their broadcasting, they still play the public service role and are still a public service broadcaster. He states:

It is true that the Commercialisation Act of 2001 impacted Radio Zimbabwe as a public broadcaster but we are still playing our role as a public broadcaster. The anchor programmes on this station did not change
as a result of the adoption of the Commercialisation Act (Chikosha, 2006: Personal Interview)

When asked to clarify what he meant by anchor programmes, he explained that these are the main programmes or the core programmes that the station cannot replace with anything else for they are the mere reasons for the existence of the station. He further explained and categorised these programmes under: educational, health and developmental programmes. He stated that programmes like “Pamhepo naChiremba” translated as “On air with the Doctor” did not change because they are of public interest. On this programme, the doctor on line will be talking about different diseases for instance Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. People call in and ask questions about what they do not understand concerning those diseases. Moreover, people are not just allowed to talk about the diseases under discussion for the day, but can ask any question concerning health matters. In this manner, he said, “the station is still playing the public service role because the programmes are still in the public interest”. This programme helps people to have an understanding of diseases that are threatening the nation and are given precautions of how to deal with them ‘without paying’.

Moreover, educational programmes which used to be aired on the station before the adoption of the Commercialisation Act are still being broadcasted. He gave examples of Career Guidance programmes and The National High Schools Quiz as educational programmes that educate people and cannot be removed because they are important to the society. Apart from these the Public Relations Officer stated:

As a public service broadcaster, we are still obliged to promote local cultures and identity as stated in the BSA (Section 11, 3(2h)) that the broadcaster shall ensure the role of broadcasting services and systems in developing and reflecting a sense of Zimbabwean, character and cultural diversity’ (Farai, July 2006: Personal Interview).
She further explains: the fact that the broadcaster is still obliged to promote local content means that we are still a public service broadcaster. The local content quotas are as follows: 75% of music must be Zimbabwean and 10% from Africa; 70% of its drama consists of Zimbabwean drama; 80% of its current affairs programming consists of Zimbabwean current affairs; 70% of its social documentary programming consists of Zimbabwean social documentary programming; 70% of its informal knowledge-building programming consists of Zimbabwean informal knowledge-building programming; 80% of its educational programming consists of Zimbabwean educational programming; and 80% of its children’s programming consists of Zimbabwean educational programme. However, this has attracted attention and heated debate amongst the Zimbabwean society. Most of the local content programmes, including “Nhaka yedu” (Our Heritage); “National Ethos”; and “Murimi wanhasi” (The New Farmer), have been criticised for being overly partisan and uncritically supporting the ideals of the ruling party (Moyo, 2006:283). Ranger (2004), for example, has argued that these programmes peddle a ‘patriotic history’ that is biased in favour of the ruling party, at the exclusion of other players and forces that aided in the struggle for independence.

Commenting on the ZBC’s adherence to the Broadcasting Services Act provision that broadcasters should give one cumulative per week to the government of the day, the Parliamentary Committee observed:

The airtime application has generally been utilised for flighting jingles for the government, for the now ‘Sendekera Mwana Wevhu’. The jingle is surrounded by controversy. Whilst some sections of the community view it as a political jingle, which would be in violation of the provisions of the law which states that it should be State information time.
Under the BSA, the ZBH is required to commission at least 40% of production to local independent producers, but lack of resources has hampered the achievement of this policy. Moreover, as Moyo (2006:284) notes, local producers are also not given favourable conditions and as a result they are not willing to sell their productions to the Corporation. There are also concerns amongst some local producers that the selection of material by ZBH is often times biased and material deemed to be ‘political’ is rejected. As the report established,

The Parliamentary Committee was also informed that selection of material from production houses had rather been biased, implying that production houses that did not hold favour with the broadcaster had found their works rejected… Many documentaries which had been accepted regionally and internationally had been rejected by the public broadcaster. It was further submitted that in certain instances there was content manipulation in the selection methods and this had largely been on political grounds (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2004:17)

All this shows that the new regulations are there to advance the interests of the ruling party. The Committee’s main finding was that the ZBH was failing to fulfil its mandate as a public broadcaster, as evidenced by: firstly, its inability to provide national coverage (it established that ZBC only reaches 40% of the country, mostly along urban areas); secondly, its drive for commercialization at the expense of the public service principles, thirdly, its lack of resources such vehicles and cameras to enable wide coverage; and lastly, the blatant editorial interference and partisan reporting of issues.

While Radio Zimbabwe claims to be executing the role of a public service broadcaster, the public whom it serving perceive it to be serving the interests of the government and not public interest. To the respondents at Radio Zimbabwe, the maintenance of such programmes that they perceive as core programmes is a sign that they are not drifting away from their public service mandate.
On the other hand, Zvidzai (MISA-Zimbabwe) notes, ZBH cannot, in its current state, serve its public mandate because as a holding company it is geared to making profits a scenario that compels it to operate on the lines of a commercial broadcaster’ (fifth year student with the National University of Science and Technology’s Journalism and Media Studies Department on attachment with MISA-Zimbabwe). He further stated that the purpose, structure and orientation of a public service broadcaster are markedly different from that of a commercial broadcaster. Thus, Radio Zimbabwe cannot play the public service role effectively while serving as a commercial broadcaster too.

The senior producer at Radio Zimbabwe noted that the adoption of the Commercialisation Act of 2001 at radio Zimbabwe had implications on public service broadcasting but he also noted that the station balances public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting such that revenues generated through advertising programmes can assist in furthering the production of non-profit programmes at the station. He noted that with the adoption of the Commercialisation Act Radio Zimbabwe introduced programmes that lure advertisers. As Chikosha (2006: Personal Interview) notes, “we have introduced a lot of programmes that we assessed and discovered that they lure advertisers and in this way we are able to sustain the activities at this station.”

Amongst the programmes that they introduced to lure advertisers, there is a musical show programme known as ‘Gumi dzanhasi’ translated as the top ten of the newly released musical albums. In this manner they attract musicians who wish to advertise their music so that the public may buy. As the Senior Producer argued,

Though we attract musicians who want to sell their music to the public through this programme, we are also performing our public service role. Radio Zimbabwe promotes local content, 75% of the music that we play
on this programme is local, 10% from other African countries and 15% from abroad. This is in the public interest because we are promoting the Zimbabwean culture and identity and also helping those who are in the music industry to earn a living.

This is in line with the Broadcasting Services Act (2001), which outlines that the public service broadcaster should promote local content. While minimum local content stipulations are not unique to Zimbabwe, 75% can be said to be exceedingly too high for a country with such a nascent production industry (Kariithi, 2003). Even developed countries that have some of the most vibrant state-supported cultural production industries have put modest requirements on local content. The European Union, for example, requires that broadcasters in member countries devote 51% of airtime to European content as a way of engendering a European identity (Levy, 2001:23).

While local producers in Zimbabwe have welcomed this as a stimulant for growth, there is a notable downside to this rapid ‘localisation’ in the sense that it compromises the quality and diversity of programmes (Moyo, 2006:266). This is against one of the principles of public service broadcasting which stipulates that the broadcaster should promote the provision of high quality and innovative programming and also promote diversity (BSA, 2001, Section 11(2)). The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee has noted a marked decline in quality as well as excessive repeating of programmes on both ZBC radio and television since the introduction of the 75% stipulation, which points to the fact that there was need to gradually increase local content quotas in tandem with the development of the local production industry (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2003).

As Chikosha (2006: Personal Interview) argued, the increase in local content quotas is in the interest of the public. This is true as evidenced by the unprecedented growth in local talent, the dramatic increase in local music recordings as well as television dramas in the past five years. However, there have
been notable trends that raise concerns as to the motives behind this whole process. Moyo (2006:266) noted that the Corporation has been far surpassing the 75% local content stipulation by using sub-standard programmes as well as repeating programmes. In some cases, such as drama, current affairs and social documentary programming, ZBC has even been reaching 100%, which meant that it was ‘closing doors, on regional and international programmes as required under the law (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2003:14-17). Thus while trying to promote some principles stipulated in the BSA; Radio Zimbabwe violates other principles of public service broadcasting.

This zeal to over-comply with the law can be interpreted as a desire to insulate the Zimbabwean citizens from foreign culture and information, which is not only difficult but also futile given the pervasive new technologies of communication. Furthermore, local artists who are critical of the government have had their productions censored or rejected by the only broadcaster, the ZBC. This has been noted by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Transport and Communications in its June 2003 report:

The committee was also informed that selection of material from production houses had rather been biased, implying that production houses that did not hold favour with the broadcaster had found their works rejected... It was further submitted that in certain instances there was content manipulation in the selection methods and this has largely been on political grounds (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2003:14).

In addition, another reason for the radical turn to local content, as Charamba revealed, was that foreign content required scarce foreign currency and that ZBC could no longer afford foreign programmes as it was in heavy debt with its suppliers:
…when we came in as the Department of Information, the one vexing dimension had to do with the indebtedness of ZBC to suppliers of programmes and they were indebted to the tune of about Z$75 million… It became a talking point because ZBC was no longer getting new programmes. They had foiled up all their programme suppliers; the Australians, Canadians, British, American, etc” (Charamba, 2003: Interviewed by Moyo in Moyo, 2006).

While Chikosha’s argument for promoting local content as a public broadcaster is valid just as it is promoted in other countries, there are problems if this local content is subject to selection which leads to the dominance of certain viewpoints over others. As such there is need for reasonable local content regulations that match the production industry. Stringent local content requirements where producers compete to sell their product to a single broadcaster can be in a way, a method of stunting the development of this sector and also at the same time denying citizens access to diverse viewpoints.

Moreover, with the adoption of the Commercialisation Act, much airtime has been allocated to programmes that attract business people. As noted, ‘business people especially in the transport sector buy airtime at this station and advertise their transport so that people can know about the services they offer and contact them when they need the service’ Chikosha, 2006: Personal Interview). For instance, the programme on Radio Zimbabwe known as “Tiriparwendo”, where owners of buses, Lorries advertise their transport and the routes that they travel, in case of buses. This makes the public aware of the buses to take when using certain routes.

In addition, on this programme those who are also in the business of selling car parts also advertise. All these programmes have been put in place at Radio Zimbabwe as a way of getting funds from advertisers. Instead of allocating much of this airtime to programmes that enrich the public, Radio Zimbabwe is engaging
in the business of selling the public to advertisers. Thus instead of viewing the public as citizens who have the right to communication channels, the public broadcaster has turned them into consumers or products for sell to the advertisers (Keane 1991b: 121).

The adoption of the Commercialisation Act of 2001 has seen Radio Zimbabwe moving away from its public service mandate to broadcasting that is commercially oriented. In order to raise funds to maintain the activities at the radio station and to gain profits, the station is allocating a lot of airtime to advertising. The Communication Officer at Radio Zimbabwe notes, ‘programmes like “Hande Kumafaro” have greatly increased advertising revenues. In this programme advertisers of holiday accommodation like lodges, hotels and also those of nightclubs buy airtime on the station so that we advertise their services’ (Farai, 2006: Personal Interview). As a result of the reliance upon advertisers for funding Radio Zimbabwe has turned to broadcasting that is commercially oriented at the expense of the public interest.

Furthermore, with the adoption of the Commercialisation Act, Radio Zimbabwe has turned to sponsors who fund different programmes but with the aim of gaining popularity so that the public can buy their products. For instance, there are drama and soaps which are sponsored by Colgate Palmolive. Though such sponsors might be doing it for the public interest so that the publics are entertained, in a way they are also advertising their products. For instance, when a programme is sponsored by Colgate Palmolive, during breaks they advertise their products like Colgate and bathing soap and they tell the public the advantages of using their products. Thus, through sponsoring the programmes at the station, the sponsors have an opportunity to reach out mass audiences who are manipulated into buying those products instead of being given the opportunity of engaging into rational critical debate that enhance their understanding of political and social issues that affect their day to day lives. Thus, though Radio Zimbabwe seems to be fulfilling its role of entertaining the public as a public service broadcaster, this
comes with manipulation into buying advertised products at the expense of gaining information that is important for the public to make informed decisions in their lives. Hence the Commercialisation Act has really impacted on the activities of Radio Zimbabwe as a public broadcaster.

Furthermore, a closer look at most of the programmes broadcasted at Radio Zimbabwe shows that since the adoption of the Commercialisation Act most programmes have been designed to include advertising. They have made it a point that advertising becomes part of every programme. In an interview with Manyere, the Public Relations Officer at Radio Zimbabwe, he notes:

> We make sure that during live programmes there are commercial breaks and we make use of the breaks to advertise different services or products as a way of generating funds so that the station’s activities are sustained. This has proved to be so effective because some people like to listen to live programmes and the advertisers get the opportunity to reach them and advertise their products (Manyere, 2006: Personal Interview).

This method of advertising manipulates audiences who will be busy following or listen to important programmes. For instance, children at times cannot differentiate between a programme and an advertisement and as a result they demand some of the things from their parents.

Moreover, Chikosha also explained that another method that they use as a way of selling airtime to sponsors is to make them ride on programmes. For instance, if a sponsor has helped in sponsoring a programme on AIDS awareness, during breaks they talk about the sponsor and in a way advertise his or her services. Because the public enjoys the programme that he or she sponsored they are likely to be persuaded to buy the products. Thus sponsors ride on programmes to reach the audiences and manipulate them into buying their products.
The respondents at Radio Zimbabwe maintained that though commercialisation has impacted on the public service broadcaster, they are still playing the role of serving the public interest. The two, that is public broadcasting and commercial broadcasting can work side by side such that commercial programmes can compensate for the public services broadcasting that does not generate income.

Upon being asked about the allocation of time to programmes, the Senior Producer noted that ‘if a programme is five (5) minutes long, one (1) minute is for advertising, if fifteen (15) minutes long then three (3) minutes are for advertising and if the programme is thirty (30) minutes long then six (6) minutes are for advertising. Thus, the longer the programme is, the more time is allocated for advertising. A closer analysis of this shows that advertising has become part of every programme on this station.

Advertising has effects on the way a public service broadcaster functions. It affects the principle of universality of access in such a way that the public is denied access to the broadcaster. This happens when airtime that might be used by the public to engage in debates relating to their social and political lives is sold to advertisers. Garnham (1990:120) notes:

> The justification for publicly regulated radio lies in its superiority to the market as a means of providing all citizens, whatever their wealth or geographical location, equal access to a wide range of high-quality entertainment, information and education, and as a means of ensuring that the aim of the programme producer is the satisfaction of a range of audience tastes rather than only those that show the largest profit.

The opposite of what Garnham (1990) asserts in the above quotation is happening at Radio Zimbabwe. The public has nothing in terms of funds to offer to the broadcaster and because of that their point of view is ignored. Thus access
is accorded to advertisers because they have something to offer at the expense of the citizens who only have views to air and not funds.

4.5 Discussion of findings on public service merits

This section presents the discussion of the findings in relation to the literature on public service broadcasting. It interrogates the findings against the hypothesis that commercial broadcasting has a negative impact on public service programming. Commercial broadcasting make public service broadcasting lose their public service values, which include: programming for an informed citizenry, being a public watchdog, catering for diversity and representation, and providing entertainment that reflects all tastes.

As outlined in the literature reviewed in chapter 2, beyond educating, informing, and entertaining its audience, the public service mandate also requires universal accessibility to all citizens within the territorial space (Reith, 1924). This requirement implies that all citizens within the broadcast territory of Radio Zimbabwe must receive its signal and be able to use Radio Zimbabwe to air their views. The station is funded by the government to ensure universal accessibility. However, my findings show that this role is being undermined by the government’s unwillingness to allow the station to function as an independent voice of the people, through interference in its administrative structure and programmes. The public service ethos, as Reith (in Teer-Tomaselli et al., 1994) argues, also implies that Radio Zimbabwe as a public service broadcaster should educate, enlighten, entertain and inform the people by maintaining public awareness.

In order to perform its public service role effectively Radio Zimbabwe needs public funding. As illustrated in chapter 2, the main sources of public funding for public service broadcasters are license fees and state grants (Blumler, 1992). However, for Radio Zimbabwe the collection of license fees is not really effective
since the public are not willing to pay due to poor services. It instead depends on
the government subsidies. This mode of funding implies that the station cannot
act as an open forum for the debate of issues that concerns the well functioning of
the government. Thus Radio Zimbabwe’s funding undermines its public service
values. Bolin (2004) sees the public service concept as a common utility that
should be available to all. This implies that beyond the public being able to
receive the signal, the programmes must be relevant and encompass all the issues
and opinions represented in the society. The fact that the government dictates who
is appointed to Radio Zimbabwe’s staff, including the Chief Executive Officer
and members of the Board of Directors, means that the station is not independent
of the government. This means that Radio Zimbabwe does not offer balanced
views on issues. The Senior Presenter at Radio Rivers noted: “I do not think that
we (Radio Zimbabwe) have lived up to the expectations as a voice representing
the public because the station is owned by the government and highly influenced
by its policies and decisions” (Chikosha, 2006: Personal Interview).

The government’s interference in Radio Zimbabwe’s operations impairs its
impartiality and brings into question its public service value as an arena for
facilitating the dissemination of information to empower the citizens (Kupe,
2003). However, despite government interference in its operations and the
adoption of commercial broadcasting, Radio Zimbabwe was found to be playing
and continuing the public service role of informing, educating and entertaining the
public through its broadcasting of programmes in the local languages, in this way
binding the society together.

Public service broadcasting emphasizes news and public affairs programmes
which are scheduled at prime-time, while entertainment and cultural programmes
are pushed off-peak hours (Hellman and Sauri, 1994; Achille and Miege, 1994). Radio Zimbabwe still adopts this public service programming format and still
broadcasts its news during peak-time and musical entertainment programmes
during off-peak times, sometimes as late as past midnight. One of the strengths of
public service broadcasting is that it ensures that its programmes are produced in-house (Bens et al., 1992). The fact that Radio Zimbabwe is able to produce its own drama and documentary programmes in-house is in line with its mandate and public service ethos.

Moreover, public service broadcasting is expected to be independent and impartial, and the management of the public broadcaster should be made up of professionals, totally non-partisan to government and corporate interests (Reith, 1924). Thus, as a public broadcaster, Radio Zimbabwe is supposed to be shielded from overt politicking by the government. However, respondents complained that at Radio Zimbabwe those that are appointed to run the station are mostly politicians who are loyal to the ruling party. This approach is against public service values and is supported by the by the BSA, which does not require public screening of the appointees. Such a mode of appointments no doubt weakens Radio Zimbabwe in the fulfilment of its public service role.

Blumler and Hoffman-Riem (1992) argue that programmes broadcast by public service broadcasters should interrogate controversial issues, thus giving programmers enough strength to awaken debate and new experiences in the public. It is crucial to note that though Radio Zimbabwe’s programmes allows programmers to experiment with their skills, there is no room to interrogate controversial issues, because of the overbearing government interests in the station. Such programming impair Radio Zimbabwe’s role as public service broadcaster. Thus, with the adoption of the Commercialization Act, Radio Zimbabwe is constrained in its public service role by the policies that established it and the scheduling policies too.

4.6 Radio Zimbabwe’s contribution to the public sphere

The public sphere as outlined in chapter 2 is defined as a space where private citizens come together to speak their minds and form opinion on how the state
should be governed (Habermas, 1989; Curran, 1991; Dahlgren, 1991). By generating a plurality of understandings, the media should enable individuals to reinterpret their social experience, and question the assumptions and ideas of the dominant culture. Curran, (1991:103) notes that this will be emancipatory in a number of ways; it will give subordinate classes increased access to ideas and arguments opposing ideological representations that legitimate their subordination, and enable them to explore more fully ways of changing the structure of society to their advantage. As a public space, the radio station should provide equal access to everybody who wants to air his or her views and wants to hear anything from the public discourse. In this section of the study, I will explore Radio Zimbabwe’s ability to contribute to the formation of opinions as advocated by Habermas (1989) in his concept of the public sphere. The contribution of Radio Zimbabwe to the public sphere will be discussed under the themes of public watchdog, agent of representation and diversity, informed citizenry and entertainment ideals.

4.6.1 Radio Zimbabwe and the public watchdog role

As discussed previously in chapter 2, the public watchdog role of the media positions the media as agents of revealing abuses in the exercise of the state and corporation authority and a facilitator of debate on the functioning of the government (Curran, 1991). This implies that the media reports anything that is contrary to the established norms of the society. At Radio Zimbabwe there is no space for programmes that reveal the ills of the government. Radio Zimbabwe does not operate free from the government, journalists and producers at the station do not freely practice their profession and write and air any programme. In all their programmes they make sure that they do not expose the ills of the government. Though as a watchdog they can watch other people in the society against abuse of power, they cannot do it against the government. Blumler and Hoffman-Riem (1992) argued that public criticism through the media enhance the society’s ability to define itself. Thus, since Radio Zimbabwe does not discuss
controversial issues, it calls into question the stations values of political neutrality. As noted before, this is evidence that the government exercise subtle control over the station. The fact that Chikosha (2006: Personal Interview) noted that they are the government’s mouthpiece says it all. Some people, for instance journalists, have even been suspended or detained for going out of their way to practice the profession the way it ought to be practised.

Government’s interference has been particularly serious during election times. During these times, all views to the political debate are supposed to be aired to enable the people to make the right choice. However it is only the views of the government in power that is heard, while those in the opposition are left out. This is noted by Auret (2000) in a letter that was addressed to the MDC just before the 2000 parliamentary elections which stated that broadcasting services are not freely available to opposition political parties for the broadcasting of promotional issues pertinent to their parties. As a result of government control, Radio Zimbabwe as it currently operates, cannot be a channel through which people can ask questions and get the right answers as far as their governance is concerned. Through government control of the station, Radio Zimbabwe has become more of a guard dog which barks at, and silences anyone who wants to criticise the government. Moreover, the station cannot play its watchdog role perfectly because of its reliance on advertisers. The activities of those corporations that are negative cannot be easily revealed knowing that they rely on them for funds. Thus Radio Zimbabwe cannot play its watchdog role in an environment where it is restricted by the government and advertisers.

4.6.2 Radio Zimbabwe as an agent of diversity and representation

Another democratic function of the media system is to act as an agency of representation. Habermas’ concept of the media as a space for people to air their views sees the media as an organ of representation and presentation of the people’s will (Curran, 1991). It should be organised in a way that enables diverse
social groups and organisations to express alternative points. Moreover, it should assist collective organisations to mobilize support; help them to operate as representative vehicles for the views of their supporters; and aid them to register effective protests and develop and promulgate alternatives (Curran, 1991:103). In other words, the representational role of the media includes helping to create the conditions in which alternative viewpoints and perspectives are brought into full play.

Radio Zimbabwe as an agency of public representation should encourage wider participation in the society’s public discourse and forms a forum which allows the public to be heard and to receive information essential as to how they are being governed. The principle of serving the diverse interests of the public means that Radio Zimbabwe should cater for everyone whether that person supports the ruling or opposing party. Besides presenting news in languages that people understand, it also provides space for other enlightenment and entertainment programmes. The space provided for the diversity and representation of the public at Radio Zimbabwe is inclusive of news, current affairs, and entertainment programmes in languages that people understand. The station has a number of religious programmes, some sponsored and others not sponsored, on its schedule.

However, despite these attempts to ensure the representation of the diverse voices in the state, some people see the station’s programming as inadequate to fulfil this role. This is so because any comment perceived to be against the government is not given space. Curran (1991:101) notes that the case for media diversity is not simply that it promotes a rational debate based on awareness of alternatives. It is also a way of promoting social equity in which divergent social groups have the opportunity to define their interests in their own terms and promote them in the public domain. It is in this context that the role of the media in forming consensus should be understood.
The media should facilitate social agreement through dissemination of accurate information and contrary opinion. This is not the case at Radio Zimbabwe where contrary opinion is silenced. Thus the problem goes back to the ownership and control of the station by the government. Moreover, the fact that some people do not have access to the media due to poor reception implies that they are left out. The principle of diversity is also hampered by reliance on advertisers who end up controlling the programmes because the have the funds that the station needs. It is important to note that advertisers are concerned about profits, which implies that they continue reproducing what sells even if it is monotonous. Thus, commercialisation has affected the role of Radio Zimbabwe as an agent of representation and diversity.

4.6.3 The Informational Role of Radio Zimbabwe

In addition to the concept of the media as a watchdog and representative, commentators have also stressed its informational role (Curran, 1991). This is usually portrayed in terms of facilitating self-expression, promoting public rationality and enabling collecting self-determination. For citizens of a given society to exercise their rights to informed choices so as to make meaningful contributions to the development of the society, they must have access to the widest possible range of information. As Curran (1991:97) notes, these functions of the media can only be fulfilled adequately through the process of a free market. No one should be subjugated, the argument goes, to another’s will but should be able to express freely what they think to whomever they want. In line with the issue of freedom expression the Zimbabwean government established the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). Instead of promoting freedom of expression such that the public are able to engage in debate about matters that concern their governance, this Act has seen the people of Zimbabwe silenced. This is clear from the Minister of information’s speech:
With this law, it is impossible for any mischievous person to use the media for regime change. They (Western countries) are talking about removing the liberation regime and putting the neo-liberalism regime, but we will change governments in democratic elections (Jonathan Moyo, *The Herald*, 2 December 2004).

The development of free and independent media is closely linked to demands for freedom of expression as well as press freedom. One of the key demands from media freedom advocates not only in Zimbabwe but throughout the region was the introduction of freedom of information or access to information legislation to ensure that journalists and members of the public are able to get information they need particularly from public officials. As Moyo (2006:277) notes, the misnamed AIPPA of 2002 should therefore be seen as an attempt to address that demand. Yet AIPPA achieves the complete opposite of what freedom of information law is expected to achieve, mainly because it inhibits the free flow of information and makes the work of journalists more hazardous. The late ZANU PF Parliamentarian and head of the Parliamentary Legal Committee on Transport and Communications, Eddison Zvobgo, described it in his adverse report on the Bill as “the most calculated and determined assault on our liberties guaranteed by the constitution” (Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ), 29 September 2003).

Moreover, the Act, among other things, provides for the licensing of all media and registration of all journalists with the government-appointed Media and Information Commission (MIC). The fact that members of the MIC are appointed by the Minister of Information after consultation with the President and in accordance with any directions that the President may give him suggests that MIC is not an independent body capable of making independent decisions. Section 79 of AIPPA stipulates that no-one shall be allowed to practise as a journalist unless she or he is accredited by the MIC. Section 39 also gives the Commission powers to establish a code of conduct which is binding for all journalists. Anyone who
disobeys this code may have his or her name struck from the roll of journalists, or be suspended or made to pay a heavy fine. This Act has resulted in the detention of many journalists, some even losing their jobs because of being critical of the government. Without the freedom to express themselves and access important information, the public cannot make decisions that pertain to their governance. Thus, with such Acts like AIPPA, Radio Zimbabwe cannot play its role of informing the public perfectly.

Furthermore, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2002 has been widely perceived as equally repressive. The Act restricts freedom of expression, movement and assembly, and makes it a punishable offence for anyone to undermine or make ‘any abusive, indecent, obscene or false statement about or concerning the President or acting President, whether in respect of his person or his office’ (POSA, Section 16 (2)). Such an offence can attract fine or one year imprisonment or both. Several editors, journalists, activists, and opposition politicians have been charged under this Act since its inception in 2002. Thus, POSA criminalise criticism of the President, his government and arms of government.

This freedom is, essential to self-realization, is safeguarded allegedly by the right to publish in a free market. In support of this view Kelley and Donway (1990:90) note, a free marketplace of ideas has a self-righting tendency to correct errors and biases. Free market media inform citizens from a variety of viewpoints; they keep open the channels of communication between the government and the governed, and between different groups in society; they provide a neutral zone for the formation of public opinion (Curran, 1991:97).

However, the market system has been criticised because it limits individual freedom of expression, and consequently prevents public debate from being adequately informed by diverse sources. This then prompted the argument that public rationality has been impaired, and collective direction has been weakened,
because people with something useful to say have not always been given a chance to say it. Radio Zimbabwe, even before the adoption of the Commercialisation Act never played this role perfectly. Of course it informs the public about the activities of the government but it does not provide the space for rational critical debate. The public is not given the forum to criticise the activities of the government, thus, in a way it is more of one-way communication. Those who have views to air are given space only if they support the views of the government. Many thought that with the commercialisation of ZBH, this situation was going to change for the better but unfortunately the government did not loosen its grip on the electronic media. Though the public can discuss other issues that prevail in the society, they are not given the forum to discuss issues pertaining to governance. On the other hand, the characteristics of the market deplete the informational role of Radio Zimbabwe. With the commercialisation of the station more attention has been given to advertisers and because they have something to offer financially, they are given the first priority in terms of space. In this way, the public suffers. Thus Radio Zimbabwe is not playing its informational role perfectly.

4.6.4 Entertainment

Public service broadcasting views entertainment as a commentary on the nature of social relations, providing a means of obtaining another view of understanding different sections of society, and thus strengthening bonds of social association (Curran, 1991). Therefore, media entertainment is not merely the media provision of pleasure through popular music; it is also a way in which society communes with itself through popular music, songs and poetry (Da-Wariboko, 2005). As the senior producer noted, entertainment is at times a way of educating somebody in a way that is relaxed (Chikosha, 2006: Personal Interview). Hence, drama or musical programmes on Radio Zimbabwe are not merely entertainment, but a way of educating and also contribute to public dialogue. With the adoption of commercial broadcasting, the percentage of local content was increased such that
most of the entertainment whether it is drama or music it is locally produced. This also helps to foster national identity and culture. However, the principle of diversity in terms of entertainment was affected since some people might be forced to watch and listen to something that they are not interested in because they have no choice. Moreover, music or drama that is suspected to be opposing the ideals of the ruling party is not accepted. To a great extent, Radio Zimbabwe has tried to play its entertaining role.

4.7 Discussion of the broadcasting policies

As things stand, ZBH has no editorial charter that legislators and indeed citizens of Zimbabwe can refer to in order to cross check whether the company is meeting its mandate or not. MISA-Zimbabwe (2006: July Alert) notes that the confusion and management crisis at ZBH is a result of an unclear mandate at the state broadcaster. The Parliamentary Portfolio on Transport and Communications report (2004) relates to the absence of editorial codes or a broadcasting charter by which the performance of the public broadcaster can be measured. The public service broadcaster does not have imposed upon it any special obligations under the Broadcasting Services Act or any other legislation for that matter. Part 11 of the African Charter on broadcasting (2001) which deals with public broadcasting specifically provides that “the public service mandate of public broadcasters shall be clearly defined.” It is submitted that this public service mandate should ideally incorporate an element of accessibility and accountability. In this respect therefore, the Commercialisation Act may be held to fall short of the standard required by the African Charter. In the absence of special obligations resting on the public broadcaster in terms of the legislation, in investigating the constitutional issue just highlighted, regard can only be to the obligations of the State itself (for the public broadcaster has no specific mandate) under the constitution.
At the face of it, the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) of 2001 is a law that seeks to open up the broadcasting sector to competition – more so given that it has been touted by its architect as a hybrid of some of the most democratic broadcasting laws in the world (Moyo, 2006:262). The Act stipulates the establishment of a broadcasting authority responsible for regulation of frequencies and allocation of licences to new broadcasters, emphasis on promotion of national culture, national languages, universality of access, quality and diversity in programming, to mention but a few. However, a closer look at the Act reveals that it achieves the complete opposite by impinging on the communicative rights of Zimbabwean citizens, who in practice are subject listeners and not sovereign listeners. Civic organisations have argued that the Act is an assault on citizens’ democratic rights as it seeks to limit rather than expand communicative space. Thus, some people argue that the broadcaster was never for public service even before the adoption of the Commercialisation Act.

While the Commercialisation Act has the potential of freeing the Corporation from political patronage, it also has its own problems in the sense that the public broadcaster would no longer be obliged to operate as a public service broadcaster (which it perhaps never quite did) (Moyo 2006:276). While there is need to find sustainable and financially viable ways of managing the corporation, the company must not sway from its responsibilities and obligations to the public in pursuit of pure financial objectives (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2004:12).

The Commercialisation Act has not been fully implemented as desired. MISA-Zimbabwe (2004: November Alert) noted that huge debts are crippling the state controlled ZBH commercialisation drive despite the government’s assumption of the ZBH’s Z$30 billion debt. The Zimbabwe Independent also noted that the envisaged commercialisation was being hampered by the ZBH’S failure to clear debts accumulated over the years. Quoting a report produced by its former Chief Executive Officer, Munyaradzi Hwengere, the Zimbabwe Independent reports that the assumption of the debt by the government had not assisted in increasing
liquidity to dwindling advertising revenue. Hwengere’s report states that the exercise initiated in 2001 through the ZBC (Commercialisation) Act, had failed to work because the state broadcaster could not generate enough income. While the Act purportedly seeks to wean the ZBH from state support, indications are that ZBH will continue to need state support for some time to come, thereby compromising its autonomy. Thus the commercialisation process though not yet fully implemented has seen Radio Zimbabwe moving away from its public service role to broadcasting that is commercially oriented.

Moreover, the AIPPA of 2002 which was enacted in a bid to promote freedom of information or access to information to ensure that journalists and the public are able to get the information they need particularly from public officials has been used to achieve the complete opposite of what freedom of information law is expected to achieve. It has been used as an instrument of controlling the media sector in Zimbabwe. This Act together with POSA restricts freedom of expression, movement and assembly and makes it a punishable offence for anyone to undermine or make any abusive or false statement about or concerning the President or an acting President, whether in respect of his person or his office (POSA, section 16(2)). These Acts have seen journalists, members of the public and opposition party members being charged and detained.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and discussed the findings of this study. Focus has been on specific obligations facing Radio Zimbabwe as a public service radio and its current dilemma of commercialization. The chapter showed how the various actors and factors combine to define and set roles for public service radio programming within the Zimbabwean context. Such obligations and expectations about Radio Zimbabwe’s programming aspects, especially at the time of pressures to commercialize, have to some extent been seen as concretizing most of the ideal-type obligations of public service broadcasting as discussed in chapter two.
In the next chapter, the study makes some concluding reflections and offers suggestions on transformation possibilities on the future of public service radio in Zimbabwe.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study and some recommendations. In it, I give the concluding reflections on how media commercialization has impacted on Radio Zimbabwe as a public service broadcaster. Issues arising from Radio Zimbabwe’s shift from public service broadcasting to broadcasting that is commercially oriented are discussed and I conclude the study by suggesting reform possibilities for the future of public service for Radio Zimbabwe to enhance its public service values.

5.1 Radio Zimbabwe in a crisis

This study has confirmed the study’s hypothesis that with the adoption of the Commercialization Act of 2001 Radio Zimbabwe will not play its public service role effectively. Amongst the most paramount threat that the station is facing is the problem of financing. This has reduced programming decisions to the whims of advertisers and sponsors. The problem of funding facing Radio Zimbabwe shows that it is not enough to have public service obligations as outlined in chapters 2 and 4 of this study, without putting in place financial resources necessary for achieving them. The study has demonstrated that the public interest in programming, that is, mixed programmes that educate, inform and entertain from the society’s point of view, is compromised by Radio Zimbabwe’s over emphasis on programming that is advertisement and sponsor friendly. Public service broadcasting institutions are supposed to function as public service channels, tasked with public service aims such as mobilizing the populace on issues of public concern. Covering issues of public concern, for instance, issues of
health and education, requires considerable funding. With the adoption of the Commercialization Act, the funds have to be raised from commercial activities like advertising. The situation where advertising is the main means of funding public service broadcasting comes with a set of difficulties. Advertisers may not like public service programmes, but rather prefer popular programmes such as entertainment. The result is likely to be an indeterminate institution largely commercial in funding but not really public service or commercial in programme outlook.

Radio Zimbabwe’s current funding base contradicts the public service mandate. The way it is funded implies that the station attempts to serve both the public interest and business-based motives with far reaching consequences for public broadcasting since it is now under the arm of commerce. The government, as discussed in the preceding chapter requires Radio Zimbabwe to generate much revenue to sustain its activities and to have profits too. This situation entrenches the commercial approach in programming. The dwindling government funding fails to free Radio Zimbabwe from the need for extra finance which it is seeking out from advertisers.

Furthermore, the study also interrogated the issue of Radio Zimbabwe’s dependence on government funding. As the station continuously seeks government funding, the government is able to dictate and control its operations, from news content and programming schedules to policy issues. The result is that Radio Zimbabwe has been found to have compromised on some of its public ethos, for instance, that of giving space to alternative views in the society.

While commercialization has led to promotion of commercial programming, the prime-time broadcast of the news at Radio Zimbabwe was not affected, as news continue to be aired during the prime morning, afternoon and evening times. The news bulletins have been lengthened and their content widened. However, Radio Zimbabwe’s reporting is more on government’s activities at the state and national
levels than happenings in the rural parts of the country. The station leads its news with stories involving top government officials and politicians, while news about ordinary people is presented towards the end of the bulletin if at all. As Scannell (1996:162) noted, some people are entitled to air their opinions about certain events whilst some appear in news accidentally and usually disastrously. This approach to news broadcast makes the station a state broadcaster, and not truly a public service broadcaster. Ordinary people too, are not only citizens of the state, but also part of the nation, and must be represented in its national cultural products and dialogue under the public service mandate (Van den Bulck, 2001). Therefore, not giving them prominence in the bulletin or relegating issues about them to the end of the bulletin undermines the station’s contribution to the public sphere which it is expected to promote. Thus Radio Zimbabwe’s failure to fulfill its public service mandate is also attributed to the government’s control of the station.

In summary, this study has shown that with the adoption of the Commercialization Act, Radio Zimbabwe is drifting away from public service broadcasting to broadcasting that is commercially oriented. The role of the public service broadcaster has been further undermined by the strong interference of government in its policies, and the dwindling finances, resulting in Radio Zimbabwe’s public broadcasting ethos moving towards commercial broadcasting. Though in principle it has been transformed into a commercial broadcaster, the ZBC, now known as ZBH, remains a government propaganda mouthpiece as confirmed by one of the respondents, with its Board of Directors and top management appointed directly by the Minister of Information in consultation with the President. The new regulatory authority, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe, as I have argued is far from being independent. However, despite all these challenges, the station still maintains some of its public service values and its contribution to the public sphere. Thus, Radio Zimbabwe today suffers from identity crisis, trying to fulfill the public service mandate at the same time operating as a commercial broadcaster and being controlled by the government.
5.2 Possible reforms to enhance Radio Zimbabwe’s public service values

Having looked at the challenges facing Radio Zimbabwe in trying to fulfill its mandate as a public service broadcaster, the study has come up with recommendations that can possibly transform Radio Zimbabwe into a true and viable public service broadcasting institution. Firstly, I recommend that the payment of a license fee be closely monitored so as to make sure that all listeners pay. The principle of universality of payment in public service broadcasting requires that public services in general, be directly funded by the beneficiaries. This principle implies that all owners of a radio or television set be made to pay a compulsory license fee as a kind of contract between the public and the broadcasting service. This would ensure that an equally good programming service would be made available to all in return for the license fee (Blumler, 1992). This kind of arrangement has not been really successful in Zimbabwe because the citizens are not satisfied with the services offered. Many people, especially in the rural areas do not have access due to poor reception. This poor reception is a result of old transmitting equipment which needs upgrading. Many people are not happy about the programmes provided. Most of what is aired is government propaganda. As a result of all this, the public is not willing to pay the license fee. Thus, for the license fee to be effectively implemented access to services should be improved through upgrading the transmitting equipment and providing better programmes that are in the public interest.

There is need for Radio Zimbabwe to reach out to the audiences and motivate them to pay for the services they receive. The station should initiate programmes to educate listeners on the necessity of paying the license fee. But this will definitely work when a universal transmission of programmes is achieved. The station’s current inability to transmit signals to all parts of Zimbabwe means that those listeners who do not receive clear signals will not be obliged to pay the license fee.
In addition, for Radio Zimbabwe to function as a true public service broadcaster, it should be independent from the government. The fact that there is no clear distinction between the government and the ruling party makes the Zimbabwean situation worse. In order for Radio Zimbabwe to act as a watchdog, it needs to be independent of the government. The fact that there is too much government interference in the day to day running of the station implies that it cannot criticize the activities of the government. Moreover, members of the public well known to be against the ruling party are not given space to air their views. The principle of distance from vested interests also implies that Radio Zimbabwe should not rely on government funding. Heavy reliance upon government funding definitely affects the way Radio Zimbabwe operates, because it is subsidized by the government Radio Zimbabwe operates as a mouthpiece of the government and cannot go against it whether it is for the good of the public. Moreover it cannot provide a public arena for the public to debate issues that have something to do with the government. However, this independence does not necessarily mean that the government will cease to influence the public service broadcasters completely.

Thirdly, while advertising and sponsorship brings in a considerable amount of revenue, it should not take a central place that undermines the listener’s interest in radio programming. Advertisements on radio should be balanced with educational and developmental programmes, and must be limited to specific and stipulated times. This stipulation should not be during prime time listening as this result in mass audience high-cost programming in peak times and low-cost programming at other listening times. Similarly, subtler ways of programme sponsorship must be adopted to reduce programming from being advertiser or sponsor friendly. In this case, revenue generated from commercial broadcasting can be used to sustain the public service broadcasts. However, this will require a strong policy. Hence, there is need for the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe to come up with policies that will systematically guide Radio Zimbabwe in its programming in the new order. The Broadcasting Authority should maintain a close relationship with
the public, broadcasters, journalists and civic organizations to debate and make recommendations on finance, structural and technical aspects of broadcasting in Zimbabwe.

Another source of revenue available to public service broadcasters are donations though the BSA stipulates that the Broadcaster should not accept foreign donations. As a common utility for the public good, something that is available to everyone, and where everyone’s opinion can be promoted, the public service broadcaster must be assured of financial independence. Such assurance, Curran (2000) argues, allows public service broadcasters to play the role of a watchdog, facilitating debate about the functioning of the government. However, public service broadcaster’s reliance on government for statutory allocations and license fees and on corporate bodies for advertisements, as observed earlier, undermines their independence. This reliance makes them continuously look to government and be too close to politicians and corporate executives. Such pre-disposition to political and corporate powers could lead to their being too weak to question wrongdoing, and sometimes even ‘turn-off their microphones to wrongdoings’ in the exercise of state and corporate powers (Curran, 2000).

It is for these reasons that grants and donations become a way of not only funding public service broadcasters, but also making them independent of the state and corporate bodies, allowing them to play their public service role more effectively. Although this system leads to various compromises (Jjuuko, 2003), it could still be adopted by Radio Zimbabwe, with modifications restricting grants and donations to programme production to ensure the freedom for producers. More importantly, its application would cushion the effect of funding problems faced by Radio Zimbabwe and reduce the station’s continuous dependence on government, which undermines its role as a public service broadcaster and contribution to the public sphere.
Closely connected to the issue of funding is the question of the independence and autonomy of Radio Zimbabwe. The current system in which the governments appoint the chief executive and the members of the Board of Directors, and the fact that the Ministry of Information oversees its day-to-day operation does not enhance the performance of Radio Zimbabwe as a public service broadcaster (Curran, 2000). Thus, there is need to tackle the current lack of neutrality and independence at Radio Zimbabwe. The government should stop direct control of the station and this will result in the station being more credible and enhance the credibility of the government.

A closer look at the way the station operates and the way the public dislikes the programmes that are broadcast, it is doubtful whether Radio Zimbabwe in recent times has carried out any audience research, as a way of testing the acceptability of its programmes by the public. The fact that they have not carried out audience research for a long time implies that they never get feedback whether the public enjoys their programmes or not. Such examination through audience research, by both internal and external experts would enable the station to be more purposeful and to align its programmes according to the public expectations. In this way, Radio Zimbabwe will emerge as a public broadcaster operating in the public interest. It is through audience research that information on audience message consumption, their complaints, signal and distribution and several other factors will be obtained. Thus, Radio Zimbabwe should make plans to carry out audience research throughout the country if it is to operate effectively as a public broadcaster.

5.3 Limitations of the study

A few limitations were encountered during the course of the study. Most of the respondents, especially producers did not feel free to air their views because of the political situation in Zimbabwe. Because of negative publicity of the operations of the government media workers have been warned never to reveal
any inside information regarding any government institution under which they serve. Some producers and journalists have been tortured and some lost their jobs because of revealing information to outsiders. Moreover, the fact that I am studying at a university outside my country made the situation worse. Many, respondents after realizing that I am studying outside Zimbabwe declined to help with the information that I wanted because of they fear to lose their jobs. Those in authority like the Minister of Information and Publicity and the Chairman of ZBH claimed to be busy with the restructuring of ZBH and thus could not attend to me. Some of them kept on avoiding me saying that they are not responsible for giving out information on the way they operate, those powers are designated to a few individuals. However, I had to repeatedly explain the purpose of the study to the respondents and assure them that the information would be treated as confidential as possible and as a result I managed to obtain the full co-operation of the respondents. In spite of the limitations cited above, the study was successfully conducted.

5.4 Summary and Conclusion

The study set out to investigate the impact of media commercialization on public service broadcasting: the case of Radio Zimbabwe after the adoption of the Commercialization Act of 2001. This study has demonstrated that though Radio Zimbabwe still maintains certain public services principles and values, it is headed for broadcasting that is commercially oriented. This is shown by the rise of commercialized programming and a reduction of time allocated to educational and developmental programmes. Moreover the limitations of finance and other resources have compromised the roles and character of public service programming. The majority of programmes currently on Radio Zimbabwe are evidently geared to attract advertisers rather than serve the public interest.

In connection with the public sphere theoretical point of view discussed in chapter two and four, it is difficult to dismiss Dahlgren’s (1995:8) observation that the
increasing prevalence of the mass media, especially where the commercial logic transforms much of public communication into public relations, advertising and entertainment erodes the critical function of public broadcasting institutions. In addition to the above discourse, government interference and the influence of sponsors on programme production, narrow the scope of Radio Zimbabwe’s performance in as far as public service principles and values are concerned. Sponsors of programmes whether, educational, informational and entertainment dictate their content and design. This compromises numerous aspects such as goals and objectives of those particular programmes, hence barring them from reaching the target audiences. The above discussion confirms the study’s hypothesis that with the adoption of the Commercialization Act, Radio Zimbabwe is drifting away from public service broadcasting to broadcasting that is commercially oriented and as a result cannot play its public service role effectively.
REFERENCES


106


Legal Documents Used

- Broadcasting Services Act of 2001
- Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Commercialization Act) of 2001
- Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act of 2002
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