

Cape Town's *The Voice of the Cape*: Profiling a 'Proudly South African Product'

Abstract

South Africa's media industry has had a facelift since it became a democracy during the early part of 1994. The democratically elected government with the assistance of a plethora of NGOs crafted and devised a liberal Constitution that secured the media's 'freedom of expression' and the religious communities' 'freedom of belief.' These clauses ensured that the media and the religious communities were granted the necessary legal protection and in this new environment injected the required confidence to effectively contribute - along with other civil society actors - towards the desired nation-building process.

Since the Muslim community formed part and parcel of this democratic society, some of its representatives set up radio stations when they successfully applied for temporary licenses that were issued by the government to set up and manage community radio stations. One of the many Muslim radio stations that have celebrated 10 years of broadcasting during 2007 was Cape Town's *The Voice of the Cape*. This essay intends to provide a profile of - what might be described as - a proudly South African station. It does so by giving a historical overview, exploring its audience, and looking at two popular presenters who have contributed towards VOC's popular image among and beyond the Cape Muslim community.

Key Words: South Africa, Cape Town, Community Radio, Religion, Identity

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Introduction:

South Africa's media industry may be considered one of the most vibrant in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). It may also be described as the most diverse that publically boasts a media pluralist environment not witnessed elsewhere in the region. From the time South Africa's interim Constitution, which guaranteed the freedom of the media, was introduced in 1993 until the time when the final Constitution, which safeguarded the broadcasting regulator's independence against state interference, was accepted in 1996, South Africa's media sector was radically liberalized. One of the most important developments that were warmly welcomed was the Independent Broadcasting Authority's (IBA est. 1993 [replaced by Independent Communications Authority of South Africa [ICASA est. 2000]) the approval of the formation of private and community radio stations (cf. Mochaba et al 2003: 61-62). Since then a fair number of South Africa's community radio stations survived and celebrated 10 years of democratic broadcasting.

From among the plethora of community radio stations that have celebrated their 10th anniversary and that have earned their stripes in the electronic media sector, the Voice of the Cape (hereafter VOC) stands out as a good example. As a community station, the VOC has indeed come a long way after having undergone many teething problems in the initial years of its formation. It has managed to demonstrate its ability to compete with other stations in and beyond the Western Cape where it is based; it has shown its flexibility in producing good programmes and, in the process, it has been able to train and empower a number of volunteers with skills in the media industry. Since it has made its mark over a period of 10 years, this essay wishes to provide a historical overview of this station's contribution to the media industry in general and the Muslim community in particular. It, however, also wishes to assess the nature of its contributions so that the station may be appreciated as a competitive station within a largely secular environment.

Community Radio Station: What is it?

The VOC considers itself as a true representative of community radio in South Africa's Western Cape region. Its daily jingle 'My Radio Station, Your Radio Station, Our Radio Station' captures that idea and repeats it throughout the day with the hope that its listeners would regard it as an extension of their (religio-cultural) identity. Perhaps the question that should be asked is: what is meant by a community radio station? This is a question that has been posed by many scholars and researchers who have explored this medium in the broadcasting industry (cf. Fardon & Furniss 2000).

'Community radio,' according to Opoku-Mensah (2000: 165) who referred to Berrigan (1979), is "a medium in which the community participates – as planners, producers and performers – and it is a means of expression of the community rather than for the community" Hendy (2000: 16-17) pointed out that though community radio is smaller than the commercial and state radio stations, it has emerged as a crucial medium that represents the interest of the community within a democratic environment. Hendy, in fact, argued that that since the mainstream media was not able to meet the needs of their diverse audience the community radio would fulfill those and he went on stating that it demonstrates participatory communication in a tangible manner. Tomaselli & De Villiers (1998: 163-167), who quoted White (1982), concurred with some of the mentioned features when they stated that these types of stations (a) encourage community participation, (b) are supported by a cadre of volunteers, and (c) are autonomous. When one peruses the South African community radio stations in general and the Muslim radio stations in particular, then it is evident that each of them reflects most, if not all, of these characteristics and particularly those set down by the IBA in its 1997 *Position Paper on Four Year Licenses for Community Sound Broadcasting Services* (cf. Teer-Tomaselli 2001: 234-235).

Bringing this section to a close, Myers (2000: 90) defined community radio "to mean small-scale decentralized broadcasting initiatives which are easily accessed by local people, actively encourage their participation in programming, and which include some element of community ownership or membership." Indeed, the VOC is a community owned radio station that have been easily accessed by its target community and one that has and continues to have a hand in the station's programming (cf. Keraan 2003).

These and other characteristic features have contributed substantially towards VOC's popularity in and beyond the Cape Peninsula, and they may also be proof that VOC is a 'proudly South African' product. At this point the essay wants to address its evolution and ownership.

Muslim Broadcasting Corporation: VOC's Owners

The Context: Vying for a temporary license: South Africa's liberal Constitution and the democratic environment that was created opened up opportunities for everyone to vie for community radio licenses. This open-door policy thus ignited a competitive spirit among community representatives that was not seen before. This was therefore a significant historical event in the media industry. However, whilst the securing of licenses was in itself a challenge, the major test was how the radio stations were going to sustain themselves beyond the first year and into the future.

When the IBA welcomed applications for temporary licenses, there were two competing Western Cape Muslim groups that forwarded their applications; one was the Muslim Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) that trade as the VOC, and the other was the Islamic Unity Convention (IUC) that trade as Radio 786; the latter regarded itself, at the time, to be a broad-based national Muslim organization and the former was made up of a plethora of well-represented Cape based organizations. The latter includes one of the most influential neo-conservative theological bodies, namely the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) that was established in 1945. The IUC, which was initially ideologically aligned to the PAC and had appointed its own theological committee, generally opposed the MJC (and its partners), which was ANC aligned, on different socio-political and theological fronts; the vying for temporary community radio stations licenses was but yet another arena where the two groups faced and competed with one another. Both the MBC and IUC prepared detailed and well motivated applications in which they spelt out opportunities for job creation, empowerment, and social upliftment. At first it placed the IBA councillors, who had to approve the applications, in a very awkward position; they were basically in a quandary as to how to deal with the two applicants' proposals since, on the one hand, there were only a limited number of frequencies available and, on the other, they did not wish

to be bias and decide in the interest of the one against the other. As far as they were concerned, both based themselves upon the clear-cut IBA criteria, and both applicants fulfilled all the relevant requirements.

The IBA eventually reached an agreement and decided to grant both groups temporary licenses to establish their respective radio stations. Since there was only one FM frequency, the IBA decision forced the two applicants to share one frequency; this implied that each of them was permitted to broadcast every alternate day using the same FM 100.4 MHz on an effective radiated power on 250w frequency beaming from Tygerberg. Although this was not the best solution as far as these applicants were concerned, it was a compromise that temporarily resolved some of the issues that occasionally caused bitter disputes between the two in the years that followed. In the subsequent years, VOC was granted a four year license in 2002 (and which was renewed in 2006) as well as additional (regional) frequencies to broadcast daily and reach other areas; consequently, these developments have continued to contribute towards the underlying tension that exists between the two stations to this day. According to the IUC officials, the temporary license holders, it appears that the ICASA counsellors have favoured the VOC at the expense of Radio 786 because of socio-political reasons; issues that need to be assessed in a separate essay. According to the VOC website, the IBA's Monitoring & Complaints Department spokesperson is purported to have said that the VOC "... is one of the few community radio stations that command a large audience...There is a definite demand for the station." As far as the MCD was concerned the VOC was one of those interest-defined community broadcasters, which was granted a license to serve the cultural interest of the Muslim community. At any rate, since VOC has set up a successful website and beefed up its audio-streaming system, it has managed to reach out to a much larger audience than Radio 786 and attract more listeners as well as web surfers who were previously an excluded bunch.

The Management and Broadcasting Area: The MBC, which consists of 12 founding stakeholders, trades as the VOC; and the VOC is, in turn, basically managed by a Board of Trust. This Board of Trust includes the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), Lavis Town Muslim Society, Mitchells Plain Islamic

Society, Paarl Muslim Jamaah (Congregation), Noor-ul-huda Islamic Society, Eersteriver Islamic Society, Noor-ul-Islam Mosque Trust Ocean View, Al-Jameah Mosque Jamaah, Atlantis Islamic Society, the Stellenbosch based Hujjatul Islam Jamaah, the Worcester Muslim Jamaah, and Islamic College of Southern Africa. The latter has since amalgamated with Dar-ul Arqam Institute – an MJC controlled theological seminary - to form the International Islamic Peace University of South Africa (IPSA). On behalf of the Muslims in the Western Cape, these organizations in effect represented the regions that applied for temporary broadcast licenses over the past number of years.

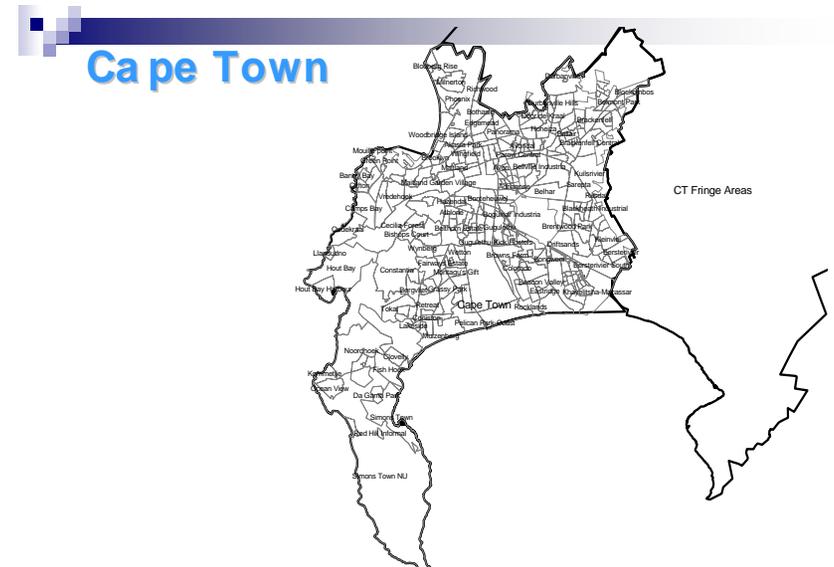
The VOC is thus represented by a Management Board that is the executing arm of the MBC's Board of Trust (BoT); the latter consists of 12 trustees (males and females) who, in turn, represent each of the stakeholders that form the MBC partnership. The BoT is presently represented by the following individuals: Warda Adams (treasurer), Imam Moutie Saban (a previous chairperson of BoT), Sheikh Riad Fataar, Faldhi Solomans, Faizel Biscombe, Salie Hendricks, Yusuf Bailey, Maulana Ghosain Rhoda, Imam Abdul Hakim Raban and Awaatief Daniels; the last three were re-elected members. All of them were elected at MBC's August 2006 Annual General Meeting and fall under the leadership of the re-elected BoT secretary general, namely Gasant Fridie, and BoT chairperson, namely Sheikh Achmat Sedick, who represents the MJC in the MBC. And as a matter of information, some of its former BoT trustees such as Achmat Jacobs (current chairperson of Management Board), Rashaad Frydie, Nijemah Hayat and Hadjierah Isaacs also serve on MBC's Management Board; and they are joined by Imam Allie and Moegsien Khan who serve on the station management. On the question of gender representation, ICASA has requested the Management Board to see that more women are represented on the Board to ensure representivity. Although the respective Board and Trust did not reach the expected numbers, it is something that the MBC is working towards; however, when we compare the position that women hold in the MBC and its sub-structures to that of Radio Islam in Gauteng, then it is quite obvious that women enjoy better opportunities and have an equal - if not a greater - say in the management of the affairs of the radio station.

MBC's Management Board is responsible for VOC's the day to day management and is in constant consultation with the Station's Management

under the leadership of the station manager. According to the VOC website report, the VOC employs 6 administrative staff, 6 sales staff, 5 technicians, 22 presenters, and 5 news staff; this list excludes the more than 80 volunteers, who work closely with the station management and who reside and operate in their respective regions. These dedicated volunteers form part of the Community Forum (CF), which consists of representatives from the mentioned regions and which is an independent structure. This forum has since its establishment formed an important partnership with VOC and has been tasked with the co-ordination of regional broadcasts as well as with the provision of grassroots community input into the radio station's programming; an activity that is highly approved and supported by bodies such as the National Community Radio Forum.

When the MBC put together a well motivated and argued document, which had inputs from technical specialists such as Anwah Ismail and academic experts such as Achmat Davids, it succeeded during the early part of 1995 in securing a temporary 'special events' license and in trading as the VOC. The latter's basic mandate was "to inform and educate the community about Islam, with an inherent focus on religious teachings"; and its programming was "to report on matters of cultural, political, social and economic significance" When the VOC was launched during the latter part of 1995 during the month of Ramadan (fasting), it was welcomed by a sizeable number of the Greater Cape Town region's listeners, who eagerly tuned to 'my radio station, your radio station, our radio station.' After years of campaigns and requests to ICASA to have its annual license renewed, the VOC was ultimately successful in having been granted a four year license in June 2002 and in June 2006 respectively; this has been a positive outcome for the station which has a diverse audience and a listenership that has steadily grown over the years. In fact, it may be argued that it competes favourably with its sister community radio stations such as Bush Radio in the Western Cape (cf. Bosch 2005) as well as those located in other provinces and have managed to extend its reach to other listeners that its fellow competitors have not successfully secured. As stated earlier the broadcast first covered the Cape Town Metropole, which included the northern and southern suburbs, and later it brought into its fold, via the FM 95.8 MHz on an effective radiated power of 20w frequency beaming from Paarl and Worcester, the Boland area; figure 1 above shows part of its initial reach.

Figure 1: The Cape Peninsula: VOC's initial reach



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Related to the point in the previous paragraph, the MBC realized that the Boland region has a sizeable number of Muslims and broadcasting to them would widen their influence and give them extra-support groups. It applied for two separate temporary licenses for two outlying areas, namely 'Voice of Paarl' and 'Voice of Worcester'. By the latter part of 1998, the MBC was successful in securing licenses for these areas and since their location was outside the Greater Cape Town and in the Boland region, it meant that they could broadcast on alternate days on the new frequency (FM 95.8). The formation of these stations implied that VOC (along with Voice of Paarl and Voice of Worcester) was on air 24hrs a day compared to Radio 786, which was limited and restricted to FM 100.4 MHz on alternate days. The inception of these stations meant that some of its human resources had to be transferred and shared with these two stations, and this resulted in the training of new persons to serve the parent station (cf. Haron 2002: 126).

As the station gained in strength via its expanding listenership through audio-streaming and its website viewers, there has been a consistent move on the part of the Management Board to request ICASA to issue it with a different frequency from that of Radio 786. It even solicited the support of prominent figures and organizations; for example, they received from the then Premier of the Western Cape, Ebrahim Rasool, and the Mayor of Cape Town, Helen Zille and posted this information on their website on the 16th of May 2006. When it applied for the renewal of its 4 year license before June 2006, it undertook its own survey by asking listeners whether requesting for a separate frequency will cause disunity among the Muslims. In fact, in another online text of the 14th of March 2006, the VOC candidly stated that its request for this separation was at 'the heart of the station's campaign.' It was and is still of the belief that "the station and the Cape's Muslim community has matured to such an extent after 12 years of democracy and 11 years of community radio that it deserves more than one frequency for Muslim community radio stations, without having to share." Achmat Ryland, the VOC admn manager, lamented that whilst VOC and Radio 786 were the only Cape community radio stations that were still sharing a frequency, there were others such as CCFM and Radio Tygerberg that have since split in accordance with ICASA's ruling. He stated: "(t)he one point we need to capitalise on is the fact that Icasa (sic) has already set a precedent on sharing frequencies".

In its online report on the 15th of March 2006, it stated that 66.7% voted that a separate frequency is the way forward and that this would not contribute towards the disunity but towards development. And it recorded that 8.9% of the listeners were uncertain whilst 24.4% agreed that it would further disunite the divided Muslim community. The problem with this poll is that one is not certain how many partook in it; if there were only 50 individuals then the numbers are far from representative, and if there were between 500 to a 1,000 then perhaps the survey results would make sense and can be used as part of their argument. Nonetheless, the quest for a separate frequency is a reality and something that MBC would like to see eventually coming into fruition. It is assumed that VOC will campaign for it more vigorously during the next round for license renewal which will be in June 2010. By then the VOC's listenership might have grown exponentially depending of course on

their presentations and programmes, and by then they might be in the position to convince ICASA to take their quest seriously.

VOC's Audience/Listenership

VOC has become acutely aware of the fact that it cannot survive or sustain itself without the support and in-put of its listeners. Hendy (2000: 115) stressed that "radio is always and everywhere produced *for audiences...*" (his emphasis) and he further stated that "'the radio audience' shape programmes and mould our listening experience." Hendy (2000: 118-120) made reference to Douglas (1999) who highlighted a number of factors associated with listening; the latter pointed out its sociable dimension and by this is meant that the listener (passively and consciously) participates in other peoples' monologues, dialogues and conversations that are being broadcast on the radio; however, the only time when the listener becomes an active participant is in talk show programmes that allows him/her to phone in and have his/her say on the issue under discussion.

On the phone-in programmes, the audience/listeners are considered as active radio consumers and perhaps as co-producers according to Hendy (2000: 140); they, in his view, play a vital role in the discussions that are being debated and engaged in on air. The audience possess the ability to influence the debate either way and this can also impact upon the way the anchor person or presenter is able to manage the flow of the debate. What Hendy and others demonstrated is that the audience have a significant say in community radio programmes. Although VOC's station manager and his team might not have been clued up with the theoretical issues pertaining to radio broadcasting as noted by Hendy, they have come to learn over the 10 years (and more) that whilst access to listeners are important, the latter's participation in programming is key to the radio's succes.

Community radio stations such as VOC, which has by - its own admission - become 'a semi-commercial entity' (29 May 2008), are heavily dependent on the critical voices of the audience when it comes to the station's programmes, particularly its contents and outcomes. The VOC team, like those of other community radio stations, went through tough times when they started out

with little or no experience in the broadcasting industry. Nonetheless, through a steep learning process, VOC's Management Board and the station management have ploughed their efforts into having informative and relevant programmes that would keep its audience thoroughly informed and highly satisfied. These efforts resulted in the VOC improving and professionalizing its internal and external structures. In her VOC website report, Munadia Karaan, who is one of VOC's respected senior staff members and presenters, has duly acknowledged that programming was a key catalyst and an aspect that need constant monitoring based upon the audience's occasional feedback via e-mails or phone-ins or online surveys.

Before we come to reviewing at least two of the programmes that demonstrate its 'proudly South African' nature, let us have a closer look at the listenership and demonstrate how VOC managed to hold on to its local and international listeners. Since its inception in January (and later in September) 1995, its audience grew at a steady pace; however, the station saw a dramatic increase when programmes were revamped and seem to have responded to the listeners needs. And it saw a further increase when the website was set up in September 2000, and when it became more interactive. However, it was given a further boost when VOC began audio-streaming in September 2006 (30 August 2006). Since then it demonstrated that sizeable numbers of listeners not only from within the Western Cape where its has its traditional set of listeners but from other parts of the world particularly among the Cape Muslim diaspora communities in Canada, UK and Australia.

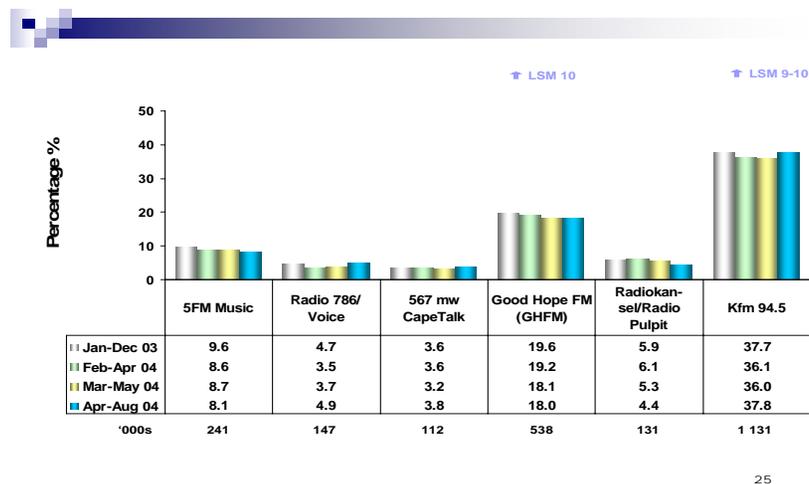
On the eve of VOC going global via audio-streaming, Karaan excitedly commented that "(t)here has been a great deal of excitement from our regular online visitors. We have received many emails from South Africans, particularly ex-Capetonians living abroad, who will be sitting up at midnight to listen to the broadcast, regardless of the hour. We will be linking up with some of them in New Zealand, Australia and Saudi Arabia among others to get a sense on how this would impact on them." Concurring with this development is *Drivetime* senior presenter and veteran journalist, Shafiq Morton; the latter referred to the development as being "a revolutionary move for South African community radio." The report stated that he said this "... should expose us to an audience of millions as opposed to hundreds of thousands. Because *Drivetime* is a current affairs show with a strong international focus, there has always been a great deal of interest from abroad

to hear our broadcast. So this move is very exciting. But this will be a very discriminating and highly critical audience that is used to the best in the business. So we will really have to be on top on our toes." Another interesting remark came from the 'Breakfast Beat' presenter, Jamiel Wallace. He expressed the view that "(t)he radio station has always been proudly Capetonian and proudly South African. By going global, we will now be able to reflect not just Cape Muslims, but also promote Cape Town and South Africa by telling foreigners what they could expect when they get here. But while it is a marketing task, we will have to strike a balance in our content so that we don't lose that which makes us unique – Cape Muslim life." Their upbeat comments as VOC presenters demonstrated the extent of their support for these transformations and give an insight into their commitment to VOC's aims and objectives.

At any rate, even prior to VOC going the audio-stream route, the number of online visitors also jumped rapidly. Whilst the site recorded during August 2005 only 73,000 hits, by the 30th of August 2006 the site saw a sharp increase of 629,737 hits. This sharp increase was in anticipation of VOC's audio-streaming that was about to be launched on the 1st of September 2006. From the time it was launched VOC saw a continuous number of individuals visiting its site and tuning in to listen to specific programs. At this point it might be useful to very briefly look at the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) statistics that demonstrate the position that VOC holds in relation to other community radio stations. According to the RAMS as at June 2008, VOC has generally demonstrated an increase in listenership when compared to the same period in June 2007. During the latter period it had 4.6% of the province listeners who tune in 7 days a week and this jumped to 6.6% in June 2008. In real terms they have about 202,000 listeners who tune in. If these statistics are compared to Radio Islam in Gauteng, then the differences between the number of listeners over 7 day period is stark; the Gauteng station only managed to garner an average of 22,000 listeners; a figure that is way below that of the VOC.

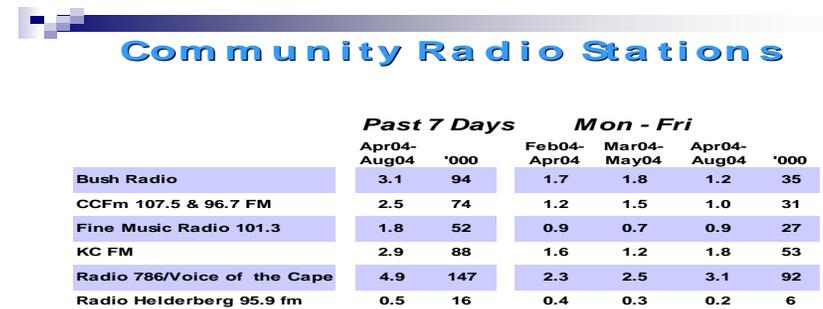
When going back to some of SAARF's earlier statistics as reflected in following graph, then it demonstrates how VOC performs in relation to commercial and community radio stations. In the bar graph below (Figure 2), one is able to get a sense of radio listenership over a 7 day period.

Figure 2: Commercial & Community Stations - Listenership over a 7 day period



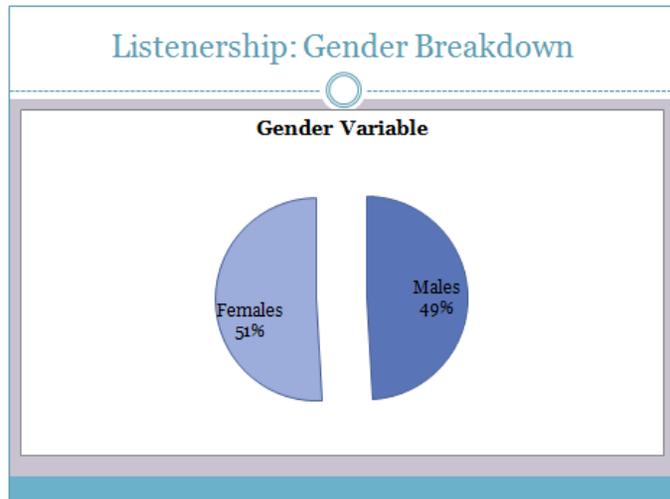
In the bar graph above the listenership of VOC, which has been referred to as the 'Voice' along with Radio 786, in the second column, has - rightly or wrongly - been compared to the listenership of more established commercial (music) stations such as 5FM and Good Hope FM. However, when scrutinizing the percentages then one finds that throughout 2003 the average percentage was 4.7 % compared to Radio Pulpit, the Christian Radio station that had an average of 6.9%. And when glancing at the statistics between April and August 2004, it was observed that VOC's audience increased by 0.2% and dropped in the case of Radio Pulpit by 2.5%. It should be borne in mind that although the Muslims are numerically smaller in the Cape than their Christian counterparts, it seems as if they have been able to attract a more devoted set of listeners. And when VOC is compared to other radio stations as shown in Figure 3 below, then it is evident that VOC has performed reasonably well:

Figure 3: Community Radio Stations – Listenership over a 7 Day period



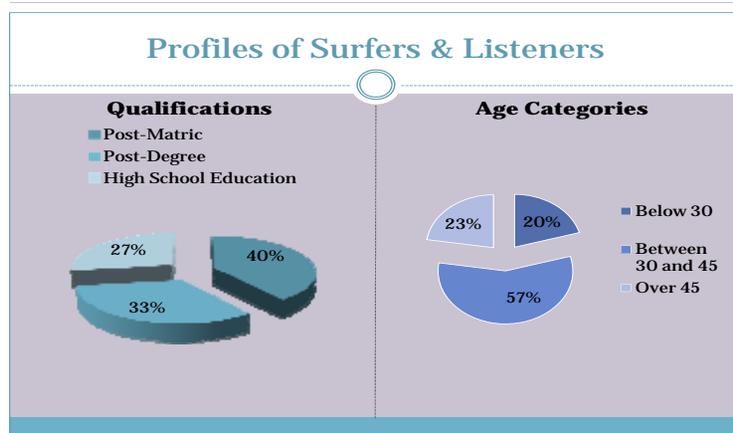
VOC - and its sister station, namely Radio 786 - has done well and they even outstripped the popular Bush Radio that has been the focus of few interesting studies undertaken by Dagron (2000), Bosch (2006) and Brown (2007); the latter station, according to SAARF reports, was only able to attract 3.1%. If one takes another station such as CC FM, another Christian station in the Western Cape, then one once again observes that VOC proved to be much more successful in enlisting listeners. Now when we compare the 2004 results to those of 2006 and 2007 respectively - as reflected in the SAARF listenership survey below - then it demonstrates that VOC has definitely been successful in expanding its audience; this could, however, be attributed to the fact that it was able to obtain more FM frequencies (90.7, 90.9, and 95.8) from ICASA during the past few years: At this point we need to briefly review VOC's listener profile. These profiles provide evidence of the gender variables, age categories, educational qualifications, etc.

Figure 4: Gender Variable



A brief analysis of the above venn diagramme indicate that the number of females pipped the males by a slight percentage. However, when this is compared to a different category, namely age and educational qualifications, then the results are quite instructive:

Figure 5: Qualifications and Age Variables



It appears that VOC managed to generally attract fairly well educated listeners. The post-matric listeners make up more than a third of VOC's listeners, followed by those that have completed tertiary educational studies. These figures demonstrate that VOC has been broadcasting to a set of discerning and critical audience who, it is assumed, have had a hand on the revamping of programmes that appear on the station. Another interesting result is that the bulk of the listeners belong to a fairly mature category of listeners, namely those whose ages range between 30 and 45. Although these statistics are based upon (faulty) online polls conducted and managed by the VOC team, they reflect significant insights into the profiles of VOC listeners who, as stated earlier, have had a hand in the types of programmes that are anchored. Let us now refer to, at least, two presenters and their programmes to demonstrate some samples of VOC programmes.

VOC's Presenters and Programmes

When VOC began its journey in broadcasting, its untrained staff was battling on air to prepare and produce programmes and now they have the opportunity of looking back and evaluating their performance and witnessing their growth; over the years they were able to overcome the major hurdles that were in their way and learnt how to keep their audience informed about religious and non-religious matters and about national and global issues. And through a process of trial and error, the VOC improved its programmes menu over the 12 years. According to Munadia Karaan, who is a senior staff member to whom we will return later, VOC like other radio stations review its programmes and bring about the necessary adjustments on an annual basis during the respective months of February and March; these adjustments and amendments are usually based upon responses from their loyal and avid listeners. The VOC and other South African community stations have also received ample assistance from SAARF that bi-annually produces information regarding listenership profiles and other relevant data through AMPS. The radio management team is therefore able to evaluate and reassess importance and relevance of particular programmes by using this data. From the beginning of 2006 the VOC decided to look at the quality of the programmes with the intention of improving the style and contents of the programmes so that its devoted listeners needs be satisfied.

Munadia Karaan and *Open Line @ Nine*: Munadia Karaan has become a household name since she joined the VOC team in 1997 as a part-time presenter. Ms. Karaan is the daughter of one a prominent and respected Cape theologian, namely Maulana Karaan who is one of the senior members of the MJC. Despite her conservative familial connections, it has not stopped her as a woman from being associated with a Muslim public broadcaster that has broken some orthodox Cape Muslim traditions. Having had training in communications, an allied field of journalism, and having worked in the field of communications in a corporate company cleared the way for her to make the leap from the corporate sphere to the community media; the shift was gradual, however. By 1999 she left the corporate world where she worked in communications and finance to pursue a different sector of the communications' arena and that is as news editor. As she became more involved and familiar with the community station, she realized the difference between the two worlds.

Nonetheless, according to Kamaldien (2007), Karaan's experience in the corporate sector where she was familiar with 'dealing with deadlines and achieving goals,' prepared her for the community station. At the station she was faced with a number of challenges such as putting the newsroom in place. After working hard in the restructuring process, she headed for the production department where she slaved to have it overhauled. And by then she spearheaded with the help of young, innovative technicians, namely Sameer and Adeeb Franciscus, in setting up VOC's website in 2002 (30 March 2008); from that time onwards, she continued to serve as its webmistress. Karaan has been responsible for regularly updating the website, which has transformed itself from a passive site to an interactive one, and making it 'a news tool' (Kamaldien 2007). Karaan's dream is to make the VOC website "a significant South Africa web portal" (30 March 2008) and, in our view, a friendly site that is very pleasing to visit.

So far it has been observed that Karaan, who is multi-skilled, has become a key player in the management and transforming the VOC community radio station. In addition to her work as a webmistress and other related VOC tasks, she has also made a presence felt 'on air' as a lively and informative presenter. In her interview with Kamaldien (2007) she stated that being an active member of the station has been and is 'fun' because "(i)t gives me reason to get up in the morning. I feel I've earned my space. My opinion is

respected and that gives you a sense of freedom but also responsibility. I'm still giving 150 percent of myself when I'm on the job." On air she has presented two popular programmes; the one is *Open Line @ Nine*, a 'daily' programme, and the other is *International Community Hour*, a 'weekly' programme.

Karaan informed Kamaldien that programmes such as *Open Line @ Nine* helped to lay "... a foundation for people to debate on an intellectual level and ordinary people are debating on a more informed level." She averred that "(w)e keep the lines open ... (so that) the community phones us with feedback, and (we then) ... immediately know the impact of the station." And she admitted that "(i)f they don't like something, they're quick to let you know." According to Karaan (2003), the rationale behind bringing about programme changes that take into account community feedback was "to strengthen our infrastructure and create an engine room of core, well trained staff which would have a positive impact on our programming." Karaan acknowledged that even though VOC was in existence for almost seven years by 2002, it had been operating without any experienced producers and by 2006 it could boast that it had four trained, fulltime producers; one who serves as scheduler and programming admin assistant and another who has been in training. She mentioned that over the years the VOC has invested heavily in the training full time journalists and interns who have continuously been feeding into VOC's actuality and news content in a regular and substantial manner. With improvements in staff training, it had a knock-on effect on the presenters' style of presentation as well as on the programmes. It is assumed that Karaan herself benefitted from the training programmes.

On the whole Karaan's *Open Line @ Nine* and *International Community Hour*, which she used to host, may be described as talk shows that permits individuals to phone-in; listeners seem to welcome this format because it allows them to interact and chat with the guests. For example, since a quota system has been imposed upon South African pilgrims, there has been a great deal of disquiet with this policy because the number of pilgrims are small compared those coming from countries such as Malaysia or Egypt. Nevertheless, Karaan debated the issue with representatives from the South African Hajj and Umra Council on her show and it as expected, many phoned in to query numerous issues with the SAHUC representatives. The *International Community Hour* that she used to host – and now in the hands

of Yusuf Gaidien - was and remains a popular programme among the ex-pat community who reside in Australasia, UK and North America. One of the interesting outcomes has been the creation of an online chatroom; this has opened up another avenue via which locals and expats interact. Yusuf Gaidien observed that "(i)t is heartening to see that there are people of all ages in the chatroom and whenever an older person comes in, you see the respect with which he or she is greeted. It feels like a family. Sometimes they talk about mundane stuff and other times they get riled about things like the rugby or what was said on air." In fact, Karaan's on air programmes and those hosted by Shafiq Morton are among the ones that ex-pats regularly tune in to. Let's briefly assess Shafiq Morton's contributions to VOC.

Shafiq Morton and Drive Time: Compared to Munadia Karaan, Shafiq Morton had had a long and rich history in the media sector. Morton's varied career reflects that he edited a surfing magazine, free-lanced for AP and AFP as a photographer, served as a South African correspondent for *Arab News*, Saudi Arabia's English daily, as well as for the local Muslim print media such as *Muslim Views* and *Al-Qalam*. Being an avid surfer and surfing reporter, he was granted the *Association of Surfing Professionals Media Award* in 1992. Morton covered a variety of stories throughout his journalistic career; he, for example, wrote about national issues such as apartheid's state of emergency and the 1994 democratic elections, and on international matters such as the famine in Niger and the Palestinian crisis. As a result of his contribution on Palestine, he was presented *The Friends of al-Aqsa Award* in 2004 for his contribution towards awareness of the plight of the Palestinians through his VOC on air series, *Letters from Palestine*. At present he is working on *Surfing behind the Wall*, a work that he describes as "an eccentric, offbeat look at Palestine" (8 July 2008). Prior to this he published *Notebooks from Makkah and Madinah*, a historical travelogue of the pilgrimage and a text that exposes the scandalous and lamentable destruction of Muslims' rich heritage in Saudi Arabia.

Speaking about on air programmes, Morton was undoubtedly one of VOC's key presenters when the station was launched. He was part of the team that went on air in September 1995 and humbly admitted that he "... was VOC's first news editor, (who had) ... set up the news department, hiring staff,

training them and going on air." At that time Morton served as joint station manager together with the multi-talented Achmat Davids (d. 1998). During the current period he not only writes – along with Munadia Karaan - some of the editorials that appear on VOC's website but also anchors two popular programmes; the one is VOC's weekday current affairs afternoon show known as *Drivetime*, and the other is *Pichara*, which is VOC's bi-monthly flagship discussion programme.

Morton's *Drivetime* show focus on national and international issues. It appears that some of the international shows have attracted a wide-range of interest. Morton claims that interviewed over 5, 000 guests from about 115 different countries. He, however, attributes the success of his programme to team effort. He stated that "it's always been about teamwork, and I've had some good producers working in the *Drivetime* team. A good programme is the sum of many players, not the ego of its presenter." As a result of his show, he received the prestigious 'The Vodacom Journalist of the Year Award' that seeks to "discover, through a countrywide search, gifted people whose work can be honoured and rewarded. Organisers say the competition recognises the impact of every piece of good, solid journalism has on society and the potential it has to make a real difference" (7 October 2008). He received the award for an article titled *Are we really becoming more radical?*, which was printed in the *Muslim Views*; it was based on an interview he did on VOC's *Drivetime* with Prof Hussein Solomon, the director of the Centre for International and Political Studies at the University of Pretoria. The result of this *Drivetime* show demonstrated to what extent the show has attracted the interest of the traditional radio listeners as well as the international audio-streaming audience. It more importantly showed how presenters such as Morton and Karaan have assisted in placing VOC not only on the physical map but also onto the virtual map.

Conclusion

In this essay it was demonstrated that the VOC compared to other community radio stations in the Western Cape and elsewhere in the country has done pretty well for itself over the years despite the local and regional competition that it had to face. The mere fact that radio station has within a

two years been recognized for its contribution in certain categories is evidence that it has proven its worth amidst a competitive sector in the media industry. VOC received the 2007 Sonitus Award for being the 'Favourite Community Radio Station' in the Western Cape. And during July VOC was a finalist for the CIO's Consumer Journalist of the Year Award and in September 2008 it won the PMR Diamond Arrow Award: Islamic Business Sector for the highest rated regional radio station. These awards show that the station has improved its image via its diverse programmes and informative presentations.

According a VOC website newsreport, Karaan expressed her deep satisfaction with VOC's status in the eyes of people who are considered outside the radio station's traditional audience. She claimed that "(t)his includes key role-players we often engage with to provide our listeners with vital information, the media and curiosity seekers – many of whom are non-Muslims – who keep a watchful eye on how we cover Muslim issues both on air and online. That also includes the opinion formers and political parties who are now vying for the Muslim vote after Cape Muslims made it clear that they were none too pleased with the ANC. But one of the station's biggest achievements has been the manner in which we have succeeded through balanced coverage to not only to provide information, but also to 'set the agenda of the mind'." Being encouraged by the radio's progress and development over the past few years, she was upbeat and optimistic about the future scenario for the station. She essentially argued that "(w)e can no longer think and market ourselves only as a community media. Muslims have made a place for themselves in this country and VOC has played a key role in that process. Therefore we have a commodity that can be offered to the business community without any excuse. If we believe this and set ourselves up structurally to market this, VOC will be able to shake off the shackles of 'only being a community media' to one that is recognized as a niche media with influence." (31 August 2008)

The radio station and its appendages such as the website, the audio-streaming system and chatroom have made a huge difference to VOC's profile over the past few years. When comparing the VOC radio station and website to its sister station, namely Radio 786, then it will be noted that it has outclassed the latter in many – if not all - departments because it has provided a much better interactive service and has been on target with its programmes and

plans. Finally, it might be accurate to describe the station as a proudly South African 'reformist voice' instead of a 'conservative one' among the Muslim community radio stations in particular and the religious radio stations in general (cf. Haron 2002).

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