

S.M. Tyali

## Challenges in normative conceptualisation: Regarding the evolving trends of the community radio industry of South Africa

### **ABSTRACT**

Technological developments continue to have an existential impact on the normative understanding of the community radio sector of South Africa. Advances, trends and changes in the technological sphere have meant that as researchers we need to keep up and re-think the long debated matter of “community” within the community radio sector. Within the discourse of continuing research, this re-thinking is being necessitated by the rapid introduction of new media and new forms of information and communication technologies (ICT) within the broadcasting space. In addition to these ICTs, the mandate and growth of some of the media institutions broadcasting as community radio stations in South Africa have changed – in some cases from small to regional broadcasters. In this paper, I examine the impact of ICTs as well as the accelerated growth of some community broadcasting institutions and their impact on the normative and conceptual understanding of the broadcasting sector. Using a case study perspective, the examination of such developments within the sector has been carried out through Vukani Community Radio (VCR) as a case study. This is one of the oldest community radio stations in South Africa. Drawing on theories about the decoloniality of knowledge, this paper argues that new trends that are emerging within the technological space, as well as community of reception dynamics, forces the academic, research and policy fraternity to re-look the conceptual understanding of the community radio sector of South Africa.

**Keywords:** community radio, ICT's, Vukani Community Radio (VCR), definition

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*Siyasanga M. Tyali is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication Science at the University of South Africa (UNISA). He holds a PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand. His research interests are in media and cultural studies, broadcasting, African media systems.*

*tyalism@unisa.ac.za*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The small and community radio broadcasting sector of South Africa continues to generate a large body of research (Berger, 1996, Teer-Tomaselli, 2001, Bosch, 2003, Tyali & Tomaselli, 2015). Researchers interested in our community radio industry have focused largely on broad but important “developmental” themes, including the history and growth of the broadcasting sector in South Africa, as well as the role of the industry in advancing democratic values and recent contributions regarding public health. In this paper the focus is on new ICT trends that are causing a necessary re-examination and revisiting of conceptual demarcations of the community radio sector of South Africa (Chiumbu & Ligaga, 2013). Here, I argue that whilst the likes of Teer-Tomaselli (2001) and Bosch (2003; 2008) have captured the sector’s mandate based on the “community of interest” and “geographic” notions of approved community radio licenses, recent trends seem to indicate that previously understood and defined roles of the sector need to be reconsidered. This research need arises from the analysis of the geographic growth of small community broadcasters and the impact that ICTs have had in expanding listener reception from communities that were thought to be geographically confined to particular spaces and localities. In one study around this subject matter, Chiumbu and Ligaga (2013:242) concluded that information and communication technologies (ICTs) had played a considerable role in transforming radio cultures in South Africa. For the purpose of this paper, the impact of ICTs is therefore examined in the context of the contemporary understanding of the community radio sector in South Africa (see the Broadcasting Act of South Africa, 1999).

Underpinned by some historical debates on the role of community radio in South Africa and across some selected geographies of the globe, this paper aims to make an empirical contribution to the evolving nature of the industry. The timeliness of this paper is vital in South Africa today as there is growing discourse on how the country will position itself in regard to the demands of the “fourth industrial revolution” (Marwala, 2019). With regard to the evolving nature of the community radio broadcasting sector, this paper suggests that the sector continues to adopt new technological tools as means of accelerating and re-inventing its processes of content distribution. The findings of the paper also illustrate that new digital platforms, including community radio websites and social media platforms, are playing a crucial role in assisting the sector to expand on some of its fundamental objectives. Whilst the adoption of ICTs by the sector is critical to its survival in the 21st century, in this paper I further aim to understand the manner in which these ICT adoptions are tempering our views of what community radio should encompass (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001). For the purpose of this paper, this examination of the conceptual dynamics surrounding community radio and the influence of ICTs on the sector was derived from a broader study (Tyali, 2017). This was conducted over three years as a detailed case study of community interests and the media identity shifts taking place at Vukani Community Radio (VCR).

## **1. BRIEF BACKGROUND: REGARDING THE CASE STUDY**

The South African broadcasting sector can be subdivided into three broadly defined subsectors. These are: 1) public broadcasting, 2) commercial broadcasting, and 3) community radio (Milton, 2012). This three-tiered broadcasting structure was the result of lengthy discussions that eventually resulted in the understanding of the role to be played by the post-apartheid media industry of South Africa (AMARC, 1998; Teer-Tomaselli, 2001, Berger, 1996). The recognition of the critical role that would be played by the media industry of South Africa after 1994 also saw the emergence of a vibrant community radio sector (Bosch, 2003). The case study underpinning this paper emerged from this history of the community radio sector. In 1996, the broadcasting license dispensation gave broadcasting rights (initially on a temporary basis) to a number of community broadcasters in the country. Among the oldest broadcasters that were granted such broadcasting licenses by the IBA<sup>1</sup> during this dispensation was a university student aligned broadcasting institution named Vukani Community Radio (VCR).<sup>2</sup>

Situated in a small, semi-rural town known as Cala in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, this community broadcaster was established by a group of students who were then using the name Cala University Students Association (CALUSA). The community radio station made its debut broadcasting service on 9 April 1996, and over the years the station has grown and positioned itself as an important community broadcasting voice in its rural and semi-urban locality. Through its initial development and its association with a group of university students, the history of Vukani Community Radio (VCR) is similar to a number of community radio stations, whom in their initial development phase were incubated either at university campuses or by students who acquired broadcasting skills from these university campuses (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001). These students then later used their acquired knowledge to build broadcasting facilities in their respective communities.

After initially broadcasting using temporary licenses in 1996, and a number of years thereafter, Vukani Community Radio (VCR) was granted a medium term broadcasting license at the start of the new millennium. In the year 2000, this community radio station was granted a four-year broadcasting license, which was then continuously renewable from the year 2004. It is this same broadcasting license condition that still allows the community radio station to broadcast until today. Therefore, as only a handful of community radio stations started to officially broadcast in 1996 in South Africa, it can be concluded that Vukani Community Radio (VCR) is

<sup>1</sup> IBA was the precursor of ICASA (Independent Communications Authority of South Africa). ICASA was formed in 2000 out of the amalgamation of the IBA Act as well as the SATRA (South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority).

<sup>2</sup> Though starting as a student's radio project, this community radio station has grown and matured throughout the years. The radio station was not necessarily started at a university campus but was rather started by university students who had left Cala (their home town) to attain university education from elsewhere in the country. Cala University Students Association (Calusa). These students also worked with other community members to set up community projects in Cala. The following link provides a comprehensive summary of the organizations that were started by Calusa, including Vukani Community Radio (VCR) <http://calusa.co.za/history/#page-content> The station is now firmly among the list of community radio stations which can be described as established and sustainable. This list includes the likes of Bush FM, Jozi FM and Radio Zibonele. For further historical details on Vukani Community Radio (VCR), the reader is encouraged to visit their website at the following url: <http://www.vukanifm.org/>

one of the oldest community radio stations in the country. More importantly, whilst its urban-based community radio cousins are well known; including Bush Radio, Radio Grahamstown, Forte Community Radio and Radio Zibonele (Mavhungu, 2009); research records indicate that Vukani Community Radio (VCR) has been understudied (Tyali, 2017). Broadly speaking, this paper also aims to fill this important gap in the holistic understanding of the community radio sector of South Africa.

## **2. COMMUNITY RADIO AND THE COMMUNITY: A CONCEPTUAL MANDATE**

In his seminal text, "Imagined communities", Benedict Anderson (1983:6) cautions us to understand that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuine(ess), but by the style in which they are imagined," he argues. It is in dealing with the imagined nature of communities of interest and geographic communities (Carpentier, Lie & Servaes, 2008) that researchers perhaps begin to understand that the community radio sector was globally conceived and that there is a need to understand nuances in some regions of the world. Research literature illustrates that in its ideal nature, community radio signifies the "democratisation" of communications (AMARC, 1998). The community radio industry is in fact a media sector that is mandated to be transparent, participatory, accessible and developmental in its conduct so that the immediate and surrounding communities it serves benefit fully from its programmes. It is often indicated that when it comes to community radio, there are as many models of these as there are community radio stations across the world (Berger, 1996; Banda, 2006). Some academic literature also indicates, however, that the broad guiding philosophy of community radio should emphasise the dynamic involvement of the people in the use of such radio platforms so as to facilitate and speed up the process of dealing with challenges related to infrastructure development for grass-roots communities. Some research emphasises that the medium is about people empowerment (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001). Writing for AMARC-Africa, Mtimde et al. (1998) defined the sector by stating that in its purest sense, community radio is a media platform that allows communities to participate as planners, producers and performers of the broadcast content. It is a means of expression by the community, rather than for the community (AMARC, 1998; cf. Mgibisa, 2005; Olorunissola, 2002; Teer-Tomaselli, 2001). The emphasis is therefore on the community being directly involved in all aspects of the community radio station. The challenge is to make sense of geographically dispersed audiences and those lacking coherence in terms of communities of interest. This challenge largely arises when we look at the role of ICTs in making a community radio station accessible to a geographically dispersed "community" (Tyali, 2017).

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) (2000) has further noted that a community radio station is a broadcasting platform that has been built by community members, is used by these members and is ideally in service of that specific community. They state that the defining indicators of such broadcasting platforms include ownership, the self-governance

and participation by the community, as well as the representation of these communities. The emphasis is on local content. Such content is produced by the community for their own benefit (MISA, 2000). These definitions (AMARC-Africa, 1998; MISA, 2000) complement the criteria of the sector as outlined by the 1999 Broadcasting Act of South Africa.<sup>3</sup> In spite of this broad understanding, Teer-Tomaselli (2001) also cautions that, taken together, the aspirations of community radio stations are onerous, and that few stations anywhere in the world have been able to achieve the aspirations of the sector in its entirety. The caution by Teer-Tomaselli (2001) also means that the term “community radio”, its definition or even its objectives, should be adapted on a case-by-case basis. However, how does this debate affect the general global understanding of the sector, and particularly the South African community radio sector? Furthermore, how do advances in the ICT sector and the growing positioning of South Africa as a global South “digital powerhouse” (Marwala, 2019) further disrupt the conceptual understanding of the sector?

In the following section, I illustrate some of the conceptual contestations experienced in some selected regions of the world. The conceptual contestation debates point to the on-going discussions of the development and on-going evolution of the sector throughout the world.

### **3. GLOBAL DEBATE ON SECTOR UNDERSTANDING: AN OVERVIEW OF ROLES AND FUNCTIONS**

Banda (2006, cf. Berger, 1996) has argued that across the world there seems to be no fixed definition of how community radio should be structured. He indicates that we are faced with various alternative definitions of community radio. This argument seems to indicate a continuous and evolving process in global definitions of the community radio model. It also seems that such conceptual contestations in community radio as an alternative media platform will continue to redefine and highlight the changing understanding of the community radio industry (Banda, 2006). Olorunissola (2002) indicates that the experiences of minority groups across the world, and more specifically in Europe, Australia and North America (Squires, 1999) indicates that community radio has traditionally emerged out of repressive socio-political experiences. Communities that have been marginalised in a political, economic and cultural way have typically adopted community radio as a tool for highlighting their inherent human rights (Squires, 1999). This assertion points to how marginalised constituencies have adopted this radio model to highlight their lived realities. This also illustrates how community radio can be seen as a liberating medium for marginalised and oppressed communities. As Freire (1970) argued, the oppressed must be their own example in their struggle of redemption. When people develop and maintain their community radio sector, the medium becomes better positioned to communicate and reflect the struggles of these communities. It becomes their identity and a mirror of their struggles and existence.

<sup>3</sup> The Broadcasting Act of South Africa (1999) highlights the key characteristics that have to be displayed by broadcast license granted community broadcasters. Largely, the characteristics resemble the global definition and worldwide understanding of the community radio sector.

In highlighting the need to understand the different ways in which community radio can be useful to communities, Berger (1996) illustrated that community media, including the community radio industry, should not be defined in the abstract. This point buttresses the fact that the medium does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it should be defined in relation to particular purposes it serves, including the social conditions of the communities that are served by the sector. However, access and local relevance are one of the most important defining features of these media platforms. In one study that looked at community radio in countries that are based in the European Union, Buckley (2009) argued that nations with a vibrant community radio sector in Europe are those that have a sound and robust legal framework. Such countries have clear public policy commitments and these aim to develop the sector and have put in place measures that support funding of this sector. In another study that looked at community radio in Asia, Pavarala and Malik (2007) argued that whilst in the West community radio is understood to fulfil the needs of self-expression of people who have been neglected by the mainstream mass media, in countries with autocratic or totalitarian governments, community radio tends to become a means of resistance by the proletariat. These researchers indicate that community radio should be seen as part of the broader struggle for access to ideas using the communication media. They indicate that the definitional characteristics of these types of community radio stations include access to the community radio station, public participation in production, and transparent decision making by the volunteers and the listeners of these community radio stations. These arguments come from various sources including those of Jo Tacchi (2003:2183), who writes that within the Oceanic region, the Australian community radio example provides us with a case of a “well developed and large community radio sector.” The Australian Broadcasting Act (ABA) defines community broadcasting service as that which is not operated for profit or as part of a profit-making business, but must represent the community of interest, it should comply with the community broadcasting codes of practice, encourage members of the community to participate in the operations of the station as well as in the selection and provision of programmes.

In South Africa, most researchers agree that part of the impetus for the development of a vibrant community radio system in this country comes from the anti-apartheid movement (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001; Rama & Louw, 1993; Bosch, 2003). Olurinnisola (2002) indicates that the rise of a flourishing community radio sector also comes from the transition to a multi-racial South Africa in 1994 and thereafter. Before the transition, the concept of community radio had existed informally, and stations such as Bush Radio and Zibonele Community Radio had to broadcast or distribute their content illegally (Bosch, 2003). After the transition to a “democratic” society, South Africa saw a spike in the community radio sector, with about 65 licensed radio stations being recorded in 1999. Amongst the first radio stations to be licensed in post-apartheid South Africa include Radio Maritzburg, Bush Radio, Radio Zibonele and Vukani Community Radio (VCR) (Wigston, 2008). In post-apartheid South Africa, the model of this radio medium has largely taken the participatory and developmental outlook (Olurinnisola,

2002; Mhlanga, 2006; Hart, 2011; Tyali & Tomaselli, 2015). Within the context of this country, Teer-Tomaselli (2001) has noted that there are two types of community radio stations. These include a community radio broadcast service serving: (1) a geographical community; and (2) those serving a community of interest. She argues that a community of interest may be defined as having a specific and common interest. The shared interest is what makes such a group of persons or sector of the public an identifiable community. Communities' common interests may vary from being institutional, religious or cultural, depending on the licensing conditions (Tacchi, 2003; Tyali, 2012; Mhlanga, 2006). The geographic aspect only looks at the locality of the radio station. Thus, taking into context the historical role of the sector, this paper considers the impact of ICTs on the sector and how such forms of ICTs have a disruptive effect on the conceptual understanding of the sector.

Globally, various scholarly outputs continue to be generated on the impact of ICTs on radio broadcasting. Chiumbu and Ligaga (2013) note that "research in the area of radio and ICTs has broadly focused on how these technologies are introducing new participatory cultures in radio." They further note, however, that within the African continent, scholarship on ICTs' influence on radio broadcasting is an underexplored area of research. More importantly, Chiumbu and Ligaga (2013:242) argue that "ICTs have changed the nature of this participation by expanding the discussive spaces and drawing audiences closer to production and the station's institutional process." This research paper seeks to understand the proliferation and availability of ICTs in community radio broadcasting. This is particularly important as ICT impact in community radio studies is an underexplored area of research in South Africa. Moyo (2012:214) asserts that "theoretically speaking, radio is changing as a technology and these changes have also brought about changes in radio practices and cultures. Especially in the production of news." In the context of this paper, the main preoccupation is how the presence of ICTs on the community radio sector of South Africa is specifically changing the normative and conceptual understanding of radio.

#### **4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK CONTEXTUALISED: DECOLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE**

To understand the meaning of the trends that are taking place within some sections of the community radio industry of South Africa, I have situated this paper within the decolonial theoretical underpinnings that are in pursuit of disrupting and re-imagining the world as it is currently understood. Moyo (2020:4) underpins the importance of decolonial theories within the context of communication and media discipline by arguing that "most recently, the anti-imperial theories of transforming media and communication studies have crystallized around decolonization and found greater nuance from decoloniality". The theory on the decoloniality of knowledge indicates that as a result of "coloniality of knowledge", that is, unfair European hegemony on knowledge as a result of colonialism and the pressures of conformity associated

with this system of domination; thus within media scholarship it can be argued that there are global South media theoreticians who avoid knowledge disruption and thus continue to interpret the world within the Western conceptual lens and understanding. As argued by Hall (1997:185), whilst the concept of the “West” originates from Western Europe, it is worthwhile to remember that “the West” is no longer only in Europe, and not all of Europe is in “the West”. Sadar (2008) has argued that the ideas produced today as knowledge systems are required to carefully work their way into one’s mind, thereby wittingly or unwittingly shaping ones view of the world. Through an analysis of the structures and influence of modernity on the world today, Sadar (2008) argues that the knowledge abounding the world today emanates from discourses that have been shaped by a culture that perceives itself to be hierarchically above the rest. Thus, what does ICT disruption of the community radio sector of South Africa offer the broader conceptual debate about the community radio sector? This is especially critical within the global South debates and particularly within African debates on how the continent and its communities can decolonise themselves and offer their own lived realities in the practice of the community radio sector.

The theory advocating for the decoloniality of knowledge posits that knowledge(s) are contextual and situational; therefore the imposition of ideas and other forms of knowledge systems on the rest of the world illustrates the “coloniality of knowledge”. Therefore in the context of this paper, I argue that by revisiting the conceptual understanding of the community radio sector through the empirical data presented in the paper, the research undertaken points towards some strides in the broader march towards decoloniality of knowledge. The argument here is that the paper also helps us to understand the knowledge(s)<sup>4</sup> that are explicitly and implicitly embedded in the media practice and content of Vukani Community Radio (VCR), and how such knowledge(s) challenge broader and mainstream conceptual understandings of the community radio sector. For instance, how does the decoloniality of knowledge, as read through the role of Vukani Community Radio and ICT disruption in re-conceptualising the idea of the community radio sector in South Africa, illustrate trends towards the decoloniality of knowledge? The theory on (de)coloniality of knowledge is particularly important for this paper as it also illustrates a conceptual de-linking in how the sector is traditionally being researched and theorised by academics in South Africa (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

## **5. BRIEF NOTES ON THE METHODOLOGY**

In its entirety, the research study underpinning this paper has exclusively relied on the critical qualitative research approach. Furthermore, to conduct targeted analysis, the study underpinning the paper has made use of a case study approach – the case of Vukani Community Radio (VCR) – in its assessment of the media institution and the impact of ICT advances on the broadcasting institution. Yin (2014) informs us that the manner in which a case study has been understood over the years continues to evolve. This very evolvement of

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4 It is important to differentiate “knowledge” from “knowledges” in this context.



the case study approach as research apparatuses therefore allows global South researchers to use it with a purpose of contextualising research, as well as understanding the nuances of the multi-world approach – the upholding of the pluri-verse<sup>5</sup> perspective. In this specific context, the critical approach was used during the interview, content analysis, and observation phases of the study underpinning this paper. Thus for the interview stage, I relied on interviews with some selected research respondents (see Table 1 below). These respondents became people that constituted the internal as well as external stakeholders of the community radio station that was being examined. The details of the respondents that contributed to the study underpinning this are as follows:

**Table 1: Details of the internal stakeholder research participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Malixole Teketa	27	Black	Male
Mnyamezeli Mbobozi	42	Black	Male
Thandeka Mbobozi	39	Black	Female
Viwe Mfundisi	28	Black	Male
Xola Nozewu	40	Black	Male
Sinethemba Nota	34	Black	Male
Linda Magazi	25	Black	Female

In addition to the internal stakeholders, I randomly approached additional members of the community as a way of getting their perspectives on the role of their community radio station. The details of these community members are shown in Table 2 below:

<sup>5</sup> In disrupting knowledge and the understanding of the world, it is important to talk of the "pluri-verse" instead of the "universe" (Grosfoguel, 2004). Pluri-verse as opposed to uni-verse seems to suggest a multi-world approach and the contribution of understanding of such.

**Table 2: Details of the external stakeholder research participants**

Therefore these are the constituencies that were consulted in the process of gathering data with an objective of understanding how ICTs are having an impact on disrupting the conceptual understanding of the sector.

Fezeka Silwane	48	Black	Female
Mvuyo Mhlekwa	52	Black	Male
Weziwe Dodo	44	Black	Female
Nolusindiso Ncapayi	32	Black	Female
Phumla Xokashe	31	Black	Female
Nompucuko July	30	Black	Female

## **6. FINDINGS**

In the following section, I outline the findings of the study underpinning this paper in relation to the idea of new trends within the normative and conceptual understanding of the community radio sector of South Africa. This has been done through detailed understanding of a single case study, Vukani Community Radio (VCR). More importantly, the findings of the study underpinning this paper also illustrate that the geographical license prescriptions are being challenged by community radio stations that have been given growth mandates by their key constituencies. Furthermore, the results of the study underpinning this paper indicate that the idea of clear and definable forms of the “community” seem to be challenged by the idea of ICTs and virtual communities that are ever encountered in the new-found avenues of broadcasting by some community radio platforms.

## **7. REVIEWING THE “COMMUNITY RADIO” IN VUKANI COMMUNITY RADIO (VCR)**

The concept of the community radio sector has a long established history in South Africa (Bosch, 2003; Teer-Tomaselli, 2001; Mtimde et al., 1998). Whilst organisations such as AMARC-Africa (Mtimde et al., 1998) have outlined various guidelines on the definitional character of the community radio sector, historical and contemporary debates on the state of the sector illustrate that definitional elasticity continues to be a factor in the practice of community radio broadcasting. As established by the data of the study underpinning this paper, the concept of community radio should mainly be constitutive of the community needs as identified in a particular locality. For instance, it was explained by one research respondent that:

They [stakeholders of the community radio station] felt that the station must cover the whole

district<sup>6</sup> so that the platform communicates with all the stakeholders. And they saw the way it is structured; it's the station that can actually do that (Xola Nozewu, VCR Station Manager, 22 March 2016).

The station is in the Chris Hani District, which covers a large and dispersed regional community. The urgency to cover a municipal district area therefore buttresses Berger's (1996) argument that how we define community radio should not be guided by abstract notions but in fact should be related to community needs. Furthermore some analysis of the "community" nature of community radio has also suggested that continual growth of this broadcasting sector should reflect a fluid and multi-dimensional approach (Bosch, 2003). Therefore the research data of the study underpinning this paper buttresses these definitional notions of the community radio sector. For instance, it was suggested by the station manager that:

Vukani's broadcast focus is not on Cala Town. This is a district platform. We have coverage of eight municipalities throughout the district. But again in terms of our coverage, it does spill over to other areas as well. There are other areas that we cover as we have seen that they need the radio station as a platform of communication. So we feel that as a radio station that is based in an area that lacks economic opportunities, we feel that we need to go beyond being just a district platform but again try to accommodate the areas that we spill over to (Xola Nozewu, VCR Station Manager, 22 March 2016).

Thus from the manager's point of view, an office that was reported to be intimately involved in conceptualising the broadcasting policies of the case study illustrates that Vukani Community Radio (VCR) seems to have transcended the usual notion of a community radio as operating in a small community (Alumnku, 2006; Majozi, 2000; Manyozo, 2012). The growth of the community radio station – from the position of a small community-centred station to a district-focused one – therefore points to the continuities and discontinuities that are an important feature in understanding the concept of community media in South Africa (Berger, 1996). The shift towards the re-thinking of the sector definitions and how a community radio such as Vukani Community Radio (VCR) can redefine its broadcasting urgency also points to a peculiar form of decolonising the understanding of the sector by the specific broadcasting practitioners (Appadurai, 1949). Whilst the global, regional and national norms of the sector have been outlined, the case study of this research is intimately involved in demystifying such widely accepted roles of the community radio sector by crafting its individual role based on the nuances and needs of its broadcasting community. The Station Manager further stated that "they [stakeholders] felt that the station needs to cover beyond what it is covering now ... So it was easier for us to convince ICASA because we had something that was coming from the people" (Xola Nozewu, VCR Station Manager, 22 March 2016). Thus the people being serviced by the broadcast medium showed their individual agency in redefining the understanding and role of Vukani Community Radio (VCR) as a "traditional" community radio station.

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<sup>6</sup> The mentioned district is the Chris Hani District Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This district municipality consists of eight municipalities. It is a large area that potentially makes the station a regional or district radio station.

It is further worth pointing out that whilst also reflecting a decolonised approach towards universal definitions of the sector, the founding principles of this community radio station revert back to the consultative need as understood by normative definitions (Tacchi, 2003; Moyo, 2012; Mgibisa, 2005). As indicated by one of the “veteran” community broadcasters at Vukani Community Radio (VCR), who has been with the station for more than 18 years, that specific broadcasting platform was started as a small town radio station by a group of university students<sup>7</sup> (CALUSA). He indicated that it explicitly consulted widely to get a firm approval from the community:

It was started by old men such as Godfrey Silinga, Dumisa Ntsebeza, Lungisile Ntsebeza, Sipho Thabo, Bhiki Khayingana and Siphwe Liwani – it is people who started the project [sic]. They initiated it in 1993 and then the process of the broadcasting License took place, and it went on air in 1996. It started on air on 9 April. Then it went on until 2006 and it left CALUSA and stood as an independent project. How it stood as an independent is that a process of visiting the towns we broadcast to was started, and we met up with stakeholders and where someone from the ANC, SANCO, PAC, UDM and TINIP and each organisation would nominate their representative and radio forums were formed. In those radio forums they took a single person from each town and then a board of trustees was formed (Mnyamezeli Mpumela, VCR Producer & On-Air Broadcaster, Amasiko Nezithethe, 30 March 2016).

Therefore the history of Vukani Community Radio (VCR) points to a community broadcasting model that has continuously evolved to meet the community aspirations. From initially consulting the community to get community input for the establishment of the initial small community radio station, the broadcasting platform kept this approach when it identified a need to expand from its initial constituency (Cala Town) and move towards a more regional/district focus (Chris Hani District Municipality). The manager of this community station explained that they consulted widely with the community and the core stakeholders of the station such as municipalities, local chiefs and NGOs. The consultative approach of this media platform also illustrates the community participation aspect that is expected from a community radio station. In the case of VCR, the move towards a regional community broadcaster has also allowed this community radio station to tap into a more regional advertising market that is largely unavailable to small conventional community radio stations. Thus at a definitional level and the advantages associated with transcending the rigorous understanding of the sector, the data of the study underpinning this paper illustrates that the case study is also responding to an open sense of the term “geographic community”:

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<sup>7</sup> The story of the development of this community radio station was also narrated to me by Prof Lungisile Ntsebeza who is now a senior academic at the University of Cape Town. He indicates that their intentions were also aimed at challenging the homeland system, which of course had been established by settler colonial government of South Africa with an intention of keeping Africans in the labour reserve parts of the country. Thus from the establishment of Vukani Community Radio (VCR), we have ideological ambitions of its initial founders to decolonise the area of broadcasting by Vukani Community Radio (VCR).

Vukani is falling under the geographic [license]. With the geographic you will notice by the fact that the target of this license is the community in general. So it is driven by the needs of the community and all that (Xola Nozewu, VCR Station Manager, 22 March 2016).

The geographic community outlook of this community radio station also accommodates the growing demands that have been placed on the broadcasting medium by local stakeholders. Originally founded on the premise of being a “voice of the voiceless”, Vukani Community Radio now sees its mandate as a “district broadcaster”. It was repeatedly explained by both the station manager as well as the programmes manager that growth in the demands on the community radio station forced it to expand its broadcast mandate. The expansion was from a small semi-urban area that constituted areas surrounding the town of Cala to a community radio station that broadcasts to the eight Chris Hani District municipalities. Thus, to a great extent the expansion of Vukani Community Radio coverage to eight municipalities whilst also keeping the traditional title of a “community radio” ultimately constitutes a redefinition of our usual understanding of the sector. It is a definitional elasticity (Berger, 1996) that re-centres the privilege to define oneself as per the purpose that one has established – in this case to serve the wider community of the Chris Hani District. This take on the standard definition of a community radio station also asserts the right to naming and re-naming as guided by the individual objective of the community radio station. Furthermore, Vukani Community Radio’s redefinition of itself also demystifies the “coloniality of knowledge” that may be prevalent in the daily functioning and understanding of the community media sector of South Africa. Thus ultimately, this definitional shift is also indicative of the decolonial shift in the understanding of community media sector and the individual agency of the community radio station in the process of carving the unique identity and mandate. Ultimately, the data of the original study illustrates that Vukani Community Radio (VCR) represents a delinking in the abstract “universalist” understanding of knowledge about broadcasting mandates (Mignolo, 2007) of the sector and the urgency to conduct media practice as determined by individual communities that practice broadcasting and are served by this community radio station.

## **8. RE-THINKING COMMUNITIES OF THE AIR: THE IMPACT OF ICT ON COMMUNITY RADIO**

In addition to the up-to-date computer hardware that is in the possession of this community radio station, it was also explained to me that the broadcasting platform has various software programs that it uses to aid its broadcasting mandate. These include programs such as “News-Builder” (used by the news desk to package news headlines during the on-air reading process), “Cool Edit” (used for editing news and audio packages) and Zetta (used for saving content already broadcast by the station). Thus, with its advanced state in the technological arena, the station demonstrates that even a semi-urban and rural-based community radio station with a special interest of the local community within its broadcasting range can be technologically astute. However, there are some technical duties which have been outsourced

by the station to a private company. “The website is not yet managed by us. There is a company called Techphonic that created the website for us. So what we do currently is send them material, pictures, so that they can update” (Sinethemba Nota, VCR Technical Manager, 30 March 2016).

Overall, however, the community radio station also illustrates that African-focused broadcasting platforms within the community radio sector are able to possess the required technological tools to meet their 21st-century broadcasting objectives. Beyond the broadcasting software that this community radio station uses to connect with its immediate community, various forms of ICT have been adopted by the station to connect with various communities that access it through the virtual sphere. This development is also aligned with other research that has been conducted on this subject matter. Chiumbu (2014:250) argued that “new media technologies are opening up new spaces for community radio that go beyond the geographical and community of interest categories to embrace translocal and diasporic communities”. Whilst outsourcing the management of the website, VCR has tapped into the website as a way of being accessible to various communities that can access the internet. At the internet level, the website is supplemented by social networking sites, including the popular use of Facebook, to communicate with its communities of reception. This media platform continues to demonstrate the nature of how communities are changing the reception of community content through new media tools, social networking sites and ICTs.

The entire infrastructure and layout of Vukani Community Radio presents the idea of a broadcast media platform that is well resourced. The building where it is housed is a relatively new building made available through government funding.<sup>8</sup> Thus the advanced infrastructure of this station disproves the notion that some South African community radio platforms are under-resourced and ill equipped (Fourie, 2008). The technologically advanced nature of VCR has also allowed it to communicate with its listeners on a regular means. For instance, it was stated by one show presenter:

I do have another show, on Sundays, it is where I am able to interact with them using Facebook or with sms and everything.

In certain circumstances, the website of this community radio station is also used by migrated members of the community to stream live the contents of the broadcasting institution from anywhere in the world. Whereas a community radio is expected to be a small geographically focused media institution, the blended broadcasting strategy of Vukani Community Radio, which includes the use of a website to distribute content, introduces us to the world of virtual or online communities. These are communities that are an additional constituency of this community radio station. Therefore, the virtual presence of this community radio’s content also mean that it is no longer a small Eastern Cape-based community radio station. In fact, the availability of the

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<sup>8</sup> The station has various funding sources. The technological and other general facilities of broadcasting were donated by the MDDA. The building was built and donated by the South African Department of Public Works. To sustain itself, the station also relies on small advertising and sometimes grants by generous organisations.

content in the virtual sphere mean that the station has a global footprint. Ultimately, this global presence of the community radio station through streaming live also calls into question the normative definitions of community radio as small and niche focused broadcasting platforms.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

Traditionally, the community radio industry in South Africa has been defined as a “community of interest” or as “communities of geography”. Underpinning this, two forms of defining and granting broadcasting licenses to community radio stations have been the issue of small and accessible broadcasting institutions that assist the identified communities with small community development projects. However, the discussion and research results outlined in this paper indicate that new developments are taking place within the community radio industry. Some of these developments are driven by new media and ICTs whilst some are driven by the natural growth and maturing of community broadcasters. Most importantly, these changes within the community radio ecosystem are therefore challenging our established understanding of the community radio industry.

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