CHAPTER 5

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on two social psychological theories: the social identity theory and self-categorisation theory. In order to gain a full understanding of these two theories, their discussion will be preceded by a discussion of two other concepts that are central to them, which are social cognition and social comparison.

These two theories are essential to this study for two reasons. First of all, they will be used to examine attitudes to the various aspects of radio programming and attitudes to SAfm among groups and individuals that are presumed to have unequal social status. Secondly, they will help to provide the mechanism for radio programming and radio presentation that transcend group differences at both theoretical and practical levels.

5.2 Social Cognition

Social categorisation is a natural product of the categorisation process that takes place in the human mind. According to Tajfel (1972a, cited by Deschamps et al, (1988), 'categorisation refers to psychological processes which tend to organise the environment into categories or groups of persons, objects, events (or groups of some of their characteristics) according to their similarities, their equivalencies concerning their actions, their intentions or behaviour' (p. 4). A social category is, in essence, a cognitive category in which individuals who are supposed to share one or several features are grouped together.

When an individual is classified into a social category, a featural comparison is made. An exemplar is compared with the most typical member of a category, the prototype, and a decision made about the degree of similarity between the two. For person categories this judgement depends on the breadth of resemblance between an exemplar and the prototype (i.e. the number of traits that are similar), the dominance of category-consistent traits in the information that is used to make judgements, and the frequency of prototype incompatible behaviours (Stephan, 1985).

According to Brewer et al (1996), although categories may be based initially on actual differences between objects, once categories have been formed there is a tendency for perceivers to exaggerate the extent of differences between members of one category and another. This category accentuation is a consequence of assimilation and contrast. Assimilation and contrast effects refer to the amplification of these basic processes involved in categorisation. Assimilation occurs when within-category similarity is perceived to be greater that it actually is, and contrast effects occur when the differences between the categories are perceived to be greater than they actually are (Stephan, 1995). The result is an increase in perceived homogeneity within categories and distinctiveness between categories (Brewer et al, 1996).

A concrete example of category accentuation was the seminal study that was done by Tajfel and Wilkes (1963, cited by Oakes et al, 1994 & Brewer et al, 1996). Three groups of subjects were presented with a series of eight lines varying in length from 16.2cm to 22.9cm. In one 'classified' condition the four shorter lines were labelled 'A' and the four longer 'B', while in an 'unclassified' condition no labels were presented and in a 'random' condition there was no predictable relationship between the length of line and the label attached to it. It was found that when reporting the length of the lines, subjects in the classified group, and these subjects alone, exaggerated the difference in length between lines labelled A and lines labelled B. This effect was particularly marked for the two lines at the boundary of the categories. The difference between the perceived length of the longest line in category A and the shortest line in category B was much greater than the actual difference between the two lines. As a result, the perceived distinctiveness of the two categories was accentuated. Tajfel conceives of this as a distortion of perception; that is, stimuli are being perceived as more similar and different than they really are (Oakes et al, 1994).

According to Stephan (1995), one of the most intriguing consequences of categorisation is that the mere division of people into groups leads to biased evaluation of the groups and their products, and to discrimination in favour of ingroup members. Jaap Rabbie conducted the first studies that tried to determine the minimal conditions under which discrimination between ingroup and outgroup would arise (Rabbie, 1966 cited by Oakes et

al, 1994). In order to study integroup relations, Rabbie (1966) adopted Lewin's theoretical approach: people form a group when they are aware of the interdependence of their destiny (Oakes et al, 1994).

Rabie and Horwitz (1969, cited by Oakes et al, 1994) told teenagers of both sexes that they were studying the way people build up first impressions. Upon their arrival at the laboratory, eight subjects were separated for administrative reasons into two groups of four: the 'blues' and the 'greens'. In three experimental conditions, subjects learned that only half of them would be rewarded for their participation. The prize was a radio and, because there were only four radios left, only one group would receive them. In each of these three conditions, there was a different mechanism for selecting the group to be rewarded. The choice was either random, based on an arbitrary decision, or based on the votes of one of the two groups. In a control condition, there was no reward. After the radios had been distributed, subjects were asked to give their impressions of the other persons, and they had to choose those with whom they would like to work further. In the control condition, sociometric choices and judgement scales revealed no bias at all in favour of the ingroup. By contrast, ingroup bias was found in all other three conditions for both groups, the frustrated one and the rewarded one. Apparently, the mere fact that people shared the same fate, no matter how this had come about, was sufficient to create a bias in favour of their own group. According to Oakes et al (1994), this conclusion is in line with Lewin's views on interdependence. Stephan (1995) contends that the mere existence of other groups, even without explicit competition, also causes ingroup-out-group bias (Ferguson et al, 1964, cited by Stephan, 1995), as does the anticipation of interaction (Doise, 1969; Rabbie & Wilkins, 1971, cited by Stephan, 1995).

The accentuation effect that leads to category salience, and particularly ingroup-outgroup discrimination, is also evident in the study by Rabbie et al (1969) cited above. Several other factors that lead to category salience (i.e. ingroup-outgroup discrimination) have been identified by other writers (Oakes et al, 1994; Stephan, 1995). For example, studies using both real distinctions and laboratory-created distinctions have found greater ingroup-outgroup bias when multiple members of the groups are present than when one-on-one interaction occurs (Dustin & Davis, 1970). In other words, it may be argued that

the salience of group membership is greater when the number of outgroup members increases beyond one (Gerard et al, 1974). According to Stephan (1995), studies of real social groups indicate that minority group members display greater ingroup-outgroup bias than majority group members (Dutton, 1976; Brewer & Campbell, 1976).

Additional evidence that the salience of ingroup-out-group differences is a significant determinant of bias comes from studies of similarity within groups and dissimilarity between groups. If the magnitude of ingroup-out-group differences contributes to the salience of these differences, greater similarity within groups and greater dissimilarity between groups should increase bias (Stephan, 1995). Factors that create the perception of ingroup similarity and between-group dissimilarity, such as assimilation and contrast, should also lead to ingroup-outgroup bias.

Billig and Tajfel (1973) conducted a study that obtained results that are compatible with this suggestion. They found that providing subjects with information on the similarity of ingroup and outgroup members with respect to a single trait enhanced ingroup-outgroup comparison with a completely arbitrary division of subjects into groups. A study by Allen and Wilder (1975) used the categorization manipulation employed by Tajfel (1970) and added manipulations of belief similarity for ingroup and outgroup members. The outcome of the study showed that ingroup and outgroup bias was enhanced as the similarity of ingroup members increased, but outgroup dissimilarity did not increase ingroup-outgroup bias significantly. What this study shows in general is that when similarity information is salient, and when it indicates that ingroup members are highly similar to the ingroup, heightened ingroup-outgroup bias is the result (Stephan, 1995).

One last important point to note is that the social categorisation process cannot be confined to only two groups (i.e. the ingroup and outgroup), especially in a pluralistic society where individuals hold membership of multiple categories. Within the same setting, a particular person might be identified in terms of gender, ethnicity, political party affiliation, religion, or occupation (Brewer & Miller, 1996). According to Allen et al (1983), multiple group memberships provide a substantive answer to the question, 'Who am I?' in terms of social status or social structure; they also give an answer to the

question, 'How well am I doing?' (i.e. the evaluative dimension).

5.3 Social Comparison

According to Brewer and Miller (1996), individuals have a strong need to evaluate their own abilities and characteristics. This enables them to know where they stand on various dimensions of behaviour or performance (Festinger, 1954). Such evaluations are often comparative by nature. Some comparisons are based on changes in the self over time. Children, for instance, often take pride in their growth, marking their height on the back of a door and noting with glee the difference between last year's mark and that achieved this year. The comparison of marks provides a basis for judgement of how much better one is now than before. Similarly, one can mark improvement in skills, or in performance in games such as golf, by comparison with one's own past performance (Brewer & Miller, 1996).

Jellison and Arkin (1977) suggest that people try to look better than others on ability-related attributes in order to be rewarded by the group. A distinctively good ability sets one apart from the pack, and bolsters self-esteem (Brewer & Miller, 1996). Baron et al (1975, cited by Turner, 1991) argue that social comparison on dimensions unrelated to values, or accuracy of evaluation, will produce the averaging effect, but that comparison on dimensions related to values, or rank-order evaluation, leads to polarisation. In rank-order evaluation, one is concerned with being better; that is, more valued than others. With accuracy evaluation one wants to be right, correct in some judgement.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) propose that social categorisation stimulates a self-evaluative social comparison process. They assume that social categorisations tend to be internalised to define the self in the social situation and hence contribute to self-evaluation. They further assume that one's self-esteem as a group member depends on the evaluative outcomes of social comparisons between the ingroup and the outgroup. Since it may be supposed that individuals desire positive self-esteem, they conclude that there is a tendency to seek positive distinctiveness for the ingroup in comparison with the outgroup. Thus their hypothesis is that self-evaluative social comparisons directly produce competitive intergroup processes that motivate attitudinal biases and discriminatory

actions (Turner, 1981).

There is evidence to support the notion that intergroup discrimination tends to contain a competitive element. Brewer and Silver (1978) have found, for example, that both independent and competitive groups adopt a 'winning strategy'. More evidence that seems to indicate that there is a definite motivational bias for positive self-esteem in intergroup behaviour is also available. Oakes and Turner (1980) confirmed the prediction that minimal intergroup discrimination would increase self-esteem, compared with a control condition in which categorised subjects were unable to discriminate. Although alternative explanations for the results are possible, they are consistent with the positive distinctiveness principle *vis-à-vis* other groups (Turner, 1981).

According to Turner (1981), the social comparison processes transform simple perceptual or cognitive discriminations into differential attitudes and actions favouring the ingroup over the outgroup. It motivates the competitive enhancement of criterial differences between the groups and other strategies, apart from direct discrimination to achieve positive distinctiveness.

5.4. The Social Identity Approach

According to Taylor and Moghaddam (1987), social identity theory as described by Tajfel and Turner (1979) attempts to explain intergroup relations from a group perspective. The theory is concerned with every aspect of relations between groups, especially groups having unequal power. It attempts to predict the conditions in which people will feel motivated, individually or collectively, to maintain or change their group membership and their intergroup situation (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987). Abrams (1992) provides a useful distinction between the social identity approach and social identity theory. According to Abrams (1992), the social identity approach embodies a metatheoretical assumption that social categories influence behaviour and the self-concept when individuals identify with, or define themselves in terms of, these categories. This view corresponds to a psychological Marxist's view of the world that sees society as composed of various groups that stand in power and social relations to one another (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). This reference to power and status relations clearly implies that it is a conflictual society. Its

structure changes constantly because of conflict. Social categories become human groups because the individuals who comprise them come to realise that they share an identical plight (Oakes et al, 1994).

Social identity theory is concerned with the specific implications for intergroup behaviour (Abrams (1992). According to social identity theory, the distinctive characteristics of group behaviour arise from the psychological processes of categorisation and self-enhancement (Abrams, 1992). These psychological processes include depersonalisation, ethnocentrism, and relative uniformity of action and attitude among group members (Abrams, 1992).

The theory assumes that people desire to have a positive social identity. This desire will influence individuals to make social comparisons between their own group and other groups in order to achieve both a favourable and a distinct position for their own group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987). According to Taylor and Moghaddam (1987), social identity theory approaches intergroup behaviour from the subjective perspective of group members, and this strictly psychological approach leads to an emphasis on how people interpret their social world.

5.4.1 Social Identity

According to Tajfel (1978), social identity can be defined as '… that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group or groups together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (p. 13). The term serves to link the self-concept with group membership and intergroup behaviour (Turner & Giles, 1981).

According to Abrams (1992), when one of the social categories includes oneself, social identity is made salient. For example, following incidents such as air crashes, people may feel more concern for casualties of their own nationality than others. Similarly, international competitions may be far more interesting to watch if one's own country is represented. Such examples illustrate that a sense of involvement, concern and pride may be derived from one's knowledge of sharing a social category membership with others,

even without necessarily having close personal relationships with, knowing, or having any material personal interest in their outcomes.

Categorisation is conceived of as a basic cognitive tool that allows individuals to structure the social environment and define their place in it. In social identity theory, the knowledge that one belongs to certain groups and the value attached to group membership, in positive and negative terms, represent the individual's social identity. The two essential features of the concept are that group membership is viewed from the subjective perception of the individual, and that the value-laden nature of group membership is highlighted and given importance (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987).

According to Oakes et al (1994), social identity theory assumes that people are motivated to evaluate themselves positively, and that insofar as a group membership becomes significant to their self-definition they will be motivated to evaluate that group positively. In other words, people seek a positive social identity. Since the value of any group membership depends on comparison with other relevant groups, positive social identity is achieved through the establishment of positive distinctiveness of the ingroup from relevant outgroups (Oakes et al, 1994).

While the desire for a positive social identity is viewed by social identity theory as the psychological 'motor' behind individuals' actions in the intergroup context, the social comparison is seen as the means by which individuals obtain an assessment of their group's social position and status (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987). On the basis of Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, it is assumed that we have an upward directional drive that leads us to compare ourselves with others who are similar or slightly better than ourselves in relevant dimensions. The social comparisons enable self-evaluation of abilities, opinions and experience.

However, one must hasten to point out that although Tajfel and Turner's (1979) idea of social comparisons was influenced by Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparisons, it is noteworthy that social comparison stems from a different origin for Festinger than for Tajfel and Turner. When Festinger proposed his theory of social comparison, he meant

that, in the absence of objective information coming from the physical reality, people satisfy themselves by evaluating their opinions and abilities in comparison with those of relevant others. For Tajfel, information is already social, or socially built, and social comparison should therefore not be considered an ersatz for physical or objective comparison (Oakes et al, 1994).

According to Abrams (1992), social identity theory posits that one's social identity is clarified through social comparisons between ingroups and outgroups. An individual's desire for self-evaluation provides a motivational basis for differentiation between social groups. Differentiation is likely to be greater in dimensions of general social value, or of particular importance to the group. Thus, to the extent that the ingroup is perceived as both different and better than the outgroup (thereby being 'positively distinctive') one's social identity is enhanced. While social categorisation produces the search for distinguishing features, social comparison and the need for positive identity promote selective accentuation of intergroup differences that favour the ingroup. The two processes also act in concert to reduce perceived intragroup variation (Abrams, 1992).

Jacob Rabbie has criticised social identity theory for failing to recognise perceived interdependence among individual members of a collective as the defining characteristic of a social group (Rabbie & Horwitz, 1988). According to Brewer and Miller (1996), perceived interdependence derives from experiencing a common fate, which Rabbie regards as a precondition for the emergence of group norms, group identification, and shared social identity. In this view, social identity derives ultimately from self-interest, under conditions in which each individual's outcome is linked to the outcomes of others. Positive interdependence produces co-operation and ingroup formation. Negative interdependence produces conflict and differentiation (Brewer & Miller, 1996).

According to Taylor and Moghaddam (1987), an inadequate social identity is not by itself enough to motivate a group to change its position. The presence of perceived cognitive alternatives to the existing intergroup situation is required if a strategy for achieving social change is to be embarked upon. The theory sets out the means by which members of subordinate groups may achieve and maintain positive social identity. The different

methods that could be adopted would depend on the individual's or group's subjective belief structures or strategies that are available to them (Abrams, 1992; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987). A 'social change' strategy would be relevant in a situation where the group makes an attempt to be absorbed into the dominant group. This strategy requires fundamental cultural and psychological change in order to be successful. For example, an immigrant arriving in North America might try to 'lose' completely his or her original cultural identity and become 'an American' (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987).

According to Abrams (1992), a 'social mobility' belief structure holds that boundaries between groups are permeable, and individuals can pass from one group to another by virtue of choice or effort. This belief structure typifies Western individualism, and is exemplified by the proverbial 'tea boy' who works his way up to become a company director. Since dominant groups often have explicit or implicit requirements that make it difficult for subordinate members to 'pass', rendering the group boundaries impermeable, social-mobility beliefs may pose little threat to the dominant group. However, such beliefs may reduce cohesiveness in the subordinate group, and so indirectly sustain the status quo (Abrams, 1992).

Another strategy that the group can employ is what Turner and Giles (1981) calls a social creativity strategy. One of these strategies is to find new dimensions of intergroup comparison (e.g. those attending lower-status schools may make comparisons with higher status schools using non-academic dimensions) that are relatively more positive for the ingroup, or to redefine the value attached to existing dimensions of comparison (e.g. being responsible is boring). When cognitive alternatives to the status quo are not conceivable, the subordinate group may resort to direct competition with the high-status group. This strategy is most likely to lead to direct conflict and clashes (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987; Abrams, 1992; Turner & Giles, 1981).

Brown et al (1983, cited by Taylor and Moghaddam, 1987) made a study that has seriously challenged one of the basic propositions of social identity theory. These researchers tested the hypothesis that is central to social identity theory: that there should be a positive association between the degree of group identification and the extent of

positive intergroup differentiation. According to social identity theory, the stronger the identification of individuals with the group, the more they will attempt to achieve intergroup differentiation. Brown et al (1983) tested this prediction in three different settings: a bakery, a department store, and a paper mill. The subjects' strength of identification with the ingroup was measured, and their attitudes towards other groups in the organisation were assessed. On the basis of these attitudinal measurements, indexes of intergroup differentiation were computed and correlated with measures of group identification. Results showed that in different groups within each organisation, very different relationships between identification and identification emerged, ranging from significantly negative (i.e. contradicting the prediction of social identity theory) to significantly positive, as predicted by social identity theory. The overall relationship between strength of identification and intergroup differentiation was weakly positive. What is quite clear in this study is that a very central assumption entailed in social identity theory is challenged.

According to Taylor and Moghaddam (1987), not all researchers have interpreted the propositions of social identity theory to mean that the strength of identity should necessarily correlate with intergroup differentiation. For example, Smith (1985, cited by Taylor and Moghaddam, 1987) has argued that the theory deals mainly with salience and security of social identity in intergroup relations, and he presents a case for viewing salience, security, and strength as distinct constructs. When viewed from this angle, the findings of Brown et al (1983) do not necessarily contradict the proposition of social identity theory. The contradictions that are inherent in the Brown et al (1983) study are not surprising at all, given that social identity theory is broad in scope and allows for different interpretations of the results.

5.4.2 The Importance of Social Identity Theory in this Study

Social identity theory will be of great value to the present study because of its prediction that someone who is experiencing negative social identity will be motivated to adopt certain strategies that could lead him or her to experience positive identity. In the context of SAfm, the theory predicts that the station has the potential to attract 'low status

individuals or groups', if it is seen to be providing superior programmes for the kind of audience they aspire to be part of. This component of the theory is important in this study because it shows where part of the future audience of SAfm will come from.

For instance, owing to the presumed low status that blacks in general occupy in South African society and elsewhere, it is expected that there will always be a need for them to strive for the better things in life that are enjoyed by 'high status' groups. An English language radio station such as SAfm, then has the potential to attract a black audience purely on the basis that it is a radio service that broadcasts to an élite audience.

Though not so much has been said or written about the strategies that are adopted by high status groups to protect and even enhance their own status, the theory does suggest that high status groups have their own strategies that they use to protect their own high status position in society. This has fundamental implications for a radio station such as SAfm, especially if one takes into consideration the target audience that the station is aiming to serve. Since the target audience of SAfm will comprise mainly professionals, opinion-makers and decision-makers, it is essential for the station to produce and broadcast programmes of superior quality that befit this kind of audience.

Any programme material or programme presentation that is regarded as being of lower quality will evoke a harsh response from the listeners, to the point where they will do anything to get what they want from the station. Furthermore, since part of the audience that SAfm will be serving comprises white, English-speaking South Africans, the 'wrong use' or perceived 'lowering of the standard' of the English language could easily sour relations between the station and the native speakers of English. They, too, could take extreme measures to ensure that the station uses 'good' or 'acceptable' English in its broadcasting of various programmes. In social identity theory terms, the English language defines who they are as a group. It may be said that the English language is about them as much as it is about their culture, which they may want to preserve and protect at all costs.

Perhaps the most significant contribution that social identity theory can make to this study is that the knowledge and insights gained from the theory would be of great value to any

broadcaster who has to contend with the challenges of broadcasting to a diverse audience in a multicultural environment.

5.5. Self-Categorisation Theory

Self-categorisation theory provides an analysis of the self and the relations between self, social norms and social context (Turner, 1991). The following comment by Turner and Oakes (1989) puts the idea of self-categorisation theory into proper perspective:

> 'The theory should not be understood as an argument for the primacy of the group over the individual. It is called self-categorisation theory (and not social identity theory) because it deals with the interrelation of personal and social, individual and group, and asserts the interdependence of individuality and shared, collective identity. The theory proposes that the group is a distinctive psychological process, but in so doing it reminds us that the group functioning is a part of the psychology of the person, that individual and group must be reintegrated psychologically before there can be an adequate analysis of either' (p. 94).

According to Turner (1991), self-categorisation theory is similar to impression management theory in its emphasis on the social identity theory and normative implications of actions, and on the variation of identity within the social context. However, the theory differs in its ideas that social identity extends into the private self, and that social norms define and shape the activity of the private self and vice versa.

Self-categorisation theory is also a general theory of group behaviour. The central hypothesis is that group behaviour may be understood as individuals acting more in terms of a shared identity than as separate individuals (i.e. more in terms of their personal identity). The theory seeks to explain variations in how people define and categorise themselves, and the effects of such variations (Turner, 1991).

The development of self-categorisation theory by was influenced by Rosch's (1978) ideas on the prototype concept or theory. Rosch (1973) singled out the prototype concept in the frame of her analysis of categories as 'fuzzy' sets. According to Rosch, class inclusion can hardly be conceived as a rigid all-or-none process. In most cases, in fact, classification

appears as a probabilistic process. More or less typical examples are gathered together in the same category; therefore, categories take a hierarchical structure, being organised around a central (prototypical) element. Categories are organised, in turn, into taxonomies (that is, hierarchical categorical systems), with different levels of abstraction (Rosch, 1978, cited by Serino, 1998).

Turner (1991) outlines the main ideas of self-categorisation theory as follows. One aspect of the self is the cognitive aspect: the system of concepts of self that people use to define themselves. Self-concepts may be thought of as self-categories or self-categorisations: cognitive groupings of the self as identical, similar, equivalent to some class of stimuli in contrast to some other class. Self-categorisations are assumed to vary in their level of inclusiveness or abstraction.

Three levels of abstraction of self-categories are distinguished: the interpersonal (subordinate level of abstraction, personal identity, self as an individual person), intergroup (intermediate level of abstraction, social identity, self as a group member) and interspecies (superordinate level of abstraction, self as a human being). These are defined not by specific attributes but by the level at which people are being compared and categorised. For instance, 'altruism' could function as a cue to an individual identity, to a particular social group, or to being human, depending on the context (Oakes et al, 1991).

The theory emphasises that categorisation is a dynamic, context-dependent process, determined by comparative relations in a given context (Haslam et al, 1996). This approach is formalised in the principle of meta-contrast, which is so called because it involves a contrast between contrasts, a judgement of difference between differences. The meta-contrast principle predicts that a given set of items is more likely to be categorised as a single entity to the degree that the differences within that set of items (in relevant dimensions) are smaller than the differences between that set and others within the comparative context. So, for example, we call a certain group of things 'chairs' because, the principle states, the differences between chairs are smaller than the differences between chairs and tables. Categories form in such a way as to ensure that the differences between categories are bigger than the differences in categories (Turner, 1991).

The meta-contrast ratio, that is the average perceived intercategory difference over the average perceived intracategory difference, provides a simple quantitative measure of the degree to which any collection of stimuli in a given frame of reference will tend to be cognized as a perceptual unit or, in the case of people, of the degree to which a collection of individuals will be perceived as a social group (Turner, 1991; Oakes et al, 1994).

It must be noted, however, that the meta-contrast ratio gives only a partial account of categorisation, since it describes the comparative relations between stimuli that lead them to be represented by a category (Oakes et al, 1994). A full explanation of how we categorise people must also take into account the social meaning of the similarities and differences between them (i.e. category content, which is related to normative fit) and the relationship of social categories to the values, needs and goals of the perceiver (their relative accessibility). For example, if a social categorisation such as men/women is already available to perceivers, it is likely to become cognitively salient to the degree that it is relatively accessible (the perceivers may be feminists or male chauvinists who are highly motivated and ready to think in terms of men and women) and that it fits comparatively (the people being represented may be men and women arguing with each other, so that there are greater differences between them than in the sexes through the attitudes they express) and normatively (the men may be taking an anti-feminist and the women a pro-feminist stand on the relevant issue) (Turner, 1991).

This emphasis on categorisation as highly variable and context-dependent produces a concomitant emphasis on the context-dependence of perceived similarity and difference, which is the major outcome of categorisation. People who are categorised and perceived as different in one context (e.g., biologists and physicists in a science faculty) could be recategorised and perceived as similar in another context (e.g., as scientists rather than social scientists in a university) without any actual change in their own position. This is the essence of categorisation: it is a cognitive grouping process that transforms differences into similarities, and vice versa (Oakes et al, 1994).

The significance of the categorisation process and the meta-contrast principle in human perception and behaviour has been made explicit in the following statement:

'We need some psychologically neutral term such as, perhaps, "distances" to indicate the nature of recognised stimulus relations. There are "distances" between people, but are they similarities or differences? Are physicists and biologists similar or different? Arising from the comparisons specified in the meta-contrast principle, categorisation subjectively transforms "distances" into similarities and differences, and from perceived similarities and differences flow, amongst other things, perception of attraction and dislike, agreement and disagreement, co-operation and conflict. In sum, categorisation provides the fundamental basis of our social orientation towards others. Within the science faculty physicists might reject and deride the biologists, claiming they aren't "real scientists", but in comparison with other social scientists the two groups may present as inseparable allies' (Oakes et al, 1994, p. 98).

According to Turner (1991), the effect of the salience of an ingroup-outgroup membership that has brought about changes in the comparative context is enhanced by the perceived similarities in, and differences between, groups. Hence, the meta-contrast principle can be used to define the relative prototypicality of members in a group (Oakes et al, 1994; Turner, 1991). As social identity becomes salient, individual self-perception becomes depersonalised; that is, people tend to perceive themselves more in terms of the shared stereotypes that define their social category membership (the attributes that define their common social identity) and less in terms of their personal differences and individuality (Turner, 1991).

Clearly, if relative prototypicality depends on intergroup comparisons, then, for example, the prototypical physicist in a comparative context including biologists would be different from the prototypical physicist compared with engineers. Paradoxically, being able to say that two things differ always implies that they share a higher level of identity in terms of which comparisons are meaningful (Oakes et al, 1994).

According to Oakes et al (1998), an important point is that, since relative prototypically depends on intergroup comparisons among other things, it will vary along with variation

in the intergroup context in which judgements are made. For example, the prototypical communist in a comparative context including fascists would be different from the prototypical communist compared with liberal democrats, or Trotskyists. Self-categorisation theory therefore agrees with Rosch (1978) that fixed prototypes are 'fictions', and emphasises context-dependent judgements of prototypicality rather than fixed prototypical images that represent groups as constants across changing contexts (Brewer, 1988, cited by Oakes et al, 1998).

Though research that tests certain basic assumptions of self-categorisation theory have been done in the past (eg.Ullah, 1987; Hogg & Turner, 1987), there are currently no studies that this investigator is aware of that test certain aspects of self-categorisation theory in the area of broadcasting media, and radio in particular.

5.5.1 The Significance of Self-Categorisation Theory in the Present Study

The relevance of self-categorisation theory to this study lies in the fact that people, regardless of the groups to which they belong, have the capacity to transcend the confines of their own current categories when the situation changes. In as far as SAfm is concerned, the theory suggests that listeners from various cultural and racial backgrounds could easily identify with SAfm and be willing to listen to the station, provided the station broadcasts programmes they can relate to. In essence, the more the programmes and programme presentation on SAfm satisfy the needs and tastes of listeners, the greater the chance of the station's appealing to most of its listeners.

However, in another context where the same listeners are exposed to radio broadcasts that do not meet their needs and expectations, a different response from them may be expected: they will stop listening to the station. Another way of expressing this is that when the radio station does not provide its listeners with the programmes and presenters they can identify with, they will find no reason to listen to listen to the station in the future.