

Eusebius McKaiser played a transformative role in talk radio in a democratic South Africa

By [Sisanda Nkoala](#)

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South African broadcaster, author and political analyst [Eusebius McKaiser](#) passed away suddenly on 30 May 2023 at the age of 45.



Eusebius McKaiser. Source: 702.

News of his death reverberated through media channels. Tributes bore witness to the impact of his voice and the enduring significance of radio as the medium through which many first encountered his outspoken, insightful commentary.

McKaiser blazed a trail that helped inform public debate in contemporary South Africa. Radio in South Africa has long been acknowledged as a significant arena for engaging in meaningful public discourse. This is extensively [documented](#) in scholarly literature. This includes my [own](#) work as a scholar of rhetoric in South African media. McKaiser's career played out in a particular historical context.

South Africa's airwaves were freed after democracy in 1994. Before this the state had tightly controlled radio during [apartheid](#), silencing black voices and imposing strict censorship when they were eventually given airtime. As a medium that amplifies diverse voices and encourages active participation, radio has become a vital catalyst for social change. It empowers individuals to contribute to a more inclusive and democratic society. Talk radio, in particular, stands out as a means of engaging citizens in what scholars have [termed](#) "dial-in democracy".



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Danette Breitenbach 30 May 2023



Within this landscape, McKaiser emerged on radio in 2010 as a transformative force. He transcended the boundaries of a traditional radio broadcaster to become known as public intellectual, knowledgeable and highly engaged in public issues and debates.

Public intellectual

As an openly gay person, McKaiser used his platform to staunchly advocate for the protection of same-sex rights. South African academic and author [Pumla Dineo Gqola](#) she [notes](#) his role as an outspoken thinker on South African life:

“ On his show, he was unapologetic about naming white supremacist power no matter how hard it masked itself. ”

Describing his public cultural impact, Gqola has [outlined](#) McKaiser's depth as a thinker, eloquence as a communicator and unwavering conviction as a citizen. She homes in on the important ways in which he helped confront the violence that characterises life in South Africa:

“ He modelled an unwavering determination to undoing violence in wide-ranging gestures. Whether he held fire to the feet of employers who expelled women who spoke out about sexual harassment, or refused to accept bureaucratic doublespeak while people were trapped in poverty, he was firm... ”

Talk radio career

McKaiser was a star academic scholar in philosophy and law, followed by work stints in corporate and academic spaces. His commercial radio career began with his late-night show Politics and Morality on [702](#), the largest English commercial station in South Africa with around [700,000 listeners](#). Here he introduced South Africans to his unique brand of persuasive moral philosophy, using words as tools of action to spark critical conversations.

The show prompted listeners to think deeper about their preconceived notions and engage in nuanced discussions on topics ranging from religion to politics. It mastered what some talk radio scholars [describe](#) as “a platform for deliberation which is akin to the idea of a public sphere”. McKaiser went on to host the popular *Talk at Nine*, simulcast on 702's sister station [Cape Talk](#).

This was followed by *The Eusebius McKaiser Show* on talk radio station [Power FM](#). Through candid interviews with influential figures, compassionate dialogues with victims of injustice, and engaging discussions on books and popular culture, McKaiser deployed his eloquence and depth of thought to shape everyday dialogue and contribute to the cultural fabric of the time.

Social justice

His brand of broadcasting was what media scholars have [termed](#) the “advocative-radical”. These voices do not see themselves as neutral and objective observers, but rather “as ‘participants’ in political discourse” who bring their own particular worldview to the discussion. This compels them to act as adversaries and the voice of those whose voices have been muted. They strive to amplify ordinary people's perspectives in mass media discourse.

One of the traits that set McKaiser apart was his ability to move beyond reliance on listener calls. He provided deep thinking, meaningful content of his own. His approach was not without critics. Some would accuse him of being confrontational and aggressive in his interviewing style. Others [found fault](#) with his tendency to make sweeping generalisations or oversimplify complex issues.

His departure from 702 in 2020, [reportedly](#) due to inadequate resource allocation, sparked [passionate debates](#) on social media. This demonstrated the impact he had on the public.

Even after his passing, people from all corners of society, including those who disagreed with him, continue to [praise](#) McKaiser's insights and fearless approach. Fortunately, his critical voice lives on through another powerful medium: podcasting.

Podcast star

[In The Ring With Eusebius McKaiser](#) provided a platform for McKaiser's voice to continue to be heard when he left traditional radio broadcasting. Since its launch in 2021, the podcast has accumulated over 150 thought-provoking episodes, engaging audiences and challenging the norms of discourse.

The fact that a broadcaster of McKaiser's stature turned to podcasting exemplifies how online audio platforms are reshaping the way broadcasters actively empower listeners to become co-creators of content, amplifying their voices and creating a more inclusive public sphere.

Legacy

McKaiser's [own view](#) of his broadcasting work was "to get public debate going about these issues which affect all of us in our private lives". And he certainly did.

His journey as a radio broadcaster in South Africa exemplifies the power and potential of the medium to shape public discourse and deepen democracy. With activism coursing through his veins and intellect guiding his words, McKaiser demonstrated that the voice of the radio host could reverberate beyond the airwaves. Reflecting on McKaiser's radio career means to recognise the medium's immense influence in shaping society, prompting citizens to question, engage, and ultimately contribute to a more inclusive and vibrant democracy.

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