

# Delivering a Public Service? The BBC Asian Network and British Asian audiences.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

De Montfort University

July 2019

## Acknowledgements

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This study would not have been possible without the participation of BBC staff who agreed to give up their time to be interviewed. I am eternally grateful for their time, thoughts and support. Equally, I am grateful to over one hundred BBC radio listeners, who also gave up their time at a number of events to complete the audience questionnaire and share their views about the BBC Asian Network and the BBC more widely.

Thank you to my supervisory team, Stuart Price for his advice, guidance and support for not just my PhD but also in life and work. Thank you, Tim O'Sullivan, for your enduring support, advice and difficult questions, which I still struggle to answer!

My final thanks are to my family, my husband, Rashpal and my beautiful children Anil and Asha who keep me grounded and support me. They have been looking forward to receiving my time and attention now that this study is complete.

Published works: please see DMU Dora

Aujla-Sidhu, G. (2019) The BBC Asian Network, the search for younger digital listeners in Matsaganis, M. and Yu, S. (ed.) (2019) *Ethnic Media in the digital age*, Routledge

Aujla-Sidhu, G. (2017) How to serve British Asian communities? The dilemmas facing the BBC. *Radio Journal: International studies in Broadcast and audio*, Vol. 15:1 May, 2017,

Aujla-Sidhu, G. (2016) Public Service Broadcasting: The challenge of representing ethnic minority audiences. *For(E)Dialogue*, 1 (1), pp. 40-51

## Abstract

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This thesis examines how minority ethnic producers employed by the BBC Asian Network, the BBC's only ethnic specific digital radio station, construct a distinctive audience for the broadcaster. The study looks at the challenges, barriers and conflicts that have emerged as a consequence of BBC strategic attempts to make the radio station relevant for younger British Asian listeners. This research sets out to fill a gap regarding the experiences of ethnic staff working within a public service remit. This type of study is necessary because evidence suggests the number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff working in the media remain small and this impacts the views articulated in the media.

The study combines a production studies approach with a grounded theory framework for the analysis of thirty in-depth interviews with editors, producers and presenters working at the BBC Asian Network. Three different audience strategies are examined from the perspective of staff working at the station: 2006 young strategy, 2009 friend of the family and 2016, young digital native. What is also exposed through the in-depth interviews is the existence of an internal divide between two groups of minority ethnic staff; the older traditional British Asian staff members who are concerned about the dilution of 'Asian' identity, and the younger group, comprised of third or fourth generation British Asians, who are likely to be integrated and better placed to promote a broad vision of British Asian identity. The interviews illustrate that a rigid gatekeeping system limits the dissemination of original journalism about the British Asian communities because the wider BBC ignores or marginalises the expertise and stories pitched by minority ethnic journalists working at the BBC Asian Network. Therefore, this thesis evaluates how the BBC as a public service broadcaster, articulates and manages issues pertaining to race and ethnicity within the organisation.

The study is significant and timely, because the BBC as a public service broadcaster, is under increased pressure since the Charter Renewal in 2016, to demonstrate that it is taking diversity seriously, and meet its own self-imposed diversity initiatives; in terms of the recruitment of staff from minority backgrounds, both on-air and behind the scenes, and improve the representation of minority groups in content. This study explores the BBC's endeavours to attract minority listeners through music, news and programme content on the contemporary BBC Asian Network. The study focuses upon a period of time between 2006 and 2018.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction and Objectives

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### The context

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This research focuses upon the experiences of BBC producers employed at an ethnic specific digital radio service, the BBC Asian Network. The study investigates how the predominantly ethnic staff hired by the BBC, construct a British Asian community of listeners through the distinctive on-air content, music and language programmes, produced according to a public service remit. The thesis highlights the challenges they face steering this 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2012) to the output, how they visualise British Asian identity and furthermore, how it is articulated on-air. In-depth interviews were conducted with staff working at the BBC Asian Network, who are responsible for reflecting and representing British Asian communities, they exposed an internal divide between two generations of minority ethnic staff; the older more traditional British Asian staff members, who are worried about the diluted 'British Asian' identity communicated by the station, and a younger group of staff, comprised of third generation British Asians, who are happier to promote a less specific and more ambiguous vision of British Asian identity. A production studies approach (Cottle, 1997, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011, Mayer *et al.*, 2009; Mayer 2011) combined with a grounded analysis (Glasser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) was utilised to gather material that examined the production process, production hierarchy, work routines, gatekeeping practices and recruitment procedures at the station. Therefore, the thesis presents an in-depth 'insider' account of how minority ethnic producers employed at the BBC Asian Network, construct a distinctive audience for the BBC and the challenges, barriers and conflicts that have emerged as a consequence of BBC attempts to make the radio station relevant to young British Asian listeners, in response to demographic changes. The station has been set a demanding goal to serve all British Asians with a single service, because it is required to appeal widely and simultaneously, equally to different communities, age groups, and different generations of Asians.

British Asian communities in the UK migrated from South Asia in the post-war years for largely economic reasons following the formal decolonisation of British India and latterly in the 1970s from East Africa. In Britain the term 'Asian' refers explicitly to people whose families migrated from countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The 2011 Census estimates that approximately four million people in the UK identify as being Asian, and collectively they form the largest minority group in Britain. The Asian community are the only

minority group who have a specific, dedicated BBC service to reflect and represent them. 1Xtra, launched in 2002 alongside the BBC Asian Network, was initially conceived as a service for black British youth, however, the station which emphasises urban music, also has a strong appeal among non minority audiences (BBC Trust, 2015: 10). It is widely acknowledged that the BBC struggles to engage young, working class and minority audiences to its output (BBC Trust, 2012; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016). Moreover, focus groups conducted for the Office of Communications (Ofcom)<sup>1</sup> with working class and young people, reveal they find the BBC to be “old-fashioned or as offering very little of relevance for them” (Ipsos Murray 2017: 9). Research into the consumption habits of minority audiences also reveals that they are less likely than the general population to watch BBC, ITV or Channel 4 in a typical day (Ofcom, 2013a: 7; Ofcom, 2018c: 6).

## Research rationale and research questions

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The BBC Asian Network is a national, digital station that retains some medium-wave access in the East and West Midlands, which remains a popular way of listening (Watson, 2016). Historically, listener figures were steady, at around 400,000 listeners, but following significant changes to the remit in 2012, the number of listeners grew to highs of 672,000 (Rajar<sup>2</sup> Q2, 2016) before dropping to 572,000 (Rajar Q4, 2018) (see Appendix A). The BBC has a public purpose to serve, reflect and represent diverse communities in the UK and their way of life to its audience (Cottle, 2000; Curran and Seaton, 1997; Debrett, 2010; Lowe and Martin, 2013; *Royal Charter*, 2016). This includes the supposedly accurate reflection of minority groups within programming and, increasingly, in the past decade, the recruitment of journalists, actors and writers from diverse backgrounds in order to offer more authentic representations of UK minority communities in drama and news. Consequently, since the publication of the 2016 *Royal Charter*, issues relating to diversity and inclusion within programme making and staff recruitment have gained a greater agency within the BBC.

This research sets out to fill a gap regarding the broadcasting provision for minority audiences within a public service remit, by focusing specifically upon radio programmes produced by minority staff, and examines BBC Asian Network endeavours to engage British Asian audiences through music, news and programme content. The study encompasses a period

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<sup>1</sup> The Office of Communications, commonly referred to as Ofcom, is the UK government-approved regulatory and competition authority for the broadcasting, telecommunications and postal industries of the United Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> Rajar stands for Radio Joint Audience Research and is the official body in charge of measuring radio audiences in the UK. It is jointly owned by the BBC and Radiocentre on behalf of the commercial sector.

of time between 2006 and 2018, and there is an examination of three key audience strategies implemented by the management at the BBC Asian Network to engage third and fourth-generation British Asian listeners. The study illustrates the problems and conflicts that characterise minority cultural production including differences of opinion among, and between journalists and managers working at the BBC Asian Network. Largely, the differences are the consequence of inter-generational change within the British Asian community. There is also a consideration of the unique challenges the BBC Asian Network faces being a specialist minority service under the umbrella of the BBC and the thesis questions if being part of the BBC causes a problem in attracting the core audience because the station is aligned with BBC goals and objectives.

My interest in the BBC Asian Network and the future of the service is due to the fact that I worked as a reporter and producer for the station between 2004 and 2009 and latterly in 2011. During my period of employment with the BBC significant changes were made to the output notably, in 2006, under new management the station transformed the target audience, the brand, the music policies and moved from serving primarily first and second generation British Asians to the third generation Asians, a largely unserved demographic. The station was recommended for closure in 2010 as part of a BBC cost cutting exercise, due primarily to low listener figures (Rajar Q3, 2009, 360,000 see appendix A) which, starkly contrasted with a high production cost per hour. Post 2012, following a decision by the former BBC Trust to retain the BBC Asian Network, a stronger digital strategy has been enacted in an attempt, to appeal to third and fourth generation British Asian audiences who may not listen to radio. For the first ten years of its existence as a national digital station, the BBC Asian Network struggled to match the on-air content to the core Asian audience and as a result, all BBC Asian Network staff regularly attended workshops to learn about their target listener.

The aim of the research is to study the BBC Asian Network from the perspective of the staff who work there and examine - the issues and challenges they face serving their listeners. There is very limited literature about the BBC's only ethnic specific service (Raychaudhuri, 2018; McCarthy, 2018), and a doctoral thesis by Khamkar (2016) which similarly to McCarthy focuses upon the history of Asian radio programming on the BBC. However, very little is known about the contemporary service or the internal conflict between staff engaged with minority cultural production. As a result, this thesis sets out to fill a gap in knowledge, because it is focused on the experiences of minority ethnic staff who work within a public service remit. The study also reveals the internal struggles that minority ethnic media workers face within the BBC, both from



an institutional perspective and from an internal point of view due to inter-generational change and division between staff. This research examines four specific research questions:

- What challenges do producers at the BBC Asian Network face in creating content for a distinctive and changing audience?
- How is the target British Asian audience imagined now and does this mode of address restrict creativity and innovation?
- What key differences characterise the way production staff conceive the different generations that comprise the audience?
- How does the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, articulate and manage issues pertaining to race and ethnicity?

This research is important because growing numbers of third and fourth generation British Asians are increasingly participating in media production at both mainstream and ethnic organisations and their perspective may differ from the older generations of their communities (Yu and Matsaganis, 2019). In addition, there is an examination of the BBC's public service values of objective news and current affairs, language promotion and educational programming (*Royal Charter*, 2016) alongside a consideration of the BBC's unique position: independent of the government, but dependent upon the government for continued funding. The scope and size of the institution means that the BBC has a unique role in the cultural and public life of British people: for example, the BBC was charged with leadership of the digital switchover in 2014 (Curran, 1997; Tracey, 1998). However, the BBC is also under pressure to justify its existence, funding and more recently, to create 'distinctive' programming and demonstrate it has diversity initiatives in place to showcase the employment of a range of people, both on screen and behind the scenes. The broadcaster is traditionally associated with middle class programme makers and as a consequence, largely middle class audiences (Hesmondhalgh, in Deery and Press, 2017; Lacey, 2018). An examination of the BBC radio workforce reveals that just six per cent of staff are from minority backgrounds (Ofcom, 2018a).

The BBC Asian Network has been set a challenging task to entice young British Asians to a specialist minority-specific radio service. One distinct advantage radio has is that it is a portable medium, and the number of people who claim to consume radio on a mobile device is increasing. Ofcom (2015a) research has noted that it is "most pronounced" for people aged between fifteen and twenty-four years of whom "40.7 per cent claimed to listen to radio on a mobile device at least once per month" (Ofcom, 2015a: 17). Research reveals that sixty-seven per cent of audiences from AB households (middle and upper classes) consume radio via a digital platform,

whereas radio listening is lower in the other socio-economic groups, with only forty-five per cent of those in the DE group listening to radio via digital platforms (Ofcom, 2015a: 21).

## Research Methods

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Interviews were recorded with thirty programme makers who either work for, or have previously worked, at the BBC Asian Network. The interviews explored BBC staff's personal and professional experiences of delivering diverse content for the BBC. The data demonstrates that a rigid gatekeeping system limits the dissemination of original journalism about the British Asian communities, because the wider BBC often ignores, or marginalises the expertise and stories pitched by minority ethnic journalists working at the BBC Asian Network. Consequently, this thesis questions if the BBC Asian Network is a half-hearted attempt at serving minority audiences or an innovation to connect with a group of people who are more likely to consume BBC output in the future. The BBC Asian Network reaches sixteen per cent of its available target audience (Eustace, 2016); however, the potential number of listeners is far greater. The staff also revealed their concerns about what they labelled as 'restrictive' music policies imposed upon the station by the former BBC Trust. Some journalists fear the policies are in conflict with the needs of the young audience they are targeting.

In addition, a secondary method, a small audience survey of the BBC Asian Network listeners was conducted across the UK in 2016 which sought their views about the station and its output. The questionnaire obtained the listeners' views about the importance of a specific Asian service on the BBC and probed what British Asian identity means to the listeners. Two methods were used to gain a fuller picture about the BBC Asian Network and the unique challenges the service faces existing within the BBC. This research is unique because it weaves together the views of ethnic journalists on the content they produce with the assessment of the output from the listeners themselves. There is limited academic literature about the BBC's only minority-specific service, and this thesis examines the station's goals, output and how the station tries to make itself relevant to the audience. There is also limited focus on solely minority workers in academic literature, therefore, this study contributes to a gap in British knowledge about minority producers' experiences of production, and examines how working practices influence minority-specific radio content on the BBC Asian Network. Research about ethnic minorities and the media often examines the media and its supposed effects, whereas this thesis examines media output with views from the producers, and asks the intended audience their perception of the service.

Two key problems are demonstrated: first, because the station is part of the BBC, it has to adhere to the public service broadcaster's conventions and norms on news production, working practices and music scheduling; second there is an internal conflict between staff over the target listener, with some worrying the version of Asian identity disseminated is too broad or 'diluted.' In addition, some staff worry that the version of Asian culture articulated on-air demands that the listener is interested in Bollywood and Asian specific music whilst the output tries to emphasise a British lifestyle. This version of identity does not necessarily correspond to the identity of the average British Asian in the UK and demonstrates that there is a haphazard approach to the notion of British Asian identity. Furthermore, there remain unanswered questions about who they ought to target; first generation Asians? third generation British Asians? middle class listeners? or working class listeners? A person's identity is not reliant on just one or two characteristics such as gender and ethnicity, instead identity comprises multiple intersecting layers' that can include geography, background, religious beliefs, education and class so that a one-dimensional version of 'Asian' identity, is avoided. However, it is important to underline that the BBC Asian Network is also innovative and is demonstrating resilience and at a time when audiences are fragmenting, it has managed to attract new audiences via social media instead of radio since 2016.

It is accepted in this study that the BBC Asian Network gains kudos by being part of the BBC brand. Some listeners may like the credibility and authority with which the BBC is associated. This is particularly important because a number of Asian-specific radio services in the UK are either commercial or community media, something which Gordon (2012: 20) considers to be "problematic" because community radio often defines itself as opposition or alternative to the mainstream media; therefore, this definition suggests that minority audiences are not considered part of the mainstream offer.

## Key definitions

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This study refers to and uses a number of terms indiscriminately. In particular, 'British Asian' is used to describe people who have South Asian heritage. In Britain, the term 'Asian' explicitly refers to people from Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan backgrounds, and those from mixed race heritage. There are a number of differences within and among each of these groups, and there are also differences that exist between them and the main population of the UK. The term 'Asian' is not homogenous and this is explored in some depth in Chapter 3 and 9. In addition, the terms 'minority ethnic', 'minority' and 'minorities' are used throughout

the study, despite some academics arguing that the terms imply that people are inferior to the main population because their use “masks the complex distinctions between dominant and subordinate groups” (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1995: 19). The terminology tends to refer to an imbalance that exists of economic, political and social power within society as a consequence of the post-colonial experience, racism and diaspora movement. Wilson and Gutierrez recommend researchers avoid broad brush terminology; however, the use of the terms ‘Asian’ and ‘Asian identity’ are central themes of this study, so the terminology is used throughout. Some researchers have highlighted problems with term ‘race’, Gunaratnam (2003) defines it as a “political and social construct” that is used to build a system of power, exploitation and exclusion. This study uses the term ‘race’ specifically in this context to explore how the term has been appropriated by elite groups in society to infer that race is problematic. The terms ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethnic’ are used throughout to refer to a person’s background. Gunaratnam (2003: 4) has defined ethnicity as a construct “where difference is grounded in cultural and religious features.” This definition is apt and relevant for a thesis that considers British Asian audiences, because these groups are considered to be distinctive and have strong cultural and religious binds.

Identity is explored as a key construct, and I apply Hall’s (Hall and du Gay, 1996: 2) definition that it is a notion “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group.” For the purpose of the research, the emphasis is upon British Asian identity, Hall suggests identity is never complete because it is “always in process” (Hall and du Gay, 1996). It is pertinent that identity evolves and adapts, and is not simply the product of history or globalisation. Furthermore, Hall and du Gay acknowledge that a person’s history, language and culture “bears on how we might represent ourselves” (Hall and du Gay, 1996: 4). The post-colonial experience has particular relevance for a study that examines British Asians and their representation. Ali *et al.*, (2006: 7) suggests that Asian communities are seen to belong to cultures that are unchanging, traditional, “patriarchal and authoritarian”, hence they are represented by the media as inferior to Western culture which is considered superior. I suggest that media organisations do not understand that identity is constantly transforming, and this is one explanation for why minority communities are poorly represented.

For the purpose of this study, minority is employed to refer to groups whose heritage or ethnicity indicates they are distinctive to the mainstream audience. I use Alba and Nee’s (2003) definition of ‘mainstream’ in that it refers to “segments of society wherein one’s life conditions and prospects for social mobility are not limited by ethnic, racial, cultural, or linguistic

backgrounds.” In other words, the mainstream population and media is intended for people whose background is likely to be ‘white’, and they are likely to have lived in the UK for a number of generations. In fact, a number of scholars have argued that as an institution the BBC has struggled to evolve from its historical goals that portrayed a singular image of the nation (Carter and McKinlay, 2013; Creeber, 2004; Malik, 2013). British Asians mostly arrived in large numbers post war and throughout this study there are references to the differences that exist among the different Asian groups. First generation are defined as those who emigrated to the UK from South Asia or Africa. They may have arrived as adults or children and are likely to be over the age of sixty. Second generation, according to Ramamurthy (in Price and Sabido, 2015), were either born in the UK or arrived as young children with their parents and thus can be considered middle aged – perhaps thirty-five to sixty. Broadly speaking, the third generation are likely to be aged up to thirty-five, and the fourth and fifth generations are either children, teenagers or young adults. A key argument presented in this study is that the interest and links that young British Asians have to South Asia, including their language, differs from the first generation who are now likely to be elderly. Therefore, terms such as ‘integrated’ and ‘assimilated’ are used by the interviewees to refer to third and fourth-generation British Asians who are increasingly employed by the BBC and perhaps do not speak a South Asian language nor have a huge interest in Bollywood. This is explored in Chapter 6, which details an inter-generational divide between older British Asian staff and younger British Asians working for the BBC Asian Network. This could be linked to the historical struggles that first and second-generation British Asian faced in the 1960s and 1970s against racism and discrimination (Price and Sabido, 2015) or to the hostility that remains more widely among Asian communities for people who are considered to be “totally assimilated” (Sharma *et al.*, 1996: 46).

Public service broadcasting is also a key concept in the study due to the significant impact the notion has upon working practices and content created within the BBC and BBC Asian Network. There are a number of definitions of public service broadcasting, these are examined in Chapter 2. The manner in which this study understands public service broadcasting is based upon the UK model, the BBC. For the purpose of this study public service broadcasting is the aim to deliver high quality content for all citizens, impartial news provision alongside information, educational programming and entertainment within a mixed schedule. Lowe and Martin (2013:20) define public service broadcasting as the method of providing “services” “to groups that are not attractive in commercial terms.” In other words, public service broadcasting is expected to provide ‘niche market failure’ content alongside popular programmes. A key defining characteristic of public service broadcasting is the tendency to serve the public as ‘citizens’ (Spigelman in Lowe and Martin, 2013; Syvertsen, 2004) because citizens have *de facto*

rights and obligations, which include the right to representation and inclusion within society, whereas consumers have interests and needs which the media can monetise.

Throughout this study, ideology, in particular the dominant 'ideology', is often referred to with reference to how minority audiences are portrayed in the media. The definition of ideology is taken from Gramsci, who notably theorised and developed the concepts of ideology and hegemony. Gramsci (in Forgacs, 1988) suggested that society is organised by a system of ideas that are advocated through an alliance of politics and economics. Furthermore, he also proposed that the state governs by achieving a hegemony as opposed to using violence or coercion. This is relevant to the study of media because Hall, Van Dyke and Price have argued that the media is part of the power-wielding infrastructure in society. Price (2007) contends that the media bridges the different structures in society – chiefly the government, economic interests and, crucially, the media, then creates “the production of meaning.” Hall (2013) argues that the media are inherently part of the structures of society because the news stories are selected on the basis of a “socially constructed set of categories” and that the media strive “faithfully and impartially, to reproduce symbolically the existing structure of power in society’s institutional order” (Hall, 2013: 56). This means that issues pertinent to minority communities, such as racism, inequality or disadvantage can be ignored. I suggest that the BBC Asian Network’s vision of British Asian identity incorporates political constructs on race and tacitly promotes the contemporary emphasis upon integration into British norms.

## Thesis structure

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The study is structured into ten chapters, Chapter 2 concentrates on literature relating to the unique position of the BBC in UK cultural and political life and examines competing definitions of public service broadcasting (PSB), the manner in which audiences are conceptualised and the role PSB plays in the public sphere. There is an emphasis on the position of the BBC aligned with the state and other elite institutions and there is an examination of how this position affects the representation of minority audiences. Chapter 3 focuses upon research about diasporic audiences, their representation and ethnic media in the UK. The chapter questions if race and ethnicity have been politicised by the BBC and contends that the broadcaster reproduces and reflects the normative political stance on issues of race and immigration across the institution. There is an examination of how the media conceptualises audiences and makes content to ‘fit’ particular groups or for different purposes. The different meanings of ‘British’ are considered, and alongside a discussion about the significance of class

in understanding differences among British Asian audiences. Throughout the research, there is an underlying emphasis on the role of class as a means to understanding contemporary British Asian audiences in the UK; this is then connected to the discussion in the analysis, which outlines a rift among the staff working at the BBC Asian Network. I propose that British Asian identity needs to be better understood, and refer to Kaur and Kalra's (1996) recommendation that identity for British Asians should be evaluated in the light of it being "in no sense fixed, bounded or cohesive" (Sharma *et al.*, 1996: 220).

Chapter 4 outlines the historical emergence of the BBC Asian Network as a digital radio station, looking briefly at its local radio roots, and demonstrates how the remit for the station is focused upon tackling the under-representation and (mis)representation of British Asian audiences in the BBC, with an emphasis on original journalism. The role of commercial and community Asian media and the competition this creates within the sector is also considered. There is also a deliberation of the argument put forward by commercial Asian media that claims the BBC Asian Network has adopted a commercial stance, as opposed to focusing upon 'distinctive' content as recommended by the Royal Charter.

The methods for the study are detailed in Chapter 5. There is a discussion about why in-depth interviews were selected as the key method and how the interviewees were approached, interviewed and how the material was analysed. A grounded approach has been applied to understand the data collected from the in-depth interviews, thus there is a discussion of the merit and disadvantages of this particular approach and the contribution it makes to qualitative research and production studies.

Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 form the core analysis discussion of the thesis. They are divided into different topics for consideration; journalism practices, recruitment procedures, British Asian representation, music and linguistic policies. Although the chapters are organised to complement one another, there are connections and overlap between them because they engage with a multiplicity of debates on different aspects of the BBC Asian Network. Chapter 6 focuses upon how diversity is managed at the BBC Asian Network through the examination of recruitment procedures and gatekeeping practices. It concludes that the wider BBC encourages minority ethnic journalists to reproduce content about the diverse communities in the UK that reinforces a sense of 'difference' and 'otherness' for broadcast across the BBC. Notions of 'assimilated', 'integrated' and 'westernised' are also examined from the perspective of BBC staff, offering an insight into a rift between younger and older ethnic staff at the BBC Asian Network.

The role of the BBC Asian Network in representing British Asians is explored in Chapter 7. In particular, there is an exploration of how the media reflection on issues pertaining to race and ethnicity is influenced by political and economic realities. In addition, there is consideration of class differences between content producers and the audience they serve. Music policies are scrutinised in Chapter 8 from the point of view of ethnic BBC staff. I contrast their views with the listener's perspectives gathered through the questionnaire. The chapter argues that British Asian artists have been marginalised as specialist or niche and as a result, receive limited airtime within the BBC. Chapter 9 focuses upon British Asian identity through the examination of linguistic policies and related programming at the station. The chapter contends that the BBC Asian Network staff are innovating to capture an audience that is evolving in terms of their identity. Questions have been posed about the national identity of Britain, particularly because immigration from the 1960s and 1970s has profoundly changed the face of British society. There is no clear answer, although this research does attempt to understand this from the perspective of British Asians and how they define their identity.

The conclusion brings to the fore the challenges that characterise minority cultural production and the problems that the BBC Asian Network faces in actively making an audience. The future role of the station is considered in light of the changing nature of UK society and the evolving identity of British Asians.

## Conclusion

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The BBC Asian Network is a unique service existing within the BBC. Previous research on ethnic programming within the BBC and Channel 4 has scrutinised if such programmes ghettoise the communities they purport to serve (Cottle, 1997, 1998). Malik's (2013) argument that the media promotes a broad image of diversity in order to commodify diversity is applied throughout the thesis, with recommendations that the BBC and other media should understand the audience from their perspective. Increasingly, the BBC Asian Network is being considered as a strategic service because it is specialist and serves a large ethnic community.



## Chapter 2 – Public Service Broadcasting

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### Introduction

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This chapter focuses on public service broadcasting and it considers the increasingly contested role of public service broadcasting in contemporary UK society. The literature surveyed in this chapter examines the purposes of public service broadcasting (PSB), key definitions and interpretations of public service broadcasting, and contrasts these against the perceived failings of PSB by examining the emergence of ideologies that favour economic principles within the structures of media industries. The relationship the BBC has with minority ethnic audiences and the government is also scrutinised alongside the contribution the PSB makes to the public sphere.

### Public service broadcasting – a contested notion?

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The BBC was established in 1924 as an independent corporation and, uniquely at that time, had a public service remit to serve British audiences. The BBC was initially established as an organisation that would provide high quality broadcasting for as many tastes and interests in society and crucially on a not for profit basis, but funded by the public. The motivation behind such a model programme was that the content would enrich society through the provision of education, news and information and contribute to society's democratic rights. Tracey (1998: 18) suggests that although the institutional structures and frameworks of national public broadcasters differ "public broadcasting is above all else a structure of ambition" because it is used by political elites to dictate that society should be nurtured". McQuail (2000) has suggested that PSB in the UK emerged during a phase of "communication welfare" where the government sought to ensure the social responsibility of print media and limited ownership concentration in the media in order to allow pluralism and diversity of opinion within the public sphere due to a belief this would contribute to the audience's democratic rights and freedoms. The notion of the BBC being a British organisation acting in the national interest was established very early in the BBC's existence by its first Director General, John Reith, who sought to promote the country's cultural, moral and political life. Williams (1968: 117) defined public service broadcasters as those who have a responsibility to "protect and guide and to develop the majority in ways thought desirable by the minority"; consequently, the early BBC featured programmes that promoted culture and arts in order to educate the mass audience. Reithian principles were dominant in the early BBC, with content produced by middle and upper class

producers for a mass working class audience. Murdock (2005: 197) has argued that there is a significant contradiction with the goals of public service broadcasting; the provision of information that offers objective or opposing views directly conflicts with media strategies of constructing the audience as a unified nation or imagined community. As a consequence, he suggests the BBC is elitist because 'ordinary' people are only given opportunities to speak within the parameters determined by programme makers and this may result in people turning to alternative media to see or hear the views they want. This is an interesting notion, because the principle that the BBC is universal suggests that the content should offer something for everyone and that programme makers ought to focus on serving the audience as citizens of a democracy. The principle of universalism also implies that the organisation has to demonstrate that it does reach all members of a given country.

Tunstall (2010) and Syvertsen (1999; 2003) have argued that public service broadcasting has always lacked a clear singular definition and in Tambini's (2004: 57) words, public service broadcasting is "ideologically ambivalent," largely because balancing public provision and regulation of such organisations poses intractable difficulties for Governments, because on the one hand they want them to be successful, while also seeking to limit the size and influence of such organisations. Ofcom defines public service broadcasting as something that exists "for the public benefit, rather than for purely commercial purposes" (Ofcom, 2015a: 1); therefore, the content is for all members of society, thus adding value to the country as opposed to producing purely what is profitably popular.

Schlesinger (2010) contends that from the BBC's inception it has been a creative organisation, and thus has an institutional framework that has always sought to recruit talent and originate programmes and formats and schedule them to ensure their distribution to everyone. The 2016 *Royal Charter*, (used as method of granting BBC power and editorial independence) stipulates that the BBC's purpose is to "show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services: the BBC should provide high-quality output in many different genres" (*Royal Charter*, 2016: 5). Syvertsen (1999) has suggested that PSB gains political and cultural legitimacy through its objectives, which include publicising notions of citizenship and democracy. The articulation of these values means that PSB is considered superior to commercial media, which is portrayed as purely focused upon money and ratings. Moreover, he suggests that public broadcasting should be seen as a model established by Governments to ensure that the broadcaster operates within established political rules and creates content that contributes to society and offers value to the public, as opposed to what is merely popular. In fact, it is notable that producing what is popular has never been an explicit

BBC priority, although because the broadcaster competes with commercial media, it has had to justify its special position and mission in terms of the number of listeners, viewers, audience shares and engagement on digital platforms.

Scannell (1989: 136) developed the notion of public benefit further, arguing that public service broadcasting fundamentally contributes to the “democratisation” of modern life, in its private and public forms. He rejects arguments by Stuart Hall that suggest broadcasters specifically impose social control or hegemonise culture, by arguing that the value of the BBC is that it provides mixed programmes for national audiences, thus it caters for all equally and minimises the privatisation of information and culture for only those audiences who can afford to pay. Freedman (2008 :149) has defined PSB as a model that rejects market definitions and produces content for an audience which is assumed to consist of citizens, who share a broad range of interests and backgrounds and are simultaneously culturally diverse. Consequently, PSB tries to promote a vision of public life through content that reflects the nation’s full range of communities and incorporates a correspondingly diverse spectrum of public opinion.

Public service broadcasters are expected to provide impartial news, promote and reflect the public interest, foster a sense of national unity, emphasise educational programmes and reflect minority communities. Australia and the UK have mandates to reflect minority interests within programmes, with the aim of strengthening or reflecting cultural identity (*Royal Charter, 2016; ABC Act, 1983; Communications Act, 2003*). The BBC’s current charter (DCMS, 2016: 5) demands that it; “reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities.” Williams (1976: 93) described the British model of media as one that emphasises democratic participation by the audience, and communication to that audience, because through such a process the public can feel informed or empowered. This is due in part to the fact that a large proportion of information disseminated is connected to political or social processes. It is precisely because the BBC defines the audience as citizens that the broadcaster has to demonstrate that it reaches all of them (Tracey 1998: 26). Other academics for example, Fenton (2011), have suggested that, although broadcasting is a business first and foremost, “news is no ordinary commodity and is linked directly to the health and well-being of democratic practice” (2011: 63). According to Freedman (2008: 5) the media is should be considered to be important economic entities. Research about the role of journalism and models of media has often focused upon the connection between informing the audience about the democratic processes of their country and the expectation placed upon the audience to participate as citizens – in the most obvious form, by voting. There is also an expectation that most models of media include some appreciation of ‘free speech’, thus allowing audiences to express opinions without fear and that news is presented with

“objectivity, accuracy, and fairness” (Christians *et al.*, 2009: 84). However, this type of news does not guarantee that the discourse covers the real issues in society, for example, poverty or marginalisation of minority communities. The emphasis upon public affairs is thought to have a democratising impact upon society, because it should mean the citizen fulfils obligations such as participation in elections because it is assumed that active participation of citizens creates social value for society. Less attention however, is given to how PSB can consciously, or unconsciously reflect political goals, through the promotion of notions of ‘inclusivity’ and social cohesion based upon the Government’s definition of these concepts (Gunaratnam, 2003).

Public service broadcasting, is therefore inherently associated with the nation and as a consequence, the audience is defined as citizens (intrinsically associated with principals of democracy), whereas commercial media serve their audience as consumers. Whilst some scholars including Hendy (2000), and Scannell (1989), have suggested that the concept of the public is a central cornerstone of public service broadcasting, Syvertsen (2004) has critiqued claims that PSB are increasingly treating their audience as consumers instead of citizens, and argued that serving audiences as consumers can have a valid purpose for PSB, particularly for participation through digital platforms. Both the 1990 and 2003 *Communication Acts*, use the terms ‘consumer’ and ‘citizen’ when referring to the audience. Syvertsen (2004) has argued that serving the citizen within contemporary PSB is simply translated as the provision of news and political information at the expense of varied social, arts and cultural content. Serving the citizen is intrinsically associated not just with participation within democracy but the promotion of civil, political, social and cultural values in order to exemplify national culture. It is implied therefore, that the citizen will receive the full range of information (or material that is deemed relevant and in the ‘public interest’) in order to make a contribution to society. Public interest, is a difficult concept to define due to the fact that it is often determined in context, therefore, in journalism it was historically synonymous with the ‘national interest’. The Pilkington Report (1962) criticised the BBC’s approach to ‘public interest’ arguing the broadcaster was paternalistic because it chose to offer what the organisation thought was good for the audience, thus implicitly viewing the audience as passive. The Pilkington report (1962: 17-18) defined public interest as a duty or obligation on the part of the media to acknowledge that public have the freedom to choose from a range of programmes.

Content for commercial media, where the audience is positioned as the consumer, suggests that the material is tailored to suit their particular needs for example, what the public is interested in as opposed to material that is in the ‘public interest.’ This is perhaps why people subscribe to Netflix or Amazon, because these services allow people to select what they want

to watch as opposed to what is scheduled. Netflix's business model has allowed the creation of original programming, and has increased pressure on PSBs which are compelled to demonstrate their relevance, through the measurement of viewer or listener figures. Commercial media's key goal according to Ang (1991) is to produce programmes for profit and use the platform for advertising. Advertisers pay money in order to share their message with the group of people or consumers at which their products are aimed at. The imperative to attract advertisers, means that it is essential for commercial media to maximise their audience share. Ang (1991) suggests that it is easier for commercial media to serve its audience, because they only need to ensure people are watching or listening to their content. In contrast, PSB have a responsibility to ensure citizens are educated, informed and served, and this is far harder to evaluate because it is difficult to measure increased awareness or education in people as opposed to acknowledging that people watched a programme.

The historical development of the BBC has meant that the definition of 'public service', has either been unwritten or highly contested within different legislation and reports, often with contradicting meanings. Dawes (2017) has argued that both 'public service' and 'public interest', from their inception were associated with 'public control' as opposed to private enterprise because private enterprise was deemed to be problematic by the Government, therefore, the BBC emerged as a monopoly institution founded in the national interest. At the time this model - publicly funded and reliant upon the government - was not an unusual and it meant that public service broadcasting was accountable first and foremost to the government, through a politicisation of the institution itself (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991). The contemporary BBC, under the current neo-liberal phase of government, has faced significant problems concerning its size, scope, mission and funding (Lowe and Martin, 2013; Martin, 1998; Mills, 2016). The place of public service broadcasting in the UK has shifted as the BBC adapts to changing technologies and cultural forms which have increased audience fragmentation, choice and diversity.

## The need for PSB?

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There are three significant approaches in the debate about public service broadcasting: first, that there is no need for PSB because within a neo-liberal society or state public service broadcasting is unnecessary and unwelcome; second, that there is a need for PSB, and crucially it should not compete with the commercial sector, because it should offer niche programming for select audiences; and third, that there is a duty to provide broadcasting free from the profit motive that concentrates on providing audiences with a vision of the society and culture in which

they live. Within the UK, the BBC embodies the third approach: independent from the state, but publicly funded to provide a range of high quality programmes for all audiences. PSB is unique to each country because it often reflects the history and culture of a given country and it is usually aligned to the fundamental principles of social, cultural and technological realities of the time.

This chapter contends there is evidence of a 'corporatist' model of media in existence within the UK, because the media cooperate on matters of national welfare as dictated by the government. This is due to the position of the BBC, independent of the government but simultaneously 'dependent' upon it for the licence fee and terms of agreement. The unique position of the BBC, and its role in reflecting the nation has been critiqued by a number of scholars (Christians *et al.*, 2009; Cottle 1997; Dawes, 2017; Hall 1990, 1993, 2013; Mills, 2016; Price, 2007; Tracey, 1998; Freedman, 2008). Tracey (1998) has documented the declining role of public service broadcasting in the UK, arguing that the "democratically significant institution" is experiencing an assault on its existence and core purpose, due largely to political ideologies which have advantaged economic principles in the creative sector. Furthermore, he argues the historical impetus for strong regulation of broadcasting was due to the state's underlying logic that audiences should be offered material to elevate their knowledge, leading to the BBC embracing a paternalistic tone. However, in the contemporary digital era that is marked by audience fragmentation, public service providers have been forced to re-examine their purpose and mission. Tracey suggests that the changes implemented in the 1980s and 1990s to restructure the BBC in order to make it efficient economically reflected the growing significance of an ideology that seeks to serve specific and particular interests (Tracey, 1998). An argument set out by Christians *et al.*, (2009: 22) is that as a result the media is inherently aligned to the social, political and cultural elites and thus attempts to showcase a vision of "national cultural unity," one that is not shared by people who are not aligned to, or involved in, these groups. This has led to an over-reliance on elite and official sources and voices within the news (see Hall, 2013); therefore, less powerful groups, voices and alternative viewpoints, are absent from the mainstream version of events. This exacerbates the problem: the message delivered to audiences reflects the views of the dominant group, and the exclusion of minority voices within the message serves to further alienate some groups in society. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that, in the UK, subscription for foreign television services is higher amongst minority audiences, many of whom opt to consume media content in their preferred languages (Ofcom, 2013).

Until ITV was launched in 1955, the BBC had a monopoly over the UK audience and as a result, it developed a generalist approach in programme services; however, ITV adopted a

populist tone from its launch, in contrast to the BBC's reserved stance. Subsequently, the BBC, was forced adapt in order to appear relevant to the audiences of the 1950s. It was not until the Conservative government under former Prime Minister, Margret Thatcher, in the 1980s advocated economic market policies that the BBC began to justify how the licence fee was spent. The goal of Thatcher's marketisation policies was to introduce market ideas and increase competition within industries to make them financially efficient (at least in theory). Marketisation within the BBC included the centralisation of key areas and was controversial when introduced; the tendering of BBC production to external production companies, tendering internally between departments, and the introduction of a public value test, were processes that were intended to run the organisation more efficiently. Born's (2004) ethnographic study of BBC examined in depth the impact of these process and illustrated the chaos and increased bureaucracy that emerged as the BBC tried to get departments to compete internally for resources. Marketisation devices can hinder PSB because they are top-down models of management that can limit the creativity of the cultural industries. Within the BBC, like other institutions, a strong managerial approach emerged (Born, 2004), and moreover, Cottle's (1997) study of producers in the BBC argued this actually constrained producers charged with minority programme production, because some content could not be commissioned due to rigid gatekeeping.

Under the Thatcher leadership the arts and culture were reassessed to focus upon the perceived economic impact the two sectors had primarily as opposed to any possible cultural benefits that arts, culture and public service broadcasting may offer to society. One consequence of the structural changes which are meant to enable marketisation within the BBC, combined with technological change, is that they undermine the Government's ability to exercise close control of broadcasting. The role of the media in society has grown exponentially due to the digitalisation of communications. Successive post-war Governments sought to advantage the creative and cultural sectors in order to create wealth and new jobs in the wake of the declining tertiary sectors (Mayer 2011; Randle 2015). Hesmondhalgh (2019) argues that the manner in which the creative industries are structurally and ideologically organised, alongside the message they articulate, illustrates the inequalities that exist in society in terms of class, gender and ethnicity. In particular, Hesmondhalgh (2019: 367) scrutinised the composition of workers in the cultural industries and suggests because the sector is characterised by insecurity, freelancing, project-based work and because people are often recruited due to their social networks this reinforces class, gender and ethnic hierarchies.

Hall (in Alvarado and Thomson, 1990) argued that media are a key apparatus of ideological production specifically through the content and its social meanings and therefore, cultural hegemony is used as a subversive way to maintain capitalist order as opposed to violence or coercion. The dominant viewpoint in society usually excludes women, non-European racial groups (e.g. British Asians and Black and British Chinese communities), the poor and the disabled members of society. It is claimed that commercially owned media protects economic interests in order to survive, whereas public service media, with their close ties to the government, are “elitist” because the content they produce reflects the view of the “privileged classes” at the expense of the working class and minority groups (Christians *et al.*, 2009: 58). In Mills’ (2016) opinion, the Andrew Gilligan affair in 2002<sup>3</sup>, which led to the resignation of Director-General, Greg Dyke, is indicative of the fact that the BBC does not report on politics and power but is “an important part of those complex networks of power and influence” (Mills, 2016: 139). Mills (2016: 214) strongly argued that the BBC is not just part of the “Establishment” but is also part of a “neo-liberal, business-dominated Establishment”, and therefore, as an institution it is unable to articulate the “public interest” despite the fact that the BBC is accountable to the public. Moreover, Mills (2016: 214) predicts the BBC will face a “legitimacy crisis.” Freedman (2008: 7) has suggested that in the mediated environment, the media are no longer extraneous to politics and culture but are in fact intimately involved in how the audience experiences these ideas and environments. The dominant notion that the media holds power to account has also been criticised, notably by Merrill (1974), who argued that people’s right to know and the right of access to media has the effect of limiting the true freedom of the media. Sambrook (cited in Mills, 2016: 96) has claimed that the BBC approach “has not been to ‘hold to account’”, instead it is “to report largely from the perspective of, and within the terms set by, the British state”, because it is closely interlinked with the institutions – economic and political – that maintain power in the UK.

Debrett (2010: 34) on the other hand, has argued the BBC is well placed to scrutinise and be ‘critical’ of institutions because the organisation’s core principles: ‘inform, educate and entertain’, contain elements of “social responsibility.” Subsequently, because the BBC is accountable to the public, it can embrace a critical stance on behalf of its audience. It is interesting that the BBC is often criticised for being biased by both the left *and* the right, although content analysis studies by Deacon *et al.* (2017) reveal that the Conservatives received more coverage on the BBC during the 2016 election. Therefore, it is questionable if an institution

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<sup>3</sup> BBC Defence Correspondent Andrew Gillian reported on Radio 4 in 2003 that Downing Street had ordered intelligence on Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction be “sexed up”. It led to the resignation of Director-General, Greg Dyke and BBC Chairman Gavyn Davis, and changed the way journalists script reports. Also connected to the case was the suicide of a weapons specialist, Dr David Kelly, who had met with Andrew Gilligan and was thought to be the source of the story.



such as the BBC is able to independently scrutinise the government because it is part of the state.

The BBC is often criticised for only reflecting the views of the majority, white middle class population in the output because the organisation is attempting to reflect a so-called national identity (Ang, 1991; Creeber, 2004; Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013; Lacey, 2018; Ofcom, 2018c). The broadcaster admits that it struggles to reach working class audiences, minority ethnic audiences and young people (DCMS, 2015). Often, groups are marginalised due to their “level of education, income, place of residence, health, race, social problems, criminalisation, or combination of these factors”; therefore, these groups cannot actively participate in social and political life and are not considered “significant”, because they are framed by the media in terms of the “social problems” they cause (Christians *et al.*, 2009: 131). Youths, out of work young people, immigrants and ethnic minorities are portrayed in a negative or stereotypical way by the media (Van Dijk, 1992; Bourdieu, 1993; Hall, 1993; Cottle, 2000; Campion, 2005). Hesmondhalgh and Saha (2013: 182) argue this situation exists because there has been a lack of consideration of the power systems within the media, particularly in terms of class domination.

Gramsci (in Forgacs, 1988) argued that the ruling class in society, or bourgeoisie, utilises cultural institutions such as the media, education, law and politics to promote the dominant or prevailing ideology to maintain power and order. Gramsci has suggested there are two types of ideology: organic and historic and it is the latter type of ideology that is utilised by the dominant group who “propagate” over society because it is “coordinated concretely” with economic, political and intellectual groups, and subsequently creates a hegemony over subordinate groups (Forgacs 1988: 199). Over a period, these viewpoints become ‘common sense’ and the mainstream consensus within society and, as a result, are reflected unconsciously by the media.

It is acknowledged by some that the deregulation of the media and other accountability systems and the emphasis upon economic policies have weakened and undermined public service broadcasters in the UK and Europe. Jakubowicz (2003) has suggested PSB have lost their “editorial and financial autonomy based on wish of the government.” Tracey (1998) has argued that the debate over the need for public service broadcasting has become unbalanced because governments focus upon the economic model of broadcasting as opposed the cultural model. Critics of the BBC require that it justifies how the licence fee is spent, whilst also demanding it serve all audiences and their disparate needs. Within this context, Goodwin (2014) has posed that the BBC must defend and embrace its position within the free market where its size and

scope can be considered “monolithic” (Goodwin, in Lowe and Martin, 2006: 84). The 1990 *Broadcasting Act* and 2003 *Communications Act*, enacted by former Labour and Conservative governments, liberalised ownership rules and created a highly competitive environment for media organisations. In 2016, the government agreed that the Charter renewal process (whereby the government and the BBC set out the terms of operation in detail and specify the programme areas or audiences that should be catered for) should take place every eleven years as opposed to ten years, in order to prevent the process being in sync with General Elections. The BBC tends to become an election issue (evident in 2010 and 2015) because each party pledges their approach to ‘fix’ the BBC, thereby explicitly presenting the BBC as a problem to the electorate. The Charter renewal process allows the government to force the BBC to make major changes; for example, in 2015, the BBC was forced to agree to fund the provision of free licences for the over-75s from 2020 – a controversial move with an estimated cost of over £600 million. It remains unclear if the BBC will provide free licences for all over 75s. Hitchens (2006) has argued that the Charter renewal process causes uncertainty, because it prevents the broadcaster from planning for the future properly, because the funding can be unclear or insecure in the lead up to negotiations. She further argues that Charter renewal has a “chilling effect on its preparedness to broadcast material which may be controversial” (2006: 71). The period before Charter renewal is sensitive; the broadcaster is keen to negotiate an increase in the fee in line with inflation in return for continuing to produce content, whilst the government wants to avoid a perception of ‘giving in’ to the BBC. Therefore, it is likely that the BBC will self-censor on political or controversial issues that perhaps are pertinent to the public interest, in order to maintain a relationship with the government that is conducive to increasing the licence fee. Born (2004: 11) has argued that the periodic charter review and funding are in fact “weapons” deployed by the government when it wants to exert pressure on the broadcaster.

Historically, the fee increased incrementally year on year, but in the current climate, the BBC is dependent upon the willingness of the government in power to increase it. Although the licence fee makes the BBC “vulnerable” to interference, this method is considered to be a more acceptable form of funding for a public broadcaster because it provides a long-term source of finance (Hitchens, 2006: 73). However, the fee is not popular with the public because it is a regressive tax that fails to take into account the ability of households to pay it. There can also be greater expectations placed upon services or goods that are controlled or nationalised (with the exception of banking), thus the lack of sports rights potentially leaves the broadcaster open to accusations that it does not serve everyone equally. This is further compounded by the fact that public service broadcasters no longer “seem able to set or seriously influence” the debate that concerns the BBC’s future (Jakubowicz, in De Bens, 2007). This appeared evident in 2015

and 2016 during the renewal negotiations, where commercial and state interests had the upper hand.

Successive governments have questioned the funding model of the BBC, its size and scope. The 2016 White Paper, *A BBC for the Future*, scrutinised the legitimacy of the 'licence fee' model and set out plans to establish a subscription model in the future. The White Paper also questioned why the BBC made 'popular programmes' such as *The Voice*, as opposed to placing a stronger emphasis upon educational programmes; the assumption being that they are less popular and therefore better suited for public service broadcasting (DCMS, 2016). *The Voice* was purchased by ITV in 2017, whilst *The Great British Bake Off*, a programme considered to have an innovative format, moved to Channel 4 in 2017 when the production company demanded more money. There appears to be an expectation that public service content ought to be worthy and attract niche audiences unserved by commercial media. There is a specific clause within the charter for the BBC to innovate; however, if it creates a new innovative and popular show, such as *The Great British Bake Off*, it is expected they are relinquished to commercial media. This contradiction is specific to public service broadcasting; commercial operators do not face similar criticisms. *The Royal Charter* (2016) also initiated a new governance structure of the BBC, replacing the BBC Trust with a Unitary Board where the government can appoint four non-executives directly onto the Board. The Unitary Board has an oversight of the BBC's mission and public purposes as outlined in the Charter. This allows the state to exert indirect influence and, consequently, it is unrealistic to believe the BBC is completely free from the influence of politics and, inevitably, business interests.

Lord Puttnam's 2016 Public Service Television Inquiry, examined the challenges facing the BBC and it noted there is very little consensus on the future need for PSB. The report contended that public service content has been defined ambiguously and by genre rather than "in terms of individual programmes", and as a result, the contemporary debate about public service "may seek to restrict the definition of public service to discrete programmes, rather than outlets or remits" (Puttnam, 2016: 22). In other words, the BBC may be expected to focus upon so called 'niche market failure programmes' leaving commercial media free to pursue audiences through popular programmes. Born and Prosser (2001) have argued that public service media should be allowed to produce

...the entire range of broadcast genres, thereby meeting a wide range of needs and purposes through the trinity of information, education and entertainment. The aim here is that [Public service media] should be truly popular, both as a value in itself... [and] in order to draw audiences. (Born and Prosser, 2001: 676)

Rupert Murdoch, owner of News Corp and his son James Murdoch, have lobbied various governments to limit the size and scope of the BBC, describing its “dominance and ambitions” as “chilling” (Cusick, 2015). A widely-held perception is that the BBC offers free online content, because the licence fee is intrinsically associated with watching television and not listening to radio or using the BBC website. In addition, because the BBC is guaranteed funding in return for performing a specific service, as outlined by the government, commercial media portray the BBC as having “privileges” that other broadcasters do not have (De Bens, 2007) or as being an exception to business norms that demand organisations compete and make profit. Commercial media have argued that secure funding for one institution can have the effect of distorting competition (Lowe and Martin, 2013; DCMS, 2015). The issue has been described as a “conundrum” in a Department of Culture, Media and Sport report in 2006, because the BBC is required to be a “strong broadcaster with universal reach” and crucially, it should not limit “innovation elsewhere” or use its “unique advantages unfairly to compete with others” (DCMS, 2006: 2). Defenders of PSB want it to be seen as a quality service in its own right, as opposed to being used to “plug gaps in provision relating to minority audiences and education” (Puttnam, 2016: 33). Born (2001) has argued that public service broadcasting cannot be shaped in the same way as commercial media, because it is mandated to promote citizenship as opposed to just popular programming. The result is that the BBC is in a precarious position because if it does not produce popular programmes, it can be accused of ‘market failure’ but if competes, it can be accused of abusing a privileged position. Therefore, the BBC is forced to balance political objectives alongside audience demands whilst showcasing a vision of the ‘nation.’ As a consequence, Saha (2018) strongly argues that this means the BBC offers a “marketised version of diversity” (Saha, 2018: 106). In other words, the BBC offers a portrayal that emphasises ‘integration’ and gives a positive view of people’s lives but critically ignores inequality of opportunity or racism.

## The media and the public sphere

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It is apparent that the media has a role to provide information, and to facilitate and promote public debate, because these goals are considered to be essential elements of a proper democracy and an independent media. It is possible to suggest there is an intimate relationship between politics and the media and that the two institutions mutually depend upon each other. Politicians would be unable to share their message effectively without newspapers or television, and the media would have considerably less content if politicians, (or at least politics), were not

included within programming. From the audience perspective, the media is a source of information on public issues and current affairs. The media's role is to summarise and present information in an accessible way, which harnesses a variety of voices and viewpoints from within society. It is essential that the media is independent and operates without undue dominance by public or private powers, otherwise the audience will not be offered a choice of viewpoints and will only get the preferred view or stance of the private interests. The discussion thus far, has demonstrated that the state, with reference to the BBC, is able to exert indirect influence. In terms of commercial media, it is documented that Rupert Murdoch, influences and directs his press and Fox Channel to cover politics from a conservative perspective (Arsenault and Castells, 2008).

News as a concept has been defined by Schudson (2003: 11) as something "normally presented as true and sincere, to a dispersed and anonymous audience", in order to include and inform them about important and relevant discourse in society. The publishing of information is referred to as the "public sphere" by Habermas (2006) and, in his opinion, it is comprised of newspapers, magazines, radio, television and, latterly, the internet. These various different media platforms reside in what Habermas labels the private realm, separate from the sphere of public authority and the market, a space where people can socially come together to identify and discuss issues and ultimately influence politics. The history of the press suggests that people became connected to an "imagined community" whilst reading a newspaper, and Anderson (2003) has pointed to the emergence of the printing press as playing a pivotal role in realising this. The public sphere is an influential theoretical framework within media and communication studies, and within its parameters is the place where journalism has the potential to improve the quality of public life instead of just promoting the concept of citizenship by giving people relevant information. Habermas (2006: 73) defined it as a space where "something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens." Historically, Habermas modelled the concept on Ancient Greek societies, where men from privileged backgrounds came together to discuss and debate political and economic affairs. The weakness with Habermas's earlier work was that women, the disabled, and poor, were excluded from participation within the political processes of that time. It is important within a modern sphere that these voices are included; however, it is also apparent that these groups are still marginalised by the media, despite the fact that participation within the media is integral to increase the "social value" of a society, because ordinary citizens are able to air their views (Trappel, cited in Lowe and Martin, 2013: 137). In response to their marginalisation from the public sphere some groups have established alternative media, or counter publics which offer a perspective that stands in opposition to the dominant hegemony in society.

In democratic countries, the principle of freedom of speech is available to participants; the media also has the same right, albeit with some limitations, under media law to freedom of speech and, therefore, can be critical of institutions of power without reprisals. Habermas (2006) suggests that public opinion can refer to and include “criticism and control” informally and through elections. Therefore, the value the media brings is collective and benefits all of society, or those who consume it. The public sphere is often used to hear about ‘problems’ that require a resolution or are being processed by the political system. In this way, the media works as a ‘warning system’ rather than an arena where problems can be solved. A similar argument is presented by Zaller (2003 cited in Christians *et al.*, 2009: 130), who labels the role of the media as a “burglar alarm” because it is able to identify problems and influence change. In this manner then, the role of the public sphere is opinion forming as opposed to decision making (Hitchens, 2006: 52). What is missing in this discussion is the impact mediatisation has had on the public sphere: the process whereby the media actively shapes and frames the discourse of political communication, as opposed to allowing the audience to forge their own opinions. It can also be argued that mediatisation is increasing the media’s dependence upon government and vice versa (see Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Hitchens (2006: 54) has argued that as the media has become increasingly commercialised, this has resulted in the public sphere being “invaded by (collectively organised) private interests and opinion management”, which means the audience does not reach consensus via “rational discourse” but through “mass entertainment with advertising.” In other words, media owners reflect their economic, political and commercial interests within the framing of the stories to attempt to secure outcomes that suit them personally, their friends and allies or their advertisers. Thus, the media is implicated as being part of social groups alongside politicians, economic interests and educators as presenting the dominant viewpoint to subordinate groups. Bourdieu (1998: 2) has argued that journalism, and in particular, political journalism, “produces and imposes” upon the audience a version of politics which is perhaps not as impartial as it should be. Furthermore, Bourdieu argues the viewpoint presented is frequently grounded in the “journalists’ specific interests produced in and by that field.” Bourdieu’s believes that journalists reproduce the dominant consensus and, crucially, present it as a legitimate hegemonic view of society.

According to Habermas (2006: 76), the political press in particular is essential, because it is not just a purveyor of news but also a “medium of a consumer culture.” This conceptualisation is idealised because the press and media ownership in the UK is concentrated in a few hands, and diversity within broadcast news and programme content is questionable. In addition, the way in which the media, and the press in particular, responded to the internet and

new opportunities can be characterised as 'slow', and crucially, the internet as a platform is also missing from the discussion on the public sphere explicitly. Contemporary media also faces problems of commanding an audience, because the growth in digital platforms has led to audience fragmentation (Ofcom, 2014). On-demand television, streaming, the growth of Netflix and Amazon, and the use of mobile phones and iPads, means audiences are unlikely to unite to consume news or current affairs, and this now appears limited to huge events such as royal weddings and national sports events. Subsequently, broadcasters no longer have the power to command audiences to consume programmes when it decides to schedule them. A number of academics (Bernstein, 1992; Franklin, 1997; Barnett, 1998) have argued that traditional news values have been undermined by the rise of celebrity and entertainment values in broadcasting, which impacts both public service and commercial provision. Hitchens (2006: 53) has argued that the commercialisation of the media has influenced changes in audience behaviour, with a move from active participation in rational debate to one of passive consumption. This could reflect the widespread lack of interest in politics, but further evidence is required on this point, as this does appear to be an over-generalisation. Born (2004) has argued that the BBC has an important role to play because it contributes to society by "providing information" that nurtures the public, with debate programmes featuring "input of specialist expertise exercising a critical oversight of the state and other powerful institutions" (Born, 2004: 378). The media is often "judged" for the "contribution" programming output makes to the "vitality of a public sphere" (Butsch, in Nightingale, 2014: 153).

It is difficult to imagine a public sphere with no media participation, because the media provides the platform to allow different views to be voiced. Not only does the media behave as a channel of communication, it also contributes to the growth of the sphere (Hitchens, 2006: 54). Thus, it is important that the media are not then subverted by political or economic interests and, in an ideal world, both commercial and public service broadcasters should work within the sphere. Critics of the public sphere increasingly question the relevance of the framework, and query if it has 'emptied' out due to the lack of journalism that is deliberately practised, as a means of improving the quality of public life and contributing to deliberative forms of democracy, as opposed to promoting active citizenship by way of debate and participation.

## Race and institutionalism in the BBC

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Throughout this study, I refer to the BBC as an institution, throughout the study due to the role the broadcaster plays in UK society. It is accepted the BBC is the leading public service broadcaster in the world (Born, 2004; Curran, 1997; Tracey, 1998). Sociological research into

institutions or 'new institutionalism' tries to consider how institutions become instituted over time, for example why do some acquire stability or reputation (Nee, 1998). Ahmed (2012) has posed that work routines become ordinary and habitual, and what makes the processes institutionalised is that these some of these actions may not be named or made explicit, particularly to new staff. Journalists are implicitly expected to familiarise themselves with the agenda of a programme, its aims and style, which often are not written out or necessarily communicated and as such can be seen to be a reflection of the organisational and cultural norms as opposed to a reflection of the needs or desires of the audience (Harcup and O'Neill, 2016). Ahmed (2012: 25) advises that institutionalism should be seen in terms why some actions and processes become automatic at a collective level. Although Ahmed specifically studies diversity in Higher Education institutes, her work is relevant to this study, because she considers why institutions are forced to embrace diversity policies and the effect this has upon them. This study also considers how minority staff working for the BBC experience the BBC as an institution and the impact it has upon their work and the listener. As such the interviews gathered with production staff reveal that although diversity is an explicit institutional goal it causes ambivalence among the institutional gatekeepers when ethnic staff foreground their journalism within diversity. This issue is considered in depth in Chapter 6, alongside recruitment policies which Ahmed (2012: 33) and Saha (2018) argue maintain "whiteness" because the purposeful inclusion of ethnic staff "confirms the whiteness of what is already in place."

Gunaratnam (2003: 8) has argued that 'race and ethnicity' issues are increasingly framed as a "political and social construct" by the BBC, because stories that emphasise the demand to assimilate or the need to monitor people reflect the dominant political narrative on race (Hesse, 2000). As a result, a number of academics (McGhee, 2008; Malik, 2013; Titley, 2014; Saha, 2018) have argued that in the UK, the concept of multiculturalism has been dropped in favour "authoritarian anti-multiculturalism" debate (McGhee, cited in Titley, 2014: 250) and instead, broadcasters attempt to showcase diversity in a mainstreamed manner. Multiculturalism is noted for being a "slippery and fluid" term due to the number of associations it has (Lentin and Titley 2011: 2).

Post 2000, the Parekh report blamed multiculturalism for the existence of segregation in the UK and the 2001 riots in Bradford. Since then, the media has emphasised political ideology, such as loyalty to the UK, identity formation, and insistence upon integration and assimilation (Titley, 2014: 248). Titley (2014) has argued that there is a pressure on public service broadcasters to reflect and represent the diversity of their audience whilst promoting messages of national cohesion and the political discourse on immigration and race. In Titley's view this



leaves PSBs “implicated and uneasily positioned” alongside their governments because they replicate and share political goals that suggest these views are ‘common sense’ (2014: 251). This was evident during the coverage of the 2016 Brexit Referendum, which Virdee and McGreever (2018) argue, allowed the politicisation of the notion of ‘Englishness’ by the official and unofficial Leave campaigns. They suggest politicians activated historically racialised structures of feeling about immigration and national belonging by presenting the ‘migrant’ both as an economic threat to the working class, and as a security threat. Furthermore, because this was articulated as logical or ‘common sense’ in line with its norm to reflect political goals, this normalised these views. They also argue that the manner in which “both nation and empire can sit together, we suggest, is one of the salient but unspoken dimensions of Brexit and its racist aftermath” (Virdee and McGreever, 2018: 1804). Hence, minority communities find that their experiences and views are ignored, so they turn to alternative media or satellite broadcasters to fulfil their needs.

Research by Campion (2005: 29) has noted that UK society is home to people from a number of minority ethnic backgrounds, from various generations, and whose connections with their roots may be more or less strong; therefore, the communities cannot be assumed to be homogeneous. It is thought the media plays a role in the formation of diasporic communities by offering output around which the audiences create symbolic, as well as material, communities, because the content brings people together and allows them to discuss issues (Silverstone, 1999: 98). Public service broadcasting ought to be the main place where audiences begin to understand the ‘other’ through specific programming. It is important to note minority ethnic media is usually not universal, because it may serve specific regions or require subscription, therefore it is exclusive to those who can afford subscription (Dudrah, 2005). Another, key weakness of ethnic media is that if it lacks a connection to the wider media ecology, then it only allows for speaking on part of the minority audience, but this does not necessarily mean there is listening on part of the majority population, which means the issues faced by these communities are not acknowledged or tackled (Yu and Matsaganis, 2019). Media broadcasting in non-English can thus remain marginalised because it offers no access to the wider audience.

## Channel 4 and other public broadcasting competitors

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Thus far this chapter has only considered the BBC within the framework of public service, the other notable provider of public service content is Channel 4, established in the 1980s to enhance the media ecology and to specifically serve ethnic and disabled audiences, whilst also nurturing a small and fragile independent media. Under the Thatcher government, the BBC was seen as a failure not only economically but also due its poor representation of, and

ability to attract, diverse audiences (Malik, 2008; Debrett, 2010). Channel 4 was given a specific charter to cater for under-served audiences and to demonstrate innovation within programme production – similar goals to those of the BBC. Channel 4 is a unique broadcaster because it purchases programmes from independent production companies as opposed to creating its own content, and this allows alternative viewpoints a platform in mainstream media. Malik (2008) has critiqued the ethnic minority programme provision offered by Channel 4, by concentrating upon the early programmes it offered within the schedules which focused upon women, the youth and minority groups such as black and Asian audiences. She found at its inception in the 1980s minority programming was a core essence of Channel 4. Notable programmes included *Network East*, for British Asian communities, and *Black on Black*. Channel 4 stood out because it showcased diversity on screen as “edgy, modern, fluid and decentred” (Malik, 2008: 344) in stark contrast to the BBC’s ‘assimilation’ and paternalistic agenda. This move enabled Channel 4 to source programmes that “positively acknowledged” minority communities in the UK, both on screen and within its institutional structure, to create what Malik (2008: 344) labelled a “multicultural public sphere.” It is interesting to note that a separate sphere is required, and that the needs of minority audiences in the UK are not necessarily met within the framework outlined earlier. However, the *1990 Broadcasting Act* had a significant impact on multiculturalism programming on both Channel 4 and the BBC, because it increased the competition whilst offering broadcasters opportunities to deregulate themselves. This allowed Channel 4 to purchase American imports, which had the effect of increasing the channel’s audience figures significantly. Around this period, Malik (2008, 2013) suggests that the media adopted a more mainstream approach to ‘multiculturalism’ through so-called ‘cultural diversity’. Both the BBC and Channel 4 closed their specific Caribbean and Asian programme units, integrating staff into larger minority teams where they served all minority communities. Cottle (2000) has argued that the representation of minority audiences is problematic because it fails to offer “robust representations” of diversity or the “difficulties of minority communities, cultures and identities”, presumably because the programmes do not explore the problems from the perspective of the ethnic audience but from the majority stance.

Research about ethnic programming overwhelmingly concentrates upon television and representation, as opposed to radio and it tends to emphasise that there is an in-adequate amount of programming. Simon Cottle’s (1997) study examined the production of minority ethnic television programmes from the perspective of minority staff. It outlined that the media played a role in the maintaining and reproducing racialised discourses. Through in-depth interviews, ethnic producers revealed they were marginalised because working on minority ethnic programmes within the BBC in the 1990s was deemed to be a “ghetto activity.” According

to Cottle (1998: 305), the term implied “poor quality, small audiences and generally substandard work.” Producers at the BBC Asian Network have historically faced similar issues to those highlighted by Cottle’s study due largely to the fact that the early national BBC Asian Network was under the control of BBC regions. Local radio within the structure of the BBC is considered inferior to national BBC stations. This thesis seeks to scrutinise how the BBC speaks to minority audiences through the station and how it seeks to represent these communities on-air. Both Channel 4 and the BBC have faced major obstacles in trying to represent ethnic minorities. They face two huge problems: trying to please a range of groups who themselves are divided and have different views, and the cost involved to make these programmes. In theory, the listener ought to be central when programmes are structured and commissioned, but the producer is also under huge pressure to attract an audience.

## Conclusion

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This chapter has outlined some of the key debates about public service broadcasting. The definition of what public service broadcasting is, has become increasingly ambiguous, contradictory, and contested and the definitions that are applied often suit the government of the day. The acute problem with the BBC is that it attempts to balance its historical roots, as a national organisation that nurtures and supports democracy by enabling or promoting citizenship and social good whilst requiring large audiences to justify its continued existence and funding model. The BBC cannot claim to be relevant if audiences switch away to popular content, or if young audiences and minority audiences are not adequately served. The broadcaster cannot demand a universal licence fee if it does not cater to all groups. This chapter has demonstrated that the BBC is influenced primarily by economic arguments as opposed to improving culture and thus when the broadcaster reflects race the framing tacitly embraces the political perspective on race and immigration. This is dangerous for the BBC because if audiences feel the content is not relevant they can switch to alternative media leaving the broadcaster with a shrinking audience.

The BBC has been forced to be competitive and embrace working in a competitive sector but equally, it is criticised if it is successful in achieving high numbers of viewers for specific programmes. There is an expectation that the BBC should focus upon worthy content, considered by the commercial sector to be niche ‘market failure programming’. The future size, mission and scope of the institution is also under threat. The economic arguments put forward by commercial media that the BBC has unfair advantages, increasingly appear to have greater impact. The BBC is being asked, or expected to share its resources with commercial competitors

through ventures such as Local Democracy Reporter Scheme, whereby staff funded by the BBC but work in the local press.

## Chapter 3 – Minority cultural production

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### Introduction

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This chapter considers how minority audiences are conceptualised and framed in mainstream media. There is a focus upon production studies research because these studies have scrutinised the conditions of labour within the creative industries. In addition, there is also an examination of the class composition of media industries in order to deepen the understanding of the impact this may have and I look at industry diversity initiatives and the recruitment of different generations of minority ethnic staff at the BBC. The chapter contends that content about diverse communities is presented through western or Eurocentric lens whereas ethnic media showcase a different version of diversity because they tend to target first-generation British Asians. In theory at least, the audience is central to the way programmes are constructed and commissioned and as such programme producers are under increased pressure to grow their listener or viewer figures.

### The Producer

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The work of a producer in film, television and radio is largely invisible to the audience because they tend to be unaware of the production process, such as the search for guests and the processes of recording, interviewing and editing. Bonini and Gandini (2015) argue that whereas a number of studies have examined production in film, television and music that radio production culture has not received as much attention, and as a result the labour of producers is rarely acknowledged in research (there are exceptions see Moylan, 2013, Mitchell, 2000). The focus tends to be placed on the presenters, who are considered to be the visible face of the station. There is however, an assumption that the producer's knowledge, views and identity contribute to society, in terms of information. This chapter contends that this has a profound impact upon the understanding of minority communities (Hall, 1990; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Mayer, 2011).

Within contemporary media the producer is presented as a highly skilled, productive creative, able to balance economic constraints whilst also being able to negotiate and collaborate. Carter and McKinlay (2013: 1239) examined how the BBC as an institution adapted

its strategies to demonstrate efficiency and suggest that the archetype BBC producer has been portrayed as “a complex hybrid figure” who simultaneously assesses costs whilst being creative and responsive to audience needs. Their study argues that the introduction of management strategies that emphasised economic principles changed the role of the producer. Themes of negotiation, the requirement to collaborate and conflict between producers and managers also emerged within the context of the in-depth interviews conducted for this study, and are outlined in Chapter 6 and 7. Hesmondhalgh (2019) describes the cultural industries as being “ambivalent” because whilst media owners give a large amount of autonomy to producers in comparison to workers of equivalent status in other industries, this independence, is limited, and behaves as a form of governance making a poorly paid job, highly desirable. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) and Randle (2015) contend that because internships and working for free have been normalised in the creative sector, this has a dire impact upon the class composition of employees, because only those with wealth can afford to labour for free. The media industry remains concentrated in London, despite the BBC’s move to Salford and Channel’s 4 proposed move to Leeds. Hence, people from working class or disadvantaged groups are forced to live in expensive parts of the country in order to work in desirable media jobs, or the location of the roles deter them from applying in the first place.

Whilst research has not exclusively focused upon radio production, there has been an emphasis within studies to scrutinise how the production process leads to a reproduction or construction of the producer’s identity in the work created (see Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). There has been an emphasis upon the role of gender within radio (Mitchell, 2000) and more recently race (Matsaganis and Katz, 2014; Moylan, 2013; Saha 2018; Yu and Matsagansis, 2019) but class has featured infrequently, the exception being Deery and Press, 2017 and Randle 2015. Naficy (2001) has described the process whereby migrants produce films as an “accented mode of production” because, essentially, a migrant subject speaks to the community from a migrant perspective. This type of production intrinsically incorporates characteristics of the transnational experience and speaks to diaspora in a manner in which they can relate to. Moylan’s (2013) study of migrant producers working in radio in Ireland posed that ethnic producers essentially craft accented production because they draw upon traditions from their homeland whilst simultaneously incorporating elements of their new lifestyle in the host nation. She suggests that such programming “can thus function at the local level – speaking not only to the migrant communities – and at the same time articulate a transnational perspective” (2013: 8). Furthermore, she suggests that through this process migrant producers embrace negotiation skills, critical self-reflection and are self-questioning and the subsequent media content reflects this. Moylan argues that the accented “voice carries connotations of authenticity and authority

in its function of articulating transcultural experience and perspective” (Moylan, 2013: 59). Content crafted by staff who have experiences and knowledge of different communities, is more authentic and resonates with the listener because the producer is likely to have experienced similar experiences as opposed to content that is created by producers with limited knowledge of their lifestyle.

Matsaganis and Katz (2014) examined how ethnic media producers in Los Angeles negotiate and develop their professional identity through their interaction with mainstream media, society and the communities they serve. Their study builds on Charles Husband’s (2005) work which explored notions of inclusive and specialist identity within minority ethnic workers. Matsaganis and Katz (2014) critically examined how producer’s identities are influenced and shaped due to managerial ideologies as well as considering institutional routines and newsroom conventions. For example, they scrutinised the roles of editors and gatekeepers, who decide what is broadcast and influence the framing of content. These authors contend that managerial ideologies conflict with established production routines and the structures of organisations because the latter determine how much power a manager/editor has. Ethnic producers revealed, through their interaction with their mainstream colleagues, exactly how they defined their collective inclusive identity. Thus whilst mainstream media *de facto* determine what professional journalism means on occasions ethnic media producers influence their counterparts when stories occur within communities or parts of the world where they are experts.

The discussion thus far has focused on the impact of ‘managerialist’ policies introduced notably within the BBC. Georgina Born’s (2004) ethnographic study of the BBC outlined the introduction of performance measurement systems across the BBC and ‘producer choice. The size and scope of the BBC means that the organisation is sensitive to ideological change (Schlesinger, 2010). What is notable is that despite playing a critical role in the execution of the broadcaster’s mission, the role of the producer remains helmed in due to financial, hierarchical and programme schedules. Although the producer is considered to be a creative employee first and foremost it is clear their role encompasses a great deal more. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) have argued that the primary objective of media organisations is to monetise their content as opposed to contributing to arts and culture in the UK. They argue that political conditions have created a “marketised” environment that makes “media workers more conscious than ever of audiences,” because in order to be successful they need listeners or viewers (2011:210). Therefore, they note that media workers are forced to “compromise” between the “professional desires of creative workers to fulfil their own internal, professional

standards of excellence needs to be balanced with an awareness of the different orientation of the readers” (2011: 211). They suggest the emphasis on viewing or listening figures directly impacts the media worker’s understanding of the audience.

Saha’s (2018) work, *Race and the Cultural Industries* is significant because it highlights the role of diversity in the creative sector. Saha strongly argues that the BBC has focused on programmes with appealing formats at the expense of specific content for minority audiences. Crucially, the content that is selected about ethnic communities is specifically chosen if it is likely to attract large audiences. Consequently, minority media workers embrace the institutional economic arguments and internal working practices and rationalise them and thus, they are effectively “steered” into creating “reductive tropes of race and gender” in order to be successful in their careers (Saha, 2018: 135). As a consequence, Saha argues the BBC offers a “marketised version of diversity” because the message they articulate emphasises ‘integration’ and gives a positive view of people’s lives but critically ignores the existence of inequality or racism (Saha, 2018: 106). In this manner, diversity is used by the media to showcase integration and contributes to the drive within the media to demonstrate efficiency in the knowledge economy. Similar findings were reported by BBC staff who explained how the gatekeeping practices work encourage news content about Muslim communities at the expense of other Asian communities (see Chapter 6).

Hesmondhalgh (2017, 2019) has also noted that people working in production roles in the media tend to be from higher or middle class backgrounds, and this results in the poor representation of working class life and interests. Hesmondhalgh (2017) has labelled this as “class asymmetry explanation”- in other words, media staff have inherently different interests, experiences and values to the working class who are also part of the audience (in Deery and Press, 2017: 24). This view is supported by O’Brien *et al.*, (2016), who found there is a significant under-representation of people from working class origins working in the creative industries (2016: 123). They examined the 2014 British Labour Force survey to draw their conclusions and they suggest one explanation for the under representation of the working classes is that working conditions are “poor” due to a high number of short-term contract roles, an emphasis upon freelance work, and low or no salary (O’Brien *et al.*, 2016: 117). The small number of paid roles in the media far exceed the number of people, including graduates, who are willing to work for free in order to get a ‘foot in the door’, meaning only people with financial resources or a wealthy family who can support them can enter the media industries (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011: 116). However, whilst diversity targets tackle issues such as under representation of



gender or disability Randle (2015) has argued that there is no legislative imperative to tackle class disadvantage and moreover, it is less obvious how this could be addressed.

## The audience

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Public service broadcasting is inherently associated with serving the audience as a 'public' (Scannell 1989). Butsch (2008) outlined that historically radio listeners were essentially invisible and therefore, they were conceived as being an audience of public citizens, and the act of sharing information contributed to the public sphere. The representation of audiences as a 'public', draws upon obligations of citizenship, whereby people are expected to have rights and an underlying duty to participate in their democracy. Fitzgerald and Houseley (2007) examined the concept of the audience by focusing upon talk radio in Australia, suggesting that an audience is an imagined community because the programme makers try to unite a disparate group of people through the virtue that they all share some similar concerns or hold similar views. Individual listeners are able to join a community of listeners through the content broadcast. Lacey (2018: 170) on the other hand, suggests that listeners are "addressed sequentially" because throughout a single day of programming they can be addressed as male, female, child, student or festival goer. Lacey concedes that in the early days of broadcasting listeners were imagined through a "thoroughly middle class-filter" and as such, the radio schedule developed as an institutional response to manage continuous broadcasting. The role of the schedule has evolved from giving the listener programme information to its current role to maximise listener share. Moreover, she suggests that the historical BBC schedules represented a "middlebrow" schedule due in part to the middle class staff occupying roles in the BBC.

As discussed in Chapter 2, commercial media describe their audience as consumers, and as a result there is the argument that these audiences are increasingly treated as "commodities" and they are essentially "bought and sold on the basis of their viewing habits" (Smythe, 1981, cited in Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 51). Scholars such as Ang (1991) and Wilson and Guitierrez (1995) suggest that commercial media only seeks to appeal to the educated middle class, who have a disposable income and a wide array of tastes, because they are a profitable audience. In this way the audience can be "polarised" in specific groups: "educated, informed, cultivated and civic minded citizens" compared to "uneducated, ill-informed, pleasure-seeking, suggestible crowds or mass" (Butsch, cited in Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 153).

Ang (1991) has argued that most audience studies are based upon the notion that the audience is a single entity, and the research findings tend to reflect the institutional media

perspective as opposed to an organic representation of the audience. Moreover, these studies ignore the socio-cultural and institutional contexts in which audiences are constituted within. Subsequently, the way in which the audience is viewed is either from above, from the outside, or from an institutional perspective. She argues that this reduces individuals to simply being numbers that belong to a specified income group, class or ethnic group. This viewpoint is explored in chapters 8 and 9, both examine how the audience is constructed from the perspective of the BBC and the staff working at the BBC Asian Network.

The contemporary BBC struggles to attract working class, minority and young people to its output (DCMS, 2015: 5). One explanation is that staff hired by the BBC are also not reflective of the working classes, for example, 17 percent of staff and 25 percent of BBC Management attended private school, figures significantly above the UK average (Feenan, 2017). Wilson and Guterrez (1995: 241, 252) suggest technological changes in media have “accelerated” a move from “mass communication to class communication” whereby the media seek clearly defined segments of the audience which, in turn, reinforces differences between them. In other words, people in the audience may be integrated in terms of the products they consume, but crucially they do not share a common culture based on the content of the entertainment or news media consumed, and consequently, the media works to “reinforce differences that keep them apart” (Wilson and Guterrez, 1995: 259, 260). Thus the media plays an important role in forming and understanding class identities (Deery and Press, 2017) and also defines what race means to audiences (Hall (1990) in Alvarado and Thomson).

Considering ethnic audiences as diaspora better acknowledges the ways in which their identities have been “transformed” through “relocation, cross cultural exchange and interaction” (Gillespie, 1995: 7). Gillespie (1995) is making a reference to the transnational culture that immigrant families adopt; they maintain traditions, customs and practices whilst simultaneously adopting new lifestyles. Her ethnographic study concentrated on British Asians living in Southall, West London and scrutinised how they watched British television and Bollywood films. It revealed that the process of watching both allowed them to recreate cultural traditions. Gillespie’s study also noted that in the late 1980s there was very limited representation of British Asians in the mainstream media and this led to, what she termed, a “devaluation of British Asian identity” and fostered instead a “desire for new kinds of transnational and diaspora identities” (Gillespie, in Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 69). Georgiou (2005) concurs with Gillespie, suggesting the identity of minority communities does not emerge in opposition to mainstream society because minority groups absorb aspects of the host ‘nation’ and create a new or ‘hybrid’-type identity. Hesse (2000: 20) has referred to this process as being

“both cartographic and dispositional” because the original geographical country of residence is used to locate people, alongside the country of settlement – in this case, Britain, to denote cultural awareness. Younger generations of minority groups adjust their identity with reference to the society they reside in and, therefore, identity is “constantly in the process of change and transformation (Hall and du Gay, 1996: 4).

Questions have been asked about what it means to be British, or what the national identity of Britain is, particularly because immigration has profoundly changed the face of society. This question also poses difficulties for the BBC, which as noted earlier in this chapter has sought to present a singular version of the ‘nation.’ Condor *et al.* (2006: 126) suggest that British identity is an “essentially contested concept” because the term has different meanings. Through interviews with members of minority communities they examined the relevance of the term ‘English’ and ‘British’ in relation to people’s identities. A study by McCrone (2002) revealed that, unlike other minority groups, people of Indian background were more likely to consider themselves to be English; however, in practice, most people do not understand the difference between the terms. British and English have two different but interconnected meanings and, their meanings are subject to change due to changes in society and policies. This research does attempt to understand, from the British Asian perspective, what their identity is (see Chapter 9).

Studies of diaspora or immigrant audiences have noted that these groups are not homogenous; that whilst there is shared culture among, for example, black and Asian groups, there is also conflict and difference (Ballard, 1990; Madianou, 2014; Saeed, 2011; Wilson and Guterrez 1995). However, British Asians are depicted as essentially similar despite cultural, linguistic, religious and socio-economic differences between the communities. Ballard (1990) charted the different fortunes of migration and settlement into Britain of Muslims from Mirpur (Kashmir), and Sikhs from Jullundur (Punjab, India), and found that their outcomes in Britain, economically and socially were different due to their strikingly different histories and political economies of their birthplace. Ballard, attempts to offer an explanation for the marked differences in economic and educational attainment for the British born second generation of these groups. As such, he considered how kinship, marriage rules and Purdah for Muslim women affected the differential outcomes of these two communities. These differences are often ignored because news is defined as events of relevance to the majority population (Wilson and Guterrez, 1995: 40). Media organisations compete for audiences in order to make profits and justify their existence; therefore, news, like other commodities, is produced in the same manner, with a goal to reach the largest possible views. Within most European societies, which are predominantly white, there is a focus on the ‘middle ground’ or mainstream middle class

interests and culture, to the detriment of working class and minorities. In this way the media presents an ethnocentric stance, because they perpetually view the world through the lens of its own culture (Shohat and Stam, 2015). Europe or the west is often placed in the centre of the axis and this polarises and demonises Eastern parts of the world, and their people. This is also referred to as 'Eurocentrism', whereby media content embeds and normalises power structures generated by colonialism and imperialism so that they become normalised and embedded into daily life (Shohat and Stam, 2014).

## Representing minority audiences

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Both commercial and public service media have had to respond to changes in society by representing and showcasing the contemporary face of the UK (Christians *et al.*, 2009: 175). It is widely recognised that minority audiences have a right to "challenge and help shape the public and political culture of the society in which they live" and that the media struggles to reflect these voices due to lack of knowledge (Deveaux, 2000: 4, 5, cited in Christians *et al.*, 2009: 174). There has been a tendency to rely on tried and tested ideas that audiences are familiar with, leading to criticisms that public service broadcasters are not innovating. Consequently, news and programming has become "homogenous," "digestible and entertaining", leading to claims that broadcasting is 'dumbing down' (Christians *et al.*, 2009: 115). The underlying problem is that success is measured in terms of listening figures, which results in content crafted for majority tastes at the expense of minority interests.

PSB is often criticised for showcasing a singular national identity, whereas community radio, which encourages the listeners to take an active role in production and is characterised as being pluralistic (Moynan, 2013). Research suggests that in public service broadcasting migrant cultures are represented by their 'difference' or 'otherness' and judged by standards established by the west (Campion, 2005; Moynan, 2013, Shohat and Stam, 2014). Said (1978), in his seminal work '*Orientalism*', presented the viewpoint that the Arab world has always been 'othered' and considered inferior to the European way of life, and as a result, it is difficult to overcome deep-set ideologies. He strongly argued (1995: 7) that because European identity has historically been portrayed as "superior" to "all the non-European peoples and cultures", this has had an enduring impact. This stance is supported by Stuart Hall (1986) who argued that ethnic difference is constructed as a set of "economic, political or ideological antagonisms" by the media and alongside the media, social institutions, school, cultural organisation, the institution of the family, the church and religion "play an absolutely vital role in giving, sustaining and reproducing different societies in a racially structured form" (1986: 26). This is similar to

Gramsci's (1988) argument that ideology is never individual and instead is collective and dispersed through society and becomes embedded. What requires further interrogation is why groups external to the media use the media to distribute their views and power throughout society; how do they benefit?

The main themes that emerge from research on representation of race in the media is that ethnic minorities are often portrayed in stereotypical ways; for example, "terrorism, violence, conflict, and carnival" (Campion, 2005: 4); within the news in negative stereotypes (Wilson and Guterrez 1995; Malik, 2008; Saha, 2018); and that the language used to describe minority communities can be considered 'racist' (Barker, 1981; Van Dijk, 2000). Creeber (2004) has argued that the BBC's reflection of racial, cultural and religious differences is poor because the institution has played a significant role in "conceiving and cementing notions of Britishness" that mandates western middle class values as a cultural hegemonic norm across most of the BBC's output (Creeber, 2004:29). One explanation is that the media often wrongly describe 'culture' instead of understanding 'identity'. Cultures are broadly defined as a collection of beliefs, customs or practices that groups of people perform together or individually, and the process of participation aligns them to the groups. The media often misconstrue culture by using it as a "source of explanation in itself" as opposed to explaining the common themes relevant to any given group (Krupey, 1999: 239). The media portrays cultures as remaining static, however, Hesse (2000) and Georgiou (2005) present the case that identity of minority community's changes through interaction with mainstream society. Culture is important to all groups in society – minority and non-minority – because it confers on members a sense of belonging to a particular group. Some cultural practices become naturalised as the normative demonstration of the ethnic culture, for example arranged marriage, saris and curry (Fortier, 2000: 5). This poses a serious problem for public broadcasters tasked to reflect diverse communities and simultaneously portray the 'nation'. This is not always achievable: race riots in Bradford in 2001 demonstrated that some communities live parallel lives to the mainstream population, which was further emphasised by the 2012 London riots. Malik (2013; 228) and Kumar (1975) believe that the concept of "national identity", in light of the various cultures, communities, religions and ethnic groups in the UK, causes issues for the BBC because the notion of identity and the concept of 'British' is "complicated". Moreover, Hall and Jefferson (1993) suggest that different cultures are ranked in relation to each other in terms of their domination or subordination by the groups that command power or have the greatest influence in society. This means that the most powerful culture is able to express its power in unison with economic, political and intellectual aims and create a hegemony over the lower subordinated groups (Gramsci in Forgas, 1988: 205).

Martin Barker's 'New Racism' theory (1981) is relevant to the study of representation of minority communities because he suggests that the language used by the media infers that these communities are inferior and a threat to society. Barker argued that language is manipulated to highlight difference; for example, the use of the term "outsiders" suggests minorities who are not "inferior, but are part of different cultures" because immigrants and minority ethnic groups do not conform to the normative ideals of the nation (1981: 4,23). The notion of the 'nation' is at the heart of Barker's argument, and he recognises that diasporic communities often utilise their faith for a "clear obvious identity" that changes and adapts as the different communities respond to one another. Furthermore, the use of the terminology 'minority audience' can connote that among the media workforce that this audience is "less important" than the mainstream audience because their numbers are smaller (Wilson and Gutterrez, 1995: 4).

The news agenda in the UK focuses upon the Muslim community disproportionately, through content that exaggerates: "asylum seekers", "black gun crime", "freedom of speech", the "clash of civilisations" and, most of all, "the war on terror" (Malik, 2008: 348). Malik describes this as a "racialised agenda," and I argue this is evident within public service broadcasting (see Chapter 6). Campion's (2005: 28) study focused on programme makers who participated or had responsibility for producing programmes relating to diversity, she found that producers were frustrated by 'othering' communities in particular by focusing on the "strangeness" of minority communities, for example the "preponderance of stories about bride burning and female circumcision, polygamy, and honour killings, or stories of witchcraft and alleged ritual child abuse." Campion argued that this led to "unbalanced representations" and simply reduced minority communities to the familiar.

In the UK, the Indian community comprises British Sikhs and Hindu communities who are now in their fourth and fifth generations and in the media they tend to be showcased as "assimilated" because the values of Sikhs and Hindus are considered to be "more tolerant, inclusive, aspirational and ultimately Western, compared to Muslims" (Sian, cited in Malik, 2012: 513). One explanation is that because these communities tend to aspire to professional careers their interests reflect middle class values espoused by the BBC. Their cultural practices, for example the dress code, is considered more acceptable to mainstream society. In stark contrast, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities – the majority of which are British Muslim – are still "associated with antiquated, oppressive, and patriarchal values" (Sian, 2011). The contrast between the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities is essentially faith-based, because

post-9/11, there is a preoccupation within the media on the Muslim community and this reinforces “distorted images of Islam” based upon a “historically forged racialised system of representation” (Harb and Bessaio, 2006: 1065). Poole and Richardson (2002: 22) suggest the overt expression of the Islamic faith is considered to be “a threat to traditional British values” and, by default, Muslims are excluded from the notion of being ‘British’. The focus upon Islam is exaggerated within the press and broadcast media, whereby news stories about Muslims or Islam tend to be oversimplified or misrepresented. Bourdieu (1998: 8) has suggested this is because journalists focus on events that are “simple to cover” and therefore it is implicit that the stories are easy to comprehend. This is, in part, due to a focus upon difference and fear, which propagates the political emphasis on assimilation.

One explanation for the negative representation of minority groups is that the news agenda epitomises the majority culture (Wilson and Guitierrez, 1995) and as a consequence Madianou (in Nightingale 2014) has argued this creates boundaries between audiences through the (mis)representation of their communities and cultures. The interviews with BBC producers revealed frustration, worry and conflict among the staff over exactly how British Asian identity ought to be articulated. There is a general expectation that each generation of a minority community born in the UK is assimilated into British society. Ramamurthy (2015) defines second-generation Asians as those who were born in Britain or arrived as children to the UK, and has suggested this group did not have the same connection with their countries of origin as their parents. Instead, their “sense of belonging” to the UK was more “complex” because their “investment and interest in Britain was much greater”, hence, this group sought to carve out an identity or “make space within Britishness which they could occupy” (Ramamurthy, in Price and Sanz Sabido, 2015: 191). The notion of making a space is important, because non-white immigrants have never ‘blended in’ because they remain visibly distinct, and British Asians are acknowledged to have retained their culture whilst simultaneously absorbing elements of the new nation. This is evidenced by the contribution of second and third-generation British Asians in the creation of a British Asian music subculture, which came to prominence in the late 1990s, whereby artists such as Bally Sagoo, Jay Sean and Raghev broke into the mainstream UK music scene and dominated the UK Top 40. During this period, there was a sense that British Asian music artists and actors were breaking into the ‘mainstream’ cultures of the UK. Sharma *et al.*, (1996) noted that this subculture disrupted the dominant stereotype that portrayed Asians as being “passive, submissive, conformist and caught between two cultures” (Haq, in Sharma *et al.*, 1996: 63). According to Ballard (1990) the definition of second generation British Asians is confined to those who are born in Britain and as such, within the Indian communities the second generation reached adulthood in the 1990s whereas, the Pakistani and Bangladeshi

demographic is generally younger. Sharma *et al.*, (1996) examined the production of British Asian music from hip hop to Qawwali genres. Their work on British Asian culture, is relevant to this study in terms of the contribution it makes to chapter 4 and 8, which consider the BBC Asian Network's music policies and distinctiveness.

What is absent in Campion, and Wilson and Guitierrez's research is an examination of how the post colonial experience influences the perception of minority audiences in their host nations. Cere and Brunt's (2011) work is particularly important in this context because it contends that more attention needs to be paid to the impact post colonialism has had on media practices. Cere makes the case that media studies have tended to focus on representation and identity formation as opposed examining if prevalent production processes work to 'silence' ethnic minority communities, because in cultural production the 'speaking' about these communities is constructed by people external to those communities, and this sustains hegemonic norms. Furthermore, Saeed, (2011) has suggested that people from former colonial nations, such as British Asians, occupy a limited space whereby the parameters and representations are established by Britain as the host nation (Saeed, in Cere and Brunt, 2011). Similarly, Gunaratnam (2003) has argued that researchers examining race and ethnicity have tended to rely upon previous research conducted within the context of colonialism as opposed to examining the impact colonialism has had on their perception by the mainstream society, for example, racism and inequality. The dominant narrative in the UK political and social context has been to present racism as an activity perpetrated by Far-Right groups, hence, there is a failure to understand racism in power or structural terms. Institutional racism defined by Macpherson (1999) following the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence, is "the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin." As a consequence, there are contexts "in which 'others' are represented as inherently different or lesser" (Fenton, 2003: 131). Hall argues the ideologies of racism have become profoundly "naturalised" within society (in Alvarado and Thomson, 1990: 9). The media creates a definition of race to help people "make sense of the social world" and simultaneously defines how the "problem of race" is understood (Alvarado and Thomson, 1990: 11). Within Britain itself, policy on race and immigration also distinguishes between 'settled' communities from old migration; for example, Black Caribbean and South Asians and, more recently, the 'Windrush generation' on the one hand, and 'new' migrants from Eastern Europe and asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria.

Alongside mainstream media, ethnic or diasporic media is flourishing within the UK offering minority audiences an alternative viewpoint. The growth of the media producing



programming in non-English recreates Anderson's (2016: 135) "imagined communities" concept, because programmes in foreign languages allow people to reconnect to the community or country they left behind. Anderson suggests that the use of different languages allows people to create a "sense of belonging to each other", "representing the kind of imagined community that is the nation" (2016: 5, 25). Problematically, the vision of the nation that is presented is often the one where people have come from, and not necessarily where they now reside. Yu and Matsagansis (2019) pose that ethnic media created by younger generations of minority communities operate and engages the audience in different ways from traditional ethnic media, and allows a platform for their self representation of their unique hybrid identities.

## Multiculturalism

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The term multiculturalism has historically been used by policy makers when discussing both race or ethnicity, and is directly linked to the movement of people because it results from immigration, or agreements that allow the free movement of skilled people from various countries (Fortier, 2008). However, in recent years it has been used less frequently because it is alleged, post the race riots in 2001, that multiculturalism allowed some communities in the UK to segregate and live parallel lives. The prevailing contemporary political discourse presented in the media is the need, on the part of immigrants, to integrate into British society, with an onus on them to conform to perceived British norms. Fortier (2008: 3) views multiculturalism as "a horizon", "vision" or a "construct" used by media and politicians to advocate a vision of social cohesion, and argues this construct is disseminated by the media in the wider public sphere. Titley (2014) has suggested the term implies the need for assimilation and integration by politicians who demand the population adhere to a set of core civic values that promote the ideals of 'nation' or Britishness.

Minority audiences, do not always conform to mainstream demands: key examples of uprising against political policies include Brixton, 1981, Notting Hill, 1985 and Bradford, 2001. These protests and subsequent movements were sparked by a sense of perceived injustice, racism or discrimination perpetrated against minority communities by majority communities. Subsequently, although the term multiculturalism often recognises difference in a positive manner with reference to 'exotic' customs, clothing and food, it also encompasses discrimination, marginalisation and the exclusion of minority groups within society, the workplace or from universal services. Whilst governments would like to create an imagined community that incorporates minority ethnic citizens and their culture, the state also demands they detach themselves from their culture for the sake of community cohesion (Cantle, 2001:

18, 19). Sarita's Malik's work examines inequality, cultural representation and institutional frameworks is thus relevant to this study; she argues the media reflects the government's assimilationist style policies in their content (in Brunt and Cere, 2011: 41). Malik (2013) also argues that emphasis upon 'creative diversity' within broadcasting has marginalised issues such as race and racism whilst allowing Channel 4 and the BBC to concentrate on economic policies to safe guard their organisations. Consequently, Malik believes that multiculturalism is considered undesirable and this is evident in the framing of news stories concerning immigration with 'them' and 'us' representation and an emphasis on resolving perceived problems from the stance of 'us': the majority community.

This perspective is further emphasised through the use of the term 'immigrant' by the media to indiscriminately refer to all foreigners. Georgiou (2005: 488) has suggested immigrant "replaces race in a racist typology." In other words, the term 'immigrant' is deployed to refer to people's race as a social marker, crucially without making an explicit reference to racial background, and within the framing of the story it is implicit that this difference is a threat. In this manner institutions avoid accusations of racism, for example, the Leave campaign in the 2016 Brexit Referendum. Virdee and McGreever suggest that the negative focus on immigration, the fragmentation of the working class and the decline of global prestige of Britain have resulted in the production of "resentment" politics and thus Englishness has been conceptualised as "insular nationalism" (Virdee and McGreever, 2018: 1080).

## Diversity initiatives

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Theoretically, public service broadcasters need to produce programmes that reflect the interests of diverse social groups and, simultaneously, they need to recruit minorities in order to represent their identities and interests within programming in the first place. The BBC appears to want to cater for minority audiences more effectively and to address any potential barriers to employment and promotion, but on both accounts, the BBC is making slow progress. In the past two decades, the visibility of minority ethnic news presenters on screen has increased, in part due to a greater acceptance of "Asianness" because Bollywood is considered to be a "positive commodification" (Malik, 2008: 352). Both commercial media and the BBC are attempting to reflect contemporary society by recruiting minority journalists to enhance the reporting of diverse communities and to improve the on-air representation of minority staff. Each broadcaster has set diversity targets for the on-air representation of minority communities in news and drama, and a target for the recruitment of minority ethnic staff. Research has found

that when minority communities are able to speak for themselves, it allows for “shared experience and deliberation by minorities about their own cultures, needs and strategies, enhancing self-expression and self-understanding” (Puttnam, 2016: 31). These targets focus upon disability, gender and ethnicity and class is explicitly not included despite the fact that class plays a significant role in social exclusion. Husband’s (2005) study of ethnic media workers is important because, he suggests that ethnic staff’s professional identity can be affected by their personal identity, chiefly their ethnicity, which can hinder or influence people they are accountable to. Furthermore, Husband (2005: 469) suggests that the class and educational profile of young minority ethnic people “effectively inhibits their entry into the media industries irrespective of active or indirect discrimination.” The suggestion being that the media seek purposely to recruit non-working class employees or those educated to at least undergraduate degree level with the relevant skillset because this is consistent with the attributes of existing staff. Within the creative industries the onus is on the individual to ensure they have the skills the employer requires because on the job training schemes have been scaled back. Saha (2018) argues that the media specifically recruit minority ethnic staff to fulfil diversity targets and to address their coverage of minority ethnic issues. Which means minority media workers can find their ethnicity is a central aspect of their work in their mainstream media employment, through “the ethnocentrism of the workplace culture” – for example minority staff are often expected to represent minority communities as ‘othered’ or through exotic tropes (Husband, 2005: 472). This thesis attempts to examine this viewpoint with insight from the in-depth interviews with staff in Chapter 6 and 7.

Saha (2018: 18) has developed Husband’s premise further, contending that diversity schemes actually contribute to maintaining “institutional whiteness” because people from diverse backgrounds are recruited specifically to increase the visibility of minorities but they can be placed onto fixed term contracts or posts where they are unlikely to be promoted. In this way, according to Hall (1996: 471) they are a “segregated visibility”, present and visible but not part of the key decision-making roles. Since 2014, the BBC has established schemes to help minority staff move into senior decision-making roles. A study of the US media by Wilson and Guterrez. (1995) noted that minority staff could be found in visible on-air roles but there was a distinct lack of them in the decision-making roles, and as a result, in America, journalists from diverse backgrounds tend to leave the profession.

It is presumed that when programmes are crafted by minority staff, they will offer a more authentic representation of different communities, and speak from their perspective as opposed to presenting issues through a Eurocentric lens. This type of communication is labelled

“inraculture”, where minority speaks to minority and the broadcaster becomes the platform for deliberation (Butsch, cited in Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 117). If this type of programming is made available on a public service, it has the added benefit of being accessible to the majority population, allowing them to gain an understanding of minority cultures; a goal that Williams (1962) alluded to in Chapter 2. One norm that is inherently expected from such media content is that it helps to bridge cultural differences by eroding suspicion of the ‘other’ and actively building trust across different cultural groups (Giddens, 1994: 186). However, despite the efforts of various broadcasters, some academics have argued that broadcasters have “failed to understand the inner life” of some of the minority communities they reflect and, equally, they have failed to portray “our common life persuasively to many of our citizens” (Lloyd and Seaton, 2006: 5). This is interesting because, as discussed earlier, politicians want people from other communities to integrate but, simultaneously, it is imperative that the so-called ‘British way of life’ is also presented persuasively. Lloyd and Seaton (2006: 142) have argued that there is a greater need for services to reach out in unique ways to new audiences who want personal communication as opposed to content created for a mass audience, and they also want the opportunities to interact with media.

In 2016, the BBC set itself an employment target of fifteen per cent of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds by 2020. The onscreen portrayal of black, Asian and ethnic minorities in lead roles and side roles is also set at fifteen per cent. In contrast, Sky, a commercial operator, has set itself a twenty per cent onscreen target. In 2014, Director General, Tony Hall launched a £2.1 million fund to help recruit black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff, to improve minority portrayal on the screen and to help BAME staff to move into senior management roles across the institution. Some progress has been made, the proportion of the workforce from a minority background is 14.5 per cent, and the proportion of BAME staff in leadership roles at 10.3 per cent, slightly above the ten per cent target. The prevailing theory is that increased representation of minority staff will naturally mean an improved representation of minority communities. This is somewhat simplistic, because there is a failure to account for the fact that some members of minority ethnic staff may not strongly identify with their ethnic background, and instead, may be ‘assimilated’ or ‘integrated’ into a different way of life or may want to cover stories about history or nature for example. Saha (2012: 436) suggests that initiatives to improve the numbers of minority staff in the industry often have little impact. His interviews with British Asians working in television, publishing and theatre and revealed they were “complicit” in creating content that featured “problematic representations of race”, in order to get their ideas commissioned. Although the recruitment of minority staff is highlighted by the employers as “positive integration”, the employees may find their ethnicity allows them

to be stereotyped as “black and Asian cultural producers” restricting the content they produce. Saha (2012: 436) thus concludes that this is a form of “institutional racism” that forces staff to produce content that contains reductive representations because diversity initiatives work to maintain the institutional whiteness of the cultural industries, even when they themselves are trying to be different.

## Transnational audience research

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As well as understanding how the media conceptualises audiences, this thesis argues that theoretical perspectives need to be re-examined to properly understand identity, intergenerational change and class difference among British Asians, in order to better understand this complex and diverse audience. These three areas, in conjunction with political and socio-economic factors, are relevant in the scrutiny of cultural production within a public service remit. In the past decade, class research has been marginalised within media research, with a focus instead upon ethnicity or culture (Meiksins Wood, 1986; Savage, 2000; Bennet *et al.*, 2009; Price and Sanz Sabido, 2015; Randle, 2015). Social class is defined in reference to a person’s position within a social structure primarily in terms of occupation and education (Bennet *et al.*, 2009). Class identification is used to understand aspects of British society, however Savage (2000: 40) suggests this identification has limited value because class alone is not the major source of identity or group belonging. The Marxist understanding of class based on economic logic: that the upper class owned the means of production to exploit the labouring class (working class) and subsequently, Marx outlined a potential revolutionary movement by the working class to bring a transition to socialism. Weber (1947) further developed the class framework, arguing class is inextricably associated with status or social prestige within societies. Since the 1980s, there has been considerable debate about the ‘new middle classes’ or service workers and their place in the social hierarchy in the UK. The definition of working class is contested in light of loss of production and manufacturing jobs in the UK, and the corresponding increase in service roles. To locate these changes in contemporary class structures of society has been a major preoccupation (Meiksins Wood, 1986).

Bourdieu (1994) is notable for his distinctive approach to appraising class because, instead of focusing upon occupation, he used ‘cultural’ and ‘social capital’ to categorise groups. Thus he defined people who actively engage in the field of power, for example, media workers and politicians, as having cultural and social capital. Bourdieu’s (1984: 506) research was based on the “hypothesis of the unity of tastes”; in other words, he assumed that the different classes

are distinguished from one another because of the existence of an internal coherent set of tastes. His theory is divisive and consequently, Bennet *et al.*, (2009) argue that Bourdieu constructed an “ideal” class, based on the activities people pursued. The research ignored women, focusing only upon the occupation of the father and paternal grandfather and also excluded broadcast media. Other criticisms argue that the structuralist approach relies upon “an excessively homogenous notion of how class identities manifest themselves” (Lahire, 2003, cited in Deery and Press, 2017).

The media is complicit in homogenising audiences based upon not only class attributes but also age and community and use this to actively construct representation of society. Bourdieu (2005) has outlined how the journalistic field is part of the elite or power, because of the way in which it participates with political and economic institutions and is also part of the cultural field because it creates content for mass audience. Minority ethnic media is marginalised within the Bourdieu model because the impact of this content is smaller, and therefore acquires less ‘cultural capital’. Bourdieu’s analysis is still pertinent because evidence from the 2014 British Labour Force survey revealed that the creative industries are dominated by those with origins in privileged classes (O’Brien *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 10) have suggested that cultural production and consumption are, in fact, linked to the expression of one’s tastes, and these are connected to displays of social power and dynamics of competitive individualism.

This research focuses specifically upon British Asians, who themselves are categorised and stratified, albeit by a caste system that is also connected to a person’s status, economic status and therefore, implicitly, class (see Ali *et al.*, 2006). The caste system among Indian communities, specifically Sikhs and Hindus, is an ancient form of social hierarchy that is widely practiced in India and, subsequently, by some groups in the UK. The system traditionally prescribed careers or jobs for people belonging to certain groups; for example, within the Sikh community, ‘Jats’ – the farmers as landowners – are considered wealthy, whereas in the Hindu community, ‘Brahmins’ – priests and teachers – sit at the top of their social hierarchy. Although the caste system is one of the most prevalent and powerful markers of Indian culture and society, it is difficult to argue to what extent South Asians and British Asians adopt it in the UK. The Indian system is not evident within Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Madianou (2014) suggest it “impossible to research ethnically and culturally differentiated audiences without theorising the concepts of culture and identity” (in Nightingale, 2014: 445). According to Brah (in Ali *et al.*, 2006: 59) there has been significant levels of social class differentiation among south Asian groups, and although there exists an established bourgeoisie and a

professional/entrepreneurial middle class the majority of Asians are, however, still working class. Mcloughlin (in Ali *et al.*, 2006: 138) profiled British Asian Muslims in Bradford suggesting they remain an “economic underclass.” Moreover, outlines that Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities tend to be concentrated in blue collar roles and live in inner cities. This thesis argues that class, inter-generational change, alongside education and the level to which people are integrated or not, play a significant role in understanding this complex audience. The interviews with BBC staff at the BBC Asian Network demonstrate the staff’s nuanced understanding of the audience they serve, whilst also illustrating a difference in viewpoints according to the generation of the British Asian community they belong to.

Minority audiences consume both mainstream and minority media, therefore it would appear the two types of media are not always in direct competition and can, in fact, complement one another. However, the composition of workers differs, mainstream media workers tend to be from middle or higher social classes, whereas staff working in ethnic media may be volunteers or community activists, and are more likely to be from working class backgrounds. There are also differences in education: mainstream journalists tend to be educated to degree level (see Thurman *et al.*, 2016) whilst volunteers or community activists may not have any formal journalism training. The most sought after or prestigious roles in journalism and other cultural industries tend to disadvantage minority communities who may have the required higher education but remain disadvantaged when applying for promotion due to their ethnic background, gender, schooling, social awareness and lack of networks to enter the sector. Organisations do not tend to monitor social class as they do race, disability or gender (Creative Skillset and DCMS, 2015, report a lack of information about social origins). Despite the differences in class, language or faith, the BBC and other broadcasters construct the audience as a “unified imagined community” in order to achieve advertising or audience figures (Murdock, 2005: 179).

There has been limited focus on the production process that creates media content or the producers’ experiences of the production process. This thesis examines production from the perspective of minority ethnic producers and examines how they shape and tailor their content for British Asian audiences and how internal BBC regulations impact the way they work. Saha and Hesmondhalgh (2013: 183) have argued this type of inquiry is necessary because research into the cultural industries has revealed “unequal access to the means of cultural production”, whereby there is dominance of the majority population in media organisations. Furthermore, they suggest “inevitably”, this inequality has a “major effect on the range of perspectives that are heard in the media”. This is an important point to reiterate: minority ethnic people are

under- and (mis)represented within the media; their voices are less documented in news and programming due in part to low numbers of minority staff hired in the first instance. The importance of understanding the various minority communities and their identity, therefore, is imperative and to achieve this there has to be an understanding of class and inter-generational change in the British Asian community. It is simply not adequate to suggest that all Asian communities are homogenous and have similar interests, for example Bollywood and Bhangra.

## Patterns of consumption

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Sixty per cent of British Asians who participated in an IPSO Mori study for Ofcom research reported that “news programmes are trustworthy” on public service television such as BBC and ITV (Ofcom, 2014). Interestingly, although British Asian audiences rate the BBC highly for showcasing “different kinds of cultures”, almost one third of people who self-identify as British Asian also claim they are under-represented in public service content (Ofcom, 2015a: 4; Ipsos Mori, 2017: 24; Ofcom 2018c). British Asian audiences can also choose to consume commercial Asian media via subscription satellite television services, whereby programmes from India and Pakistan are screened in South Asian languages. There is also a successful commercial Asian radio sector dominated by commercial stations, and a growing number of Asian-specific community radio stations (see chapter 4). An audience study by Harb and Bessaïo (2006: 1068) noted that all their interviewees had satellite television so they could access a variety of Arabic channels and, as a result, their motivation to watch UK terrestrial channels decreased. British Asians have earnestly adopted either cable or satellite television since its introduction, enticed by the number of channels offering programmes, films, music shows and religious content in Asian languages. Georgiou (2005: 481) has observed that satellite dishes in parts of Europe are considered a “symbol of ethnic segregation”, because the assumption made is that immigrants are purposely not integrating into the host society. It is thought that satellite television allows minority communities to share “common cultural concerns with each other, such as a religion, language or ethnicity” external to the framework of the nation established by public service providers (Malik, in Horsti et al., 2014: 28). Public service broadcasters have been forced to evaluate how they serve minority audiences now that these groups, due to technology changes, are less reliant upon public service content.

Minority ethnic communities appear to be less satisfied with public service provision and spend less time consuming channels such as the BBC and ITV (Ofcom, 2013a). The BBC interviews suggest that satellite television programming in the home language is popular among first and second-generation British Asians and recently-arrived immigrants, because third and



fourth-generation British Asians are more likely to be confident in English and thus consume mainstream media. Deuze (2006) has suggested the popularity of ethnic media across a number of countries is contributing to audience fragmentation for mainstream media, and in particular news. A trend whereby minority communities receive their news from other countries or channels, such as Al-Jazeera, means that the audience is able to access news and current affairs produced with a non Eurocentric viewpoint. The information imparted is no longer framed from the stance of Western media, and this is considered an important contribution to making news less homogenous. However, there remains a concern that news is created by commercial operators instead of public service media; the underlying worry being that the public service media, despite the politicisation of the organisations are still inherently 'objective'. This notion is explored in Chapter 9 with reference to the version of identity that the BBC promotes on-air through the BBC Asian Network.

The inclusion of minority groups within programming and equal employment opportunities have helped to "diversify" the face of national culture on TV, but critics argue that the impact is limited (Debrett, 2010: 38). Audiences are able to consume content on-demand, which is particularly popular with younger audiences. E4, a digital station offered by Channel 4, is the most watched service for 16-34 year olds, Channel 4 also has a public service remit (Ofcom, 2014). One reason why public service media is popular is that it engenders "active trust" in audiences who identify with the British brand, and this is also replicated online where traditional media are inherently considered to be more trustworthy. Subsequently, in the era of fake news, the number of visitors to traditional media websites outnumbers newer, so-called 'clickbait' websites. Audience trust in the BBC brand could play a pivotal role in engaging British Asian audiences to the output although as pointed out earlier the station has struggled to match its output to the listener. The next chapter specifically examines the BBC Asian Network.

## Conclusion

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This chapter has outlined the fact that media workers, both in commercial, community and public service media are working in a difficult and competitive environment. The economic conditions mean that in order for producers to be successful they are encouraged to use familiar frames or stereotypes to present content to the audience that reinforces Eurocentric views. Malik (2008 and 2013), Saha (2012) and Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) demonstrate how the institutional structures of media institutions work to marginalise minority communities. Whilst Moylan (2013) in her examination of radio programming contrasts how public service norms and

conventions can restrict the representation of diversity. In contrast, because community radio often embraces a bottom up approach, this allows for an authentic representation with greater opportunities for participation.

What is also demonstrated is that the audience as a concept differs according to different media. Within commercial media the audience is considered to be a consumer, with needs that require satisfaction and to achieve this commercial media concentrate on the most profitable segments of society. In contrast, public service media is expected *de facto* to serve the audience as citizens with an expectation that the content should be educational, worthy or serve niche audiences. However, what this chapter has tried to outline is that audiences cannot be viewed as single entities and, within British Asian audiences there exists differences of language, faith, culture, generational difference, age and class. These dimensions have to be considered by the media when they reflect these communities. Subsequently, due in part to the institutional structures and the staff composition of the media industries, representations of minority groups remain frozen in 'difference' and the 'other' (Campion, 2005; Saha, 2012).

There appears to be a lack of understanding of diversity despite a number of initiatives within the media to better represent society. The framework of the 'nation' poses issues for the BBC, alongside the BBC's problematic position, and the tacit representation of political views on immigration as being 'common-sense.'

## Chapter 4 – Asian Radio, the BBC and independent radio

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### Introduction

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The chapter concentrates specifically upon the historical development of the BBC Asian and the transition from local radio programming into a national digital radio station. British Asians are the only minority community in the UK who have a dedicated service on a public service broadcaster because the communities historically called for a specific service. British Asians are also served by a range of commercial and community ethnic media, and this chapter also looks at some of the key competitors to the BBC service. It is not possible to examine a radio service for a niche community without understanding how that service fits into ecology of the BBC, thus there is consideration of how being part of the public service broadcaster directly impacts upon the way the BBC Asian Network envisages and addresses its listeners. In addition, I look at the political motivations behind the BBC's move into minority ethnic programming. The BBC Asian Network promotes a broad vision of 'Asian' in an attempt to appeal to third and fourth generation British Asians who may not feel as connected to their heritage. In contrast, most independent Asian radio and television services showcase a version of identity more closely linked to South Asia through the language and tone. A number of these services are targeted at older British Asians, with some specific services, such as BritAsia TV, aimed at young British Asians. These service however, have tended to be marginalised by the broader media system because they broadcast in non English which means there they have limited or no access to the majority population, whereas the BBC Asian Network is offered on a public service platform, and in theory is accessible to all audiences.

### The BBC Asian Network remit

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Since 2016, the BBC Asian Network target listener has been British Asian aged up to 35 and primarily broadcasts in English, with some programming in South Asian languages. The station is mandated to have "a strong focus on news and current affairs" (BBC Trust, 2016b: 1) and provide British Asian music and culture through a rare fifty-fifty split of music and speech during the daytime, thus making the BBC Asian Network unique in comparison to the BBC's other national radio stations which are either speech-based, such as 5 Live and Radio 4, or a mixture of speech and music, such as Radio 2 and Radio 1 and in addition, no other BBC station is defined by the audience it serves, for example, explicit Asian programming for British Asian audiences.

The remit explicitly requires that “complex” issues are “explained” and “contextualised for listeners in order for them to further their understanding of UK and international events” (BBC Trust, 2016b: 3). This educational goal implies the BBC believe the listener inherently requires UK current affairs to be explained to them, and links to Murdock’s (2005) suggestion that the audience is often seen to be “untutored.” The remit also stipulates that the listener can “engage in debate,” share their experiences and utilise the station as a platform to unite as a shared community (BBC Trust, 2016b: 3). However, Pinsler (2015) suggests that debate programmes are highly managed and that the listener’s voices are manipulated “to create an impression of participation,” in order to showcase a coherent community of listeners. Moreover, because their voices or opinions are used as material the listener’s views are not “freely” expressed because they are explicitly asked to respond to a question (in Bonini and Monclus 2015: 69). The *raison d’être* for the existence of the station is to allow the voice of minority citizens to be heard, however, Pinsler makes a valid point that the conversation is managed by the producers, who stipulate the topic of discussion and phrase the question so that the listener participates but is steered.

The remit also outlines the genres of music and stipulates that thirty per cent of music played is ‘new music’ – specifically defined as being released in the past two months, which tends to be Bollywood music released in India by various film production companies. The definition of ‘new music’ is contentious. Galvez (2017: 68, 69) has noted a variety of definitions exist within the BBC: Radio 1 labels it as music that is unreleased or in which less than one month has passed since release, whereas 1Xtra defines it as music that has never been in the Top 40. In March 2018, Ofcom recommended that, for Radio 1 and Radio 2, a music track should be considered ‘new music’ for a period of 12 months from first release or six weeks from the date the track first enters the Top 20 of the UK Official Singles Chart (Ofcom, 2018c). It seems obvious to define new music from the physical release date of the song, but as physical sales have increasingly given way to downloads and streaming services, this has impacted the definition.

A further thirty per cent of music played must be from UK artists to make the BBC Asian Network distinctive by “providing a platform for new and established British Asian talent” (BBC Trust, 2016b: 3). The term ‘distinctive’ is ambiguous, but commercial media have defined it to mean that the BBC should appeal to a narrowly defined audience and provide ‘worthy’ material, whilst leaving the profitable audience for commercial stations (Plunkett, 2010). Although this policy is contentious at the BBC Asian Network, it is not unusual. Since April 2018, Radio 1 is required to play forty-five per cent of music from UK artists and acts. It is worth noting that the mainstream music industry in the UK is far larger than the fledgling British Asian music industry.

As a public service commitment, the BBC has adopted a pledge to support new and specialist music in order to make its stations distinct from commercial radio (Wall and Dubber, 2009: 28). The BBC Asian Network has defined UK artists to mean British Asian artists or artists influenced by Asian music. The UK is the home of Bhangra music, a genre that has incorporated other styles such as jungle and soul which has resulted in Bhangra becoming “quintessentially ‘British’ as it is ‘Asian’” (Haq, in Sharma *et al.*, 1996: 62, 63). Bhangra has its roots in Punjabi folk music and is associated with the beat of the dhol drum; it travelled to the UK in the 1960s and 1970s with North Indian immigrants (mostly Sikhs) and was played at weddings at parties. The genre crossed briefly into the mainstream in the 1990s with key artists such as Bally Sagoo, who was signed to Sony Records in the late 1990s and mixed Bollywood samples with Hindi lyrics, and Apache Indian, who incorporated patois into his lyrics. The music has been exported across the world and back to India itself, and the Indian film industry has also incorporated it into its movies. The 1990s’ British Asian music scene allowed for a new distinct British Asian identity to emerge and it challenged notions that the term ‘British’ exclusively applied to non-minority groups because the music drew from both cultures and expressed a uniquely British sound. The dance scene represented a medium through which British Asian youths were able to “articulate and to deploy a sense of Asianness that is not necessarily in opposition to notions of being black, and though more problematically, even British” (Sharma *et al.*, 1996: 40). One problem they noted is that because Bhangra is considered to be “diasporic South Asian music”, it means participation of British Asian artists in grime, soul, punk and jungle genres is ignored (Sharma *et al.*, 1996: 8, 26), this issue is examined in Chapter 8. Bhangra is synonymous with British Asians, in the same way that reggae and soul music became a key way in which Caribbean migrants constructed their identity as black Britons (Wall and Dubber, 2009).

A smaller proportion of music played – ten per cent – is specified as being South Asian. This category includes Pakistani pop, non-Bollywood Indian music, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and regional/classical music, including the Qawwali and Ghazal music genres. Radio has a cultural and social role for being a ‘tastemaker’, but this role may now have diminished with the advent of streaming services such as Spotify that allow the listener to pick and choose music. Hendy (2000: 743) has argued that radio is a central force for “shaping music tastes”, and in the digital age, radio still attracts listeners and people are listening to the radio for longer (Ofcom, 2017b: 97). There are age differences: the younger and older age groups listening hours have actually decreased whereas the middle group are listening on average for longer. The radio station playlist is considered by radio studies scholars to be the musical ‘gatekeeper’ and thus its existence tends to narrow the range of music played (Negus, 1993). Gallego (2015), holds similar views to Pinsler (2015) contending that listeners are highly managed, through the music played

on-air because this is how commercial stations construct the identity of their audience. Moreover, although the listener may imagine the act of listening to the music means that they are contributing to trends, in reality, the music programming policies have limited the music offered in the first place. The emergence of new forms of distribution has had a profound impact on music radio stations, because in the former structure the music label was considered to have editorial control, and the role of the radio station was to share the music. Now that people can create their own playlists, they have become “programmers of the sound flow, with significant impact amongst their peers thanks to the socialisation of content in the digital social networks” (Gallego in Bonini and Monclus 2015: 203). Wall and Dubber (2009: 36) have argued that music streaming is best understood as “reshaping (rather than replicating or replacing) traditional radio broadcasting”. In fact, the role that radio plays in digital age is more fragmented, mobile and interestingly the manner in which people listen has become more personal (Lacey 2013 in Loveligo and Hilmes). According to Lacey (2013) listening is a learned art, people adapted to having a wireless in their home and to accept personalised content from the BBC (a formal institution).

The BBC has positioned specialist music as a PSB commitment in order to appeal to ‘specific’ groups of listeners as opposed to everyone and consequently, this definition has encouraged the BBC to translate music genres into clearly defined and demarcated listener groups (Wall and Dubber, 2009). Furthermore, within the BBC, specialist music is explicitly not considered to be mainstream popular music. This poses a quandary with reference to the BBC Asian Network, which plays popular Bollywood and Bhangra genres in line with commercial Asian radio stations, emphasises British Asian music and plays limited ‘specialist’ music in the form of Indian classical and Bangladeshi pop. The BBC Asian Network remit stipulates the station should be a platform for “nurturing and developing new acts”, in a similar way to Radio 1 and 1Xtra (BBC Trust, 2016b: 3). The 2016 Charter review concentrated on the notion of ‘distinctive’, and singled out Radio 1 and Radio 2 for being “arguably less distinctive” than 6 Music, claiming there is a “sizeable crossover in audiences” between the two stations (DCMS, 2016: 27, 28, 32). The BBC has disputed the figures but has renewed its pledge to appeal to younger audiences via Radio 1, 1Xtra and the BBC Asian Network. The concern is that the government is, by stealth, getting the BBC to focus on audiences who are perhaps not profitable and thus, of little interest to commercial media or are hard to reach. Born and Prosser (2001: 675) have strongly argued that public service media should not be tasked with “filling gaps left in the market place” and instead should be used for aiding in the “definition and negotiation of social identities” as part of the core aspect of public service media to develop citizenship.

Content for speech programmes should recognise the “diversity of the British Asian population in terms of geography, interests, ethnicity, and religion” (BBC Trust, 2016b: 4). There is clear acknowledgment in the remit that the lived experiences of British Asians vary according to where they reside, their background and their faith. Bennet *et al.*, (2009: 199) noted that ethnic minorities are concentrated in the working class group: accounting for approximately ten per cent, twice the number of minorities in the ‘intermediate’ (middle) class as defined by the study. Equally, a large proportion of the BBC Asian Network listeners are working class (Watson, 2016). Listener figures for the station have grown from 368,000 in 2009 and reached a peak of 676,000 in June 2016 but dropped significantly in December 2018 to 576,000 (Rajar Q4, 2018) see Appendix A. Internal research by the BBC acknowledges the highest listener reach is in the West Midlands, with reach in London growing because conversely, the largest British Asian audience is concentrated in the South East and in London (see Watson 2016).

## Challenges in growing audiences

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Since 1992, listener figures have been measured by Radio Joint Audience Research (Rajar) for all radio, through a retrospective listening diary. Respondents are required to complete a one-week diary listing all the stations they listened to, in quarter-hour time blocks. A total of 130,000 respondents are used each year to compile listener data for 340 radio services, making it one of the largest audience research surveys in the UK. Each station is required to pay for the option to join the service; consequently, a number of independent and community stations do not opt into the survey due to cost. It is a disputed method because respondents are required to retrospectively fill in a diary, and ethnic and niche media argue that minority respondents are under-represented in the survey (Starkey, 2004: 9). Newer digital reporting tools allow different networks to assess the number of clicks a story or content have generated, but in radio and television, Rajar and BARB figures are still used to calculate the number of listeners.

The take up of Digital Audio Broadcast (DAB) has been slower than anticipated with fifty-seven per cent of households owning DAB radio set (Ofcom, 2017b: 97). Furthermore, Ofcom has also found that age and ethnicity affects the take-up of DAB: those aged between 45 and 54 are more likely to have DAB radio compared 25 to 34-year-olds (Ofcom, 2017b: 123). Analysis of minority communities has revealed that Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi households are less likely to own a DAB radio (Ofcom, 2013a: 8). Almost half of the time spent listening to any radio (48.8) is now through a digital platform (Ofcom, 2017c: 5). Loviglio and Hilmes (2013: 2) explain that radio has expanded beyond its original parameters, and is increasingly defining its audience

through cultural affinity. 4G and smart phones now allow people to download podcasts and music in order to create their own playlist. Lacey (2013 in Loviglio and Hilmes) has argued that radio listening has becoming increasingly private due to the growth of ear phones. Moreover, she suggests there is a sense that active listening to some extent has been eradicated because the listener's new activity is personalising and producing, whereas historically the listener was imagined to be passive (2013: 9). Berry (2006) has argued this has effectively shifted the power dynamic from producers to listeners because they make their own scheduling choices. Traditionally, the way in which radio stations have commanded listeners has depended upon the "unity of tone" across the station, and the way genres of music are mapped into programme schedules often reflect people's daily and weekly rhythms; for example, the knowledge that listening peaks between 7am and 8am as people wake up. A key objective of any radio station's playlist is to attract the largest number of listeners. Most stations have largely automated this process so that expertise and labour of the presenter or DJ is now considered to be somewhat redundant, this issue is examined in Chapter 8 with input from BBC Asian Network presenters. Furthermore, Lewis (2008) has suggested that the impact of music in the language of ethnic communities has not been sufficiently examined with reference to the role it performs in reflecting and enabling communities of listeners to form.

The primacy of radio is being challenged by digital and mobile media for two reasons: it is no longer the primary source of music (especially among younger audiences), and, although it remains a unique medium for instantaneous news delivery, the internet is catching up (Ofcom, 2013b: 1). In an interview for the Radio Times, Ben Cooper, Controller of Radio 1, claimed that radio has lost more than half of 10 to 14-year-old listeners (Radio Times, 2016), because the iPad and mobile phones have replaced the radio set. Wall and Dubber (2009) found that BBC radio producers continue to view the internet as a platform to "extend the brand and bring audiences to the brand," rather than a method to engage with audiences. They label this a "broadcast orientation" which reveals that some radio producers still believe in the primacy of live on-air content first and foremost. Wall and Dubber (2009) studied specialist music and concentrated on music of black origin, indie rock and jazz and examined listener activity online alongside interviews with BBC staff. They contend that BBC staff should not simply refocus their attention from broadcast to online only, but they do recommend that the BBC considers the scope of the public service purpose.

The medium of sound is increasingly incorporating visual elements epitomised by Radio 1's Newsbeat strategy, that has called on people to "listen, watch, share" since 2014 to tackle the reduction in listening hours by encouraging audiences to consume Radio 1 in other ways,



primarily via its YouTube channel, which had 3.8 million subscribers (July 31<sup>st</sup> 2017) and over one million views per day. Loviglio and Hilmes (2013: 44) describe contemporary radio as “a screen medium: we access it through screens both mobile and static, using tactile visual and textual interfaces... Radio crosses platforms”. The modernisation and extension of New Broadcasting House in London allowed Asian Network, Radio 1 and 1Xtra to have studios fitted with cameras, lights and a control room, which allows radio content to be filmed, streamed live online or edited quickly. Radio 1 in particular has utilised the internet to extend the brand visually. Controller of Radio 1, 1Xtra and BBC Asian Network, Ben Cooper, has argued that “young audiences are key to the future of the broadcasting industry and if we don’t adapt, we will die” (Radio Times, 2016). Cooper’s emphasis on young audiences is emphasised across the BBC, especially in light of statistical evidence that illustrates the number of young people listening to radio is decreasing (BBC Marketing and Audiences 2017: 4).

## BBC history of Asian-specific programmes

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The BBC first began to create and broadcast programmes in non-English in the 1960s when it began to create content for newly arrived immigrants from South Asia. The first ever programme was broadcast on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1965 on BBC 1. *"In Logon Se Miliye"*, translated as "Let me introduce you to these people," was broadcast in Hindi and Urdu with a goal of introducing the British way of life to immigrants. On radio in the 1970s, local radio stations began to offer daily or weekly Asian shows for listeners in their regions. BBC Radio Leicester was the first BBC station to air a daily show produced and presented by Asian staff. Research commissioned by the station after the launch of the show found that sixty-six per cent per cent of the Asian community in Leicestershire were listening regularly to the ‘Six O’clock Show’ within a year of it starting<sup>4</sup>. At the time, the BBC was the only place for British Asians to consume Bollywood news, entertainment and music, because there were no other competitor stations. The popularity of the Asian show at BBC Radio Leicester encouraged BBC West Midlands (BBC WM) to launch a daily Asian programme on their medium wave frequency. The two regions merged their programming in October 1988 to enable a joint seventy hours of Asian specific output on the medium wave frequencies for listeners in the two regions. News and programming was predominantly aimed at the largest two ethnic groups who lived there: Pakistani audiences in the West Midlands and Gujarati Indians in the East Midlands. At this stage, the presenters were community members who volunteered their time and were paid nothing or very little.

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<sup>4</sup> [Bbc.co.uk/asiannetwork/help](http://Bbc.co.uk/asiannetwork/help)

In 1996, the regional BBC Asian Network began broadcasting 24 hours a day via the Sky satellite. The station also established its own news desk so that information about and for the Asian communities could be covered. It is suggested that the media fails to adequately cover minority community's due language barriers and the lack of specialist knowledge about these groups. Cottle (2000: 20) has argued that very few resources are given to looking at non-institutional voices and minority voices which in turn means that the media affirms majority social norms and conventions as legitimate. In 2002 under Director-General, Greg Dyke, the BBC Asian Network was re-launched as a national digital radio station alongside 1Xtra, which was specifically aimed at an urban youth audience; and BBC3 and BBC4 on television, alongside new children's channels, CBeebies and CBBC. Dyke argued that 1Xtra and the BBC Asian Network would appeal to audiences who felt underserved by the BBC's existing services (Gardem, 2004). 1xtra has over one million listeners and has a strong reach with Black, Asian and minority ethnic listeners reaching 383,000 (BBC Marketing and Audiences 2017: 6). In 2017, the management of both 1Xtra and Asian Network was merged, with Mark Strippel taking over as head at both stations. Born (2004: 487) suggested that the new services focused upon offering "core public service dimensions" that were not available from the commercial broadcasters. This is an interesting notion because by 2002 a number of Asian commercial radio stations were in operation and serving Asian audiences regionally. There was however, no single national service for Asian audiences, and significantly in 2019 a handful of commercial Asian stations are national stations, the majority remain regional stations broadcasting nationally on DAB.

Although the BBC Asian Network began broadcasting 28<sup>th</sup> October 2002 as a national digital station internally, very little had change in terms of organisation and structure, programmes continued to be made in London, Leicester and Birmingham. The ownership moved from Nations and Regions department within the BBC into Radio and Music, in a bid to bring the BBC Asian Network closer to the BBC's other national stations, but this initiative failed. Within the BBC, the Asian Network was considered to be an anomaly and internally there was a lack of vision among the management to change the on-air schedule, request a single site, or to try to disconnect from the station's former local radio roots. Also, funding remained static. The programmes produced targeted Asians aged under 35, but also first, second and third-generation Asians and all communities whose origins were from the Indian subcontinent. In a book about the station, former news editor and Network Manager, Mike Curtis, described working there as a lonely experience because "we always felt we were on our own – challenging, different and complicated" (Curtis, 2013).

In 2004, two years after the launch of the digital stations, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport commissioned a study to assess the impact of digital radio, chaired by former Channel 4 and BBC executive, Tim Gardam. Two years into the digital radio experiment, the BBC Asian Network was criticised for failing to attract the target audience to the output. Audience focus groups conducted for the report revealed there was a “lack of clarity” over who the target listener was (Gardam, 2004: 50). Programme formats were evaluated as “unambitious” and the editorial position “vague” (Gardam, 2004: 50). As noted, the programmes formats were not updated, demonstrating a lack of leadership and steer from the management. Although the journalism created by the BBC Asian Network journalists was commended as having “added value to UK Asian radio” (Gardam, 2004: 5), the report questioned why the BBC Asian Network was defined by the audience it served, whilst 1Xtra and Radio 1 were defined by their music. Commercial Asian stations are also similarly defined by their target audience; therefore, the report recommended that the BBC Asian Network should also be defined by content for two reasons: first, because the move would make the service distinctive in comparison to independent ethnic media; and second, because:

The fragmenting nature of Britain’s Asian community, as different groups settle into British society at different paces, will increasingly question the notion of a homogenous Asian community with a body of shared values and interests. This may undermine, in the longer term, the current defining criterion of the station. (Gardam, 2004: 50)

The term ‘Asian’ implies a homogenous and united group, which, as outlined in Chapter 3, is misleading. Husband (1994: 11) has suggested it is in fact “functionally meaningless” because it imposes “conceptions of ethnic identities” from a Western or Eurocentric point of view and that omits the experience of colonialism and impact of the post-colonial on members of these groups (see Shohat and Stam, 2014). There is also no consistent definition of ‘Asian,’ in the USA, it refers largely to people from Japan, Korea, China and Vietnam, whereas in Britain in the 1970s, the term ‘black’ encompassed Asians based on the notion the communities shared histories of colonialism and experienced racism and exclusion. Thus, Kaur and Kalra (1996) have argued British Asian is a “poorly defined category” that “essentialises both terms, as well as hierarchising the former against the latter” (in Sharma *et al.*, 1996: 219). In other words, people are not necessarily British or Asian in equal measure, and instead, one aspect is more prominent in terms of a person’s identity. Further complexities arise when considering the identity of the second and third generations. As a consequence, the representation of Asian communities prescribed by the BBC and the state implicitly places the colonised as inferior (Shohat and Stam, 2015; Ali *et al.*, 1991).

Sreberny (2005) has called on researchers to view ethnicity and diaspora in fluid terms, whereby, the audience can look back at their old home and forwards towards a new home. This is because there is often an assumption that people 'belong' to a single minority group and that the group operates within a single national public sphere. The analysis of the public sphere, in Chapter 2, revealed that the media implicitly accept the framework of the 'nation' despite the fact that research about diaspora audiences' challenges this frame (Sreberny, 2005: 445). Therefore, a radio service aimed at a diverse group of people who are fractured by class, faith and language is forced to find ways to unite listeners, as opposed to focusing upon the issues that divide them. This is broadly achieved by broadcasting in English and by emphasising shared cultures, particularly with reference to entertainment. Husband (2005) noted that ethnic media is often forced to ignore gender, class and faith difference in order to serve audiences defined "in broad ethnic terms" (2005: 463). This is the approach adopted by not only the BBC Asian Network but also a number of commercial Asian radio stations, that appeal to all British Asians, as opposed to a specific language group, and it appears to pay dividends because almost half the funding that commercial ethnic stations received was through on-air advertising or sponsorship by companies who want to get their message to a particular demographic (Ofcom, 2017b: 115). Matsaganis and Katz's (2014) study of ethnic producers in the USA, suggests that ethnic media provide a complex number of functions their audience, including offering a platform for new immigrants to discuss linguistic, ethnic and racial concerns, unlikely to be covered elsewhere in the media. They also note that the size of the audience they serve shapes the content and also the practices of ethnic producers.

## Proposed closure of the BBC Asian Network

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The BBC Asian Network was deemed by DCMS review (2004) as attempting to be "all things to all Asians" (Gardem, 2004: 50). Following the report, Bob Shennan, Controller of BBC 5 Live, was appointed Controller at the BBC Asian Network. A £1 million investment was also made by the BBC; the monies were spent on recruiting a new layer of assistant editors for key areas in order to improve editorial standards in response to the DCMS review. Prior to this just three people oversaw the editorial decision-making at the Asian Network. Vijay Sharma, the Head of the Asian Network, was supported in her role by a news editor and the programmes editor. In 2006, the management tier was expanded so that below the Controller, the Head of the BBC Asian Network, Vijay Sharma, was supported by a Head of Programmes, Head of News and a Management Coordinator (this role later ceased to exist). It is notable that, until her retirement in 2012, Vijay Sharma was the only female and ethnic minority member of staff recruited to the management team of an ethnic media service. By and large, non-Asian men

were hired in these roles until 2016, when Arif Ansari was hired as Head of News.

Under Shennan's leadership the station aggressively changed its sound and presentation to focus upon British Asians aged 15 to 25, because research revealed that Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi households are, on average, larger and also younger, compared to the general population (Ofcom, 2013a: 26). Presenters who were considered 'old' were dropped from the schedules. The new breakfast show embraced a 5 Live format, with a strong emphasis on news and current affairs blended with music. The afternoon programme, which had formerly been presented in Hindi and English and played classical music, was replaced with a new arts and culture programme. The music policies were refreshed, and for the first time in its history, music from the UK Top 40 was played alongside Bollywood and Bhangra. A daily news programme was introduced, as was a soap, *Silver Street*, to allow the BBC to capitalise on the success of *The Archers* on Radio 4. The new disjointed schedule, which attempted to mimic both 5 Live and Radio 4, was unsurprisingly not popular with the audience, and listener figures began to steadily decrease. Rajar figures for Quarter 4, 2009, revealed that just 360,000 listeners were tuning in. By contrast, the key commercial Asian competitor, Sunrise Radio reached 483,000 listeners in the same period.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2010, it was announced that the BBC Asian Network, 6 Music and teen services, Blast and Switch, were to be closed down in order to make £600 million saving as part of Delivering Quality First cuts across the organisation. The cuts followed an unsuccessful negotiation between the BBC and the Government to increase the licence fee in line with inflation. The BBC was forced to reduce spending by twenty per cent in order to continue to deliver programme commitments. This was the first time in its history that the BBC admitted that other broadcasters would have to fill the gap in provision for young people, and it was the first instance of the BBC voluntarily offering to reduce its size and scope (BBC News, 2010). In 2006, in a review of the BBC, commercial media urged the Government to limit the BBC from "empire building" (Brook, 2006); thus, when the cuts were announced, it appeared that the BBC was ceding to political and commercial media pressure. The BBC explained that it cost 8.5 pence per listener per hour to run the BBC Asian Network – an amount considerably higher than the other national radio stations. There were some major flaws with the rationale: the BBC Asian Network was compared to 5 Live and Radio 4, and not to BBC language-specific radio services such as Radio Scotland, Radio Cymru and Radio nan Gàidheal, both cost significantly more than 8.5 pence per listener per hour to run. These language-specific services broadcast in non-English and are comparable to the BBC Asian Network, which at the time broadcast more than twenty hours per week in South Asian languages and played music in foreign languages. The proposed

cuts received extensive media coverage, and in a Channel 4 interview, BBC Asian Network presenter, Bobby Friction, questioned why the BBC wanted to "cancel the one British Asian national space. It's a British thing for everyone to listen to" (BBC News, 2010). A campaign to save 6 Music was high profile and, in contrast, the campaign to save the BBC Asian Network received little attention. Guardian journalist, Malik Meer, suggested the problem was the BBC Asian Network audience - predominantly working class with seventy per cent of listeners based in the Midlands - they were unlikely to be "on Twitter or in media friendly places" (Meer, 2010). Implicit in this viewpoint is that the listeners were not deemed important or worthy because they are not as profitable as other groups that the media seek to serve (see Ang 1991). This also links to the discussion on class asymmetry in Chapter 3, whereby the concerns of the working classes are not considered significant to media professionals (Hesmondhalgh in Price and Deery, 2017).

The BBC had claimed the money saved, by closing services, including the BBC Asian Network, would be reinvested into the BBC, however, a new way to serve British Asian audiences had to be found. The listening figures that followed the closure announcement in March 2010 measured audience consumption from the end of March 2010 to 27<sup>th</sup> June 2010, and revealed the number of BBC Asian Network listeners had grown to 437,000 (Rajar Q2, 2010) see Appendix A. 6 Music listeners also grew to 1.19 million (Rajar Q2, 2010) due in part to the publicity generated over the proposed closures. Under a new Controller, the BBC Asian Network had embraced a 'friend of the family' strategy from late 2009 to target listeners of all age groups. This strategy acknowledged that different generations listened to the station for different reasons and at various times of the day. The core daytime schedule was reformulated to create content for the whole family. The BBC Trust took three months to reverse the decision to close 6 Music, claiming the existence of the station encouraged audiences to embrace digital radio; however, it took another year and a public consultation before the BBC Asian Network was saved from closure. The differences in how the two stations were dealt with illustrates the low value and insignificance of the BBC Asian Network within the BBC hierarchy. A cheaper way to serve British Asian audiences was not found in the intervening twelve months, and therefore, the BBC Trust recommended that the BBC Asian Network be reprieved and continue to broadcast with a smaller budget and half the staff.

In 2012, a new on-air schedule was unveiled to include longer daytime shows to save money. Radiocentre, (a body representing the sector), responded to the changes, stating it was concerned that the BBC Asian Network was failing to connect with the target audience due to an “overly ambitious remit which attempts to serve a broad diverse audience.” This is a key weakness of the station that, since its inception, it has tried to serve all British Asians. Radiocentre (2012: 8) noted that the BBC is the only station that “encompass[es] a large range of music, culture, language, news, documentaries and current affairs that cover British Asian culture from an accessible perspective.” This is a pertinent point – no other Asian service tries provides as much content and depth to their viewers or listeners. The establishment of the BBC Asian Network has caused fierce competition between commercial Asian stations, with reference to the salaries for talent and bidding for high-profile guest interviews. The existence of the public service station is blamed for a reduction in income for commercial media because the BBC covers the same events, which historically, commercial media would have charged for. Radiocentre further argued that the “ill-defined” remit should in fact focus upon “six distinctive content areas: BBC news, music and entertainment, Asian culture, languages and specialist music” in order to be distinctive from commercial Asian media (Radio Centre, 2012: 8, 10). BBC licence fee payers did question the purpose of an ethnic service targeting just one minority group funded by the licence fee payers, and suggested commercial media ought to fill the gap (BBC Service Review, 2012: 19). The BBC Trust Executive Summary claimed the BBC Asian Network made a “strong contribution to delivering the BBC’s public purposes” via the station’s news, British Asian music, and coverage of live cultural events. It concluded that these aspects make it “highly distinctive within the UK’s Asian radio market” (BBC Trust, 2012: Executive summary). The review also discussed the potential size of the British Asian listeners in the UK. Data from Rajar suggests that the number of British Asian listeners may have doubled since 2001 and the wider BBC is failing to attract this audience (BBC Trust, 2012: 15, 16).

In 2012, days ahead of the station’s 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, a new schedule was unveiled, with the BBC claiming that the changes were made to ensure the station remained “relevant to and reflective of all the UK’s Asian communities” as opposed to budget cuts (BBC Media Centre, 2012). After operating for ten years in three cities, the station was consolidated into two bases: Birmingham and New Broadcasting House in London for the news and key programmes such as Breakfast, phone-in and Drive. A new presenter line-up was unveiled for the late evening programmes and the controllership of the station switched hands once again from Andy Parfitt (Controller of Radio 1 and 1Xtra) back to Bob Shennan, and under his stewardship in 2015, the

station again modified its audience strategy to engage younger listeners or the so called ‘digital natives’ – who traditionally do not listen to radio. The 2016 remit set by the BBC Trust requires the station to “use new technologies to broaden its reach” (BBC Trust, 2016b: 2). Thus, since 2012, the BBC Asian Network has curated content specifically for the Red Button, and has created download content and video content for social media including Facebook and YouTube in recognition that radio has become a web experience (Loviglio and Hilmes 2013). A number of key changes were also instigated among the news team to make the journalism more influential and distinctive. Despite the cuts across the station, BBC news funded specific ‘impact reporter’ roles, that were intended to allow some of the original journalism sourced by Asian Network reporters to be shared more easily and widely across the BBC. The changes in terms of music, news and presentation have resulted in an upward trajectory in terms of listeners, forcing the BBC’s key competitor, Sunrise Radio, into second place.

The on-air schedule was further modified in 2016, when the remit was amended to remove a stipulation that required twenty hours of output to be broadcast in South Asian languages. The station has always offered a number of language-specific programmes, including Punjabi, Gujarati and Urdu. The new presenters and their programmes also ceased to be explicitly described as language shows, and across the station ‘blended language’ was introduced. Presenters for these shows are no longer required to speak exclusively in one South Asian language but in a hybrid of English and one South Asian language. The style was introduced to mirror how some young British Asians speak and to remove the perception that language programmes are for first and second-generation British Asians (see Chapter 9)

## Commercial Asian media in the UK

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Alongside the BBC Asian Network, a range of ethnic television, radio and print media also exist which cater specifically for British Asians. Lay and Thomas (2012) attempted to map ethnic media in London and found that out of 175 media outlets for minority communities, 49 exclusively catered the Asian communities reflecting the different languages spoken by Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan and Tamil communities. Their study also found clear generational differences in media suggesting some products were aimed at second- and third-generation members who have different interests to their parents and grandparents. Minority editors or publishers, explained their role is to offer an alternative to mainstream media. Another important function of ethnic media noted by the study is the provision of news and information in different languages to foster “cultural unity and identity” (2012: 376). Lay and Thomas (2012) characterise ethnic media as being in the process of transition and transformation, in part, due



to generational differences that result in new media forms and platforms for younger minority audiences. Yu and Matsaganis (2019: 24) suggest that ethnic media contribute to building a sense of community by highlighting and thus strengthening people's cultural and ethnic identities. Yu (2019) highlights that non English media face particular challenges because they are unable to offer access to the broader mainstream audience, and as a result, are also not heard by the majority audience. This means a number of services can exist in a silo and that the needs of their listeners/viewers are not understood by the majority population.

The rest of this chapter looks at some of the BBC Asian Network's key radio competitors, and considers the impact Asian satellite television on British Asian audiences. The UK British Asian media industry encompasses a plethora of satellite TV channels, online news sites, newspapers and magazines and commercial and community radio stations. Each platform has been popular and successful; one possible reason is that these alternative media offer a representation that is in opposition to "stereotypical images of Asians as submissive, hard-working, passive and conformist" that have tended to be prevalent in mainstream media and influence how people view these communities (Haq, in Sharma *et al.*, 1996: 63). According to Haq this type of representation is "reductive" because it suggests Asians are victims and ignores that they complex identities. This point is explored further in Chapter 7 and 9.

Ethnic media, with their expertise, knowledge, and staff, are able to showcase minority communities in a more authentic manner and on occasions this representation can showcase a parallel existence of British Asians in the UK. Whilst careers in mainstream media can be described as relatively stable, ethnic media is characterised by change, and as such, the sector heavily relies upon volunteers and low paid staff who are willing to work long hours to produce information (Brown 2005). Sreberny (2005: 446) has suggested that the range of ethnic media in the UK has enabled minority audiences to "to direct the gaze backwards, inwards and all around" because these services acknowledges the history of migrant communities, their interests, music or culture, and allow people to have a space outside of the public sphere. Saeed (2011) suggests that post colonial communities have imposed upon them preconceptions, prejudices and racism as a direct consequence of the post colonial experience. However, ethnic media as noted by Moylan (2013: 7) is able to be "organic, reflexive and self-questioning."

The BBC Asian Network's key competitor is commercial Asian radio station, Sunrise Radio in London, established in 1989 on medium wave. It subsequently began broadcasting nationally via DAB. Prior to gaining a space on the spectrum, Sunrise had broadcast as Sina Radio from 1984 as a cable radio station. Sunrise is the first 24-hour Asian radio station, and continues

to offer music, news and entertainment from South Asia, broadcasting in English, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. It has signed up to Rajar, and is the most listened to Asian radio station in London, with 330,000 listeners (Rajar Q2, 2018). Sabras Radio in Leicester, launched in 1995 and does not subscribe to Rajar but claims to have the largest Asian audience in the Midlands. The name Sabras means 'all tastes', and the station caters for its audience by offering something for 'all tastes' by playing Bollywood, Bhangra, Gujarati and Indian-Pop genres (Sabras Radio, 2018). Sanska is a community radio station owned by Sabras, the commercial arm of the company. Sanskar caters specifically for the Hindu community by playing religious music across all its shows. Other notable commercial Asian stations include Asian Sound Radio in Manchester and Radio XL in Birmingham, none of which subscribe to Rajar.

London is served by twenty-nine independent radio stations, nine of these services are targeted at Asian listeners, including commercial stations: Lyca Dil Se (Greater London), Lyca Radio (Greater London), Punjab Radio (Greater London and North London), Sunrise Radio (Greater London), and community stations: Asian Star (Slough), Betar Bangla Radio (Stratford), Desi Radio (Southall), Radio Minhaj (Newham – commencing broadcasting in 2019). The BBC Asian Network faces intense competition for listeners in London because listeners can choose from a number of stations. In fact, Lacey (2013) suggests that listeners do not listen to one station and instead look for a number of stations to identify as either listeners, users and contributors.

Lyca Radio is a relatively young station and was only granted a DAB licence in January 2018. The brand also broadcasts on medium wave in London. Rajar figures for Lyca reveal it has 106,000 listeners (Rajar Q2, 2018). Lyca's other station, Lyca Dilse, has 35,000 listeners (Rajar Q2, 2018). Ofcom describes the station as a music service with "particular emphasis on British Asian Urban artists within a music mix that also appeals to young and older British Asian listeners" (Ofcom, 2018b). The genre of music chosen means that, in the future, Lyca could be the potential key competitor for the BBC Asian Network as both stations emphasise British Asian music. Punjab radio, has 213,000 listeners (Rajar Q2, 2018), the station predominantly plays Punjabi music, including Bhangra and also folk music, classical music and devotional music for both Sufi Muslims and Sikhs, and provides news in Punjabi specifically for first and second generation British Asians.

The terminology Community radio implies that they serve local regions, but they also serve 'community of interest' such as gay groups, disabled or ethnic and migrant communities. They are non-profit making and both Sanskar Radio and Desi Radio define their target audience

by language. Barnard (2000: 68) has suggested that community radio fills the void by representing minority audiences. All stations – community and commercial – need to attract large audiences, but because Asian stations target “smaller populations” this can mean “limited access to human and financial resources (e.g. staff, advertising revenue, and subscriptions)” (Matsaganis and Katz, 2014: 937). Mainstream media spends little time specifically focused upon minority communities and, often, programmes about specific communities are framed as ‘exoticised’ or ‘othered’.

Over the last thirty years, the number of television satellite channels targeted at Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi communities in the UK has grown exponentially. Access to Asian channels is offered in the UK by Sky, Virgin Media and TalkTalk, platforms that charge subscription fees for access. Sky subscription offers access to 45 channels (correct as of March, 2018) including Zee TV, B4U Movies, Sony Max and ARY. The channels offer comedy, drama, reality shows (such as Dance India Dance), Bollywood films and WWE matches in Hindi. A huge proportion of the content is broadcast in South Asian languages such as Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu, simply because the programmes are imported directly from India and Pakistan. These services specifically address “ethnic, linguistic and/or religious groups” residing in countries where they are considered to be a minority and thus they “have some connection (imagined or real) and share a sense of belonging within a larger community spreading beyond national boundaries (the diasporic element)” (Georgiou, 2005: 483). Georgiou (2005) refers to ethnic media as diasporic media, and contends that they develop in the intersection of local, national and transnational spaces. For example, Indian communities in the UK share common interests and values with Indians living in Canada, Germany and the USA and as a result the communities connect to each other through their shared sense of transnational identity. Moreover, she suggests that when media portray shared common cultural information on satellite television (for example Asian programming across Europe) this can lead to the (re)invention of shared identity and community. Criticisms of such services argue content from South Asian countries reproduces an insular viewpoint, however, Georgiou contends that these services also have to promote universalism, due to the fact the modern nation-state supports their existence with money and infrastructure (2005: 483). Malik (2010: 123) has argued the key objective for satellite subscribers is the ability to “identify with the homeland” and simultaneously secure access to a platform to share “common cultural concerns, such as a religion, language or ethnicity, to defend their collective interests.” Research conducted by the former BBC Trust in 2015 found the BBC Asian Network audience indicated that the station has “no real competitors in terms of its pan-UK, British Asian identity and high quality programming” and that the emphasis upon British Asian as opposed to South Asian audiences is what makes the station

distinctive (BBC Trust, 2015: 62). Brit Asia TV, a music service that focuses primarily upon Punjabi music is UK based, but other popular services such as Star Plus, is an Indian subscription service owned by Star India and Zee TV is part of Zee Network established in 1995.

## Conclusion

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This chapter has focused upon the history of the BBC Asian Network. The service is unique for two reasons, first it is the only public service radio station for the Asian community, the other services are either commercial or community radio, and second, the BBC service focuses upon producing content in Britain for third and fourth generation British Asians. As demonstrated in this chapter, most other ethnic media focus upon linguistic policies to serve older audiences, although Lay and Thomas (2012) and Yu and Matsaganis (2019) have found ethnic media are creating new platforms and services for younger generations of British Asians. These new services tend to be in English as opposed to a South Asian language in recognition that younger audiences associate less strongly with them. The changes made to the on-air schedules since 2016 and music policies changes are helping the station reach more listeners. However, the BBC are focused on attracting British Asians in London and yet as outlined these listeners are well served by independent Asian stations, so this poses some challenges for the BBC. Key changes in music policies which now include more Grime and Rap appear to be more prominent since Mark Strippel, Head of Programmes at the BBC Asian Network, also took charge of BBC 1Xtra, leading to a concern the two stations could potentially be merged (Baddhan, 2017). The music changes are also part of the attempt to appeal to third and fourth generation British Asians, alongside the changes to language programmes.

## Chapter 5 – Research Methods

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### Introduction

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The aim of the study is to understand the experiences of BBC producers employed at the BBC Asian Network and scrutinise how they imagine and address their target audience through the distinctive content, music and language programmes produced according to a public service remit. Therefore, this thesis explores both radio production and the production of race for a distinctive minority audience. Thirty interviews with content producers examined their experiences working for the BBC, their target listener and the content they create. Programme producers were chosen for interviews because they are the link between big media organisations and the audience. Simultaneously, the research considers the proposition that being part of the BBC, and aligned with the values of the broadcaster actually creates problems in matching the on-air content of the radio station to the listener, because the vision of 'Asian identity' is based upon white middle class values espoused by the BBC.

Chapter 3 outlined that the media articulates a Eurocentric stance in news content and that when minorities are included within media content they are often stereotyped or 'othered' (Said 1995). Ethnic media exist on the periphery of the media ecology offering an alternative for their respective communities however, they can also be marginalised because they are niche, serve small audiences and because they may serve their audience in non-English in order to reflect their cultures and identities. The BBC Asian Network, is unique because it serves a specific minority, chiefly in English, within a public service remit, therefore the thesis tries to critically map the goals and intentions of the BBC Asian Network against the producer's perspectives and the listener's perceptions of the radio station in order to knit together the two distinct groups. As stated in Chapter 3, audiences are actively imagined and constructed by the media to serve a specific purpose, as either citizen or consumer (Ang, 1991; Scanell 1989; Syvertsen, 1999, 2004). Manchin (2002: 10) has suggested that studies of audiences have provided insights into the way people now relate to the media but "very little has been revealed about how the media are now part of the way that we experience the world." This study also aims to examine from the perspective of the listeners, how an Asian specific service is important or relevant. The research questions are

- What challenges do producers at the BBC Asian Network face in creating content for a distinctive and changing audience?

- How is the target British Asian audience imagined now and does this mode of address restrict creativity and innovation?
- What key differences characterise the way production staff conceive the different generations that comprise the audience?
- How does the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, articulate and manage issues pertaining to race and ethnicity?

It was essential to select a method of data collection that allowed an insight into how the BBC operates internally in terms of power structures, cultural practices, with particular reference to decision making and working practices that could expose how and why content is organised, framed and presented in particular ways. Two possible options were available: ethnographic research at the BBC Asian Network and in-depth interviews with BBC staff. I chose in-depth interviews because it is a method that offered a way to gain deeper understanding of ethnic programme production. Production staff are able to provide a unique insight into the internal culture at the BBC because they are engaged in the production of radio and work within a set of pre-determined parameters established by the institution and external forces for example: government, economics and commercial media. Their accounts can illuminate how such forces are experienced and negotiated, with reference to the representation of British Asians. Similar studies of production have tended to use a mix of ethnographic research and interviewing (Mayer *et al.*, 2009, Wall and Dubber, 2009) or interviews only (Campion, 2005; Cottle 1997; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Matsaganis and Katz, 2014; Mayer 2011; Saha, 2018). Studies of production aim to gather data through in-depth semi structured interviews in order to learn about the production process, this includes work routines, institutional conventions and external forces such as economic and political which influence the media. In addition, the interviews can examine the impact of technology or distribution (Mayer *et al.*, 2009).

I use Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory framework, which is defined as theory generated from interview material that is systematically obtained and analysed. The grounded approach characterises production studies research. The approach can be described as inductive and emerging because this combination allows findings to emerge that were not anticipated whilst gathering material to examine a phenomenon, in this instance the BBC Asian Network. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe this method as a project whereby the researcher starts without "preconceived theory in mind" and thus "allows the theory to emerge from the data." They argue that "theory derived from data is more likely to

resemble the “reality” than theory derived by placing a series of concepts based on the experience or solely through speculation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 12).

An ethnographic study would not have proved fruitful in gathering an audience perspective; therefore, a face-to-face questionnaire was chosen, followed up with telephone interviews with seven participants. The questionnaire generated an insight into what people liked or disliked about the station, and the significance of an Asian specific service. The follow-up interviews allowed the researcher to focus on the listeners’ notion of their identity and learn what being ‘Asian’ meant to them. The data gathered for this project was collected through interviews, questionnaires, policy documents and reports. The reports were used to gain an overview of the government’s position on issues such as immigration, community cohesion and integration, as well as its views on the organisation and structure of the broadcaster. The research period encompassed the Charter renewal process in 2015 and 2016; therefore, government consultations and reports were also examined.

The rest of this chapter is structured into sections, including a discussion about in-depth interviews, utilising the constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), questionnaire design and execution, and structured telephone interviews, their design and implementation. This is followed by a discussion about the analysis process: how the material was collected and ordered to find concepts and relationships in the raw material and then organised into a theoretical scheme for analysis. This should allow the reader to then have a greater understanding about the discussion of the material ahead of Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, where the key themes are deconstructed and discussed with reference to the wider media and UK society.

## Reflection and ethics

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I was uniquely placed to conduct this study because I worked in the BBC for a period of ten years, approximately seven years were spent at the BBC Asian Network as a news reporter and producer. I had pre-existing knowledge and awareness of working practices within the BBC Asian Network and some understanding of the listener they are trying to serve. This enabled a rapport to be established early in the interview because a number of the interviewees were personally known and we shared a common ground due to my ‘insider’ knowledge of the work environment. I found it easy to create a supportive atmosphere for conversation, once I had explained my current job role and my PhD objectives. A number of BBC staff were supportive of

my change of career and wanted to help in any way. Charmaz (2014) suggests that once a common ground has been established interviewees can give more time and depth of information than is expected at the outset. This did occur a number of times, where interviewees gave up more than an hour to continue the conversation. I addressed interviewees on a familiar yet formal basis to establish an 'independent perspective' during the course of the interview and I had the knowledge to pose searching questions due to my journalism experience. A number of participants did, however, try to draw me into the answers by referring to my knowledge with phrases like "as you know" in an attempt to gain my understanding or approval. My role as the interviewer required me to be objective and to leave bias, personal perceptions and my experiences to one side, because what the researcher brings to the study can influence what is seen (Charmaz, 2014). It was useful that approximately three years had passed since I had left the BBC when I first began interviewing staff and in that time the BBC Asian Network had undergone extensive internal change. As a consequence, I was unfamiliar with new processes, programmes and the new digital native strategy. I used this as the starting point and asked interviewees to explain their job role and duties first and then I could probe and explore further. I tried to use my previous knowledge positively to enrich the study. I purposefully left contentious questions for later in the interview and this allowed the interviewee to feel comfortable from the outset but allowed for some difficult questions to some staff.

My former roles within the BBC meant I had greater access to BBC staff compared to other researchers who have no prior connection to the broadcaster. All potential interviewees were contacted via social media in the first instance and if they expressed an interest this was followed up through email, where the PhD research objectives were outlined and permission was sought to record the interview for the purposes of transcription. Members of staff who I did not know personally were also contacted, and a large number of them chose not to participate. In order to request the participation of Bob Shennan who at the time of interviews in 2016 was Controller for BBC Asian Network, access and permission was sought through his PA. He agreed to offer thirty minutes of his time and a date was arranged that was mutually convenient at his office in New Broadcasting House. I preferred to choose neutral places for the interviews and often let the interviewees suggest places to make them feel at ease. All contributors were asked to sign a consent form before or after their interview. The form outlined how the interview would be used and how their personal information would be stored and explicitly asked if they wanted their participation to be anonymised or not. Ethical approval was sought from De Montfort University and granted prior to the interviews and questionnaire taking place, and wording for the consent form and research objectives was approved. Over half of the interviewees requested that their participation was anonymised, particularly those with



reporter, journalism or production roles whereas, in contrast most senior staff were happy to have their real names and job titles used in the study. Anonymity offered some interviewees the confidence to speak freely and openly without fear of recrimination from the BBC or their colleagues. A handful of interviewees admitted they did not want to be identified because they were worried about the consequences of being critical. Therefore, in the chapters that follow anonymised interviewees have been given a generic South Asian pseudonym and a vague job title to conceal their identity. In addition, the 'voice' of the interviewee used in the analysis has been carefully evaluated in order to avoid revealing people's real identity, thus specific situations or references to stories that may identify them has been removed. The participation of senior BBC staff in this study is significant because it gave staff on the lower paid grade (Broadcast Journalists) the confidence to be interviewed for the research. The difficulty, however, was to capture the contradictions between the wider BBC policy from the top down, and the thoughts on working methods that were expressed from the bottom up. This is where interviews were insightful and rich; participants revealed frustrations with policies and lack of autonomy to produce content for an ethnic audience. The unique advantage of interviews is that they can extract information about feelings and thought processes which is difficult to gain through other methods (Charmaz, 2014)

Research has also found evidence that the interviewer's race can influence how people respond and answer questions, and suggests there are issues around the social class of the interviewees and the interviewer (Anderson, Silver and Abramson, 1988). Gunaratnam (2003) has suggested that the matching of the participants' and interviewers' race can allow for access, promoting trust and rapport. For this study, my race may have particular relevance for the execution of the face-to-face survey. I may have engendered trust among the listeners due to my ethnic background, and thus people were more likely to agree to an interview or complete the questionnaire. My background and experiences were also brought to the fore through the analysis of the data, Charmaz (2014: 17) suggests that researchers construct grounded theories using their past and present involvement and interaction with people or institutions. I tried to be as systematic and objective as possible and to make the written description as true as possible in the narrative (Priest, 2010). Strauss and Corbin also acknowledge that the researcher's understanding is brought into the research process. In fact, I believe the analysis process benefitted from by prior knowledge of British Asian communities and the BBC Asian Network. The analysis of any subject is difficult to complete without the insight of the researcher, because these are manifested in the tone used in the questioning and the design of the questions. In this particular study, where diversity is a primary part of the research, my own knowledge, personal experience and awareness of ethnic diversity was brought to the data

analysis, interpretation and validation process. Furthermore, I suggest it is the prior knowledge in the first instance that allows researchers to examine phenomena in the first place.

## In-depth and focused interviews

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In-depth interviews with BBC staff working at the BBC Asian Network were specifically chosen because they allowed the researcher to enquire openly about situational meanings or motives for action (Flick *et al.*, 2004: 203), specifically to learn about content production and the audience the staff serve. Most importantly, for the purpose of clarity, this method allows flexibility, because researchers can probe and ask further questions allowing various directions to be followed up in the interview (Priest, 2010: 101). In keeping with the grounded approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), every interviewee selected ought to have been involved or have experienced the subject matter, which in this instance is the BBC Asian Network. Merton and Kendall (1945/6: 549) have suggested all interviewees are thus involved in the “concrete situation.” A semi-structured interview approach was chosen over structured interviews, because it allowed different questions to be posed to people who occupied different roles within the BBC. Although some standardised questions were posed to the interviewees, for example, their perception of the audience when they first joined the BBC Asian Network and what they imagine is the future for the service. The format enabled follow-up questions for information given during the context of the interview, and to probe further into the meanings of individual responses. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or on Skype (video call), and also allowed for the collection of reactions within the interview, which enhanced the findings. This type of interview can be characterised as conversational, which means that because the interviewee is familiar with the topic but not the questions, they are unable to pre-prepare answers.

The questions were open in design, allowing the opportunity for points of view that had not been anticipated to emerge, and further probing if required. The major advantage of this method is that it enabled points made by one interviewee to be put to another interviewee, and thus, allowing more clarity and depth on issues the production staff discussed. This also allowed answers to be compared. The interviewees were sought on the principle of maximum variation (Miles and Huberman, 1994); therefore, their roles ranged from Controller to editors, broadcast journalists and presenters. This allowed for a diverse range of views and outlier interviewees to see if there are patterns or conflicts.

Thirty former and current BBC employees were interviewed between December 2014 and February 2016: fifteen women and fifteen men to achieve a gender balance. At the time of the interviews, fifteen members of staff were employed in senior roles within the BBC, such as editors, heads or senior journalists, and the other fifteen were journalists, producers or presenters. Twenty-three of the interviewees are British Asian, encompassing first, second and some third-generation. At the time of the interviews, the interviewees were aged between 33 and 70 and worked in a variety of roles: broadcast assistant, broadcast journalist, senior journalist, programme producer, language producer, presenter, editor, Head of BBC Asian Network and Controller of BBC Asian Network. This allowed for the material gathered to be “grounded” from participants who have experienced the production at the station (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Each individual interview lasted up to an hour with a handful lasting longer; the average duration of an interview was approximately forty minutes. The first few interviews took place with either retired or former colleagues, taking place in their home or new place of work. This allowed for a relaxed way to conduct the interviews, because the interviewee was not worried about their job. The initial interviews focused on the origins of the BBC Asian Network and the goals and objectives of the station. They were followed by in-depth interviews with the Head of the Asian Network, Mark Strippel, and the then Head of News, Kevin Silverton. I chose to interview the Head of the Network first, in anticipation that, if a senior person had agreed to cooperate, staff in other roles would be more likely to participate. Some interviewees sought permission from the Head of News before agreeing to take part.

The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in London, or near New Broadcasting House, or at the BBC Mailbox in Birmingham, where a number of BBC Asian Network programmes are broadcast from. A large number of the interviews in London took place in coffee shops, which offered neutral territory for both myself and the interviewee. This allowed some people to open up, and in some cases criticise BBC policies. The majority of the interviews recorded at the Mailbox were carried out in the informal soft-seated spaces, which are open but did not allow for one hundred per cent privacy. Five interviews took place over Skype; this option still allowed for a deeper and more meaningful conversation than would be possible during a phone interview and could be recorded.

Direct quotes are used prominently in the analysis to allow the reader to hear the interviewee’s voice and perspective. All the interviewees appeared to be open and responsive, apart from one, who, perhaps because the interview took place in breakout space at work, was cautious and offered little more than a public relations interview about the BBC. Charmaz (2014) has suggested workers who believe in retaining “company secrets” may be reluctant to reveal

important information. In-depth interviews can contribute to the development of an ethnography or a systematic description of a social group, institution and its cultural way of life, and this was the intended goal: to examine the production culture inside the BBC with reference to ethnic programme making. The questions that were posed were intended to be non-judgemental; however, on one occasion an interviewee pointed out that the manner in which I framed a question on audience figures was indeed “judgemental”. Charmaz has argued that professionals and elites “often recite public relations rhetoric rather than reveal personal views, much less a full account of their experiences” (Charmaz, 2014: 73). A few of the senior management interviews did contain elements that suggested that they were attempting to represent the BBC in the best possible light. This could be because, when people are questioned about why things are done in a certain way, they “often produce a set of common sense, widely shared ‘official reasons’ to explain themselves” (Manchin, 2004: 4). Interviews are often considered to be a construction of reality, but in the process of the interview, I was always conscious that a ‘particular reality’ was being constructed by the participants. This was relevant particularly with some of the early interviews that focused on upon a historical account of the BBC Asian Network. Bazeley (2013: 19) has suggested that researchers need to question, when interviewees describe an event, “is that a description of what really happened?” or is it an “account that reveals how that person made sense of that event or experience – their situated reality?”. This is something I considered when analysing the material gathered.

Although interviews are an increasingly popular method of research, there are some notable problems with this method. Interviews are retrospective narratives, so what an interviewee may say about an event or practice may not be entirely accurate, or the actions may not have taken place in the order suggested (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997, cited in Charmaz, 2014: 78). However, because interviews are retrospective, they also offer participants time to reflect upon events and to “clarify meanings and actions whilst providing rich data that sparks analytic insights” (Charmaz, 2014: 80). The goal was to find detailed and rich material that revealed the interviewees’ “feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives” (Charmaz, 2014: 23). Interviews can be influenced by specific social and cultural conditions taking place at that time of the interview and during 2015 and 2016, the recently elected Conservative government initiated the Charter renewal process of the BBC. A public consultation was launched in June 2015 amid controversial claims that the government wanted to weaken the BBC. It became evident in later interviews that some BBC staff were genuinely concerned about the future of their career in the BBC, and framed their responses about the relevance and future of the BBC Asian Network accordingly.

The questions for each interviewee recognised the different roles the interviewees occupied and took into account their levels of leadership or editorial power. The number of questions varied according to the interviewee's specific job role. This design is an essential element of grounded theory because, the material gathered can provide a conceptual or abstract understanding of the topic being studied because it is non-linear. All the in-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed. There were no technical problems recording interviews, handling an interview, or concerns about putting interviewees at ease. The interview topic did not seek out particularly private or confidential information unless interviewees chose to share this if relevant. None of the interviewees was nervous about the presence of recording equipment, because all were familiar with the technology and its uses, as a result of their own professional practice.

Although interviewing is a source of qualitative data, Charmaz (2014: 18) has suggested that it is a "contested method of data collection", because in order to obtain reliable interpretations, the material should always be extracted from the raw data as opposed to the researcher placing their world views onto it. Other critics suggest that researchers are unable to "replicate" the views of their participants or "reproduce their experiences", but Charmaz (2014) has recommended researchers try and see the lives of research participants from the "inside". Here, I had a unique advantage, having worked at the BBC. Although working practices, objectives and strategies have changed, the key aspects of being a journalist or a producer essentially remains the same hence, I drew on this experience to enhance the research and I have included the 'voice' of interviewees in the analysis to allow the reader to hear their views.

## Questionnaire

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In addition to in-depth interviews, a questionnaire sought listeners' views on the relevance of the BBC Asian Network. The questionnaire was, therefore, broad in focus, inviting opinion relating to the on-air content. Questionnaires are often considered an 'easy' or 'simple' method within quantitative and qualitative research. A useful definition of a questionnaire is that it is a highly structured and detailed survey, used in order to obtain information from a large number of respondents who are presumed to be representative of a specific population (Wiseman and Aron, 1970: 37). I considered a number of options on how to execute the survey: focus groups, online survey and postal. Ultimately, a face-to-face option was chosen, specifically so that I could seek out British Asians who listen to the BBC Asian Network. Although it is anticipated that online surveys potentially yield a greater sample size, I could not be sure if everyone responding was indeed a BBC Asian Network listener, and could not ascertain their

ethnic background. Thus, I chose to attend a number of Asian music and comedy events in London, Leicester and Nottingham, where it was anticipated people from the British Asian communities would be present. This meant the event 'self selected' a sample of the population for the purpose of this study, and I then asked people to participate *only* if they consumed the BBC Asian Network, in order to obtain depth and detail in the answers. Personal information including each participant's age, ethnic background, the city/town of residence and gender was collected; therefore, ethical approval, which included the design and questions, was sought in advance and was granted by De Montfort University.

The face-to-face method allowed the researcher to purposively select British Asians, and my presence allowed respondents to seek clarification and enabled a "rapport" to be established with potential respondents, meaning some people were more likely to cooperate (Deacon *et al.*, 2007: 64). This approach was also required because English is a second language for some participants, and as a result, some potential participants did not feel they could complete the survey. There were some disadvantages: I had limited time to travel to the events, and a number of events took place in different cities on the same day so I had to select one event over the others. Due to time and expense of completing the questionnaire in person, there is a smaller sample size; however, what is gained is quality of responses as opposed to quantity. Internet surveys can often be skewed towards upmarket males or young adults, as they are more likely to be online, but in fact they attract a low response rate. Personal surveys have several key strengths according to Evans and Mathur (2005: 206), including personal interaction, clear instructions, question variety, ability to use physical stimuli and the capability to observe respondents. They do, however, acknowledge the potential weaknesses, including interviewer bias, costs per respondent, limited sample size, geographic limitations, convenience sampling and respondent time pressures. One key problem with an online survey was how to obtain email addresses of British Asians or Asians who listen to the BBC Asian Network.

There is an ongoing debate that quantitative methods are more objective than qualitative ones, because qualitative methods are more dependent upon the researcher's own reactions and subjectivity (Priest, 2010: 96). The questionnaire design contained both quantitative and qualitative questions, and the responses provide some insights into the popularity of the station and the perceived drawbacks. De Vaus (1996: 61) has suggested that the most important thing about sample groups is that probability samples are "preferable" because they are "more likely to produce representative samples."

## Questionnaire design

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The questionnaire was designed as a descriptive survey, with an aim to discover what is liked and disliked about the BBC Asian Network, as well as seeking opinions on British Asian music. It has been argued that surveys can be a superficial way of understanding complex or collective behaviour, but Priest (2010: 29) has argued that material gathered can “take the pulse of public thinking in a useful way.” Open questions are considered to be more demanding because they can challenge those less articulate and less fluent in English; however, if they are answered well, they can provide researchers with useful insights into subjects (De Vaus, 1995: 87). It is also argued that closed or forced choice questions create false opinions, either because respondents are offered an insufficient range of options from which to choose from or the options influence their response. There was an intention from the outset to follow up with telephone interviews with those participants who had interesting or insightful viewpoints on the BBC Asian Network, so email addresses were requested in the first part of the survey.

The questions themselves were informed by material drawn from the in-depth interviews in an attempt to ‘ground’ the questions in the data gathered. The first few questions asked for the respondent’s name, age, location and ethnic identity, with the intended outcome that this information allowed the researcher to see what opinions are dominant in particular age groups. Although the questionnaire asked participants to self-select their ethnic identity, it became clear after the first survey conducted on April 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 at the BBC Asian Network Live concert that it was going to be difficult to capture the various ethnic communities in equal numbers as desired. At the concert, the people surveyed were overwhelmingly from Indian backgrounds and were aged between 18 and 50. This was a ticketed event costing £25 per person, and reflected that the people interviewed had the means to attend, whereas the Leicester Mela in August 2016 was free, and there was greater diversity in terms of age: the elderly, young families and a large number of new or young immigrants were in attendance. A more balanced approach to having a survey completed in equal or, at least, proportionate numbers to reflect the various communities would be to travel to different parts of the country and select a key city in which to approach these groups on the street. This could mean however, the people approached may not know about the BBC Asian Network or its output. In a PhD project, this approach is difficult, and additionally in this project, the survey was a secondary method, intended to supplement the data gathered via the in-depth interviews.

Respondents were also asked what they liked about the service in a free text question that allowed participants to write a response in their own words without any leading input from

the questionnaire or myself. This was followed up by an open question with no multiple-choice options that invited respondents to suggest what age the typical listener is. This resulted in a range of answers that had to be coded into categories in order to allow for a conceptual ordering. The question was posed because a report by the Department of Media, Culture and Sport published in 2004 suggested the station lacked a defined target listener. Participants were also asked what they disliked and what could be improved. In hindsight, there was no need for the improved question as the answers were similar or left blank. These responses were contrasted with the views of the BBC journalists and are examined in Chapter 8.

A change was subsequently made to question 8, following the BBC Asian Network Live concert, because it caused a misunderstanding. I was explicitly seeking views on British Asian music artists, but some participants thought they were being asked if they liked the music played on-air. Therefore, the phrasing was modified to read: *A large proportion of the music played on the BBC Asian Network is specifically by British born artists; do you like this type of music?* and the names of key British Asian artists were added to guide respondents. Question 10 asked how the BBC Asian Network provides content specifically for the respondent's community. This question was posed in the anticipation that it would allow an insight into how equally the various communities are represented by the BBC. This was followed by a question on the importance of an Asian-specific service in the BBC for the respondent. The mixed use of free text answers was purposely designed in keeping with grounded theory that seeks to generate a theory or to find concepts and relationships from the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

## Questionnaire collection

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The questionnaire took an average of ten minutes to complete and was conducted at BBC Asian Network Live on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2016 at the Hammersmith Apollo, London; Leicester Mela on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2016; Zee London Mela on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2016; Nottingham Mela on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2016; and BBC Asian Network comedy night in Leicester on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2016. The questionnaire, was conducted over a seven-month period, planned to encompass a series of music events that typically take place in July and August. In 2016, two key events – London Mela and Boishakhi Mela – were postponed or had date changes. One important factor was that in 2016 the BBC Asian Network withdrew its support from these events in order to run its own concert in April 2016. This was an interesting development because, as outlined in the literature in Chapter 4, commercial Asian stations are critical of the BBC Asian Network on-air promotion or supports for an event. Historically, commercial stations generated revenue from such events.



The impact of the withdrawal of BBC support, which is usually not financial but broadly cultural and on-air promotion, suggests that British Asian festivals had benefited from this.

The face-to-face method at events bears some resemblance to “convenience sampling”, which is a statistical method of gathering representative data by selecting people who are available, for example, British Asians and Asians at specific music events. As stated earlier, the sample may reflect a variety of ages and ethnicities, but is likely to be biased in favour of people who attend free or paid ‘Asian’ music and comedy events. I did, however, find differences in the types of people who attended across the different cities. At the first event, the BBC Asian Network Live concert where, with the help of an assistant, twenty-three respondents completed the questionnaire in a period of an hour and half. There was an assumption that, because the event was taking place in London, a number of the attendees would also be from London but a notable number of participants had travelled from the Midlands. The BBC Asian Network has a strong listener presence in the Midlands; therefore, it is not surprising that these listeners attended the event, which was the first one the station had organised.

The second event was the Leicester Mela, where twenty-nine people completed the questionnaire. This was an outdoor event and initial turnout was very low due to poor weather, so I struggled to find people for the first hour and half. The event’s line-up for the main stage lacked major British Asian or Asian artists, thus leaving community groups to fill the time with dancing and cultural activities. The event had formerly been headlined and promoted by the BBC Asian Network, but in 2016 it was hosted by Star (satellite channel) and commercial radio station, Sabras. The demographic for this event was far more diverse, with a number of families, young children, elderly British Asians and other community groups in attendance. A large proportion of people approached at the event who appeared to be newer immigrants from South Asia, responded that they did not listen to Asian radio. This meant the majority of questionnaire respondents were British Asian. I actively tried to find a representative sample, and deliberately approached women wearing headscarves, because they were noticeably Muslim and could have Pakistani heritage; however, the majority of these women had Indian backgrounds. Among the survey participants who took part, a huge majority listened exclusively to the BBC Asian Network, which is not surprising as the station was initially based in the city and its audience is predominantly in the Midlands.

The Zee Mela was the largest event attended and, over a period of three hours, forty-five questionnaires were completed, the respondents varied in age from teenagers to the middle aged. Participants predominantly self-identified as Indian, but this sample also included Telugu,

Guyanese, Nepalese and Bangladeshi people. Interestingly, some Londoners identified as simply British Asian rather than selecting an ethnic background from the multiple choice options, which included, for example, Indian and Pakistani. This suggested that some British Asians do not feel a link to the country of their parents' or grandparents' birth. The line-up and the two stages meant the turnout was good; however, not as many people were aware of the BBC Asian Network because they listened to Lyca or Sunrise Radio, both London based stations (see chapter 4).

Nottingham Mela, in contrast, was small and was billed as a 'South Asian' celebration, taking place in the castle grounds in the city. Over a period of an hour, eight questionnaires were completed. The key challenge was that the British Asian turnout was low and a number of people approached did not listen to the station, although a large proportion were aware of the station's existence. Participants were aged from twenty-four to the mid-thirties, and all self-identified as Indian.

The final collection was conducted at the BBC Asian Network's comedy night held at Curve Theatre in Leicester. Twelve surveys were completed before the event and during the interval. The audience for this event was mostly middle class and middle aged – there was a distinct lack of young adults, which could be due to the fact it was a comedy as opposed to music and ticketed. This was a BBC Asian Network event, and almost every person I approached consumed the station. By conducting the questionnaire at five different events, an effort was made to find a representative sample of respondents.

## Sample size

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A decision to stop surveying was taken once the sample size reached 122 in October 2016. The sample included an overwhelming dominance of women: 74 compared to 47. The dominant ethnic background was identified as follows: 99 Indian respondents, 9 Pakistani, 2 Guyanese, 1 Nepalese, 1 Afghan and 1 Arabic. As stated earlier, it had been desirable to achieve a balance of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan groups, but this was not possible. The median age of the questionnaire participants was 33 – the youngest was aged 13 (with parental consent) and the oldest was 69. Nearly half the respondents lived in either London (41) or Leicester (42) with 4 respondents from Peterborough, 3 people from Leeds, 3 from Nottingham, 3 from Wolverhampton, 2 from Manchester and 2 from Luton. Therefore, there is some limited representation from parts of England, and no representation from Wales or Scotland. A larger study would include these regions.

The difficulty with obtaining a larger and more diverse sample was the fact that the questionnaire was conducted face-to-face. What was noticeable was that the people who often agreed to participate were predominantly British Asians as opposed to new immigrants who would be classified as first generation. The sample is representative of 'British Asians' living in the UK aged between 13 and 69 years of age in 2016. Miles and Huberman (1994) have suggested that qualitative samples tend to be more purposive than random, and I sought to obtain a sample that was composed of British Asians.

## Telephone interviews

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Structured interviews were conducted with seven BBC Asian Network listeners between October 2016 and January 2017. More than twenty people were contacted by email after the questionnaire responses were placed into Excel for coding and analysis. People were selected due to the nature of the answers given on the questionnaire itself. Five questions were posed to those who agreed to participate: What is the continuing relevance of the BBC Asian Network?; Does the BBC Asian Network has sufficient understanding of the British Asian lifestyle?; How do the respondents define their identity?; How does the station serve its specific community?; Ten years from now, will the BBC Asian Network still be relevant? Hopf (cited in Flick *et al.*, 2004: 78) has argued that semi-standardised interviews, where all participants answer the same question, reveal no more than a "superficial tally of issues." However, the responses given offered an insight to the participant's identity and how they evaluated the BBC's reflection of this identity within the on-air content. Four out of the seven people who agreed to be interviewed, were born outside of the UK. This alone posed interesting insights into the identity of this so-called 'homogenous' Asian community in the UK. The respondents all required further clarification during the telephone interview, particularly when they were asked to define themselves; I purposely did not want to use the terms British Asian or Asian in order to avoid influence. Follow-up clarification questions included drawing on and remarking upon my own ethnic background to specify to the interviewee, 'what do you answer when you are asked where are you from?'. This question resonated with interviewees, and suggests that most people are quizzed by others on their ethnic origins, even if they are born in the UK.

Two methods of data storage were employed for the interviews and questionnaires. The former were transcribed as Word documents and transferred into NVivo 11, and the questionnaire answers were input into Excel. The interviews were transcribed soon after the interview by myself or a paid assistant (to speed up the process). In keeping with grounded theory, I sought to classify concepts according to their similarities or differences. This allowed comparisons within the material and to see if there were patterns of agreement, conflict, confusion and, crucially, variation and to then formulate new questions for the next interviewee, potentially allowing a larger set of viewpoints about an issue to be analysed (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The software NVivo was used to structure the material from broad theme into nodes. The technology aided the analysis process by breaking up large pieces of material into smaller, clusters that could be grouped in order to find meaning. Bazeley (2013) has argued that researchers ought to integrate their chosen conceptual framework into the process so that they can find “what and how they might code, and what questions to ask of the data” (Bazeley, 2013: 10). Although the focus was on radio production, and the visualisation of the British Asian listeners, other clusters of material also emerged: BBC’s recruitment practices, the notions of being ‘integrated’ or ‘westernised’, the perceived barriers faced in employment by ethnic staff, gatekeeping and the effect on Muslim audiences, and strategic change that appears to be regularly interrupted. This material was grouped into categories and labelled either with names given by me or taken from the material itself, which is referred to as “Nvivo code” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Where specific concepts did not fit naturally, a new category was created.

The second stage involved drawing connections with other interviewees’ comments on the same issue or topic. There is a need to be objective and to listen and “give voice” to respondents; this involved hearing what interviewees have to say by micro analysing the words and contrasting these viewpoints with opposing views, and then representing this accurately (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 43). The process can be described as a mix of reflection and drawing connection and naturally, some categories grew because they connected to other pieces of material, whilst some pieces of data remained distinct. This material formed a basic narrative that incorporated quotes from the interviewees, whilst also considering the outlier views and opinions. Following a break from the interview analysis between October 2016 and February 2017, I then returned to the interview material with a clearer idea of how to compare and contrast the two sets of material. What is particularly interesting is that I had not anticipated how important music was to the listeners, and also how relevant it was to some members of

staff, and how BBC recruitment practices contribute to the internal rift among the older and younger staff at the station.

At this stage, relevant categories in NVivo were re-examined through a microanalysis to consider any meanings, thoughts, ideas or relationships that had not previously been noticed. The groups of data were systematically contrasted with each other to consider differences, similarities or their unique properties or set of conditions, to see how some contexts or situations may occur inside the BBC. The goal was to break down the material further into discrete ideas, events or actions, and this allowed a set of concepts to emerge that are an abstract representation of an action, event or object considered significant in the material. The concepts were then used to organise the material into a narrative that offers an explanation of radio production, and the production of race by the BBC Asian Network. The voices of the interviews have been organised by the overall framing of the thesis, meaning that their quotes have been selected and analysed and then arranged thematically into coherent chapters. The analysis has been organised into four chapters: Chapters 6 and 7 have a focus on journalism practices, recruitment and the representation or voice of the British Asian community. Chapter 8 focuses exclusively upon the music practices; how the music is selected and the perspective of BBC staff, and this is contrasted with the views of the listener. Chapter 9 draws language and identity together because a number of the questionnaire respondents indicated that their identity came, in part, from their linguistic practices. It is intended that the structure of the data into these chapters allows for different theories to become apparent. The interviewees' voices have been incorporated into the narrative itself, in the form of direct quotes and they are presented alongside my own thoughts on the research and any relevant contextual information in this instance relating to what the BBC Asian Network was doing at the time of the interviews and survey.

## Questionnaire analysis

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The free text answers from the questionnaire were input into Excel (see Appendix D) so that the content could be sorted and filtered in order to find the quantities of answers as well the space to form qualitative analysis. One useful aspect of Excel was that it easily allows researchers to contrast categories of information, such as the age of respondents and their answer for a specific question. This allowed me to draw meaningful interpretations on how the age of the listener affects what they like about the BBC Asian Network, and juxtapose this information with the interviews about the desired audience. This approach was utilised because a number of interviewees discussed the drive within the BBC to target a younger audience.

All the free text responses required a form of categorisation, and in order to remain accurate, categories were devised using the voice of the respondents. The only question this was not possible for was question 7, which asked respondents their thoughts on the age of the typical listener. The responses were diverse, so, utilising the answers, I created age ranges and placed answers into them. In this way it was intended that the analysis be grounded in the data from the participants. Therefore, I sought to generate theory and points of consideration about the BBC and its engagement with British Asians, as opposed to describing the current state of affairs.

The collection and analysis of such a large amount of material drawn from BBC staff and listeners did pose some methodological questions in the early stages of analysis. I ended up repeatedly coding or examining material in a “circular process” that involved going back and forth, before finally reaching the intended goal to represent difference and agreement in the experience of the staff creating the content and the listener perception and reception of said content. Following the initial coding I then began to memo my thoughts incorporating the voice of the respondents by using their quotes within the text and discussion. Some responses remained isolated or coded as ‘other’ because they did not naturally fit together. This does not mean the viewpoint expressed is not valid, but that within the sample size no other person held the same opinion. Material gathered from the interviews is usually referred to as inductive, but as it is analysed by a researcher with, in this instance, the use of NVivo within a theoretical construct, it would suggest that, often, research is a combination of inductive, abductive and deductive approaches. Reichertz (in Flick *et al.*, 2004: 159) has argued that abduction within qualitative research is a way to create meaning from material, so on the one hand “it is a logical inference (and thereby reasonable and scientific), and on the other hand it extends into the realm of profound insight (and therefore generates new knowledge)”. Furthermore, Reichertz (2004) has argued abduction also allows social research to make new discoveries in a logical and methodologically ordered way (in Flick *et al.*, 2004:60).

## Telephone interview analysis

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Seven survey respondents agreed to participate in a short telephone interview. Five questions were posed to each of them, and were drawn from the contrast between material gathered in the BBC interviews and material gathered through the questionnaire. The interviews lasted up to ten minutes and, due to the small size of the material, transcription and analysis was relatively straightforward to compare the perspectives, and contrast and draw together

views on the BBC Asian Network and their identity. The interviews were transcribed in a similar manner to the in-depth interviews and are discussed in Chapter 9 as opposed to the in-depth interview material that is dispersed throughout the four analysis chapters.

## Conclusion

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The aim of this chapter has been to explain how material was collected, collated and subsequently analysed. The in-depth interviews offer an insight into minority ethnic media production within the BBC. The two methods provided a wealth of material that is considered in detail in the following chapters. I have tried to ground the analysis within the data gathered in order to produce a study that has reliable findings. This type of research is important because the cultural industries are acknowledged to be influential in peoples' lifestyles, and they remain largely dominated by white middle class employees (Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013; O'Brien *et al.*, 2016). As a consequence, there has been limited focus on the views of minorities working in these sectors and their distinctive target audiences. This study attempts to examine the radio production process with particular reference, to race and ethnicity, through in-depth interviews with producers. These views are explored in detail in the next few chapters. One reason to use a grounded design for this project is that there is limited work on understanding how British Asian communities consume media and on their perceptions of the media.

## Chapter 6 – The Governance and Management of Diversity in the BBC

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### Introduction

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This chapter considers how the licence fee acts as a form of governance for all staff working in the BBC, and considers how it influences the representation of minority communities. Furthermore, I contend that the institutional structure of the BBC, economic and managerialist conventions combined with public service goals, influence how race, ethnicity and identity are imagined and recreated by the BBC Asian Network. Chapter 2 outlined that race is “a political construct,” (Gunaratnam, 2003) due to the BBC’s dependency on the Government and thus it reflects the state’s insistence on cohesion and integration. The BBC is also renowned for its paternalistic approach to media output (Kumar, 1975; Malik, 2013; Saha, 2018) and promotes British middle class values to the detriment of minority and working class audiences (Creeber, 2004). Therefore, this chapter looks at the internal working practices within the organisation and considers how the gatekeeping system seeks to restrict content concerning Sri Lankan and Indian communities (including Sikh and Hindu groups) in favour of negative stereotyped content about Muslim communities. The interviews with BBC staff reveal the existence of an intergenerational divide between older British Asian staff and the younger third generation British Asian producers at the BBC Asian Network. This is a significant insight into BBC programme production and shows disagreement about the target audience and the manner in which to serve the core listener.

This chapter draws on interview material with BBC journalists conducted between December 2014 and February 2016. Direct quotes drawn from the interviews are part of the discussion in order to allow the voices of the journalists to be heard and offer an insight into the cultural conditions that existed when the data was gathered (see Richie *et al.*, 1997). Interviewees who chose anonymity have been given South Asian pseudonyms and vague job titles to conceal their identity. The trends are also discussed within the context of the complete dataset gathered for this study, and are juxtaposed with BBC internal policies and government policy.

### Journalism practices at the BBC Asian Network

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The contemporary BBC Asian Network is positioned within the BBC as a centre of



expertise that other parts of the BBC can use in order to make their content 'diverse'. This should increase the influence of the BBC Asian Network within the organisation through the dissemination of original and diverse journalism about British Asians across the organisation. There was unanimous agreement among the BBC Asian Network staff that there is a lack of coverage of minority communities elsewhere in the BBC. Riaan (*not his real name*), a daytime producer, believes the majority of staff hired at the BBC Asian Network are essentially the same as any other journalist but have additional skills. "We have that extra bit of knowledge about our audience", which he described as being "instinctive" due to the ethnic background of the journalists – this can be language skills or cultural awareness. Riaan suggests that ethnic journalists offer a unique perspective and range of skills that contribute to the organisation and that they are not just 'tokenistic employees' hired by media institutions under pressure to meet diversity targets. Kaylon (*not his real name*), concurred with Riaan:

Even though I am not Muslim, I am more aware of how things work in a mosque. You have got those contacts and you are a bit more comfortable. I think it's important that the BBC is serving the diversity of the country and it recognises that hiring people from different backgrounds is perhaps a better way of getting the contacts. (Former Journalist, Kaylon, 2016)

Kaylon believes that minority staff are able to build relationships with diverse audiences, and suggests this is possible because they are able to engender trust. This is beneficial to the BBC because it is mandated to serve all audiences. A journalist's gender and language skills can also help gain trust among diverse communities. Sam, a former senior journalist (*not her real name*) for the station, explained she is able to make connections with potential contributors even on terror related stories: "Even though they were scared to say anything, they are willing to talk to me simply because I use their language. They all spoke Gujarati and I speak Gujarati." On other occasions, Sam has been able to get by with limited knowledge of other languages, which has given her exclusive access to communities. Whilst covering terror related stories for the BBC, Sam observed that the press has also begun to "dispatch their Asian journalists even though they may not necessarily be on that beat." This indicates that this is not just a BBC policy to use minority journalists on some stories but across the media. One possible explanation was outlined by Kaylon, a former journalist, who explained his non-minority colleagues in the BBC regions found it harder to obtain interviews with diverse contributors:

They had more challenging experiences when they were at Bury Park, Luton. A really predominately Pakistani Muslim part of Luton, and for varied reasons, perhaps found that the shutters came up. I found it a lot easier. There was less suspicion perhaps. (Former Journalist, Kaylon, 2016)

Kaylon notes that some communities continue to remain closed off to mainstream media, hence the notion of 'shutters'; however, he believes being male and his ethnic background have helped him to engender trust and open doors into these communities. BBC Asian Network staff tend to be from different communities, have language skills and, in addition, have specialist cultural knowledge that is advantageous for the entire BBC. Other parts of the BBC have been trying to reflect the diversity of the UK and "connect with those communities" by hiring "reporters from those backgrounds" so that they can enhance the coverage of minority communities (former journalist, Kaylon, 2015). This strategy is ongoing and has two benefits: the number of minority staff across the BBC increases and the reflection on-air of diverse communities is improved. However, it is simplistic to expect that minority ethnic staff desire to specifically report or produce content about and for minority groups, because this strategy ignores other interests or strengths that the new employees may also possess. This strategy also tacitly allows an employee's ethnic identity to remain salient through the ethnocentrism of the workplace (Husband, 2005).

Another pitfall of such strategies is that the non-ethnic editors do not necessarily understand the nature or worth of proposed stories about diverse communities. Former senior journalist, Sam, pointed out that she has been editorially supported in finding and investigating stories at the BBC Asian Network by editorial staff who have cultural awareness, sensitivity and specialist knowledge:

I think I'm able to do the type of stories that wouldn't necessarily get supported elsewhere or there would be no scope for me to do the type of stories that I uncover. Why would you pose the questions you would pose if you didn't have prior knowledge of that area, for example, know how British Asians were using fertility treatment, to develop a potential story? (Former Senior Journalist, Sam, 2015)

Sam is alluding to the specialist cultural awareness and sensitivities that many minority ethnic staff have. She is critically self-reflective, acknowledging that some of the content featured on the Asian Network is unique to the station and would not be commissioned elsewhere. Alia (*not her real name*) a former senior member of staff, developed Sam's point further, arguing the reason the station makes a connection to the listeners is because a proportion of staff are members of the British Asian communities:

We can paint pictures that listeners identify with. The listener knows exactly what I am talking about, it's targeted, it's not patronising, it's relatable, it's identifiable. (Former Senior Member of Staff, Alia, 2015)

Here, Alia underlines the connection between the language journalists use in their scripts, and how they pitch the story and tone they take in order to make stories relatable for the listener.

Content that speaks to the audience, and harnesses their language or voice in order to convey their culture, is likely to encourage people to listen, and this allows the station to build trust and its authority with audiences. It is important that the listeners do not feel they are being patronised with explanations of terminology or practices that are familiar to most British Asians. News reporter, Safia (*not her real name*), explained that because the listeners are knowledgeable about the other Asian communities and their practices, this also allows the journalists and presenters to use phrases and terminology from South Asian cultures “without having to explain what they [the words] are.” Ishani (*not her real name*), a former senior member of staff, explained that when you consume the BBC Asian Network there is a sense that presenters and journalists are knowledgeable:

It’s having some level of confidence and understanding the story, so when Nihal [phone in presenter] is talking to somebody, I get the sense that he knows what the backdrop is. (Former Senior Member of Staff, Ishani, 2015)

In her interview, Alia also voiced that it is imperative staff are “confident” in their stories and that they “know their stories inside out” and “the communities inside out because you are representing the Asian community.” Although this sounds obvious, Alia makes an important point that, in order for ethnic media to survive serving a small audience, building trust through good journalistic practices of fact checking and non-misrepresentation of communities help to grow the audience. Matsaganis and Katz (2014: 937) outlined that in addition to internal managerial policies, interaction with the audience also influences the “identity” of ethnic media and the “journalists in forceful ways.” Thus, if the community is unhappy with their representation, they will complain and even protest. This has occurred a number of times: notably, the Sikh community in the UK has lodged complaints about how its faith has been represented on-air, particularly by Nihal, the Big Debate programme presenter, and Bobby Friction, Drive presenter. In addition, in 2008 an investigation was launched by the BBC to examine if the station had an anti-Muslim bias.

The interviewees all agreed there is a need for the BBC Asian Network to offer a platform, give a voice to and represent British Asian communities. Senior reporter, Safia, firmly believes the station has made an important contribution to the media ecology by “giving people a voice.” Producer, Joy (*not her real name*), also agreed with Safia, arguing that:

The paradox is that if we didn’t have the Asian Network we would have far less in the BBC about Asian cultures. So the Asian Network is a kind of cultural centre of excellence and knowledge that needs to be shared. (Producer, Joy, 2015)

These quotes concur with journalism studies that have noted that immigrants, ethnic and sexual

minorities, the homeless, women, children and young people are often “unheard” or “invisible” (Bourdieu, 1993; Cottle, 2000; Downing and Husband, 2005; Christians *et al.*, 2009; Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013; Moylan, 2013). Bourdieu (1998: 2) argued that political journalism “imposes” on audiences “a very particular vision” that is often grounded in the journalist’s interests. In other words, the needs and the interests of ordinary people or, in this instance, minorities, are marginalised in favour of what interests the mainstream programme makers and the issues they are knowledgeable about. According to the former News Editor, Kevin Silverton, the content about the communities is “a rich vein of journalism”, which, prior to the existence of the BBC Asian Network, “wasn’t seen, heard or written anywhere else.” What is evident is that minority staff, although born in Britain, are knowledgeable about the different Asian cultures, and operate in “transnational spaces”, through their connection to South Asia and their connection to family and friends in other parts of the world (Moylan, 2013: 8). Thus, third and fourth-generation British Asians have globalised knowledge, and because they are part of the British community, they are able to locate themselves in the British Asian community or their specific community, identify with Britain, and maintain a globalised identity. This practice informs the work they produce for the BBC and in Naficy (2001) words results in “accented” production. The advantage of the co-existence of ethnic media alongside mainstream media is that this provides greater diversity within the public sphere and enhances the media ecology.

The BBC is required to explicitly serve all communities and to demonstrate visibly that it is achieving its diversity targets for staff recruitment and on-screen representation. Kaylon believes that the existence of an Asian-specific service has allowed the organisation to defend itself against claims that some audiences are not well served, because when the BBC Asian Network was threatened with closure, the station was able to demonstrate “it was connecting to audiences who were not being served by other areas of the BBC” (former journalist, Kaylon). One notable example is from 2007 when Bollywood actor, Shilpa Shetty, participated in Channel 4’s *Celebrity Big Brother*. The BBC Asian Network was overwhelmed with listeners discussing on-air what they considered to be racist bullying on national television. Non-Asian listeners also contacted the station to discuss the topic:

There was a moment I think that we tapped into as the Asian Network, because we had an affinity. People wanted to say to Asian people, “We think it’s sickening what’s going on”. (Former Senior Journalist, Sam, 2015).

This example demonstrates that there is some recognition of the unique role the BBC Asian Network plays by facilitating discussion on issues such as bullying, racism or inequality within minority communities, and it reveals the void that is unfulfilled by mainstream media. A large number of complaints about *Celebrity Big Brother* were made to Ofcom. In fact, a subsequent

Ofcom investigation into the programme ruled that Channel 4 had broken the Broadcasting Code by not challenging the bullying and by their “bungling treatment” of the situation (Malik, in Cere and Brunt, 2011: 50). Former Controller, Bob Shennan, noted a large proportion of BBC Asian Network journalists “regularly” appear on the BBC News Channel or Today programme

...in a way it never happened 10 years ago, and that’s part of our strategy as well, is for it to be less of a niche and less of a ghetto and more of a sort of source of content for the rest of the BBC. (Former Controller, Bob Shennan, 2015)

Shennan’s reference to ‘niche’ and ‘ghetto’ does suggest the BBC Asian Network is still battling this stereotype despite efforts by the wider BBC to make the station part of the central strategy for the broadcaster. This is mirrored by Cottle’s research (1998: 302) that revealed staff working for the former ‘minorities unit’ were considered to produce “ghettoised content” and thus lacked equal professional status in relation to other BBC staff. Twenty years after Simon Cottle’s study of ethnic television producers it is worrying that this terminology is used by such senior personnel and suggests that a degree of institutional racism exists within the BBC. The use of the term suggests that there is work to be done to make the BBC Asian Network as prestigious as the other BBC national radio stations.

## Recruitment practices

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The journalists recruited by the BBC Asian Network are predominantly from Asian backgrounds, there exists a mix of first and second-generation British Asian journalists who joined the station historically, and the latter group, who are younger, educated to degree or postgraduate levels, born and raised in the UK as third and sometimes fourth-generation British Asians. The interviews revealed inter-generational differences between the two groups, causing tension and differences of opinion over working practices, strategies to engage the desired listener, and skillset. This chapter explores if this is due to the fact that, increasingly, the staff recruited tend to be middle class, assimilated and westernised (these concepts are examined in detail later in this chapter), whereas the first and second-generation British Asians may have been born abroad, often speak a South Asian language, and may have learned journalism skills on the job or from broadcasting experience abroad, notably Africa. As indicated in Chapter 3, the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic journalists, producers, presenters and editors remain underrepresented in the media in spite of initiatives to increase the number of journalists from diverse backgrounds (Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013; O’Brien *et al.*, 2016; Ofcom, 2018). One possible explanation is that jobs in journalism require high levels of education and training that some minority ethnic people do not possess. Another problem is that the media is a precarious sector and demands that graduates have prior work experience,

often gained by exchanging their time and skills for no financial reward, thus disadvantaging a number of black, Asian and minority ethnic people who tend to come from working class backgrounds (Savage, 2000). Potential employees with relevant work experience, a degree or postgraduate qualification find there are limited numbers of permanent or fixed-term contracts and are forced to freelance, effectively working on zero hour contracts. The hours are long and because the supply of workers exceeds the demand, this causes salaries to remain depressed.

I feel as though there are barriers to Asian people coming into our industry. I feel as though Asian people have to work a lot harder to prove their skills and demonstrate what they can do. (Producer, Riaan, 2015)

I suggest that one reason Riaan perceives there are barriers is because BBC ethnic journalists are forced to consistently prove their credentials when pitching stories across the BBC. I link this to the notion indicated by the Controller, that the station is perceived in some parts of the BBC as being a “ghetto”, which implies that ethnic staff are not as skilled as non-minority staff. In addition, I suggest that because within the BBC, and in society more widely there is a tendency to inscribe identities, cultures and to some extent histories of people, ethnic staff are expected to fit in to the culture of the BBC and conform to expected behaviours, for example, understanding what type of story fits the overall goals and agenda of the BBC and if they do not they are excluded from sharing their journalism or other opportunities within the organisation. However, Alia, a former senior member of staff, pointed out that some younger British Asian journalists lack knowledge pertaining to British Asian communities:

There are people working at the Asian Network who do not know the Asian community because they haven't lived in it. They probably live in a very westernised household then moved on to university and then got into their job. (Former Senior Member of Staff, Alia, 2015)

The term ‘westernised’ is used to refer to households where perhaps people do not speak often in a South Asian language or maintain cultural or religious traditions. The interviewee displayed a tacit disapproval of the BBC goal to focus on a younger audience and recruit corresponding staff at the expense of older British Asian staff. This reveals there is a mismatch between the existing producers and audience, or a “class asymmetry” (Hesmondhalgh, in Deery and Press 2017: 24).

The former Head of Programmes, Husain Husaini, explained he had purposively recruited a mix of people “from different backgrounds” for newsroom roles because they “know different parts of the audience”, and he restricted the number of staff who knew little about the audiences they would be serving. I asked Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel if the staff at the

BBC Asian Network are reflective of the listeners? He answered “it’s a tricky one it depends on your generation.” Strippel explained that staff aged above thirty were likely to have attended University because in the 1980s and early 1990s it was free and there were grants:

We have much more flow of staff than we used to, more interns coming in. I see a broad range of people from across society. The truth is as well; the Asian audience is quite working class focused in many ways. But it’s not just working class there’s middle class. One of the key factors around Asian audiences is that there has always been a real focus on higher education, it sits in the centre of the family. I see our staff group and it changes and shifts ethnically and geographically across the country. (Mark Strippel, 2015)

Broadly, Strippel believes the staff are reflective of the listener, because it is perhaps impossible for any media organisation to be entirely reflective of the groups that comprise the audience. Kamran on the other hand was concerned that a large proportion of staff recruited viewed the BBC Asian Network “as a stepping stone” into the BBC and consequently were not passionate about Asian music or entertainment:

I think you can probably count on one hand the number of people who actually should be working at the Asian Network. Who are dedicated, who know the scene and actually want to move it on. Anyone can produce a show but you would expect someone on a Bollywood show to have Bollywood knowledge. (Former Producer, Kamran, 2015)

Former BBC Asian Network Producer, Kamran also had concerns that some staff lack specialist knowledge of Bollywood or Asian music and have little connection to British Asian communities. He believes this hinders the contribution the station can make to the British Asian ‘scene’ musically, artistically, and in the representation of the culture back to the listener. Both Alia and Kamran feel it is problematic that some staff do not feel compelled to engage with Asian culture or music as part of their role. Alia explained that when staff admit they lack knowledge about Bollywood actors it is “considered funny” among staff in the newsroom, as opposed to an objective the journalist ought to improve. The lack of expertise of some of the staff recruited illustrates a wider issue noted by O’Brien *et al.*, (2016), that within the cultural industries, people who share similar middle class backgrounds, tastes and experiences tend to be hired for jobs, as opposed to those who are knowledgeable about Asian culture or Bollywood. It is possible that this expertise is not considered essential because this knowledge is not easily transferable to other roles in the BBC for example, 5 Live or BBC Breakfast. The BBC Asian Network is a relatively young radio station in comparison to the other nationals, and it is accepted as a point of entry into the BBC: “The Asian Network will always have a relatively inexperienced team, as people will want to move on to more prominent BBC services” (Gardem, 2004: 51). One possible explanation is that editors look for people with skills required to work, not just at the BBC Asian

Network, but also more widely across the BBC, especially in light of the diversity targets the organisation has set itself.

The management of the BBC Asian Network in 2018 is led by Controller, Ben Cooper, and Mark Strippel, Head of Programmes for BBC Asian Network and 1Xtra. Under Strippel there is the Head of News, Arif Ansari, and Editor, Khaliq Meer (Commissioning and Programmes). However, when the interviews took place in 2015–2016, the team was led by former Controller, Bob Shennan, Mark Strippel, Head of Programmes, and Head of News, Kevin Silverton, and a minority of interviewees outlined in their interviews it was problematic that the leadership team were non-ethnic: “I just don’t think they are ethnic enough” (Kamran, former producer, 2015). Kamran (*not his real name*), pointed out that it is important staff are knowledgeable about the cultures, Bollywood and religious festivals: “We still get people who say ‘What is Eid?’ Can you explain that to me?” Furthermore, Kamran outlined that senior staff at Radio 2 and 1Xtra are superior in terms of their skills:

The knowledge that they have of their genre of music is incredible. They inspire you, they push you and tell you that’s not right. So you want that bit of guidance. But the knowledge is lacking at the BBC Asian Network. (Former Producer, Kamran, 2015)

This is a revealing insight into the culture within a station that has historically been accused by DCMS of having lower editorial standards that “do not always match the audience’s expectations of the BBC” (Gardem, 2004: 47). Kamran argued in his interview that if the management were from ethnic backgrounds and possessed what Riaan described as “instinctive” knowledge of the Asian communities, then perhaps there would be greater editorial guidance and direction. The underlying suggestion is that staff are not pushed or challenged.

Joy, a daytime producer, acknowledged BBC Asian Network staff are not reflective of the listeners because “our audiences do not have lives like the many people who work at the Asian Network. The audience are in a totally different world.” She is alluding here to differences in wealth and social class between the staff and listeners. However, Joy further elaborated that because staff are professional, they should remember the audience is different. In contrast, daytime producer, Bela (*not her real name*), outlined that because staff at the BBC Asian Network “don’t have that higher education we’re still very connected to the community”, although she was unsure if this rhetoric applied universally across the UK or just to Birmingham specifically, where the interviewee worked.

Mark Strippel, Head of Programmes, explained new journalists need “the right level of



cultural insight and experience” and “demonstrate cultural awareness”, it was unclear during the interview if cultural awareness is more important than experience of broadcasting. The former Head of News, Kevin Silverton, explained it is imperative that people from diverse backgrounds are recruited so “that their voice is heard” and “their understanding of the issues is heard.” Silverton acknowledged that some communities are not sufficiently served: “The Bangladeshi community don’t get enough coverage and probably the Sri Lankans as well.” He believes that this can only be rectified with further work:

You need journalists from all kinds of backgrounds dotted around the BBC. The particular problem is within the higher levels – that’s where you don’t see the diversity because if you have diversity at that level it tends to then permeate downwards better. (Former Head of News, Kevin Silverton, 2015)

Statistics reveal that 10.3 per cent of staff employed in leadership roles across the BBC were from BAME backgrounds (BBC Annual Report, 2017/18). Ofcom reported in its first television diversity report, that “only the BBC employs people from an ethnic minority background in commissioning roles broadly in line with the UK population average, at 15%” (Ofcom, 2017a: 7). In BBC radio just seven per cent of BAME staff are employed within non-management roles; minority ethnic staff occupy nine per cent of middle management roles (within the BBC this is likely editorial posts for radio programmes), and eight per cent are in senior management (strategic decision-making roles running divisions, such as radio and education, news and current and affairs, content (TV), and design and engineering) (Ofcom, 2018a: 22). It is clear, that the number of minority staff employed within BBC radio falls significantly below the national average of fourteen per cent.

It’s part of the BBC’s remit to develop talent from within the Asian community. For me, the BBC hasn’t succeeded in developing talent from within the Asian community into senior managers. If the BBC can’t have managers – senior Asian managers on an Asian output – what chances are there of having senior management on the rest of the output? (Former Senior Journalist, Kamlesh Purohit, 2015)

Purohit’s interview took place in 2015, at a time when all the senior management roles at the BBC Asian Network were occupied by non-minority members of staff. The situation has since changed, however, Purohit makes an important point that an ethnic radio service does require people in senior roles who are from minority backgrounds, particularly because the BBC has set itself diversity targets.<sup>5</sup> Head of Programmes Mark Strippel explained it is important that the BBC does address diversity:

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<sup>5</sup> see BBC Diversity and Inclusion strategy; <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/diversity/pdf/diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2016.pdf>

For senior positions, you need to look at the professional diversity, BAME, and also working class, so that there are people who understand the temperature of Britain as a whole and not through a particular lens. I think there's work to do. BBC Asian Network, yes the Controller's not Asian, I am not Asian, Head of News isn't Asian but there are a lot of people who work at the Asian Network, a lot of senior people who work at the Asian Network and the overwhelming majority of those are Asian. (Mark Strippel, 2015)

What is particularly revealing about Strippel's perspective is that the staff recruited across the BBC should not view Britain through a "particular lens," he recommends there is a need for a broad perspective which is in keeping with the vision to articulate a general representation of British Asian identity. Staff who hold broad or non-Eurocentric, non-middleclass views, may also have the ability to challenge hegemonic norms and conventions, suggesting Strippel is keen to test institutional views (Shohat and Stam, 2014; Creeber, 2004). In addition, I suggest because Strippel is from a working class background and occupies a senior role within the organisation he is perhaps more keen to widen participation across the BBC. Creeber (2004) has argued that the BBC has played a significant role in "conceiving and cementing notions of Britishness" as a way to showcase cohesion, at the expense of minority communities and the working classes. I suggest that this is also evident at the BBC Asian Network. Mya (*not her real name*), a news reporter at the BBC Asian Network, posed the idea that change can only cascade throughout the organisation when "you have black and Asian people actually in senior positions" where decisions are made – "that's when you are going to see a real difference." One problem she highlighted was minority ethnic staff appointed into senior roles tend to reflect the status-quo or the internal culture:

Those people often come from private education backgrounds. They have been to Oxford and Cambridge so you got people very similar to people who represent the hierarchy within the BBC coming from very similar upper class backgrounds. (Senior Reporter, Mya, 2015)

As outlined in Chapter 2, critics such as Mills contend that the BBC represents the establishment as opposed to the public, despite being mandated to serve in the interest of the public. There is an over-representation of Oxbridge within the BBC and people from middle class backgrounds (O'Brien *et al.*, 2016; Feenan 2017), causing a "class asymmetry" between media workers and the audience. This is problematic, because if the BBC is hiring people who represent the established hierarchy, this suggests that employees are unlikely to have the specialist cultural insight required to serve British Asian audiences in a meaningful way. Moreover, Mya acknowledged there is a trend of hiring "people who mirror themselves, somebody who reminds them of themselves and maybe shares the same values and shares the same skin colour", thus they are often white, middle class and male. Mya suggested that it is only possible to connect with diverse audiences through the recruitment of "people from those communities." Kaylon, a

former journalist, noted that although “great strides” have been made in hiring female Asian news presenters, those roles lack editorial decision making powers. Essentially, ethnic news presenters are recruited on television to allow the BBC to visibly demonstrate it is a diverse employer and is reflecting UK society. Saha (2018: 109) suggests that the BBC has embraced an accommodating stance that emphasises integration and social cohesion but critically the organisation ignores inequality and prejudice and instead focuses “on how diversity can contribute to innovation, efficiency and competition on the new knowledge economy.” In this manner Saha (2018) argues diversity has been commoditised by the broadcaster, and as such content about ethnic communities is only selected for broadcast if it is likely to attract and secure a large audience. What is also interesting about the increased employment of minority staff is that the onus is implicitly placed upon them to improve the representation of diverse communities as opposed to the rest of the staff in the BBC. Nadine (*not her real name*), a former senior member of staff, argued: “I strongly, passionately believe that unless you are from that background you will not understand the story or do it in an authentic way.” She did admit that the BBC “is quite far behind” in terms of diversity initiatives and on-screen representation, which reflects other academic findings (see Cottle, 2000; Campion, 2005).

## Westernised

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The BBC as a public service broadcaster reproduces what can be described as a “singular national culture” (Kumar, 1975; Malik, 2013) embedded within the paradigm of the nation, and therefore, minority ethnic people are viewed as inherently ‘other’ and the media content reinforces this. During the in-depth interviews, the producers explained how they conceptualise British Asians and interestingly they also adopted a ‘nation’ framework to apply to all British Asians, (the nation being South Asia) and then terminology such as ‘westernised’, ‘integrated’ and ‘assimilated’ was applied to ‘other’ members who do not conform to their preconceived notions of Asian identity. Whilst academic research argues against homogenising ethnic communities (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1995; Madianou, in Nightingale, 2014), it is pertinent to note that within some communities there exists a practice of ‘us and them’. The phrase ‘westernised’ was used in a negative context as opposed to ‘integrated’ or ‘assimilated’ – two phrases that mirror terminology used by the government on race and immigration policy and legislation. ‘Integrated’ and ‘assimilated’ refers to people or communities who have, to a large extent, conformed and adopted the practices of their new host nation. This could mean wearing British clothing as opposed to traditional costume, or speaking English instead of the mother tongue. Other indicators of assimilation include employment and contribution to the economy

and society more widely. Sikh and Hindu communities are widely depicted by both the government and media to be assimilated, whereas the Bangladeshi community in the UK is not (Sian, 2011, cited in Malik, 2012). However, Sikhs and Hindus also remain distinctive because they retain cultural practices that are often showcased in positive tropes, i.e. “saris and samosas”.

We have Asian people working here who do not consume Asian entertainment, who cannot speak an Asian language, who probably have Asian food once a month. We’ve also got people who are totally engrossed in that Asian world and probably watch a Bollywood movie twice a week. We’ve got a variety and somehow you’ve got to find a balance. (Former Senior Member of Staff, Alia, 2015)

This appears to be one of the causes of the internal division and tension within the staff at the radio station. Some staff are considered to be integrated or westernised because they do not consume Asian film or TV, whereas other staff are deeply involved and connected with Asian culture. Alia said that the station has to find a balance, but it is unclear if this can be achieved. Kamlesh Purohit noted the gap between the staff hired and the audience they serve:

A number of the journalists and producers who work at the Asian Network are people born in this country and they are mainstream in their outlook. They are not necessarily watching Bollywood movies and intimately in touch with Asian culture. Whereas the audiences are very different, particularly the older audiences. (Former Senior Journalist, Kamlesh Purohit, 2015)

The phrase ‘mainstream’ is used here in the same context as ‘assimilated’, ‘integrated’ and ‘westernised’. Purohit argues that some staff are not linked to their respective Asian cultures and that this is apparent in the work they produce. Purohit’s views replicate Alia’s and Kamran’s concerns, that a number of staff do not have the required knowledge or expertise about issues that are relevant to the Asian listeners. It was assumed by most of the interviewees that the audience is connected to British Asian music, their culture or faith, and Bollywood, and want news and information about British Asian communities. What is interesting is that Purohit’s prime concern is the older audience as opposed to the young audience that the BBC is aggressively seeking. His perspective is emblematic of the rift among the team: the older staff appear to want to focus on the needs of the heritage or older listener, whilst the younger staff, third and fourth-generation British Asians, who may not consume Asian music or Bollywood regularly are able to chase the young listener as directed by the BBC with a version of identity that is positive and accepts assimilation and integration. Saha (2018) has acknowledged this version of diversity eludes engagement with disadvantage or inequality which the older staff may have experienced and want to address.

Alia argued strongly in her interview that British Asian audiences “are losing the Asianness” and becoming “westernised and more integrated”, thus they no longer rely on their Asian culture or identity. Consequently, she stated there are only two options available for the BBC Asian Network: “to become more integrated and more mainstream” or “to get to know the Asian community, to inform and educate people.” The latter option appears to imply that the public service broadcaster ought to focus on the first and second-generation with information in South Asian languages. However, she acknowledged this option is not possible because internal and external pressures are forcing the BBC to demonstrate it is distinctive, and the BBC is achieving this by focusing on third and fourth-generation British Asians. Purohit accepts the strategy but questions the purpose of the BBC Asian Network:

I think most Asian youngsters are quite white in their interests, they follow mainstream music, they watch Hollywood movies, follow football and sport. I am not sure that younger audiences need an Asian Network. (Former Senior Journalist, Kamlesh Purohit, 2015)

The reference to ‘white’ can be considered contentious, because he appears to suggest that it is regrettable that people are rejecting Asian music, arts and culture in favour of Hollywood and football. Both Purohit and Alia seem to view British Asians as only belonging to two distinct groups: one that remains deeply connected to their culture and the other who are Asian in terms of their ethnic background only, because they are assimilated. Their views fail to take into account any variations or nuances to a person’s identity: “They are Asian in race, but they have no links with the Asian Network” (former senior member of staff, Alia, 2015). This is a strongly pessimistic stance about British Asian people and does beg the question if this person is in the right job. In contrast, Riaan takes a different approach:

Although they are British they also have other parts which makes them who they are [...] so a British Asian girl who is 25 years old, although she watches EastEnders and consumes Rhianna and mainstream pop music, she also has an appetite for Bollywood because that is part of her culture. There is no harm in us nourishing that bit of culture. (Producer, Riaan, 2015)

Riaan’s perspective is that the listener is British first and foremost and this does not seem to threaten him. He accepts that being Asian is one aspect of someone’s identity and the station’s role is to nurture Asian culture and maintain it for the listeners who are interested in it. Simultaneously, as a producer, he recognises the listeners have interests that are external to their Asian background and they are interested in British TV, music, arts and news and current affairs because they engage with British culture. Riaan’s approach recognises that British Asians occupy a space in the UK that is unique to their experiences and he recognises that identity is complex, and that not all British Asians identify exclusively with a so-called ‘homeland’ because,

over generations, the host nation is the homeland. This is the perspective embraced by the BBC: it encourages a mainstream dissemination of young British Asian identity that I suggest, resonates with middle class upwardly mobile British Asians in line with the internal culture of the BBC which then marginalises to an extent, the experiences of the working class British Asian listener. Strippel's perspective of the British Asian audience is class-centric he outlined that the "Asian audience is quite working class-focused in many ways", and moreover, the staff are reflective of the audience in terms of their "social backgrounds". However, I suggest that the staff are not that reflective, because they are from largely middle class backgrounds, in keeping the normative recruitment practices within the BBC (Creeber, 2004; O'Brien *et al.*, 2016)

### Gatekeeping: British Asian communities versus Islamic stories

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In theory, ethnic media workers have greater autonomy to craft alternative representations of minority communities due to their specialist knowledge; however, because the Asian Network is part of the BBC, this poses some complex problems and tensions for ethnic staff employed by the organisation. Banks (2007) has argued that cultural workers are forced to respond as employees to internal frameworks and power structures and compromise their standards, because the creative industries have become increasingly commoditised. It is a view supported by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) who similarly, suggest the producer is forced to make compromises in order to create material that attracts the largest possible audience. In this way Saha (2018) argues minority ethnic producers contribute to the sustenance of 'difference' by complying with hierarchical conventions. This section of the study examines the barriers ethnic staff from the BBC Asian Network face when pitching their material to the wider BBC, and demonstrates that gatekeeping systems across the BBC encourage the reproduction of difference. Ethnic journalists are pressured by BBC Asian Network editors to share their original content across the organisation; those who are successful are likely to be praised, promoted and perhaps move to other prestigious programmes in the BBC. Thus, there is an underlying pressure upon staff – the management encourage the sharing of journalism in order to demonstrate the pivotal role the station plays in the BBC to reflect minority audiences, but on the other hand, a journalist's performance is measured against the quantity of their shared stories. Through in-depth interviews with the news journalists, it emerged that news content about British Muslim communities is more likely to be commissioned by the wider BBC over stories about the other Asian communities.

The former Controller, Bob Shennan, described the act of sharing news stories from the BBC Asian Network as a “pipeline”, a visual illustration of the BBC Asian Network becoming a conduit for original content about British Asians for other BBC outlets. Kevin Silverton, former Head of News, outlined that the wider BBC “trust[s]” the station and that the journalists and presenters are used by other programmes to “explain and illuminate” as the expert voice on diversity issues. He also argued that the BBC has a better “understanding” of diversity and therefore see the value in a wider selection of stories, for example “a story about Ramadan or interfaith marriage, that they actually have their worth as well,” suggesting that historically such issues were not considered worthy or interesting. Shennan described this process as one that resulted in British Asian content being “a little bit more accessible and intelligible.” Clearly, if a story is delivered across a range of BBC platforms it will reach a larger audience, but there is an underlying suggestion that Asian specific material is difficult to comprehend in contrast to other content. Increasingly Muslim-related stories are selected because terror, Islam and stories about Muslim communities have become part of the mainstream global news agenda (Gerhards and Schafer, 2014). Abbas (2001: 254) has argued that the media depict Muslims “as threats to society, as ‘fundamentalists’, as aliens; rarely if at all, highlighting real and distinct patterns of racial and ethnic disadvantage”, thus, the focus is on difference or strangeness and not inequality of opportunity. The BBC Asian Network ought to have a pivotal role in portraying the British Muslim community through a unique ‘British Asian’ lens, but former News Editor, Kevin Silverton, explained because the mainstream agenda on Islam dominates the media, the BBC Asian Network also follows this convention. Some of the reporters explained they are compelled to cover Muslim stories because the rest of the BBC and the competition will do so regardless. Nadine, a former senior member of staff at the Asian Network, pointed out that in order for journalists to “hold people to account” it is impossible to “ignore” Islamic stories. What is revealing is that Nadine felt the need to justify her professional standards and practices ahead of the notion of representing the listeners. Reporters Safia and Mya, explained in order to do their jobs properly they feel they cannot shy away from Muslim stories in fear of offending the audience:

What happened in Bradford and Dewsbury where the mothers took their children to Syria. That is a massive news story. Something that affects our community. I think it would be irresponsible for us not to report that story. I know some Muslims would turn around and say you are always portraying the Muslim community in a bad way but the stories we cover have to reflect what is going on in the communities and we don’t just cover negative stories all the time. We do try to make an effort to cover positive stories but it is a two-way process and I do think sometimes people forget the onus is also on them to communicate with us. (Reporter, Mya, 2015)

Mya illustrates her journalistic integrity in this quote, arguing it would be “irresponsible” for the BBC Asian Network to not cover stories about the British Asian community. What is pertinent here is the repeated use of the term “us” and the fact that Mya explicitly places herself within the community, by using the term “our” and, also simultaneously distances herself from the criticism about the Muslim communities, taking refuge behind the guise of professional journalism standards and suggesting that the stories ought to “reflect” what is taking place. The concept of a two-way process is interesting because the reporter pointed out that the onus is on the communities who shy away from the negative media coverage to offer stories in order to improve their representations. She appears to suggest that staff actively try to produce a wide range of news stories, including positive one but are reliant upon the communities to achieve this. Mya also admitted she struggles to convince Muslim contributors to participate in stories because they are “very wary of the media” and consequently potential contributors decline to participate because they believe the “BBC has an agenda and that the BBC is biased”:

Many people have come up to me and say “Does someone tell you what to say?” Or “Are your pieces vetted?”. They are actually quite surprised when I tell them that what you hear on-air is my work. I think this perception is perhaps created because they believe their views should be given complete airtime and I have to explain to people that we have to be unbiased and objective. (Senior Reporter, Mya, 2015)

This demonstrates that some parts of the audience are unaware of the BBC’s values of impartiality, accuracy, balance and independence, and thus do not understand the work produced by BBC journalists. Although the BBC is expected to be objective, the literature assessed in this study has demonstrated that stories about minorities are frequently framed as problematic (Campion, 2005; Cottle, 2000; Malik, 2008; Titley, 2014), and by situating immigration and race within the framework of the ‘nation,’ masks racism and inequality in society (Barker, 1981; Polson and Kahle 2010; Virdee and McGreever, 2018). As a key cultural institution in the UK the BBC is positioned alongside the power elite and disseminates the government’s views on race and foreign policy, and this explicitly means Muslim audiences mistrust the broadcaster (Harb and Bessaiso, 2006). The Muslim community are framed in media content in terms of their ‘difference’, due to a “massive and calculatedly aggressive attack” on Arab and Muslim societies that emphasises “their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women’s rights” (Said 1995:16). Therefore, BBC Asian Network listeners complain that the station is also complicit in circulating negative depictions of Muslims:

Sometimes when we do [Muslim stories] people get offended, and say, “Why are you doing a Muslim story again? Why are you doing Islam again?”. (Senior Member of Staff, Alia, 2015)



The station is in a difficult position: it is part of the BBC and therefore some stories either tacitly or overtly adopt a Eurocentric lens, which naturally impacts how the British Asian communities respond to the BBC Asian Network. It is worth noting that the communities who fear the media do so because they have often been negatively portrayed (Abbas, 2001; Poole and Richardson, 2004; Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013).

Kamlesh Purohit, a former senior journalist, argued that the BBC has “formulaic” working practices specifically with reference to content about diverse communities, because the coverage disproportionally focuses upon “radicalisation and forced marriages” at the expense of stories about the other British Asian communities. Safia concurred with Purohit; she explained that despite pitching a range of British Asian content, her stories about the Muslim communities are more successful because “there is a lot of appetite in the BBC for Muslim stories.” Alia explained that these stories are familiar to commissioners: “Forced marriages are a stereotype, honour killings, terrorism, Islam, Muslim, those stories you don’t need to get people’s attention, their ears will pipe up.” Safia also acknowledged that “the negative stories sell more, if you put jihadism or Jihadi brides or radicalisation and Muslim in the same sentence, automatically it’s like light bulbs go and they want it.” BBC Asian Network journalists are aware that to enhance their career prospects they should pitch ideas concentrating on Muslim communities. In fact, according to former journalist Kaylon the staff discuss it among themselves “there’s a bit of talk at Asian Network that when there’s a Hindu story its harder to get that done.” Kaylon’s stance reinforces Saha’s (2018) argument that the media manages race and diversity through working and economic practices so that staff justify such representations as natural or logical. Journalist, Mithra (*not her real name*), explained the pressure within the BBC Asian Network to share stories is frustrating because “it’s hard to convince other editors what the story is because they *don’t get* [emphasised] South Asian stories. Or they don’t understand the value of the stories.” Mithra has found that the gatekeeping process within the BBC is difficult to circumvent because the commissioners fail to see, in her words, the “value” of a story due to their lack of knowledge and awareness about people who are not similar to them. Thus, stories that do not fit the expected norms of society are stereotyped as ‘other’, which tacitly suggests they are problematic. This means the stories shared from the BBC Asian Network are distinctly marked as ‘ethnic’ and Chow (Chow and Bowman, 2010: 35) has argued that the use of markers such as Chinese or Asian within research or news stories is a method “of differentiation” that allows the subject to be framed as “the other”.

Alia proposed that the problems with gatekeeping are due to the lack of cultural awareness on the part of producers and commissioners across the rest of the BBC: “They need

to widen their horizons and acknowledge that there is a wider audience out there” (former senior member of staff, Alia, 2015). Within the BBC, the commissioning of content from external production companies for programmes is a formal procedure intended to maintain the public service broadcaster’s values of quality, impartiality and balance. However, within radio news and programming, the person commissioning the story is not always an editor and is often an (inexperienced) producer seeking to fill space in programmes. The commissioners are the ‘gatekeepers’ who remain loyal to “conventions” that appear to be “common business sense”, in other words, ideas that are considered to be successful in attracting viewers or listeners, which means that the dominant negative framing on stories about race is often selected (Saha, 2018: 135). The producer’s personal experience, education and ethnicity is expected to inextricably influence the content they produce, therefore, contributing to the knowledge and beliefs circulated in the public sphere. However, because ethnic staff are constrained by gatekeeping and internal power systems, it means that they are also complicit in the reproduction of negative content pertaining to diverse communities. Alia explained that the ethnic journalists who succeed in getting commissioned are “convincing salesmen”, because they are able to navigate institutional norms, standards and meet external expectations, for example, societal and political. Sam, a former senior journalist, found the expectation to share their journalism creates a very pressured work environment:

It’s not simply saying “I’ve got this story; does anyone want it?” They have to trust your judgment about a story. They have to trust that your packages are going to sound right on their output because often you’re not offering bespoke packages, you’re having to tailor your work for a mass market. (Former Senior Journalist, Sam, 2015)

Sam demonstrates that, in addition to journalistic skills, staff at the BBC Asian Network need other soft employment skills to pitch their knowledge and specialism to non-ethnic commissioners and staff. Therefore, the notion of trust is central: if the commissioner is unaware or has no previous knowledge of a journalist, it is likely that the story will not be commissioned. If the journalist is known, they are also then judged on the quality of their previous work before they can be given the opportunity of producing another story. Therefore, if a journalist has made an error or mistake previously, this potentially limits the chances of the new pitch being commissioned. Furthermore, the stories that are selected are not crafted into two bespoke versions, one for the BBC Asian Network, and a mainstream version; instead, the BBC Asian Network often broadcasts the version of story framed by other programme editors to save time and money. There are two problems here: The Asian audience are more likely to disagree with the framing and language of a story pitched at mainstream audiences and may feel compelled to switch to alternative diasporic services, which are aimed exclusively at minority audiences. And second, minority ethnic staff are forced to structure the content

according to the desires of other editors in order to broadcast their work, thus, if they fail to conform this can have a detrimental impact on their career prospects. Sam suggested that ethnic journalists do face problems in getting promoted and proposed the “reputation” of the station “isn’t necessarily where it should be at even though we’ve got all those connections, and I think we’ve got to work harder at trying to develop that reputation.” Purhoit underlined his frustration that within the BBC “people see you as somebody who is Asian rather than somebody who is who is a good broadcaster.” Purhoit’s point links to the assumption made by the media that ethnic staff will only want to craft content for and about minority audiences and not have other interests.

What underlies this discussion of sharing journalism is that the ethnic staff are judged by other BBC staff and have to prove themselves to other BBC outlets in a manner that may not apply to staff working at Radio 4 or 5 Live. This suggests that the skillset of a BBC Asian Network journalist, or simply an ethnic journalist, is perhaps considered inferior to other journalists, or that working practices in the BBC hinder the development of people’s career prospects.

## Conclusion

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This chapter has demonstrated some of the challenges that staff working at the BBC Asian Network face in sharing their original content with the wider BBC. The institution wants to demonstrate that it is willing to recruit greater numbers of minority staff, women and disabled members of staff to improve the overall content presented by the organisation. I have argued these initiatives are simplistic because they require minority staff to explicitly want to cover stories about minority communities, in a similar way to how, historically, female journalists were expected to cover ‘women’s issues’ (Chambers, Stein and Fleming, 2004). There is a contradiction in terms of the skills potential journalists are required to possess, and I suggest that specialist cultural knowledge appears to be secondary to journalism and broadcasting skills, meaning the staff hired, can lack knowledge about the Asian communities, Asian music or Bollywood, and yet work on an ethnic-specific service. Minority ethnic staff appear to have to prove their professional credentials regularly and are undermined within the organisation because they get limited opportunities to cover national news stories (particularly terror related) for other parts of the BBC, despite their specialist knowledge (more in Chapter 7)

The goal of the BBC Asian Network is to provide an enhanced representation of British Asian listeners. The in-depth interviews with staff demonstrate they continue to face similar issues outlined by Cottle’s (1997) study; dealing with institutional gatekeepers and

commissioners and navigating between the political position on immigration and race and audience expectations. The interviews gathered for this research therefore, provide an insight into the professional and production environment within the BBC Asian Network.

Within the contemporary BBC, minority ethnic staff tend to be clustered in producer and journalism roles with fewer minority staff members in the decision-making roles (BBC Annual Report, 2017/18). This suggests that “class asymmetry” is evident in the media; the experiences of the people commissioning stories in the BBC do not coincide with the experiences of the audiences consuming the content. In the specific case of the BBC Asian Network, it is still in the process of transitioning from an audience that traditionally was working class, first and second-generation British Asian, to middle class, third and fourth-generation British Asian. Some may like the ‘marketised’ or mainstream representations of their community whilst others may not. The BBC appears to tackle diversity by implicitly promoting integrationist policies in line with its paternalistic outlook. Therefore, it is unsurprising that some British Asians do not listen to the output. Editors across the BBC require cultural awareness to select from an array of diverse news stories offered by BBC Asian Network staff that will allow more robust representations of diverse communities. The recruitment of editors or people in decision-making roles from minority backgrounds also needs to take place so that change can be more easily channelled through the organisation.

## Chapter 7 – Giving Listeners a Voice

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The previous chapter outlined how working practices, internal power frameworks and media regulation has encouraged producers, including minority ethnic staff, to reproduce content that reinforces ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’. This chapter looks at the politics of representation, and considers how the representation of British Asian listeners is shaped by societal attitudes, internal BBC perspectives and other discourses and methods that shape the behaviour of the station (Freedman, 2008). In addition, there is an evaluation of the contribution made by BBC Asian Network to the wider mixed media ecology. In particular, I examine how the target audience is imagined by staff and question if this mode of address restricts creativity and innovation at the BBC Asian Network? I propose that the BBC’s only ethnic-specific outlet for UK audiences is, in fact, constrained by the BBC because staff are directed to produce material within a public service remit. I refer to Hall’s (1996: 471) conceptualisation of ethnic minority staff as being the “segregated visibility,” present within the BBC but unable to influence editorial decisions, and argue that the views of minority journalists are ignored in favour of BBC working methods.

### Class Asymmetry

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Each BBC station has a service licence that sets out for audiences and relevant stakeholders a framework of what the service ought to provide. The stations are then expected to meet the obligations; therefore, the remit is essentially a metric against which a radio station’s performance is measured. The BBC Asian Network’s remit<sup>6</sup> was updated in August 2016, with a recommendation that the content “stimulate, support and reflect the diversity of cultural activity” in the UK, whilst also addressing “the needs and interests of a wide range of Asian communities in the UK” (BBC Trust 2016b: 5) thus, explicitly acknowledging that Asian communities are diverse. Evidence from academic research and the interviews gathered for this study indicate that broadcasters are attempting to make diversity more appealing to non-ethnic audiences (Malik, 2013; Saha, 2018). The BBC Asian Network schedule has adopted a ‘broad’ approach to the notion of being ‘Asian’ in terms of the music, programme content and the issues covered on-air, in order to appeal to all the groups that comprise the British Asian UK communities (Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani and Sri Lankan). Head of Programmes, Mark

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<sup>6</sup> The BBC Trust formerly set the remit until the organisation ceased to exist in the new BBC structure. The station remits are far more detailed in contrast to the Ofcom Operating Licence, which covers all BBC services. It can be found here [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/135187/Operating-licence-for-the-BBCs-UK-Public-Services.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/135187/Operating-licence-for-the-BBCs-UK-Public-Services.pdf)

Strippel, explained why this strategy has been adopted:

There is massive commonality between people of Punjabi origin, Gujarati origin, and Pakistani origin. Is there a commonality between those audiences and ties that bind? Yes, there are ties that bind in a cultural context in a faith approach and on discussions around race and immigration [...] there is a massive shared experience whilst there are differences. (Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, 2015)

Strippel's perspective focuses on what the audience share as opposed to what separates them. It is inclusive and optimistic. This is the tone promoted on-air by the BBC Asian Network, it explicitly acknowledges that the 'British Asian' experience is unique to those who belong to any of the groups within the label and this unites them because it is a "tie". Wilson and Gutierrez (1995: 42) have argued that, in order to find large audiences, the media seek shared goals: "common themes, ideas, interest areas that would attract and not offend the mass audience," and this method appears to be utilised by the BBC. The tone used on-air by the BBC Asian Network aims to unite disparate Asian communities who differ due to language and faith. According to Clark *et al.* (1990: 170) the Asian community is not "a concrete community" and instead they are "dialectically rather than absolutely defined," this recognises to some extent the history of South Asia and the enduring impact of Partition in 1947. Strippel explained that "the truth is we serve a very broad audience." There are some problems with this approach: notably, the Muslim community is comprised of a number of nationalities; not all of them are British Asian and some members of the Indian community, Sikhs and Hindus, purposely distance themselves from the Muslim community to distinguish themselves from the dominant negative agenda on terrorism (BBC, 2012).

Strippel also acknowledged that it is important that BBC Asian Network listeners are not stereotyped as only being interested in "Bhangra or Bollywood" music, because, he pointed out, they consume arts, culture and British music. Consequently, the station tries "connecting with mainstream media" by playing music from the UK Top 40 and discussing mainstream programmes such as *The Apprentice* or *EastEnders* alongside Indian and Pakistani dramas broadcast on satellite television (Joy, Producer, 2015). According to Joy, a daytime producer, the role of the station is to showcase the "best of the different Asian cultures in the UK, which breathe life into British culture." This is achieved by playing South Asian music and by crafting programmes that include "cultural references" and a "deeper understanding" of the British Asian history and heritage, which is not found in the mainstream content (Joy, producer, 2015).

Through in-depth interviews, a huge proportion of journalists explained how they reflect and represent all British Asian communities – a group comprised of new South Asian immigrants,

traditional working class Bangladeshi families in Tower Hamlets, the working class or unemployed Pakistani families in Birmingham and the North of England, British Asian students from all Asian backgrounds, working class Indian families in the Midlands, and the more affluent middle class working in professional jobs in London. Alia, a former senior member of staff, explained it was easier to visualise the audience in the early days of the station: “I knew the Asian community in Leicester, I kind of lived it.” However, in 2018, this is no longer the case, and it became evident during the interview that she has struggled with the evolving identity of British Asians in the UK. I suggest this is because the interviewee is either first or second-generation British Asian and remains tangibly connected with her country of origin, language, culture and, simultaneously, disconnected from the young listener the station is targeting. Joy, a producer, explained that the mission of the BBC Asian Network is to present the contemporary British Asian lifestyle to listeners, as opposed to the historical experiences of first and second-generation British Asians who immigrated to the UK. It is apparent there are some contradictions with the aims of the station, the audience it is seeking and the music played.

There are some notable differences between the staff who work at the BBC Asian Network and the listeners, something that is replicated in other parts of the BBC, for example Radio 1 and BBC 1. The staff are members of upwardly mobile communities, integrated into society, often attended university, and some have specialist knowledge of arts and music and technical expertise. In contrast, the core audience is based in the Midlands and tend to be employed in skilled working class and lower middle working class (Eustace, 2016: 2). Some of the listeners have married partners from South Asian countries, which often means that English is the second language for their offspring. Thus, the listeners do not share the same ‘lived experience’ of being Asian and British as represented on-air by the BBC journalists and presenters. It is documented that people working in the creative industries tend to be educated to degree level and that the sector is dominated by people from privileged classes (Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013; O’Brien *et al.*, 2016; Thurman *et al.*, 2016). This is an issue across all of the media, but it is felt more deeply at the BBC Asian Network because the listeners are predominantly working class, in contrast to other BBC services which serve mostly middle class audiences. Former senior journalist, Sam, acknowledged that “most of the presenters we have are reflective of, I would say, the more upwardly mobile aspiring British Asians in London. I still think we’re not representing Bangladeshis.” This is a particularly revealing observation that the on-air team are distinct from the listeners they serve. Joy, a daytime producer, defended her colleagues, stating that they have specialist knowledge of the ‘lived experiences’ of British Asians because most are familiar with their family’s journey to the UK

People at the Asian Network know more than people in other parts of the BBC [about working classes] coming from working class immigrant backgrounds. And that means hard work, struggle, isolation and grit. I think a lot of people have that at the Asian network and have that in mind when they produce programs. (Programme Producer, Joy, 2015)

Joy suggests that the journalists and presenters are empathetic of the immigrant journey and thus, have an inherent understanding of the issues pertinent to the communities they serve, even if they no longer live among those communities. Strippel explained that the BBC Asian Network, helps the BBC to serve a number of groups that the broadcaster struggles to engage:

Youth is a massive challenge. BAME audiences are traditionally underserved, dislocated, disconnected sometimes from BBC output. C2DE [working class] not a term I like necessarily, but it is way the BBC refer to it. It certainly is my background; I am from a working class background. BBC Asian Network serves all three group. But we focus more on the younger demographic that is our core mission. (Mark Strippel, Head of Programmes, 2016)

It is interesting that the management focus explicitly upon on the age of the listener, as opposed to class or ethnic background, two factors that contribute to disadvantage. Furthermore, Strippel also believes that the journalists and presenters working at the BBC Asian Network are reflective of the listeners specifically in terms of their “social backgrounds” but not necessarily in terms of experience or knowledge. His view contradicts, Joy and Sam’s perspectives that the staff are not reflective. I suggest the internal working practices limit how producers articulate British Asian identity because of the emphasis upon young listener and because the BBC is associated espousing white middle class values and recruiting corresponding employees (Feenan, 2017; Creeber, 2004; Ofcom, 2018c). This move means that minorities tend to be framed as “backward” and “traditional,” particularly within the news content produced by the BBC Asian Network and thus, this tacitly normalises hierarchal power relations which were generated through the processes of colonialism and imperialism (Shohat and Stam, 2014: 2). Former programme producer, Kamran, outlined that the bigger problem is that the staff, presenters and producers are “not evolving” and instead remain:

In the Goodness Gracious Me era. Which was funny at the time but we have moved on. As a producer you have to keep evolving, and follow different types of people and see what the next generation what they are tapping into. (Kamran, former producer, 2016)

In his opinion a proportion of the staff are unable to connect with the young listener because they remain focused upon the past. The different perspectives offered by the interviewees reveal a divide among the staff and as such, the manner in which content is produced and targeted at the listener is best described as haphazard.



## The role of the BBC Asian Network

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Although there is a greater impetus upon diversity across the BBC, the different strategies can cause programmes and departments to clash and create tension between teams. It also means that the demand for Asian-specific news within the BBC is greater than ever, as the public service broadcaster tries to demonstrate it serves all audiences. Hence, the BBC Asian Network staff are not alone in sourcing diverse stories. Silverton admitted there is a danger that the same ethnic interviewees are used across the various outlets because “it’s symptomatic of the mainstream doing more stories but not always having the depth of understanding.” Furthermore, he suggested the significance and impact of the BBC Asian Network has been the fact the production staff have “brought to the fore lots of issues that needed to be discussed.” Although commercial Asian stations also offer phone-in programmes, it is likely that news and debate from the BBC is valued highly because it is from a public service broadcaster recognised for upholding high standards on objectivity and impartiality. Christians *et al.* (2009: 84) suggest in theory journalists are expected to be objective, accurate and fair and base content upon sources of truth, as mandated by Ofcom and BBC Producers’ Guidelines, however, these regulations alone do not guarantee the truthfulness of the news. Often, the news is accurate and fair but fails to illustrate the real underlying issues in society as indicated in Chapter 2. The journalists interviewed firmly believe they showcase and discuss issues relevant to and affecting the Asian communities and, subsequently, that the BBC Asian Network is “bigger” than just a radio station because it essentially provides a civic service: “We are adding more to the BBC. That seems to be the major part of the argument: the comedy, news, the debates. That’s got to be something that’s overall beneficial to the BBC” (former Head of News, Kevin Silverton, 2015). Mark Strippel said it is important the BBC does “serve all audiences”:

[...] to serve them meaningfully. Reflect their lives. British Asians are an audience that comprises seventy per cent of London, the whole of London. 1 in 10 of people aged between 18 and 34 is Asian, it is a growing audience, you can’t ignore that audience. (Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, 2015)

In his opinion, the BBC Asian Network, via news, debate, music and entertainment, reflects the lifestyle of British Asians in a meaningful manner, and engages with the 18 to 34-year-old listener in a way no other UK-based media does. The prominence of the British Asian youth audience has been instrumental in the transformation of the tone, music and content of the BBC Asian Network over the past eighteen years. There is no longer an emphasis on integrating or educating British Asians in keeping with the BBC’s integrationist agenda in 1970s and 1980s.

Instead, the goal is to reflect British Asian communities and acknowledge how they draw on two cultures simultaneously. This means, according to the former Controller, Bob Shennan “Britishness” is the common denominator for the listeners and not a national or religious identity. The former Controller’s views are not unusual and in fact epitomise the BBC rationale that minority programming should be included in the main offer, because British Asians or Afro-Caribbean audiences are British first and foremost. This viewpoint does however, ignore new immigrant groups in the UK.

[...] I think because we are distinctive, and quite unique. There’s no other radio station that caters for this many different communities and there’s probably over four million South Asians in the UK. So we are catering for a large chunk of that so-called minority. (Presenter, Noreen Khan, 2015)

One key change at the BBC Asian Network is that some of the presenters now also work on other BBC outputs: “Previously our presenters were very ghettoised on the Asian Network” (producer, Bela, 2015). Yasser, a new music presenter on the BBC Asian Network has a show on Radio 1, as did Bobby Friction with Nihal Arthanayake, who is now a BBC 5 Live presenter. The term ‘ghettoised’ was used by a couple of the interviewees to refer to the position of the station and its staff within the BBC. The inferred meaning of the term suggests that the BBC Asian Network is treated differently within the institution due to the listeners it targets and the music and language differences. The use of the term implies inferiority in term of programme content or the skills required to make them. The same terminology was used by BBC ethnic staff in Cottle’s study of television producers in 1997, who indicated in their interviews that working on minority programmes was consider to be a ‘ghettoised’ activity. Interestingly, Cottle also found that ethnic staff interviewed for this study held a reverential attitude to ‘mainstream producers’ (1997: 41) presumably because they aspired to as successful. Historically, the BBC Asian Network was isolated within the framework of the organisation because it was, and remains different, to the other national radio stations such as 6 Music, 1Xtra, Radios 1, 2 and 4, and 5 Live. Former Controller, Bob Shennan, explained that the Asian Network is acknowledged within the BBC as being “an entry point to an audience, many of whom would not consume anything from the BBC was it not for the Asian Network.” The BBC has noted that it struggles “to appeal to less well-off elements of the population” (former Controller, Shennan, 2015) and theoretically, this should make the station “an important tool” to connect with licence fee payers. Internal BBC research reveals that British Asians come to the BBC through the BBC Asian Network and not vice versa, and this is significant because research has found that public service viewing is lower among minority groups compared to the general population (BBC, Service Review 2015: 61, Ofcom, 2013: 19).

The Head of programmes, highlighted that the station plays an important role in “creating citizenship”, a goal in keeping with BBC public service values, but as an ethnic service this goal has more impetus because it aims to integrate migrant communities:

We reflect the lives of our audience. We do that in a way that isn't in a silo, it's not an unhealthy cluster of specialism in the BBC that stops anyone from covering it. We actively promote links with the rest of the BBC. (Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, 2015)

Strippel appears to defend the station from accusation that it operates as a single entity within the BBC and perhaps does not share information or resources. This perspective offers an insight into how some non BBC Asian Network staff view the station - a resource to utilise - but significantly they perhaps do not share their resources or information in return with the BBC Asian Network. Some of the interviewees suggested that BBC departments prefer to cover ethnic or British Asian stories using their own staff. Whereas, the Asian Network producers believe they should have greater opportunities to be at the forefront of reporting diversity for the BBC. The emphasis on actively promoting links has led to an increase in the number of joint ventures with other parts of the BBC; for example, the 2017 and 2018 Asian Network Live Concerts were broadcast on the Asian Network and simulcast on Radio 1 and 1Xtra, an unusual move whereby two mainstream stations featured non-English music for three hours on a Friday or Saturday night. Bob Shennan, the former Controller, explained these types of events allow the station to “become mainstream”, and by working in this way, “we are trying to fight our way out of this small niche as a sort of afterthought radio station,” this suggests he feels the station is not at the forefront of the wider BBC. He also outlined that the BBC Asian Network is focusing particularly on third-generation British Asians because “the service has to fit into the modern contemporary warp and weft of young British Asians lives rather than [be] a kind of service of news from home, which is where it began.” The reference to the term “home” is potentially contentious, because I question if third-generation British Asians refer to South Asia as ‘home’. I suggest this is how BBC senior management conceptualise British Asians – born in Britain but inherently aligned with other nations. This notion is problematic and contradictory, not least because the station tries to engage the listener based on their ‘Britishness’ as opposed to perceived links with other countries. During 2004 and 2009, when I worked as a reporter at the station, some news and presenter scripts contained references to “home” or “back home,” not all staff necessarily agreed with this. Another cause of division among the staff was over how names of places and South Asian names in the news were pronounced on-air. Thus, at the BBC Asian Network a number of staff members called for British Asian celebrities with anglicised names, such as then-England Cricketer, Monty Panesar, to be said with the correct South Asian

pronunciation, because they argue that the listener has an expectation that ethnic staff set an example. Reporter, Safia said “If we are not pronouncing the names properly, god help the rest of the BBC”.

## Working methods – enabling or constraining

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The BBC and BBC Asian Network use a broad and inclusive approach in order to attract the widest possible audience to the output, to justify the BBC’s relevance to all communities in the UK. Therefore, I propose that the licence fee is a form of governance for BBC staff and it influences how race and ethnicity is imagined and articulated by the BBC and the BBC Asian Network. Saha’s key argument in *Race and the Cultural Industries* (2018) is that staff adopt working conventions, rules and cultures, which then explains the “churn of historical constructions of otherness in terms of gender, class, sexuality” (Saha, 2018: 141). I want to apply Saha’s argument to understand and deconstruct the views of BBC journalists on the BBC’s internal working practices. The dominant consensus among the thirty interviewees was that the wider BBC lacks awareness about the distinctive communities they serve, and although most of the interviewees did not expect the Director-General to have a thorough knowledge of the Asian listener, they do want greater autonomy to serve their listener. The production staff believe their perspective is largely ignored in favour of institutional requirements and power frameworks. Anish Shaikh, a daytime producer, exemplified the key problem internally:

I sympathise with the BBC because I think the managers are trying to look at it from the point of view of that, if something works on 5 Live, it works on Radio 4, it works on Radio 2, but those audiences are not Asian. Asian radio has a different function altogether. (Producer, Anish Shaikh, 2015)

Shaikh is describing a process whereby working practices and strategies are imposed upon the station because they have proved successful elsewhere in the BBC. Shaikh believes the plans fail because BBC management are not comparing like for like: “They’re always trying to compare with the mainstream stations so that can be problematic”. He explained that in 2006 the style that was adopted by staff “very much focused on Radio 5.” At the time, Bob Shennan was the station Controller and, also Controller for 5 Live, a number of key assistant editorial posts were filled by 5 Live staff in an overt attempt to introduce new working practices at the BBC Asian Network to improve the editorial standards (see Gardem, 2004). At the time, the move caused some controversy because external BBC staff were placed into senior roles over existing predominantly ethnic journalists suggesting the minority journalists were not of a similar standard to mainstream staff or perhaps did not fit in with the expected norms of the

broadcaster. In addition, producers and reporter felt practices and procedures were imposed upon them.

Working conventions and practices exist in organisations to limit the unpredictability of markets, and the creative industries are particularly unstable because the media anticipate what audiences would like or use market research to aid commissioning. They can also encourage an institutional standard, and because media content is widely considered to offer a symbolic representation of political, cultural and social relations, and as a result, the media is subjected to forms of interventions through policies, control (overt and indirect) and surveillance due to the perceived influence it has within society (Freedman, 2008). According to Saha (2018: 126) the over riding need for listeners influences how race is articulated, he describes it as “[unconscious] racial bias wrapped up as common business sense shapes the production of representations of race.” As a result, there is an overemphasis upon framing ethnicity and culture in ways considered by the majority staff to be logical. In this manner, race and ethnicity is effectively commoditised by the media and packaged and sold to audiences in the form of news or entertainment to attract viewing figures. At an ethnic specific service, such practices can result in minority communities turning elsewhere.

The BBC Producers’ Guidelines<sup>7</sup> provide guidance for BBC staff and the Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, explained that under his leadership staff are encouraged to embrace risk:

I think there are most definitely general ways of working at the BBC. The formulaic way of working isn’t necessarily the best way of working. Obviously, we have editorial guidelines. They direct and guide but there is a lot of flex within those guidelines. I don’t feel overly restricted and I don’t interfere with my teams. Does that constrain us, our ability to connect with Asian audiences? No, I don’t think so. I don’t think our audiences are different in how they consume media, where they want to consume their media or their engagement with the radio station from any other audience. I think you can read too much into the idea that the Asian audience is separate. (Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, 2015)

Strippel acknowledges the existence of a specific and preferred way of working. Other academics have described it as ‘conservative’ and risk averse (Campion, 1995; Cottle, 1998; Malik, 2013). He also stated he does not interfere with staff, and I connect this to Kamran’s assertion in Chapter 6, that editors at other stations push and guide staff. Strippel believes his teams are best placed to make editorial decisions and he is there to support them. Strippel also

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<sup>7</sup> the guidelines set the parameters within which BBC staff can take risk and innovate in programme making whilst protecting the reputation of the BBC. They apply across the institute regardless of platform. Avail here <https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines>

does not perceive the British Asian audience as being inherently different to mainstream listeners – the antithesis of Shaikh’s perspective. He does, however, recognise that all audiences, including British Asians, have changed how they consume media. Ishani, a former senior member of staff, also concurred with Strippel and pointed out that:

Asians consume radio in the same way, [as mainstream listeners], they don’t just permanently keep their dial on the Asian Network. So its not about just targeting the station for the whole of the community all the time, you accept they listen to the radio in the same way pretty much as everybody else does. (Ishani, former senior member of staff 2015)

All radio stations face similar challenges, listening practices have changed particularly, because radio is accessed via a number of platforms and not just the traditional radio set (Lacey, 2013). The ‘friend of the family’ strategy accepted different groups of people listen to the station at different times of the day. However, the post 2012 ‘digital native strategy,’ only accepts that some young people do not listen to radio, thus, the station brand is shared digitally to entice them to engage with the brand online, in the hope they will listen to the station. The emphasis upon the younger demographic also means that staff are advised on who they can interview:

We always get told who to interview. They don’t like people who are too old. So when there are certain health stories that affect the older generation, they will always try and get you to interview their grandchildren, rather than the subject, because they feel that age range isn’t relevant. (Mithra, broadcast journalist, 2016)

What is interesting is that within the BBC Asian Network there are specific directives that ultimately steer and frame the news content for young listeners because the wider BBC and the Ofcom Operating Licence<sup>8</sup> demands some BBC stations appeal to younger audiences (Ofcom, 2017: 35). The emphasis upon a younger listener is also the source of the division between staff members. According to Shaikh, the target listener has been imposed upon him:

I think the BBC can say it’s consulted in a sense because if you have a one to one or group discussion, that’s a consultation and taking your view. I think what happened is two years ago we had an away day for the Asian Network staffers and about an equal amount of people who were not part of the BBC Asian Network. They were researchers, BBC managers and other BBC staff and they were all put on the table and a policy was formulated that the listeners need to be young. If it was just Asian Network staff, then it would have been a different outcome. (Producer, Anish Shaikh 2016)

A number of the staff interviewed indicated they disagree with the strategy to target a third or fourth generation young British Asian listener. Alia, a former senior member of staff, agrees with

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<sup>8</sup> available here [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/107072/bbc-operating-licence.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/107072/bbc-operating-licence.pdf)

Shaikh, “BBC Asian Network can’t go old. The BBC will not let it go old. Old people die! But I didn’t say that!” Whereas Shaikh feels that the organisation has manipulated staff and forced strategies upon the station, Alia, accepts that the BBC is in charge of steering the BBC Asian Network. Former senior journalist, Kamlesh Purohit also concurred with Alia, pointing out BBC commissioners and editors “have pre-formed ideas and pre-conceived kind of thoughts about what are the important stories for their output” and thus when they are pitched from the BBC Asian Network they influence and shape it so that it fits their agenda and viewpoint as opposed to the BBC Asian Network’s goals and listeners. Programme Editors are expected to implement a framework for the type of stories they will broadcast; this is usually done to make the content recognisable and distinctive from other programmes. However, Purohit has experienced instances where journalism from the BBC Asian Network is rejected because it does not meet the mainstream version of ‘Asian diversity’, thus Purohit’s experiences supports the notion that the service is constrained by the wider BBC.

This theme also emerged in the discussion in Chapter 6, which examined the need to ensure that the BBC hires people with the correct skillset for broadcasting and not necessarily a strong cultural insight. Former producer, Kamran, explained potential staff who have “knowledge of music, film, different genres of music, they don’t get a chance at the Asian Network because they don’t know the BBC way.” It is implied that staff need to be familiar with internal processes, methods and regulations because this allows an employee to fit into the internal culture of an organisation. This links to Mya’s point that people are often hired because they demonstrate they share the same values as the recruiters. Former senior journalist Sam, explained because the station is positioned as a resource for the wider BBC, it has enabled them to become “tapped into the rest of the BBC” in order to help them improve the wider BBCs representation of diversity. In addition, Nadine, a former senior member of staff at the BBC Asian Network, believes this has allowed staff from the station to take up roles around the organisation:

It feels like there was something established for programme makers, for talent, for senior managers, that they start at the BBC Asian Network and then they work their way through the BBC. (Former Senior Staff Member, Nadine, 2015)

A number of the interviewees who participated in this study now work elsewhere in the BBC. Nadine had recently left a post at the BBC Asian Network when she was interviewed, so was perhaps optimistic of the opportunities available to other staff. However, Sam also explained the wider BBC hinders the development of BBC Asian Network journalists because they do not want them to be “at the forefront of reporting” on terror or ethnic stories

You've got some very experienced journalists at the Asian Network who are willing to put themselves out there, and want the stories for themselves because they've put all the effort in. Often what happens is the nationals will take over and because they see the Asian Network as a resource pool, all they want really is our contacts and for us to make connections and not to be able to carry it on and push it forward and actually own it. (Former Senior Journalist, Sam, 2015)

In her interview, Sam discussed the Birmingham Trojan school story (circa 2014-15), claiming that when it became a mainstream story a number of the station's contacts felt "misrepresented" by the mainstream media. This is the crux of the problem: the wider BBC has promoted the BBC Asian Network as a resource or centre of specialist knowledge, whilst perhaps failing to advocate the ethnic journalists who work there and their unique skillset. These conditions have allowed a suspicion that perhaps ethnic journalists at the station are not up to the same standard as other BBC journalists. I suggest that minority ethnic journalists working at the BBC Asian Network are considered to be somehow inferior or less skilled to mainstream journalists, and this has a huge impact on their career prospects. This perception may also be applicable externally, in September 2018 the Crown Prosecution Service took the unusual step of charging the Head of News, Arif Ansari under the *Sexual Offences Act*, after a reporter named on-air a victim of the Rotherham sex abuse case, he was found not guilty in January 2019.<sup>9</sup> This supports the notion that minority staff are present but often in non-influential posts (Hall 1996; Wilson and Gutierrez, 1995). The media is hugely competitive and in the BBC, there exists a hierarchy of order, which means that important politicians are first heard on the Today programme ahead of 5 Live and BBC Asian Network. Journalists are also competitive and can be uncooperative with fellow colleagues in order to get the by-line or break the story. Thus, if BBC Asian Network journalists are expected to make the the initial contacts for a story but not actually cover it, this has a detrimental impact on their careers. Nadine outlined there is competition, "a mentality" within the BBC departments, as opposed to "complementing" each other.

We should be working together and being collaborative. It's a cultural thing really that sometimes you're competing with each other (Former Senior Staff Member, Nadine, 2015).

The lack of collaboration between BBC departments was also noted in Born's (2004) study of the BBC suggesting, this is a cultural issue unique to the BBC. However, recruitment and promotion are not the only areas affected by practices that seek to limit creativity: the music

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<sup>9</sup> The Crown Prosecution Service decided to charge the Arif Ansari instead of the BBC as a corporation.  
<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/bbc-asian-network-head-of-news-charged-under-sexual-offences-amendment-act-after-rotherham-sex-abuse-victim-named-on-air/>.



policies as dictated by the BBC may also limit the appeal of the station among the target audience. Former producer, Kamran, argued that the way the music is selected is too “scientific” because “everything seems to be a formula at the Asian Network.” Kamran deeply believes that the music is instrumental in attracting listeners and, if the station gets this wrong then the listener figures will decrease. He believes Bollywood music is restricted on the playlist in order to meet quotas set by the former BBC Trust for British Asian music. Kamran argued that Bollywood music is popular among the listeners, and failing to play it could be dangerous. On the other hand, the BBC appears to try to remain relevant to younger listeners by incorporating mainstream music into playlists in recognition that the listeners have interests that are inherently British and to be tastemaker for British Asian listeners (Hendy, 2000). Strippel believes that the station is best placed to serve the British Asian audience:

There were moments when the BBC tried to interact, engage and reflect our audience. But maybe didn't quite get it. It was clear to us the BBC didn't understand the audience in the way we would have liked. If we had been involved, we would have advised them differently. (Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, 2015)

Strippel is correct in pointing out that programmes, soaps and news content have too often relied upon the same voices or storylines and working with familiar pre-existing knowledge as opposed to innovating or taking risks, in order to offer stronger authentic representations.

Language in news reporting is another area where the BBC as an institution sets clear parameters for all departments, found within the Producer Guidelines, particularly with reference to the terms terrorist and Islamic terrorist. Gerhards and Schäfer's (2014: 16, 17) content analysis of CNN, Al Jazeera, the BBC and ARD's coverage of terror attacks reveals that the BBC and ARD are careful about “potential prejudice in their identification of the perpetrators”, “carefully choose their words” and “clearly distinguish between the perpetrators and other Muslims.” This still fails to prevent accusations that the BBC is biased, and as a result, the BBC Asian Network also receives complaints about the language used on-air. There was a recognition by the interviewees that the BBC brand requires staff to be careful with phrasing because it is a public service broadcaster funded by the public and as such staff are required to scrutinise what their scripts say and imply.

The former Programmes Editor, Husain Husaini, believes the BBC Asian Network plays a pivotal role in disseminating Asian-specific news in a “fair and open-minded” manner and is not “deliberately provocative”, and this allows the station to gain audience trust: “They may not like

what you are doing but may respect what you are doing.” Furthermore, Husaini explained when he worked as the news editor, there were:

[...] a lot of conversations about terminology, Islamist and Islamic and how you pronounce things to try and make things seem authentic. That’s quite hard but that’s the sort of stuff that makes your radio station fit in. (Former Head of Programmes, Husain Husaini, 2015)

A large proportion of the content crafted by the BBC Asian Network producers tackles issues such as terrorism, inequality and racism. Producers are careful about the terminology used within their scripts so that their listeners are not offended, whilst remaining within the parameters of Producer Guidelines, Ofcom and other media regulation. Broadcast journalist, Mithra, outlined during her interview that a story she produced was accused of racism by an external organisation because the phrase ‘white’ was used by the presenter to introduce the report. Mithra explained that the BBC Asian Network felt “justified” using the language because the content is explicitly for an Asian audience; however, the BBC lost the case. Therefore, staff are “mindful” of the phrasing, particularly at the lower pay scales, because journalists do not want to get into trouble. Editorial discussions take place regularly over the use of racist terminology used in legal cases. There are often warnings given to listeners if offensive language is used, so that journalists do not have to shy away from reporting sensitive issues.

The former Head of News Kevin Silverton also underlined in his interview that social media means that journalists need to take extra care, not just with language but also questioning, “Have we thought about all sides of this story?”. There is an underlying recognition that it is not always possible to get everything right, especially when some issues create a diversity of opinion. Silverton explained that journalism is not always about two sides or two viewpoints with reference to the Asian communities: “It’s about lots of different sides.” This is a point that the wider BBC does not appear to explicitly showcase in their reporting which often uses ‘us’ and ‘them’ framing.

Other producers also explained that they can challenge the listeners and be brave with the language they use in their stories. Neeta (*not her real name*), a language producer highlighted that because the production staff speak from the perspective of the British Asian community they are able to pose questions that mainstream services are fearful to ask:

We always start from that standpoint that we are talking to the Asian community so we don’t need to be sensitive because we can ask very direct questions. A lot of the time, they are questions you wouldn’t get on 5 Live because it sounds like a bunch of white

people being patronising or putting Asians down, whereas when it comes from us, we come from the standpoint we are Asians. (Language and Phone-in Producer, Neeta, 2015)

Neeta alludes to a sense of legitimacy that the BBC Asian Network possesses that other national stations do not have. Moreover, she noted that when mainstream stations cover Asian specific issues they can be viewed as being patronising or “putting Asians down.” Neeta, suggests that the mainstream producers frame or script stories in a way that the ethnic audiences can feel either ‘othered’ or inferior and hence, talked down to. Alia, a former senior member of staff, agrees that the station is empowered and therefore can be “far more brave with our language” than the rest of the BBC because often it speaks from the perspective of the audience it serves as opposed to speaking *to* the audience:

We can say so many things or pick topics that other programmes may not. For example, we did something about menstruating women visiting places of worship when they’re not allowed to. You would not hear that elsewhere! They [BBC] would probably not want to offend the Hindu community. (Senior Member of Staff, Alia, 2015)

This particular issue is perhaps unlikely to be picked up by the mainstream media because gatekeeping conventions focus on avoiding offence or damaging relations with diverse communities. The privileged position of the BBC Asian Network among the listeners allows the station to tackle discussion that challenge conventions within the different Asian cultures. In this way the phone in programme offers an opportunity for listeners and the presenters to interact and articulate difficult issues.

I think some of the phone-ins on the difficulties of the Muslim community integrating have been excellent and have given a voice. I think that is really important for the BBC Asian Network; it has always been able to challenge and sort of celebrate the differences between the various Asian communities. (Former Radio Leicester Editor, Owen Bentley, 2015)

The ability of the BBC Asian Network to challenge the listeners it serves ought to make it appear authoritative because it can also celebrate different communities. However, as outlined in Chapter 4, radio stations highly manage their listener’s voices on-air through the topic selected or the question posed, that tacitly reflects the aims of the BBC Asian Network as opposed the listener’s view (Pinsler in Bonini and Monclus, 2015).

Mainstream media are mindful of offending minority communities and often the content is reduced to familiar frames: “asylum seekers, black gun crime, the war on terror” (Malik, 2008:348), or they do not stray away from the dominant discourse that minorities are a problem (Cottle, 2000; Allan, 2010; Malik, in Horsti *et al.*, 2014). Content that focuses on

difference can lead to minority communities becoming alienated from public service content and switching to satellite services to satisfy their needs. The BBC attempts to balance its mainstream audience on the one hand, whilst representing minority audiences on the other. Consequently, “programming often attempts to combine a broad educative function for the established majority with a desire to communicate directly to the migrant audiences” (Tittley in Horsti *et al.*, 2014: 130), and this can often mean that minority audiences familiar with an issue do not consume it, whereas the majority may want to view or listen because the issue is broad in the first place.

## Engaging the listener

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The discussion thus far demonstrates that the target listener is at the heart of content that is crafted, the music selected and the type of presenters hired to speak to the audience. At the time of the interviews in 2015 Noreen Khan, was the only female presenter in the main daytime schedule. She has presented an afternoon show since 2012 and explained she always imagines the listeners to be similar to herself

I imagined them to kind of be in their 20s, 30s, maybe 40s, just British Asian and have an interest in South Asian culture and lifestyle, and predominately the music. It’s the music they tune in for. (Presenter, Noreen Khan, 2015)

Khan was one of the first presenters at the BBC Asian Network to strongly engage with social media through her You Tube Channel, and her former ‘Khandaan’ feature, which invited listeners to join her extended radio family, described by Noreen as being “an exclusive club.” She credits her success in engaging female listeners and increasing her programme’s audience to social media:

I think it just happened quite naturally and the listeners just grew and grew. I have the biggest Facebook account and I’ve got the biggest following on Twitter and I’m the most followed on Instagram. (Presenter, Noreen Khan, 2015)

It is interesting to note she also believes the listener comes to the station for music above all the other content. The Drive time presenter, Bobby Friction, explained he is aware of the huge diversity in his listenership and admits he can “became obsessed by it”:

As a presenter, I try be everything to all people. I have learnt you don’t have to kind of dumb yourself down because people expect a certain level of education and knowledge

from their presenters. The way I have done it is through music, and how I joke about British Asian culture. (Presenter, Bobby Friction, 2016)

Friction appears to imply that British Asians are perceived to have lower educational standards than the majority population. Whereas Noreen Khan actively embraces what her listeners are consuming, Bobby Friction seeks access to the listeners by showcasing his specialist music background. Khan lacks a specialist music background and thus commented that she feels she has to “keep your eyes and ears on absolutely everything so whether it’s TV, entertainment, sport, its showbiz, it’s what’s trending on Twitter.” This indicates that the onus is on the presenter to connect with the listener, as opposed to the BBC Asian Network brand. In 2019 the on-air team are reflective of different parts of the British Asian community: Breakfast is fronted by a woman with an Indian background, the Big Debate by a woman from a Muslim background, the Afternoon show is presented by Noreen Khan, who has a Pakistani background, and Drive by Bobby Friction, from an Indian background. A former senior member of staff, Ishani, explained there has always been a focus on balancing the representation of all communities: “it was a case of saying, is our offer equitable? Are we trying to serve the communities in as equitable [a] way as we can?”. Therefore, amongst the management there is an on showcasing equal representation of the different communities, and equity can be used to defend against criticism from the listeners that one community is more favourable than another.

## BBC representation of minority communities

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Up until now the discussion in this chapter has focused upon the limitations that production staff perceive to be a hindrance in programme making. Another area of significance, is the burden of representation. Do ethnic staff find it difficult to reflect the communities? and how do they seek to reflect the British Asian community back to the listeners? Producer, Riaan, explained that minority audiences expect if their culture is showcased on television, that it is correct and any actors are indicative of their specific community

I sometimes worry about how authentic those characters are that they are purporting to represent. They are just individuals and I don’t expect them to carry the weight of their background on their shoulders or anything like that, but the BBC as a whole should feel some of that responsibility. I think young Asian people do struggle to be represented and I think that’s where the Asian Network can help and does help. (Producer, Riaan, 2015)

This is a thoughtful reflection on the deeper problem of representing minority communities. Riaan works within the media and thus, he accepts an actor or a presenter cannot embody all members of an ethnic group, however, minority audiences have indicated they want enhanced representations of minority communities which are “richly and authentically portrayed” on the BBC (Ofcom 2018c: 4). Matsaganis and Katz’s (2014) have suggested that because ethnic audiences feel they have a sense of ownership over ‘their’ media, they are likely to complain, if they feel their community is showcased in a negative or inaccurate manner. Chapter 3 outlined that the BBC is criticised for poor representation of minority audiences, and one possible reason could be that some communities demand that actors are indicative, of the ethnic background they purport to reflect, and when a plot in a soap or drama deviates from the contemporary norms of that culture, the audiences get upset. This is evident with BBC comedy, *Citizen Khan*, which in its first series attracted 700 complaints, most centred on the inaccurate and historical representation of Pakistani families in the UK. The sitcom has since had six further series and attracted more than 2 million viewers. Adil Ray, the creator of the character Mr Khan, explained in a Mirror newspaper interview, that the complaints were inevitable because “it was a very new thing, a Muslim sitcom, and there’s always that feeling if you’re Muslim, Pakistani or Asian, this must somehow represent you,” (Ahmed, 2014). Reporter, Safia argued the media has a responsibility to accurately reflect minority audiences in the news and drama,

Coronation Street got it so wrong with the recent death of a character who was supposed to be Muslim. Muslims do not wear all white at funerals or when somebody dies, its just not done, Muslims spread white sheets on the floor when someone dies. Muslims sit on the floor and eat and they had none of that there. So for me that loses its authenticity, I am all for bringing in ethnic characters, but I believe in doing it properly. (Safia, Reporter, 2015)

Audience studies conducted for Ofcom reveal minority groups expect accurate representation of their communities because in their view, the majority population receives greater attention, and they feel “overlooked by society” (Ofcom 2018c: 3). Almost half of listeners surveyed for this study acknowledged that the wider BBC does include and represent their community.

There was very little coverage given to Asian communities on the BBC in the past. That is changing; I have seen major services like 5 Live or Radio 4 covering more. (Senior Reporter, Mya, 2015)

Mya feels that the BBC is forced to improve the representation of minority communities, in order to remain relevant and because there is a strong “business case” to do so. Furthermore, she suggests that poor reflection in the mainstream media of marginalised communities can lead to “those communities feeling alienated” and result in them engaging with other media which is

“very dangerous” for a public service organisation (see Malik, 2010). Mya also highlighted that, in order for stories about British Asian communities to be on BBC News Channel or Breakfast, they have to be “of sufficient amount of interest and relevance to those mainstream communities” as well as minority audiences; therefore, stories about obscure Hindu faith practices among small communities do not get the attention that terror-related news stories do. This links to the argument set out in Chapter 6 that when staff across the BBC choose which stories to commission from the BBC Asian Network, they unconsciously select stories with either ‘positive racial tropes’ or negative framing with particular reference to the Muslim communities. In this way the media reinforces the dominant ideology within society (Price, 2007). Joy a producer, outlined that the problem with representation of minority communities is that “the BBC as a whole doesn’t have an even adequate understanding, of different Asian cultures and what they mean to British culture and how they interact.” Therefore, the content is unable to explain and illuminate audiences because the staff are disconnected from the people they serve.

## Concluding remarks

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The discussion has highlighted that minority ethnic producers in the BBC require greater autonomy to serve British Asians. Although the BBC makes a concerted effort to recruit diverse staff, the producer’s experiences in this study indicate that their ideas are marginalised in favour of familiar stereotypes. This reveals that the ethnic specific content created by the BBC Asian Network and more widely across the BBC is influenced by societal attitudes, internal BBC policies and is underpinned by a lack of knowledge about minority groups. It also demonstrates that the insight and experience of ethnic employees is side-lined, even when the story is about minority communities or involves them for example on terror related news or the Trojan Horse story. This move has a twofold impact: minority staff feel ignored within the organisation and are aware their perspective does not hold strong weight, and it encourages the adoption of a broad representation of minorities as through a Eurocentric lens. This perpetual existence of Eurocentrism encourages ethnic staff to rationalise newsroom conventions that appear to commodify ethnicity if they wish to be successful.

BBC internal working practices appear to stifle creativity pertaining to content about diverse communities, and there is a tension between economic objectives that emphasise the need for large audiences and civic content that contributes to the public sphere or social value of society, particularly to the British Asian community. The target audience and the strategies to entice these listeners are top down policies. To summarise the discussion thus far, the BBC Asian

Network's specialist ethnic contribution is largely restricted to the radio station itself because only a limited number of stories are selected to be shared more widely. As a consequence, BBC staff may create unique material, but if it is only broadcast on the BBC Asian Network, it means that the broadcaster is only speaking on part of the minority to the minority, as opposed to the majority (Yu and Matasaganis, 2019). This means stories about inequality, racism or disadvantage are not acknowledged by mainstream producers or audiences. What also appears to be demonstrated, is that minority staff are powerless to change the dominant framing of ethnic minority news content across the institution because these decisions are top down through the BBC leadership. Therefore, the manner in which the target listener is conceptualised directly impacts manner in which the audience is addressed and stifles creativity.

Collaborative working across the BBC is also hampered by internal competition among teams. Within the BBC Asian Network there is the existence of a divide between two groups of staff, one that not agree with the target audience imposed upon the station and the other group who are likely to be younger and possess journalism skills but perhaps do not have the depth of knowledge pertaining to South Asian cultures. If managed well there are opportunities to fruitful, I suggest that the senior management are not guiding and directing staff enough.



## Chapter 8 – Music Policies and Strategies

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The previous two chapters have highlighted how institutional frameworks and internal power dynamics have side-lined both, minority ethnic staff and audiences. This chapter has two key focuses, the views of the producers on the audience strategies to engage with young British Asian listeners and the music policies at the station. In addition, this chapter includes the perspective of BBC Asian Network listeners about the music played and the significance of an Asian specific service for them.

I examine the three distinct strategies used by the BBC to try to engage the desired listener: young, friend of the family and digital native, from the perspective of BBC Asian Network staff. The in-depth interviews revealed that a number of BBC staff do not believe the target audience the BBC desires is the correct one. BBC management defend the decision to focus on young British Asians aged between fifteen and thirty based on the size and growing significance of this age group.

The listeners' views were gathered through a face-to-face survey of 122 British Asian listeners conducted at various British Asian music and cultural events in London, Leicester and Nottingham between April 2016 and October 2016. The views of the BBC journalists and BBC Asian Network listeners are narrated through their direct quotes. All the questionnaire participants have been anonymised and are identified by a respondent number, age (at time of survey) and town where they reside. The interviewees are identified either by their name and job title and the anonymised interviewees have been given South Asian pseudonyms.

### Music policies at the BBC Asian Network

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The remit for the BBC Asian Network stipulates that thirty per cent of music played on-air is by UK artists and thirty per cent is new music, which is translated as music released up to two months previously (this tends to be Bollywood music from India) (BBC Trust, 2016b: 3). There is a ten per cent requirement to play specialist South Asian music such as Qawwali or Ghazal (*ibid*). There is also a ten per cent requirement to cover live events and festivals – often melas (music events) across the UK, the station's comedy nights and its own annual concert. The two dominant genres played on the station are Bollywood music, imported from India and

aligned with the Indian film industry, and Bhangra music, either imported from India and also produced in the UK by British Asian artists or Asian artists abroad. As indicated in Chapter 4, Bhangra is considered to be a transnational genre of music allowing the artist to incorporate their identity with traditional beats, instruments and a sound that intrinsically connects the listener to India. The BBC Asian Network emphasises UK British Asian musicians because nurturing new and specialist music is a vital part of the public service ethos of the BBC (Wall and Dubber, 2009). This means that music produced or sung by a British Asian artist is counted in the UK music quota which tends to include British Bhangra artists and some R&B artists. The BBC itself acknowledges that as an institution it “plays a vital role in the UK’s music sector, both culturally and economically” (BBC Service Review, 2015: 3). However, a minority of interviewees were concerned that the UK quota, restricts the station’s appeal to the available audience:

It’s almost like a BBC Trust thing where we’ve got to show that we are supporting British Asian music to keep getting our money and to make sure we are still a station on the BBC. I am not entirely sure though if putting such strictures on a playlist is the best thing for the growth of listeners. (Presenter, Bobby Friction, 2016)

Friction demonstrates that the music quota is imposed upon the presenters and that he is required to “forcefully push British Asian music” to meet metrics imposed upon the BBC Asian Network. Friction’s underlying concern is that the music quotas remove flexibility for presenters like him who are specialist music experts. Dubber (2013) suggests radio stations use familiar music to construct a community of listener rather than new genres. The BBC actively promotes music created by UK artists across all its radio stations, including Radio 1 and Radio 2, in order to make them distinctive from commercial stations. According to Wall and Dubber, (2009) this allows the BBC to defend itself from criticisms that the stations are similar to the commercial offer. Radio 1 focuses on indie and dance music, and for 6 Music emphasises specialist alternative music. Formerly the BBC Asian Network also promoted Bollywood, in line with commercial Asian stations but this has changed in the past few years (Baddjan, 2017)

The former Breakfast Show presenter, Tommy Sandhu, pointed out that there are far more British Asians working as producers than artists and, moreover, a large proportion of them work for the Bollywood industry. Contemporary Bollywood music is influenced by Western music: “They got rappers, and really cool sounds, modern sounds, great production on it, so there’s more of a fusion happening there than a British Asian music scene” (former presenter, Tommy Sandhu, 2015). This means some Bollywood songs may have been produced by British Asians in India, but that music is likely to be on the Bollywood playlist as opposed to the UK artists’. Crucially, Sandhu also pointed out not all British Asian artists are influenced by Asian music. Some may be making dance, hip-hop or dubstep, genres that get limited, or no airtime

at the BBC Asian Network within specialist music shows.

The contemporary British Asian music scene is small and less influential than in the 1990s. Friction agrees that British Asian music “is unique” and deserves nurturing and that the BBC Asian Network platform is best suited to do this. His views were mirrored by Kamran, a producer who agreed the station ought to “champion” British Asian music but explained that this has resulted in the station playing “mediocre stuff which the listeners are not that interested in.” In Kamran’s opinion, the BBC Asian Network ought to emphasise Bollywood music above other genres, in the same way that commercial Asian stations do.

A film is releasing tomorrow and we have only played two tracks out of the ten on the album so far. That’s where I think Asian Network doesn’t connect with our listeners because Sunrise Radio and Lyca Radio will have played most of the tracks. People don’t come to Asian Network to listen to the latest Bollywood tracks because they know it’s very formulaic. (Former Producer, Kamran, 2015)

It is plausible that Bollywood fans would expect to hear more than two songs from a new album and, therefore, may look elsewhere for this genre. However, Ishani, a former senior member of staff argued that because something is popular does not justify its inclusion on the BBC, and that the onus is on the staff to craft distinctive content:

Bollywood is big, so the treatment of the content is very different on the BBC Asian Network. Just because it is popular, it does not mean the network should not to go anywhere near it but it is what does it do with it. (Ishani, former senior member of staff, 2015)

Strippel described Bollywood music as a genre that offers the “perspective of looking back whilst also looking forward in Britain” for the older British Asian generations. In contrast to Kamran’s stance, Affie Jeerh, a former language programme producer proposed the key contribution the station makes is the platform it offers to new artists “people like Raghev, people like Jay Sean, these people were no-bodies, and the Asian Network gave them a platform. They are big stars now.” Furthermore, she defended the station against claims that it plays the same music as commercial Asian stations commenting that you cannot stop championing musicians “just because they are big stars.” Alia, a former senior member of staff, expressed frustration that the third and fourth-generation British Asians targeted “are getting more into non-Asian music”, which is widely available elsewhere, making it harder to entice them to the BBC Asian Network in the first instance. She was also concerned about the UK quota, arguing the “Asian music industry is at its lowest level at the moment” and cannot be relied upon. Moreover, she pointed out other stations such as Radio 1 do not rely on imported American music to sustain their

playlist.

These views from four members of staff reveal a common thread: that music is vital to attract listeners, and they are worried whether the correct genres are being played in the right quantities. The role of music within a radio station is important in attracting the listener and the choice of music played on-air influences people's musical tastes. However, the playlist also narrows the range of music played often at the expense of new talent, because it is essentially a 'gatekeeping' concept and does not encourage innovation (Hendy, 2000: 743). Strippel, argued in his interview, that the BBC Asian Network is distinctive: "the level of UK music played and live South Asian music that isn't Bollywood, we are absolutely distinct." Commercial stations spend more time playing imported Bollywood music, so whilst Kamran advocates greater impetus upon Bollywood, the BBC is able to meet its public service goals by emphasising British Asian music. Research by Wolock and Punathambekar (2015: 666) has suggested that, because there has been a tendency within media to "privilege cinema, Hindi-language films from Bombay, and English-language diasporic films", this genre is naturally, popular and as such, Bollywood has played a dominant role in the Indophile interest in the UK media.

Sandhu noted that the radio station ought to be a platform for artists who produce Asian-specific music but he "would love to see more British Asian artists, just making music regardless of them being Asian. Making great 'whatever' music. We been there long enough." This demonstrates that Sandhu wants greater opportunities for Asian artists to become mainstream artists. This has not occurred naturally thus far, and he feels British Asian artists have been actively marginalised by BBC music policies:

If you are making British Asian music, with the kind of twist of your cultures and, yeah, the Asian Network is there for that. If you are making straight up Hindi music or Punjabi music, that is what the Asian Network is there for. If you are making crossover music, we got Yasser and Candyman. But even if you are just making dance, hip-hop, R&B, garage underground music and you are British and Asian, then your music should be played on any platform. That's almost like positive discrimination, almost like box ticking. They're just giving them Asian Network as a platform. It shouldn't matter that you're Asian, the music has to hold its own on Radio 1 and anywhere else. (Former Presenter, Tommy Sandhu, 2016)

Sandhu feels the BBC has side-lined British Asian artists by relegating their music to the BBC Asian Network, with some notable exceptions. The use of "positive discrimination" conveys that the BBC does not support British Asian music or UK artists, because the BBC emphasises "music that can be relied upon" or, in other words, music that it knows will have a wide appeal (Dubber, 2013: 86). This move does imply a degree of institutional racism against ethnic musicians

meaning British Asian artists risk marginalisation if they are considered to be explicitly 'Asian artists' regardless of the genre of music. British Asian artist MIA (real name Mathangi 'Maya' Arulpragasam) has avoided "the dominant Orientalist discourse that exoticises and reifies Asian artists" due to her own active management of her representation and, thus, is a mainstream artist (Saha, 2012: 737). MIA is seen to be a "progressive example of effective diasporic cultural production" because her music is political and explores different experiences within a global context (Saha, 2012: 737). MIA, Jay Sean and Raxstar are just some of the contemporary British Asian musicians whose work fuses Bhangra with R&B, rap and Western music. MIA is mainstream and Jay Sean is a mainstream artist in the US, whereas Raxstar, a rapper, gets airtime on the BBC Asian Network. Zayn Malik (formerly of One Direction) and Naughty Boy (producer) on the other hand, are prominent figures within the UK music industry and not just the British Asian music sector, and get airtime across all stations. Priya (*not her real name*), a music producer, and explained internal BBC research revealed "it is the music that brings people to the station." However, she was frustrated that the wider BBC considers British Asian music to be insignificant: "I don't think Asian music is getting as much of a buy-in as other music. This is probably lack of knowledge, and probably lack of British Asian artists." This suggests that inside the BBC, British Asian music is considered to be either 'specialist' and played upon Radio 1, 6 Music or 1Xtra or foreign, and relegated to the BBC Asian Network. Hendy (2000: 750) has argued that new artists who feature in specialist programmes often lack airtime and "remain 'trapped' in the cultural ghetto of 'specialist' minority programming, even when played by a high-profile station".

[...]Timbaland probably uses more British Asian samples than Naughty Boy. But we can play more Naughty Boy because he is a British Asian artist. It's great we should champion him and we should be proud that an Asian Pakistani guy from North London is making mainstream music with Beyoncé. (Former Presenter, Tommy Sandhu, 2015)

Sandhu encapsulates the problem with the remit: the BBC Asian Network is forced to play artists who are British and Asian over music that is foreign and exceptional in order to meet metrics. Specific genres such as grime and dubstep, which are popular among younger listeners, receive limited airtime. This means that people seeking genres not played on the station turn to streaming services such as Spotify, which pose serious competition because the listener has the power to determine what they want to hear and when. Music producer, Priya, explained: "It's more difficult now to have people tune in for longer and I think that's why Asian Network are playing mainstream music just so that people don't feel they have to switch over."

The inclusion of music from the UK chart was specifically introduced to attract younger

listeners aged between fifteen and thirty, integrated into British society, who like mainstream music alongside Asian music, because both are part of their identity. Priya is aware that the under-25 age group have highlighted at the station's listener forums they want to hear "grime and beats", whereas the older listeners requested "Bollywood, the older tracks." The contradiction between musical styles is a complex issue for the station to navigate – how can it appease opposing views? Bollywood is considered to be an influential and powerful entity within Asian music. Friction claimed: "We [Britain] will always be the servants to the masters that are the Bollywood industry and the media conglomerates in India" thus he suggested that the BBC Asian Network is shaped far more carefully:

What they [BBC management] need to do is make the station musically less Asian and make that badge of culture something that's just part of who they are. That actually scares them. I think you will find over the next couple of years the playlist reflecting far more non-Asian music. (Presenter, Bobby Friction, 2016)

Friction's perspective connects to Riaan's views outlined in Chapter 6. Riaan recognised the identity of third and fourth-generation British Asians is quintessentially British as well as Asian. Hence, the two interviewees agree that both cultures are innately a "part" of the listeners' identity. Former Controller, Bob Shennan, explained that the changes to the music and news at the station are a purposeful move away from a "walled garden" of Asian content to a contemporary reflection of "what it's like to be young and of Asian descent in Britain today".

Former Language Producer, Affie Jeerh, uniquely underlined that the BBC Asian Network is "a music station" that also "creates some amazing news and documentaries but the network is predominantly music." Her view differs from most of the other interviewees who focused on the speech content. Lewis (2008) has argued that the impact of music in the language of ethnic communities, particularly the role music plays in reflecting and enabling communities of listeners to form has been over-looked. The BBC Asian Network is not explicitly marketed as a music station, due to the split between speech and music and broadcast journalist, Mithra, explained this poses a conundrum for listeners who want music because they find the station "too speech based, and the reason they listen to commercial is that it's all music, and that's what they want." This suggests the public service values upheld by the BBC impact some of the target audience negatively.

## Listeners on the music at BBC Asian Network

An audience questionnaire was conducted to seek the listeners point of view on the BBC Asian Network to find out what they like or dislike and, in their words, the relevance of an Asian specific radio station to their lives. Question 6 asked what they specifically liked, and more than half of the respondents (67) specified the variety of music and artists played on the BBC Asian Network. This was a free form question to understand what respondents liked about the output in their own words. Respondent 13, a twenty-three-year-old woman from Leeds, highlighted the “good mix of Asian and English music”, and respondent 77, a seventeen-year-old from Aylesbury, commented, “[the] music is up-to-date, appeals to all ages, not just one group.” I contrasted the age of the respondents with their answers, to see if there was a correlation between people’s views and their age. One notable observation is that over half of the people who listen to the station for the music are aged under thirty. Thus they fall into the ‘desired’ age group that the BBC is targeting, and it would appear that the inclusion of mainstream music is paying dividends. Table 1 illustrates how the preference for music dwarfs all other responses including presenters, language programming and discussion (this includes news and the debate programme).

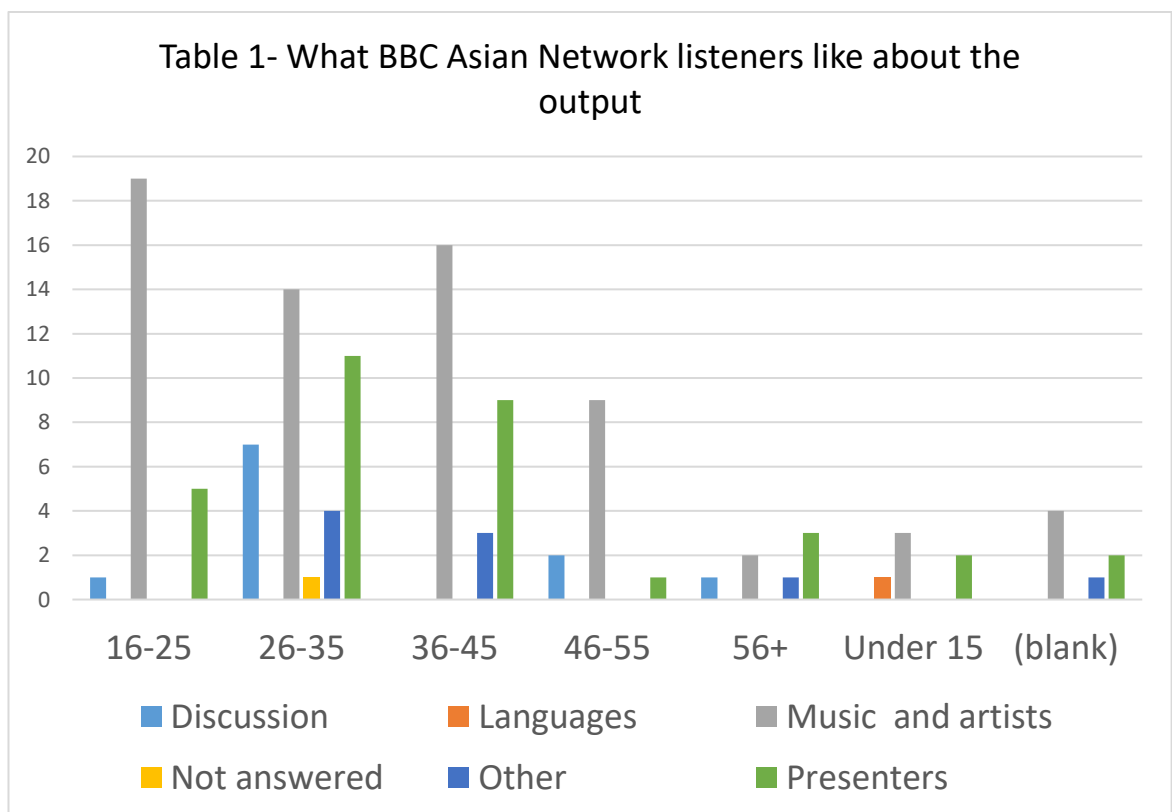


Table 1 illustrates the respondents grouped by their ages and their answers..

The table shows that music is especially important to the 16–25 age group and is a dominant reason to listen among the other age groups. This contradicts the views of the BBC staff who are worried the music is not right.

Almost a third of the respondents (33) specified that the presenters and shows are the reason they listen, with answers including “variety of shows” and “presenters.” Some respondents identified their favourite presenter or feature of a programme, and half of these respondents were also aged under thirty, indicating that the listeners identify with the presenters. Since 2012, there has been a trend to recruit young British Asian presenters who broadcast in English, thus being inclusive and representative of British Asians in the UK. Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, explained he wants presenters who “are able to connect and engage with young audiences” because they are the visible face of the station.

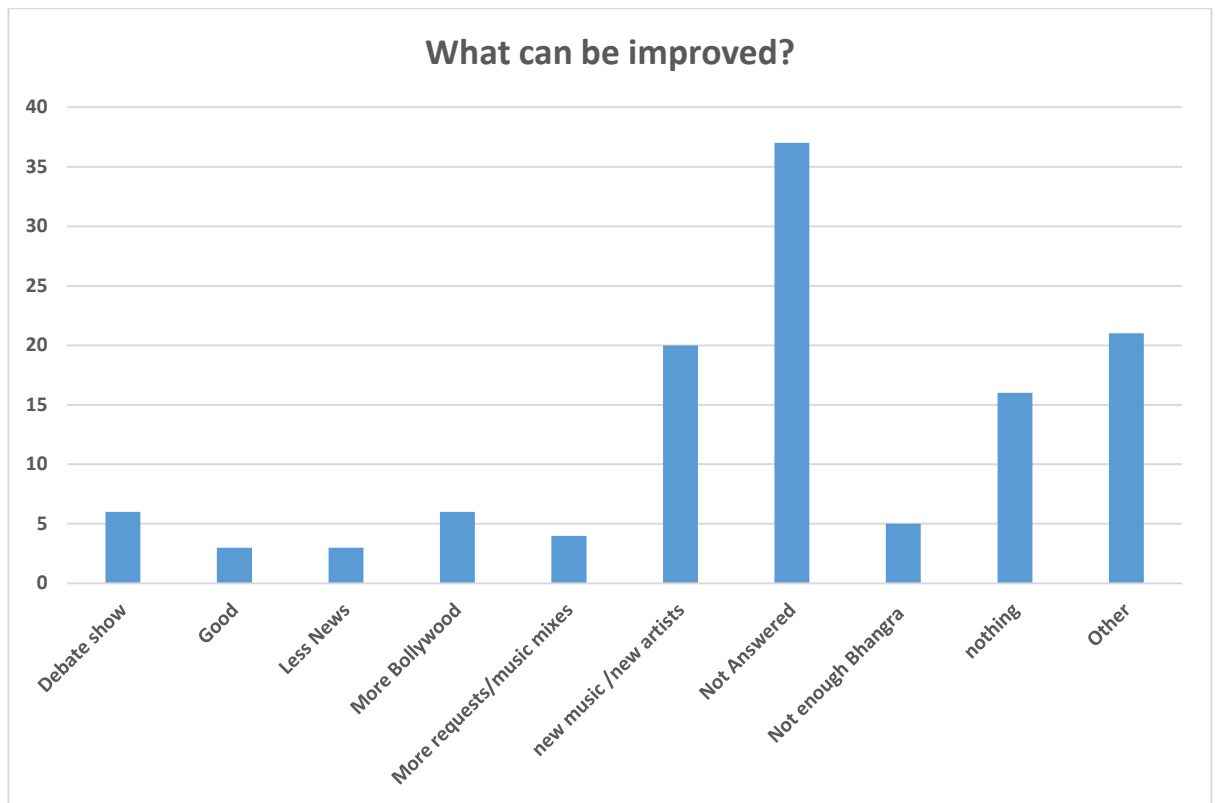
Nine responses were coded as ‘other’ because they did not naturally fit into the categories. One example included respondent 42, aged twenty-eight from London, who wrote they listen because the station has content about “community, socialising, religious views, debates and community concern.” The listener appears to be alluding to a sense of community that is created by the station through the content that embraces community and religious concerns, and suggests that there is some appreciation for the specialist news programming in addition to the music played. Respondent 61, a woman from London, age unknown, commented that the BBC Asian Network “represents my ethnicity, female presenters keep music interesting, are charismatic”. The BBC Asian Network is the only national radio station dedicated to British Asian audiences which has a public service remit thus, it is able to reflect and represent Asian heritage across the UK. A number of Asian community and commercial stations offer an Asian news service, despite the expense, and many also offer phone-in programmes for debate and advice, in a mix of English and home language.

Respondents were also asked what they dislike about the station, and a large proportion (44) reported “nothing” or “I love it”. Respondent 67, a twenty-one-year-old man from London, exemplified most answers by stating, “I like everything about the BBC Asian Network.” However, a large proportion of participants (32) failed to answer this question, an indication they do not dislike any aspect of the output. Just eight of the responses focused on the music played on-air. Respondent 84, a twenty-four-year-old man from Nottingham, commented, “same playlist at certain times.” A thirty-four-year-old female listener from St Albans, answered, “old music and lots of typical Punjabi, Bhangra. Could be more diverse, i.e. South Indian songs, Telugu and Tamil music.” The BBC Asian Network launched a South Indian music programme in 2014, following



sustained criticism that the South Indian communities were not explicitly catered for. Respondent 44, a twenty-four-year-old female from London, answered, “the majority of shows aren't geared towards youngsters.” What is particularly pertinent is that the respondent is aged within the desired age group that the BBC wants to entice but, she does not believe the content is relevant for her age group. This issue has also been acknowledged by the former BBC Trust, through audience focus groups they found that the “some younger listeners feel that the station is aimed at older people, due to the more serious tone in daytime” (BBC Trust, 2015: 65). This suggests that the station still needs to improve the content for younger listeners and rebrand itself. Respondent 119, a fifty-six-year-old man from Leicester, commented that it is “difficult to please all audiences, as Asians are all different.” This appears to be the crux of the problem: the listeners are not homogenous; they have different needs and requirements depending on their age, community, class and how integrated they may or may not be in British society. The BBC has the task of navigating and meeting these needs in a sensitive manner.

Participants were also asked what could be improved and approximately a quarter of the responses (37) concentrated on the music: the lack of diversity, too much emphasis on Bhangra, the need for more Hindi (Bollywood) music or music mixes and request formats. The range of responses illustrate the huge differences in what listeners would like see Table 2, with the majority of the answers called for greater diversity in the breadth and range of music played. For example, respondent 103, a forty-seven-year-old woman from Leicester, answered “more songs, especially new songs.” Respondent 112, a thirty-seven-year-old man from Leicester, stated, “more new music of all Asian variety.” A small number of responses requested more Bhangra music, for example, respondent 8, an eighteen-year-old from Peterborough: “they mostly play music from movies but hardly any Bhangra.” In contrast, six participants aged over thirty, called for more Bollywood music, exemplifying an age division in the interests of the listeners.



*Table 2 illustrates what changes the respondents would like to see at the BBC Asian Network.*

Although a small proportion of listeners called for greater diversity in the music, the majority of those surveyed were actually happy with the music. Hendy (2000: 744) has argued that the BBC, with its strong public service ethos, ought to “lead rather than reflecting popular musical tastes.” This resonates with Georgina Born (2004) views, that to demonstrate its legitimacy the BBC needs to be popular, and make popular programming, but to justify the licence fee it must provide a diverse range of programming for all audiences. The BBC Asian Network seems to be caught between trying to lead musical tastes by being distinctive and nurturing new artists, whilst relying on ‘safe music’ specifically, Bollywood in order to attract a wide variety of listeners. The remit requires the station to be a platform for new music and artists and the BBC Asian Network often relegates this type of music to live events and specialist music shows, in order to maintain listeners with traditional musical tastes. This approach, however, directly impacts younger listeners who may want new or ‘edgy’ music, which is available more widely on the music scene.

What is clear from the questionnaire is that listeners of all ages specifically listen to the BBC Asian Network for music as opposed to journalism (news and debate content). It is particularly revealing that younger listeners, specifically those aged under twenty-five, want

new and contemporary music; therefore, if the BBC wants to succeed in successfully matching the output to the desired audience, then the playlist requires further work.

## Audience strategies for the desired listener

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Post-2012 the BBC Asian Network has focused on reflecting young British Asians, their interests, music tastes and programme content aimed at younger listeners whereas formerly the station had a paternalistic tone, “the emphasis in the early years was giving information because it was an immigrant community” (former senior member of staff, Ishani, 2015). In 2002 when the BBC Asian Network was re-launched as a national digital radio station, the output was primarily aimed at British Asians aged under 35 and all communities whose origins were in the Indian subcontinent. It is questionable however, if the station did succeed, because an independent government review of the BBC’s digital radio stations in October 2004 demonstrated that there was a “lack of clarity” over who the target listener was (Gardam, 2004: 50). The contemporary Asian Network is focused on third and fourth-generation British Asians and, increasingly, the on-air content is created and produced by journalists who are also from those groups. Following the station’s reprieve from closure in 2011, it was widely accepted that the BBC Asian Network would focus on British-born Asians and not first-generation Asians.

This is a service which targets British Asian diaspora who are born and bred here. They live here. The myth of returning has disappeared completely. And it is a significant and growing demographic, something which needs to be paid attention to. (Former Senior Member of Staff, Ishani, 2015)

Ramamurthy (in Price and Sanz Sabido, 2015) described younger Asians as having a “vested interest” in Britain because they live and work in Britain. A number of BBC staff interviewed broadly support this strategy. A former senior staff member, Kavya (*not her real name*), described the BBC Asian Network prior to 2010 as experiencing a “cultural identity crisis” because “if you asked six people ‘what does the Asian Network stand for?’ you would get six different answers.” Kavya explained the programmes were made with a “cavalier” approach, whereby “we thought this is what the audience wanted, but we didn’t really listen to what they wanted.” This suggests that at the time of the interview in 2015, Kavya thought a greater effort was being made to rectify this.

Three key strategies have been implemented by the BBC Asian Network to attract their desired listener since 2006: young, friend of the family and digital native. The rest of this chapter

examines the listener strategies from the perspective of the BBC staff involved. The 2006 strategy aggressively sought a young audience and subsequently failed (see Chapter 4). Former Head of Programmes and News, Husain Husaini, explained that the strategy emerged post the 2004 Gardam report, and was an attempt to “reposition” in the light of criticism. However, this caused upheaval among the “heritage audience on the medium wave in Leicester and Birmingham who absolutely loved the Asian Network and wanted it to be in their lives”, leading to a “tension relationship” (former Head of Programmes, Husain Husaini). The plan to focus on younger audiences was implemented under the stewardship of former Controller, Bob Shennan:

I don't think we decided to go extremely young but we did decide we were going to move from a first and second-generation network to a second and third, and that was based on just the trends and audience. (Former Controller, Bob Shennan, 2015)

Research about minority communities reveals they have a younger demographic in contrast to the main population (Ballard, 1990; Wilson and Gutierrez, 1995; Ofcom, 2013), and they are increasingly important because they are profitable, particularly from the perspective of commercial media. From the public service point of view, there is an obligation to serve all audiences, and ensure that a wide range of voices and opinions are articulated, in order to provide people with information so that can make their own decisions. Increasingly, the BBC has been forced to demonstrate this more clearly. Mike Curtis, former News Editor (1996–2006), explained that “seventy per cent of all the communities were aged under thirty-five” and to increase the listener figures it was essential to “grab them so they stay with us through their twenties and thirties when they start getting married.” The on-air sound became extremely “edgy and trendy – achingly trendy” and “probably a bit too hip, the majority of the audience wanted a radio station a bit friendlier and warmer” (former Head of Programmes and News, Husain Husaini, 2015).

The strategy was reversed from 2008, under former Radio 1 and 1Xtra Controller, Andy Parfitt, who took over from Bob Shennan, he implemented the ‘friend of the family’ strategy. Husaini explained the emphasis in this strategy was on categorising the listeners as belonging to distinct groups, for example:

[...] old audience who listened to maybe our language programme and the very young audience who listened to our specialist music programming. But in the middle was this core, it was young and family orientated. (Former Head of News, Husain Husaini, 2015)

This particular strategy acknowledged that the various age groups and generations listened to the output for different reasons and at various times of the day (Lacey, 2018). The core daytime

offer was reformulated to offer general content for the whole family. Wall and Dubber (2009) have demonstrated that BBC practices mean in the daytime music that has a wide appeal is specifically selected, whilst specialist music and related content is relegated to the evenings for smaller and perhaps a more niche audience. The 'friend of the family' strategy appeared to be an extension of this music policy but with specific reference to programme and speech content on the BBC Asian Network.

The average Asian household was five rather than two. And so two things came about: one was to say "we'll do something that feels like it's at the heart of that family" and "let's do something that reflects all those relationships in what we're doing". I thought that was successful in pulling us all together. (Former Head of Programmes and News, Husain Husaini, 2015)

The daytime output embraced a family-centric approach to appeal to everyone: the grandparents, middle aged and teenagers. The problem was that the BBC still kept trying to attract all British Asians regardless of their specific musical interests. This strategy can be described as 'safe', although gradually, the number of listeners did increase (see Appendix A, 2010), because the production continued to offer content for everyone who was Asian. Daytime producer, Bela (*not her real name*), described the pressure: "I sometimes get a little bit frustrated" because the BBC is making "[us] push ourselves to get that audience who have blatantly said 'I couldn't care less what the latest Bollywood track is, I couldn't care less what Shahrukh Khan is up to'". Bela acknowledges not all British Asians feel compelled to consume the BBC Asian Network simply due to their ethnic background. However, because the BBC has defined the target audience exclusively by ethnicity there is an expectation that people in those groups should embrace the service. Bela's views illustrate an important contradiction, on the one hand, the BBC has adopted a mainstream stance to attract young listeners, but on the other hand, the station demands listeners have some interest in Bollywood and their culture. Subsequently, this leaves BBC Asian Network staff to negotiate how they navigate this gulf to appeal to listeners who potentially "can't relate to the music, they can't relate to the language" (Alia, former senior member of staff, 2015). Moreover, Alia commented, "I personally find that the youngsters that I come across are not really interested in the BBC Asian Network. The older generations are not happy with it." Her views exemplify the problem of appealing to the entire British Asian community.

Since 2015, a stronger digital approach has been embraced designed to attract the younger listener who may not consume radio in the traditional way. A BBC Trust review of the service in 2015 noted that engagement with the BBC Asian Network was low and that the station needed to embrace a stronger offer online (BBC Service Review, 2015: 65). Former Controller,

Bob Shennan, described this move as “another version of that [2006] strategy, but carefully. Ten years on, the Asian population of the UK is an incredibly young population.” He also voiced a concern that if the BBC Asian Network fails to evolve and adapt, it will inevitably have “zero listeners, so we’ve always got to cater for the evolving population.” The digital native strategy is aimed at British Asians aged between fifteen and twenty-five, living in the South East of the country, chiefly London. Statistics reveal that the British Asians are primarily located in and around London. Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, explained “We are in the process of evolving the network at the moment.” This has been achieved in a number of ways: new live events, intimate ticketed recordings, a diversification of the guests interviewed on the programmes and a stronger social media profile. Neeta (*not her real name*), a language programme producer stated that this has resulted in more “daring” output. I question whether Neeta actually means the output has become ambitious because journalists are encouraged to consider ideas that are unusual or untested. However, Producer, Anish Shaikh, believes the continuous change to shows and music may have a detrimental impact upon the ‘heritage’ audience and, as a result, he feels “pressured” to serve a large and disparate audience:

I think we are pulled in every single direction. You’ve got to appeal to the young, you’ve got to appeal to the old, you’ve got to appeal to the traditional, you’ve got to appeal to the middle aged. I think that the pressure can prove fatal for the Asian Network. (Producer, Anish Shaikh, 2015)

Shaikh is concerned about the ‘heritage’ audience who he describes as being the “traditional base”, as opposed to the listeners the station is chasing. He is also worried the strategic changes will result in a reduction of listeners and lead to the closure of the station. The BBC is pushing a number of outlets to focus on young audiences following the White Paper (2016). Drive time presenter, Bobby Friction, acknowledged young British Asians in London are important: “There are no more people to get unless they go into the South East”; however, he is also cautious, warning that, paradoxically, this group of listeners “are less into overt Asian culture than any other part of the British Asian community.” In his opinion, British Asian Londoners are more likely to be assimilated and integrated and therefore, less likely, to be interested in south Asian music and culture. He suggested the younger generations of British Asians “don’t connect on a British Asian way to other British Asians.” Friction also noted that the manner in which young British Asians mix with each other has changed, he believes the communities are becoming more insular with people connecting because they share the same faith or belong to a specific community. He also observed that “culture and identity change at high speed.” It is unclear if this suggests he is unable to relate to the changes or that he is able to keep abreast of the changes more effectively than other production members of staff.

This poses serious problems for the station because in order to attract this audience, the BBC needs to reflect on-air their lifestyles and aspirations. Former senior journalist, Sam, also explains that in order for the digital strategy to be successful, the staff need a stronger understanding of how “Asian communities have implemented social media and social networks into their lives.”

We’ve got to think about how people are going to access us via the internet, via apps. They’ve got to choose to want to come to us and, unless we are reflecting their world, they’re not going to be a part of it. (Former Senior Journalist, Sam, 2015)

Sam believes far more work needs to be done to better understand the media habits of a young audience and is concerned the station is not always on the right platforms, noting that, for a long time, there was an emphasis on Twitter, when the listeners were in fact engaged with Snapchat:

A lot of people don’t listen to the output via the radio but they will engage via social media, so the way that people are approaching the Asian Network is changing and I think we just need to keep ahead of the game. So being in the places that they’re in beforehand or signpost it very early on. (Former Senior Journalist, Sam, 2015)

I suggest the limited understanding of digital platforms could be a generational issue whereby non digital natives are forced to engage with platforms inhabited by young people and find this difficult.

In contrast, the younger generation of producers, such as Kamran understood the importance of engaging with social media to share the BBC Asian Network brand, noting that “radio has become visualised.” According to Bela, a daytime producer, the BBC Asian Network has been innovative in its incorporation of social media compared to other parts of the BBC. “..they are probably a little bit behind us in terms of what we are doing because their audiences aren’t as young.” Social media has enabled the BBC to find new ways to engage with audiences and Radio 1 and the BBC Asian Network have perhaps been able to be more creative than 5 Live or Radio 4 due to the age difference in their listeners and the content they emphasise. Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel explained that social media interaction is far more informative and useful than listener figures from Rajar.

Does it count if someone views our content on iPlayer? Yes it does. It is engagement with the Asian Network. They are watching content that’s linked to radio and it’s linked to our core values. So it’s really important. I am more than comfortable with that, and

Radio 1 and other networks approach it with the same way. (Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, 2015)

In 2013, the BBC Asian Network News and Breakfast teams were moved to New Broadcasting House in London alongside Radio 1 and 1Xtra, in a calculated move by the BBC to demonstrate visually that the BBC Asian Network is a core part of the BBC and not an ethnic service demoted to the regions. Strippel explained that the “growing presence” of the British Asian community in the UK means that the station is “in the centre of gravity for the BBC”, and further claimed, “we are now central to the BBC’s core mission, which is good.”

### [Listener perception on the average age of the listener](#)

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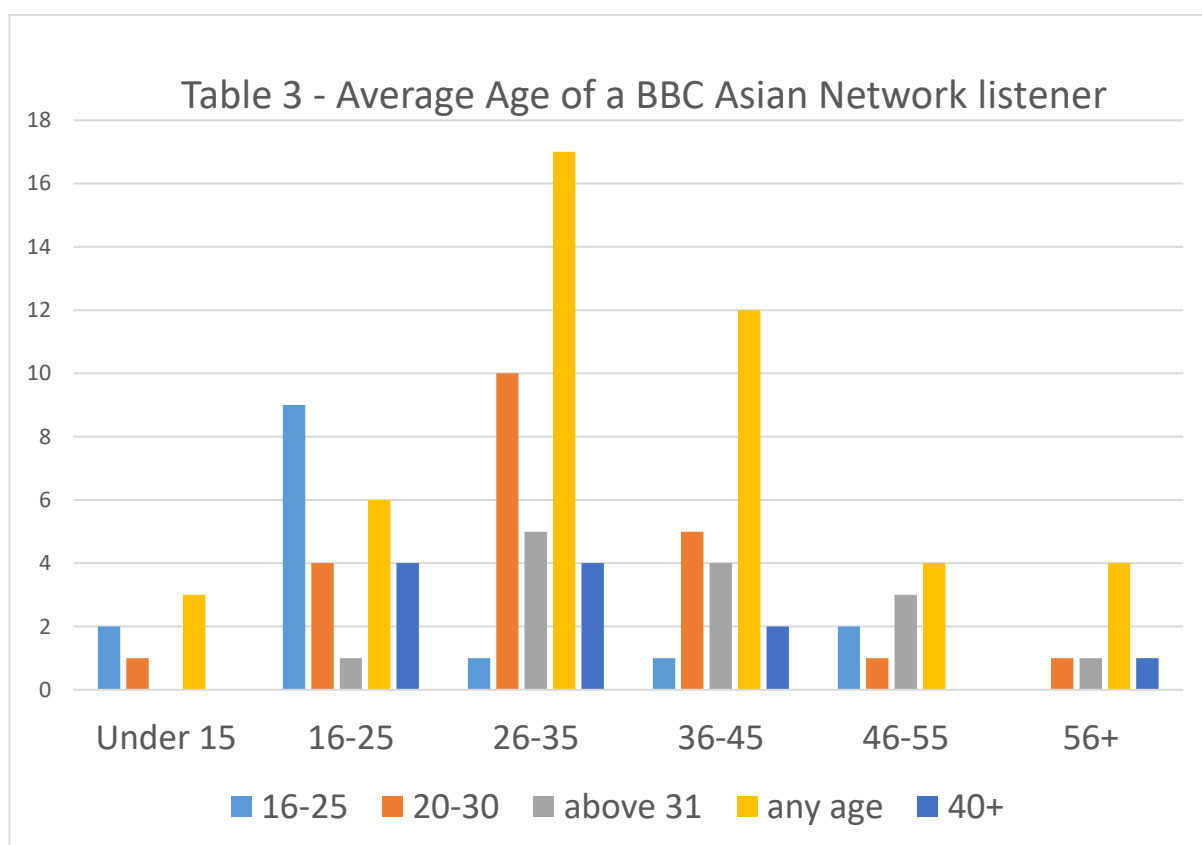
The interviews illustrated disagreement among staff over who they should be serving. In order to gauge the audience perspective on whom they believe is the target audience, the questionnaire asked participants what the average age of the typical BBC Asian Network listener is? The question was posed free form to avoid any influence, and consequently, the answers varied from specific ages to age groups, which in some instances spanned ten or twenty years. To understand the answers, I created age categories to code the responses, broadly based upon the dataset generated by the survey: 16–25 years, 20–30 years, above 31, old (any age above 40), and ‘any age’. There is an overlap between 16–25 and 20–30, therefore to best reflect the answer given by participants, those that stated up to 25 and were placed in the 16–25 category, and other responses that simply stated ‘twenties’, or ‘20–30’ were placed in the other code. Answers where the age range indicated spanned more than a twenty-year period were coded as ‘any age’ because this was considered the best description.

The responses indicate confusion among the surveyed listeners, with the most common answer being ‘any age’ given by forty-eight participants and appears to mirror the confusion among the staff. Respondent 43, a twenty-four-year-old female listener from London, commented that “the listening audience is really diverse. There are shows directed to every age group.” The next most common answer, given by twenty-two respondents, was ‘a listener aged between twenty and thirty years of age’, which falls into the target range determined by the BBC. Some listeners noted that that the station does not appeal to younger listeners; for example, respondent 65, a seventeen-year-old male from London who answered, “Twenty-seven. Not many young people listen to it. It appeals to older people.” Respondent 91, a twenty-five-year-old woman from Leicester, answered that twenty-eight is the average age of the listener because, in her opinion, the music is tailored for “second and third-generation mainly



because of the Bhangra/urban music.” Thus there is a perception that the BBC Asian Network serves older listeners. References were made in the answers to the genre of music and the news and debate programmes and essentially equating this type of content with people aged somewhere between twenty and thirty years of age.

A far smaller number of responses (17) suggested the station is consumed by young British Asians, aged between sixteen and twenty-five years of age. Potentially, this means that by summer 2016, the initial changes to the music and content had begun to alter perceptions among some listeners. Respondent 14, an eighteen-year-old man from London, answered, “16–19 years because they are more engaged with music”, and respondent 12, a twenty-two-year-old woman from Leeds, answered “18–25 because BBC Asian Network always has the latest songs.” What is underlined in these particular responses from the desired listener is that music is a very important part of their lives. Table 3 visualises the participants’ responses, which are colour coded and categorised by the age of the respondent. This illustrates the participants’ age group is frequently reflected in their answers; for example, nine respondents aged between sixteen and twenty-five suggest the average listener is within the same age group.



*Table 3 illustrates respondents’ age with their answer (colour coded).*

Internal BBC research reveals the average listener is thirty-seven years of age and that the station has a record reach among the second-generation British Asians, defined by the BBC as people aged thirty to forty-nine years (Eustace, 2016: 2). The statistics demonstrate the station reaches 21.7 per cent of fifteen and twenty-four year olds compared to 27.9 per cent of the thirty-five to forty-four age group. The mean age of the participants taking part in this survey was thirty-three years and suggests that the listener is likely to be female. This is possibly because more women agreed to participate as a female researcher was conducting the survey. According to the findings, the average listener likes the music played on the BBC Asian Network and listens on average one or two hours daily via AM frequency or DAB. Furthermore, she feels represented and included by the wider BBC and, in particular, values how the BBC Asian Network serves her Indian community, primarily by connecting her to her culture through music.

## Concluding remarks

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It is clear the BBC is working to address disparities between the on-air content and the listeners by implementing changes to the music played. I question if music is considered to be less important than the news and current affairs output? The BBC's reputation for its journalism being balanced and objective far outweighs its reputation for music, with the exception of Radio 1. In many ways, the BBC has been demonstrating resilience by trying to adapt the BBC Asian Network content to match the evolving audience. The BBC has modified how it addresses British Asian listeners by explicitly focusing upon young listeners, but crucially remains committed to serving all young British Asians. These changes are likely to mean that the station can continue to air for the foreseeable future.

The metrics set for music, at the BBC Asian Network are likely to be broadly right because they enable the station to be distinctive from Asian commercial radio. However, I suggest the problem is that British Asians occupy a transnational as well as a British space, and the parameters set by the BBC management on how these audiences are served in terms of music, appear to be conceptualised within a "nation-centric understanding", meaning there is an over emphasis upon Bollywood music, whilst the speech content focuses upon the notion the listener is British first and foremost (Wolock and Punathambekar, 2014: 665). This has another unintended impact, in that the majority of British Asian music is deemed to be 'foreign' and is consigned to the BBC Asian Network or specialist programmes on Radio 1 and 1Xtra. Thus, the influence of British Asian music is limited to small audiences. Wall and Dubber (2009) suggest that the BBC has utilised specialist music, for example, British Asian music and its prominence

on the playlist at the BBC Asian Network, as a way to present itself as a public service broadcaster. What is implicit in the ordering of music into social groups or genre is a distinction between a majority mainstream and a series of minority 'taste groups'. Further research is required to clarify if young British Asians prefer a less Indophile genre of music. If this is the case, then the BBC needs to reduce this genre, although this leaves a question mark over what genre ought to replace it.

## Chapter 9 – Language and Identity

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### Introduction

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This chapter focuses upon language programming and the identity of British Asians to better understand, how the BBC Asian Network is responding to the listeners. The station has been set a demanding goal to serve all British Asians with a single service, forcing the BBC to appeal widely and simultaneously equally to different communities, age groups, and different generations of Asians from different socio-economic groups who have had different experiences in the UK. From the station's inception in the 1970s as a regional programme on BBC local radio, the BBC Asian Network has provided programming in South Asian languages, primarily in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Gujarati. Since 2012, a number of presenters have spoken on-air in 'blended language', which is a hybrid of English and mother tongue in order to better reflect how the listeners speak.

The historical language programmes developed by the BBC were intended to give information to immigrant communities in their mother tongue and were an extension of the BBC's paternalistic and integrationist agenda (Kumar 1975; Malik 2008). These programmes were presented by members of the communities; some were radio presenters and others were simply volunteers from the communities who had exceptional language skills, and thus contributed to "accented" production (Naficy, 2001). This type of production intrinsically incorporates characteristics of the transnational experience and speaks to diaspora in a manner to which they can relate.

The BBC has a longstanding commitment to nurturing mother tongues and offers non-English output on radio through Radio Cymru, which broadcasts in Welsh, and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal, a Scottish Gaelic station. Through S4C, a Welsh-language British public service TV channel broadcast throughout the UK and Republic of Ireland, the BBC provides a news service and some programming, and from 2022 will fund it from the licence fee. Language is intrinsically connected to identity and culture. Gillespie (1995) noted that Indian parents considered viewing South Asian programmes as "essential language training for their children." In addition, Gillespie (1995: 76) suggested that viewing cultural programmes could reaffirm and reinvent "Punjabi cultural 'traditions'" as well as challenge them. Therefore, there is an examination of the 'perceived' identity of British Asians, from the perspective of seven people who took part in structured telephone interviews for this research after completing the questionnaire. The

telephone interviewees have been anonymised and their views are quoted in their voice to understand from their perspective their identity and how the BBC Asian Network nurtures or helps maintain this.

## Language and the BBC Asian Network

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The BBC Asian Network language programmes were required to “connect listeners with each other, and with their cultural and linguistic roots” as specified in BBC remits until mid-2016 (BBC Trust, 2016a :5). The remit also stipulated that a minimum of twenty hours per week ought to be dedicated to South Asian language programmes. The Punjabi programme appeals to both North Indian and Pakistani communities who speak Punjabi; the Urdu programme is aimed at listeners with Pakistani heritage and features Pakistani pop; the South Indian programme emphasises Tamil music and language for South Indians; and a Gujarati programme features related music and discussion. The April 2016 remit also used the education aspect of the remit to emphasise that the BBC Asian Network should offer opportunities for “informal learning” because these programmes “should be for listeners who may speak English as a first language” (BBC Trust, 2016a: 6). It is evident the BBC recognised that the audience was not necessarily first-generation British Asians with a good command of language skills, but subsequent generations who may not speak a South Asian language fluently. However, BBC Asian Network producers all indicated that the language programmes serve the first generation as opposed to people who do not speak a language fluently.

In August 2016, the language requirement was removed and the updated remit outlined that the BBC Asian Network will make an “important contribution” with its content “by responding in its output to the diversity of the British Asian population” in news and programme content (BBC Trust, 2016b: 5). The news and current affairs should “reflect the voices of the different British Asian communities”, and the coverage of religion and festivals should “aim to put British Asians in touch with each other” (ibid). The changes were described in a BBC press release as “necessary to help the station evolve its unique offer for the younger British Asian community” (BBC Media Centre, 2016). The language programmes have not been removed from the schedules, however, they are no longer explicitly labelled as ‘language’ shows. Instead, in keeping with the current style at the station, the programmes are simply referred to by the presenter’s name and the description gives information about the music genres played in the show. Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, explained that the language programmes have become “specialist music programmes; they provide the best of that genre and language.” Alia, a former senior member of staff, pointed out that the fact that the BBC has “peeled away the

language programmes” is evidence of the commitment to pursue a young audience. Neeta, a language programme producer, explained internally the language shows receive less attention and that most BBC staff do not listen to them: “I do think they are still seen as the poor man’s show even amongst a lot of staff”.

One explanation for this, is that the format and style of these programmes remained completely unchanged until 2012, even though across the station other shows were refreshed as part of the 2006 young and friend of the family strategies. Kavya (*not her real name*), a former member of staff explained as a result these programmes disseminated “puritanical” speech and that they connected with listeners through notions of “cultural identity and through that came a religious identity.” Therefore, Kavya describes the overall tone as “anachronistic.” Not only were these programmes disconnected from the main schedule, in Kavya’s opinion there was also a skills gap, because the presenters had other paid employment. The presenters “had really good intrinsic knowledge of specialism and that was great for them” (former senior staff member, Kavya, 2015). In contrast the main daytime radio presenters carved out careers in broadcasting, with some becoming celebrities among British Asian communities. Affie Jeerh worked as the Punjabi programme producer and explained that the programmes are inclusive to all listeners:

[...] language programme[s] are very different from those presented in English. One would assume they are for an older audience, but if you love music, regardless of what language it is presented in you can tune in. (Former Punjabi Programme Producer, Affie Jeerh, 2015)

Like Strippel, Jeerh focuses on the music ahead of the language presentation, and she acknowledges the stereotype that exists among the staff, that language programmes are intended for first-generation listeners. Jeerh does notes that these programmes are “different” which suggests that despite changes to their format a clear demarcation remains between language shows and the main daytime programmes.

The BBC implicitly accepts that many British Asians speak a South Asian language and by broadcasting in English, the output remains inclusive to all listeners and the specific language programmes acknowledge different linguistic practices are prevalent among the communities (Clark *et al.*, 1990). According to Neeta, a language programme producer, there is a “perception they are for older people” and that they do not attract many listeners because “the presenters aren’t as high profile; the guests aren’t always high profile.” Neeta highlighted that when she took over her show, “you could literally tell it was an old audience.” However, a switch to a

younger presenter who engaged with social media and presented in blended language has resulted in new listeners:

Because they are using social media, they are younger and they are engaging with Twitter. We are getting a younger listenership and the people approaching us to do interviews are younger and they are really into what we are trying to do. They recognise that Gujarati culture is not really out there and they want to help. (Language Programme Producer, Neeta, 2015)

BBC Asian Network staff are under pressure to seek the younger British Asian listener and the changes to the Gujarati show are translating into new and younger listeners who approach the station via social media. It is assumed that people who listen to the language programmes value the nurturing of language by the BBC and, in fact, a minority of survey respondents explained this is how the BBC serves their community. However, Lay and Thomas (2012: 380) concluded that language content online or within broadcast media is likely to become “obsolete” in the future because ethnic media is evolving its offer in order to attract younger generations of users. Publishers and editors of ethnic media, noted in the Lay and Thomas study that the use of mother tongue is important in “fostering and maintaining cultural unity and identity” (Lay and Thomas, 2012: 376). Furthermore, Wilson and Gutierrez (1995) have argued that foreign language media is transitional in nature because the appeal of languages tends to be restricted to first generation of immigrants. Jeerh pointed out it would be unusual to have no South Asian language presentation on the BBC Asian Network: “All the music is in language, how crazy would it be to have music played in a language and not speak the language?” (former Punjabi programme producer, Affie Jeerh, 2015). Kavya, a former senior member of staff, explained the language programme content allows listeners to make a “cultural connection” to their heritage through the festivals the programmes mark. Thus, they play a dual role in maintaining listeners by acknowledging the differences between them and by making deep connections to people’s culture and faith through the language.

The language programmes have fewer production staff, lower budgets and fewer high profile presenters. Neeta acknowledged that working on a language specific programmes does make her feel “slightly alienated” within the station. Safia, a reporter for the station, argued there is a huge need for language programmes because, she suggested, without them “our heritage, our culture will die out.” It is pertinent to note that Safia is likely to be second-generation British Asian and would like to maintain her language, as opposed to the younger producers who are making huge changes to the style and tone of language programmes in order to engage a younger listener.

A minority of staff argued that language programmes are not necessary. According to Mithra, a journalist, their existence is “a conflict of interest” because the desired young listener does not require programmes in languages and listeners who want language programming can find them elsewhere on community or commercial Asian radio. Another former senior staff member, Alia, noted that although the language programmes are considered to be culturally important, it is questionable if the target audience is speaking a South Asian language: “If no one is speaking those languages then what is the point in having them?”. This is a good question, at present the BBC appears to remain committed to offer some linguistic programming, but perhaps in the future this will be reduced further. The BBC Asian Network is actively trying to create an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991) though the use of South Asian culture, music and news above language. Their intention is to unite disparate Asian communities into a cohesive listening community through their shared interests in Asian culture and music. Furthermore, as suggested by Fitzgerald and Housely (2007: 150) the community is “bought into being” and “and maintained” through the interaction between the listener and the station.

## Blended language

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A key change on-air has been the introduction of blended language, meaning presenters no longer exclusively speak in a South Asian language when presenting a language programme, and instead use a hybrid of English and the original tongue. The strategy was introduced to reflect the way many British Asians speak. Former Controller, Bob Shennan, explained he observed how listeners flip between two languages with an “incredible kind of deftness” whereby people switch in a sentence to Urdu or Hindi from English and back again. Blended language is a strategy led from the top down to make the station relevant to the target audience by purposely reflecting a “much more contemporary sense of what it’s like to be young and of Asian descent in Britain today” (former Controller, Bob Shennan, 2015). The Head of Programmes, Mark Strippel, described the changes as a move away from “language purism, cultural purism” in order to better connect with audiences. This has been achieved by the introduction of “colloquial language, slang, Punjabi as spoken in Southall, or Sylheti Bangla as on the streets of Tower Hamlets.” What is notable is that the new language programme presenters third generation British Asians and have first-hand experience of the British Asian lifestyle and can connect with the younger listener. This move also acknowledges that some listeners only speak English, whilst others retain their south Asian tongue, hence blending can appeal to all listeners. The concept is widely liked by staff, although one former journalist, Binali, explained she dislikes the use of colloquial language because it dilutes the language: “I like the idea but it’s



too much slang.” Binali was making a particular reference to the South Asian language as opposed to English. However, this was the only viewpoint that disapproved of the blended language and it is pertinent to note that Binali is a first-generation British Asian who explained in her interview that these programmes are vital in order to “educate our kids.” In Binali’s view, the BBC as a public service broadcaster has a role to play in maintaining and preserving the various South Asian languages for the younger generations of British Asians in the UK.

The Punjabi programme presenter, Dipps Bhamrah, explained he is happy to present in blended language because English has “crept into the everyday language, even in India” and he wants to be “more inclusive than exclusive.” The former Breakfast presenter, Tommy Sandhu, explained that when he listened to other Asian radio stations prior to joining the BBC Asian Network, he was strongly aware that the “Asian presenters weren’t like me” and “I felt like they didn’t represent me, they didn’t sound like me and they were very Asian.” The reference to sounding Asian refers to the language skills of those presenters and as a result they came across on-air as overtly traditional and reflected values that younger British Asians may not uphold because their lived experiences differ from younger generations of Asians

If listeners want to hear an all-Punjabi programme which is very deep, thought-provoking, there are other platforms and other stations that can provide that better than I ever could. (Presenter, Dipps Bhamrah, 2015)

Dipps Bhamrah was one of the first to embrace blended presentation, explaining some listeners consume his programme specifically for the music as opposed to the language, thus, “I go for a 50/50 split if anybody can’t speak Punjabi, it’s great for them. If they speak English, they’re still getting a flavour of what’s going on.” Bhamrah, like Friction, is a music specialist, therefore, listeners may choose this programme for the music he plays as opposed to the fact it is a Punjabi show. Jeerh, a former Punjabi programme producer, explained the feedback about language blending has been positive. She suggested it is important to reflect that the majority of listeners speak in English: “We live in the UK, I am a second-generation British Asian and on a daily basis ninety per cent of my conversation with people is in English” (Jeerh, language producer, 2015).

In terms of attracting the audience, if we presented in pure Gujarati we would be alienating the listeners that we were trying to attract. (Language Programme Producer, Neeta, 2015)

Neeta acknowledges that the linguistic practices among young British Asians mean they do not necessarily engage with a ‘pure’ or undiluted version of a South Asian language that their grandparents perhaps communicated in. Yu (2016) found that more than half of the three

thousand ethnic media outlets in the US produce content in English. Furthermore, Yu poses that although first generations have higher dependency on mother-tongue media, ethnic media can in fact serve both minority and majority communities. The introduction of purposeful blended presentation in 'language' programmes is innovative and ought to have wide appeal, especially among younger British Asians because it embraces the dual aspects of British Asian lifestyle in contemporary Britain.

The language programme presenters have been refreshed a number of times since 2012. The current presenters "are absolutely target, they are living and breathing what their communities are doing. I think because of that [they] are attracting a broader audience" (former senior member of staff, Kavya, 2015). However, the existence of the language programmes on the output can explain why some listeners believe the station is targeted at all age groups. They are scheduled on Sundays but have historically occupied various different timeslots on weekday evenings. Their scheduling has been problematic, because wherever they are placed denotes a switch from the main programming aimed at all listeners to language programming primarily attracting a smaller community. This has meant that the schedule has always been "disjointed" (former News Editor, Mike Curtis, 2014). Curtis explained that the specific language programmes were:

[...] an appointment for people to listen. I speak Gujarati. I will listen into those two hours but I am not terribly interested in the rest of it, it's a bit serious so [I] go back to commercial stations. (Former News Editor, Mike Curtis, 2014)

This is an interesting analogy to view the language programmes and the role they fulfil for some audiences. It seems evident that different age groups come to the BBC Asian Network at different times of the day for their specific content; however, by focusing on young people, the BBC is excluding older audiences who also pay the licence fee. At present the BBC Asian Network is experimenting with a Radio 1 style surgery show and music show from 10pm on weeknights. Friday and Saturday evenings focus on music anthems and music mixes. It is clear the schedule is regularly updated to attract a wide variety of listeners.

## Intergenerational change among British Asians

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It is evident that the BBC has been attempting to experiment with the output and presenters in order to sound more like its sister stations, 1Xtra and Radio 1, now under the leadership of Controller, Ben Cooper. The increasing significance of young British Asians and their growing participation in media production roles means that the BBC and ethnic media are being forced to innovate and change as they respond to the evolving workforce and their listeners. Although the majority of ethnic media organisations are founded by and targeted at first generation migrants, they now recruit younger generations of their own communities who have a diluted, hyphenated and hybrid identities (Yu and Matsaganis, 2019). These circumstances are replicated at the BBC Asian Network, and the disagreement over the age of the target listener affects the manner in which producers address the listener. Perhaps the older generational staff find it difficult to engage with the contemporary issues that young British Asians face and thus in Kamran's words remain in the "Good Gracious Me era." Presenter Bobby Friction, outlined his difficulties with engaging young British Asian listeners:

How do you say to an 18-year-old, 'I want you to listen to the Asian Network' when their grandmother and grandfather listen to that stuff? Some kids don't even have parents who listen to it. 'I want you to listen to the Asian Network', well why would I? The brick wall is about culture, about links to mother cultures, and also actually just about who we are. (Presenter, Bobby Friction, 2016)

The underlying suggestion is that the station is not considered to be relevant by younger listeners. Friction also appears to imply that some third, fourth and fifth generation British Asians do not want hear about Asian culture and heritage because this is not a prominent aspect of their identity. Kamlesh Purohit, used to listen to the regional Asian Network on BBC Radio Leicester in the 1970s and rationalised why the service was able to appeal to all Asians:

In those days the differences that are so important now, whether you are Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, weren't big differences. If people were Asian, you related to them, we had the same battles to fight. So having a radio show in a way was one thing that every part of the community, everybody in the Asian community, felt that they could belong to. (Former Senior Journalist, Kamlesh Purohit, 2015)

There appear to be clear differences among the Asian communities in Britain; for example, the Parekh Report (2000) noted that some communities live segregated lives in some cities and only interact and mix with people from the same community. Historically, there were no other ethnic media outlets in the UK and, thus, the BBC programming had to appeal to everyone and not just specific communities as many Asian community radio stations choose to serve (e.g. Punjab

Radio, Sanskar Radio and Desi Radio). The BBC tries to enable a sense of belonging and ownership for the entire Asian community in an inclusive manner:

The Asian Network is a glorious kind of extension of the BBC and also one of the hardest places to work if you're in management because you have to honestly sit there and consider 'how can I bring a Pashtun family who speak Pashto, who are nominally part of Pakistani culture and join them with this Gujarati family of lawyers in Wembley?'. How do I hit both of those demographics and it's pretty hard! (Presenter, Bobby Friction, 2016)

To make any station work, there needs to be a consideration of how to appeal to the largest audience possible, and, as indicated earlier in this chapter, the BBC does this through presenting in English, and by offering bespoke 'accented production' in order to be inclusive and appeal to British Asians. There are, however, questions about how you unite all the disparate communities that are labelled 'Asian'. What Friction is referring to is achieving a balance between traditional or heritage content and mainstream content in order to match the programming to the desired audience. Regional regional differences among British Asians in the UK also have to be considered:

If I say on the Asian Network that we don't need do all this as most Asians speak English, then I will be alienating all my listeners up north, totally alienating them. (Former Senior Member of Staff, Alia, 2015)

Alia has underlined that, among the British Asian community, there are various dimensions and different nuances depending on people's jobs and where they live. Alia pointed out in the North of the UK, "they are still marrying abroad and bringing people over so your Asian community there and here [Midlands] are completely different." According to Ali *et al.*, (2006: 138), social divisions between Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian, (especially African Asian) are "marked, most especially in terms of class, education and upward mobility." The North of England is often viewed as having a 'traditional' listenership, for example they may have partners from South Asia and work in factories or service sector roles. In contrast to London and the South East where British Asians are conceptualised as being largely 'professionals' or students. Former Controller, Bob Shennan, outlined his plan to united the audience:

The common denominator is Britishness, not Asianness, its Britishness. And that in a way is the definition of how the Asian network has totally changed over the course of its existence. (Former Controller, Bob Shennan, 2015)

This suggests that at a senior level that the role of the BBC Asian Network is not to promote Asian culture *per se*, and is instead to link together a distinct ethnic group in the UK who share a post-colonial history and the experience of living in Britain. Mitchell (cited in Brunt and Cere,

2011: 64) has argued that the significance of minority ethnic community radio is the fact that it is able to “broaden media representation with creatively useful definitions of communities.” What is problematic, however, as Yu (2016: 5) has argued, is that there are often two identities in operation: the identity that members of ethnic communities self-identify with, and the identity that is socially constructed and prescribed to them – in this instance by the BBC. It is clear the management and some staff have a sense of direction and an understanding of whom they are serving. However, the other group, largely older first and second generation member of staff disagree with it.

### BBC Asian Network – the view from the listener

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To understand how the listeners, integrate the BBC Asian Network within their lives, a number of respondents were contacted via email in January 2017, and were invited to participate in short structured phone interviews. Seven people aged between eighteen and thirty-six took part. They were asked the same five questions: how well the BBC Asian Network reflects the British Asian lifestyle, the understanding the station has of the different communities, the relevance of such a service in ten years’ time, how the interviewee identified themselves and which aspect of their identity is (i.e. Asian) is the dominating aspect in their lifestyle. Although a small sample, some differences are evident as to how well the BBC Asian Network understands their British Asian lifestyles. The interviewees are anonymised and described by a number.

Interviewee 1 has been a listener for a number of years and explained that the service is relevant because “we pick up things that are pertinent to our communities in relation to culture and religion. It also allows the wider society the chance to get to know about what our culture is all about” (Interviewee 1, 2017). The reference to “we” is understood to refer to all British Asians, and thereby suggests that members of the Asian communities can access information. What is unique is that the interviewee also acknowledged that the majority population can learn from the BBC Asian Network. This is similar to Yu’s (2019) argument, that majority populations need to have access to ethnic media, in order for issues affecting minority groups to be heard in the public sphere. Similarly, interviewee 7 noted that the station is important because it “offers an Asian perspective, and discusses how [news] affects us, how it’s relevant for us.” In contrast, interviewee 2, a woman of Gujarati heritage, argued the BBC Asian Network focuses on some communities to the detriment of others:

When I listen to other Asian radio stations there is a lot more emphasis on Garba [dance performed during Navratri] but I don't somehow sense that at the Asian Network. They probably do, I just haven't heard it. Whilst when I listen to other radio stations, it's all over the output, so it's engaging and everybody is celebrating it. Every time I put Asian Network on, there's a lot of Punjabi Bhangra and urban Asian music. (Interviewee 2, 2016)

This perspective was also apparent in the questionnaire responses, that noted not all Asian communities are treated equally in terms of the time given to cover their faiths or festivals or language. Interviewee 3 concurred, arguing "there are certain cultural events covered by the BBC Asian Network that they seem to understand to a degree, but I don't think they are fully understood, i.e. Bengali or Gujarati" (interviewee 3, 2017). This is an interesting observation and suggests that among BBC staff there is a lack of knowledge about some Asian communities. One explanation offered by Kevin Silverton, in Chapter 6 was that some communities are still absent from the staff structure within the BBC Asian Network. In addition, both Gujarati and Bangladeshi cultures more generally have been subordinated to the dominant 'North Indian' culture, which is evident in food and music in the UK. Malik (2012: 513) has noted that the legacy of Sikhs and Hindus serving on behalf of the allies during World War 2 and their "enhanced socio-economic status" in the UK consequently means that British Punjabis "occupy a representational space marked both by distinction and inclusion." In other words, the Sikh and Punjabi culture, norms and practices are considered applicable to all Asian communities, even though this is a relatively small group among the larger South Asian communities. However, former BBC Asian Network senior journalist, Kamlesh Purohit, argued that these communities get very little attention on the BBC:

One of the comments I get from so many people is that Hindus and Sikhs don't exist in the eye of the BBC. I find that quite difficult to defend. Occasionally you see the odd programme on Diwali but otherwise you don't see much reflection of those very large communities. (Former Senior Journalist, Kamlesh Purohit, 2015)

Purohit receives feedback from his community that people feel ignored at the expense of the Muslim news stories and festivals. Chapter 6 outlined how the wider BBC selects stories from the Asian Network that emphasise difference, for example, terror, forced marriages or burkas over stories about other British Asian communities, because the prevailing belief is the former content interests people. Although the term 'Asian' is applied indiscriminately to people from Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan backgrounds, the use of the term masks the differences that exist between them, and simultaneously unites them. However, for BBC Asian Network journalists to advance their careers, they need to source and pitch original news stories to the wider BBC, and those that are familiar are more likely to be selected.

Interviewee 7 outlined that because the BBC Asian Network is a platform for British Asians, it ought to project a positive image of all the Asian communities but noted the news output does not always these expectations:

I want them to be more positive. They [the journalists] do bring out the negativity of stories. You expect it to be a platform to raise a positive outlook. It's a platform for us. Sometimes I think that Asian Network align more with the BBC narrative on political topics: Islam, Islamophobia, terrorism. I want to see them break away from that a bit more. (Interviewee 7)

Interviewee 7, acknowledges that the news agenda at the BBC Asian Network is similar to the BBC more generally, this is due to the fact the station is part of the organisation and therefore is subject to the same guidelines. Interviewee 7 identified as being Muslim, and her views on Islam mirror the perspectives outlined in Chapter 6, whereby Muslim listeners question why content about their community is often negative. The interviewee's feelings in the quote reveal she has a connection and feels a form of ownership of the station because she explicitly sees it as a "platform for us", yet because the service is aligned with the normative values of the BBC, it inherently reflects establishment, business and elite views as opposed to what she would like – the voice and views of British Asians. Matsaganis and Katz (2014) suggest that ethnic media audiences do expect their media to showcase their community at their best whilst ignoring the deeper underlying issues. However, Alia, a senior member of staff, believes the reason the station can cause offence is because British Asians "are very protective about their histories, their culture, their religion", and will attempt to preserve their way of life and present it in the best way possible (Alia, former senior member of staff, 2015).

Interviewee 6 noted that the debate show can be divisive because the format can allow communities to feel they are "pitched against" each other and thus encourages listeners "to ring in and have a pop at the opposite culture". Moreover, "I don't think it brings people together – it actually creates a divide that already exists" (interviewee 6, 2017). The terminology used is strong and clearly indicates interviewee 6 believes the listeners are highly managed in controversial debates structured by the BBC. Fitzgerald and Housley, (2002) suggest producers tend to have inherent knowledge about their audience and shape the question to suit their agenda. Interviewee 6, views suggest that the debate programme, which allows listeners to "interact and communicate with each other and the station" does achieve this, but not all listeners may agree with the views expressed on-air (BBC Trust, 2016b :2). The interviewee did note that, overall, she is pleased with the changes the BBC has made because "they are getting in new fresh faces and presenters rather than the old presenters that have been there for years" (Interviewee 6. 2017). However, she is unsure of the future relevance of the station because,

she said “We are actually becoming segregated. Different cultures, different religions are branching off and doing their own thing” (Interviewee 6, 2017), and thus questions the future of an Asian service for all.

## British Asian identity

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The BBC is demonstrating innovation by fundamentally transforming the BBC Asian Network so that the content, music and presenters reflect contemporary British Asian society. However, the questionnaire and subsequent telephone interviews highlight there is an underlying problem with the term ‘Asian’ and the connoted identity associated with this phrase. Therefore, to explore this further, the telephone interviewees were asked to describe how they ‘define themselves’ in order to see if there are similarities or differences between the Asian identity disseminated by the BBC Asian Network. Due to the vague nature of the question, I did have to clarify with further prompts: “What do you answer when people ask where are you from?”. The difficulty with this question was that I deliberately tried to avoid using ‘British’ and ‘British Asian’ in order to avoid leading the interviewees. The responses gathered reflect that four out of the seven interviewees were born abroad and some of them did not consider themselves to be British or British Asian. Interviewee 2, aged thirty, explained she is “British Indian” and is “equally as proud” of being Indian and British. When asked which aspect dominates her lifestyle, she admitted, “it would probably be the Indian side more.” In contrast, interviewee 1, age unknown, defined herself as “British Asian, even though I was born in Africa.” Interviewee 3, a nineteen-year-old male listener, explained:

The only time I say British Asian is when I am filling out a form and they want to know your ethnic group. I am someone who would consider myself as more Indian than British. My family is very religious so we tend to go temple at least once a week. We have fasting period every fifteen days, so for me, personally speaking, I would feel my Asian side, I would class myself Indian. (Interviewee 3)

This perspective is particularly interesting, because the interviewee is aged nineteen and is part of the target age group the BBC wants to attract through the notion of ‘British’ identity first and foremost. Bobby Friction highlighted that fourth and fifth-generation British Asians “don’t connect on a British Asian way to other British Asians who possibly don’t connect even to where they come from”; however, this interviewee feels a deep connection to his ‘cultural’ homeland due to his strong faith, but conversely does not believe that the identity associated with Asian has a meaning for him. ‘British Asian’ is an identity that has been created and manipulated in order to label groups of different people together, by the media, politicians, educators and other



institutions in society who play key roles in society. Shohat and Stam (2014: 6) argue terminology such as Black or Asian works to privilege 'Whiteness,' because it centres this group which means all the other groups become the "rest". Ali *et al.*, (2006: 7) describe 'British Asian' as a term that connotes South Asians as belonging to a culture that is "static, patriarchal and authoritarian, in contrast to British/Western culture, with its gleaming (post) modernity." The creation of 'British Asian' as a singular identity, means that the media, impose a version of Asian identity that is constructed through a Eurocentric lens and perpetuates historical stereotypes on audiences. Whereas Kaur and Kalra (in Sharma *et al.*, 1996: 219) argue that British Asian is "over-used and poorly defined" and seeks to represent an arguably large ethnic cultural category in Britain.

Interviewee 6, aged twenty-five, also does not define herself as Asian: "I don't use the word Asian, ever, when I describe myself. I say 'I am British and I come from an Indian background'". Interviewee 2, who aligns with her Indian heritage, explained her great grandparents came from India, and her grandparents from Africa, thus:

When I go to India, I feel I don't really belong. Yet it's home but my home is also here. So it's an unusual twist and I think that's a confusion a lot of my friends and a lot of people I spoke to have – they don't actually know where they belong. (Interviewee 2)

This is a unique insight into the feelings of someone likely to be third-generation British Asian. Because this is a minority view, it is not possible to apply this to all second or third-generation British-born Asians. This perspective does illustrate the complex transnational experience that British Asians have experienced through the various generations and the space they now occupy in Britain (Moylan, 2013). The prevalent dominant stereotype of British Asians through the 1980s and 1990s as being conflicted or caught between two cultures has traditionally been articulated by mainstream media (Haq, in Sharma *et al.*, 1996). However, the interviewees all indicated a sense of pride in their particular cultures and the importance of maintaining the culture for their children. Conversely, interviewee 7, aged twenty-four, touched upon an issue that a number of British Asians face, that they are British but not considered 'ethnically' British:

I tend to say I'm Pakistani, even though I was born in America and have lived here for fifteen-odd years. I still relate to Pakistan and, oh my skin is brown, that's why. (Interviewee 7)

The interviewee feels she cannot be considered British or English due to her skin colour and background, as she believes that being English or British denotes "an exclusive cultural or racial category", which in this instance is white (Condor *et al.*, 2006: 123). It is significant that most of the interviewees rarely describe themselves as British or Asian. Interviewee 4, defined himself

as “British Asian,” although he was born abroad, and refers to abroad as “back home”. However, BBC reporter, Safia, believes use of the term Asian is justified:

I think the blanket term ‘Asian’ is better because we are talking about three million Asians in the country. It’s like Bollywood, all Asians understand it, nobody from Bangladesh will say ‘Bollywood doesn’t cater for me’. (Reporter, Safia, 2015)

The use of the term ‘Asian’ is often the subject on the station’s debate programme. It is worth mentioning that a number of Indian BBC viewers have complained about the use of the term ‘Asian’ in child grooming news stories (BBC News, 2012). The BBC does not always refer to the community of origin for this particular story. Kamlesh Purohit is unhappy with this stance:

Rightly or wrongly, people say that the Indian communities who have settled here and integrated really well and contribute in a very positive way. They are not always involved in crimes like this [child grooming]. But because the generic term ‘Asian’ is used, they feel that they are being implicated in something. (Former Senior Journalist, Kamlesh Purohit, 2015)

Purohit’s remarks indicate that there is deep conflict, and mistrust between the different communities underlying the sense of unity that the BBC Asian Network attempts to create, and this was highlighted by interviewee 7, who explained that she found the debate programme divisive.

The discussion suggests that the BBC has concentrated on emphasising British values and lifestyle on-air over South Asian language and culture. Therefore, British Asian music is emphasised on-air, and presenters mostly broadcast in English and make cultural references to Bollywood and Indian and Pakistani television, alongside British television, in order to reflect the contemporary listener. However, not all the listeners identify with the British Asian identity articulated on-air because each person has their own individual experiences – some British Asians migrated from Africa and others from South Asia; some are deeply connected to their religion and language whereas others are not.

## The relevance of the BBC Asian Network

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The BBC attracts listeners to the BBC Asian Network through the music and offers news and current affairs content specifically for the British Asian communities, alongside South Asian language programming. This suggests that, although the BBC want to gain a large audience, primarily aged between fifteen and thirty, the inclusion of programmes in South Asian languages and Bollywood music on the playlist also meets the needs of a slightly older audience and

maintains listener figures. The questionnaire asked how the BBC served the participants' community and the importance of an Asian-specific service on the BBC. Thirty-four responses expressed that the station builds a 'British Asian community': respondent 29, a thirty-six-year-old woman from Leicester, explained that it "serves the needs of the Asian communities, religion, culture that no one else serves." This links to the discussion in Chapter 7, whereby the ethnic staff at the BBC remain unconvinced there is a sufficient representation of British Asians by the wider BBC. A number of answers focused upon the size of the Asian community, for example, respondent 16, aged thirty, explained that "the Asian community in the UK is well established, integrated, yet retains its own unique identity and this should be celebrated and shared." The respondents appeared to approve of the service and some had a sense of pride that it exists. A twenty-four-year-old female participant from London commented that British Asians are "a population within the UK that need the service, the representation and the platform", and respondent 61, age unknown, explained that the station "sends a message that Asian communities are quite important." This is pertinent – the comment conveys that this respondent feels valued. It is plausible that all the questionnaire respondents have paid a licence fee and in return want to be included and visible within the media output. Historically the BBC placed a huge emphasis upon constructing and reflecting the nation and it is interesting that a minority community also values the contribution the BBC makes in building and promoting a community of British Asians. The BBC Asian Network is unique – no other minority group in the UK has its own service, and the questionnaire responses demonstrate that the communities value the service. The other BBC language services exist for Welsh and Gaelic-speaking people in Scotland in order to preserve the language as part of the public service remit.

A smaller number of participants – nineteen – believe that the station plays an important role in showcasing the 'culture' of different Asian communities. Respondent 27, a thirty-nine-year-old woman from Birmingham, highlighted that the station "keeps our cultures alive when we're being bombarded to conform to society," this answer recognises the implicit messages within media content to assimilate. A number of participants placed a value on maintaining their Asian-specific culture and music and suggest the BBC Asian Network is best placed to do this. For example, respondent 10, a thirty-eight-year-old woman from Leicester, outlined that it "gives [the] younger generation culture and music and retains and promotes your language." Although it was not possible to gain as much depth as the telephone interviews allowed, the answers do indicate that a number of British Asian listeners want a platform for their music. A fifteen-year girl from London best exemplified the contribution that the BBC Asian Network makes:

It allows a space for people like me who have grown up with Indian heritage. It gives people a sense of their own personal identity, as it isn't fully Indian or fully British. (Respondent 63)

This response connects to what Bob Shennan highlighted in his interview – that the “common denominator” for the listeners is being British as opposed to being Asian. Interviewee 2 had some concerns about the music, which she described as being “all urbanised and British Asian” and “more British than Indian”. The underlying suggestion is that the interviewee does not approve of changes to the playlist

I don't know how many people will be interested in a radio station like that because I think people like to listen to Indian music because it's a way of connecting to something back home. (Interviewee 2, 2017)

Her views may not necessarily be applicable to younger listeners. The BBC is trying to make the station distinctive from commercial Asian services that emphasise Bollywood music, so it is likely listeners who agree with interviewee 2 will switch to other stations that better suits their needs. Interviewee 4 observed that the sound of the station has changed: “It's more British Asian music to be honest, it's not purely Bollywood”. This interviewee does not find this to be a negative.

## Concluding remarks

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It is clear from the responses gained through the audience questionnaire and telephone interviews that a large proportion of listeners engage with the BBC and feel a sense of ownership and pride in the BBC's only ethnic-specific service. Most of the participants believe the existence of an Asian-specific service contributes to building and maintaining Asian culture and an Asian community. This makes the station's offer unique within a public service remit. The BBC has been demonstrating innovation with the language programming by actively adapting and changing language programmes with the introduction of 'blended' presentation in order to remain relevant to contemporary young listeners.

How individual British Asians identify themselves is clearly a very personal issue that takes into account different family histories of migration. The deeper issue seems to be how can the production staff effectively cater for all British Asians? If the BBC Asian Network is focused on uniting disparate groups through notions of 'Britishness', it may need to acknowledge that some younger generations do align with the country their grandparents or great grandparents originated from.

There remains one contradiction, the listeners pose that the station plays an important role in maintaining their cultures, whereas, the BBC is moving away from promoting South Asian language arts and culture towards a younger contemporary British Asian tone in keeping with the focus on the younger listener who is likely to be assimilated.

## Chapter 10 – Conclusion

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The main goal of this study was to examine the experiences of minority ethnic producers working within the BBC. The chapters have scrutinised how staff construct a British Asian audience for the BBC and the BBC Asian Network specifically through the music (Chapter 8), news and journalism practices (Chapter 6), recruitment procedures (Chapter 6), the representation of British Asians by the BBC (Chapter 7) and linguistic programmes and Asian identity (chapter 9). What has been identified is that minority ethnic producers face a number of challenges in targeting their ‘imagined community’; they lack the autonomy to offer the robust and authentic representation of Asian communities they desire; their ethnic expertise is marginalised and some staff feel young listener profile has been forced upon them. In addition, among the people recruited to work at the BBC Asian Network there exists an internal divide between two groups of staff over whom they should be serving and how. Chapter 2 and 3 highlighted how content producers are forced to navigate institutional and societal perspectives on ethnic audiences on the one hand and, on the other, balance their views on Asian identity, when creating material for broadcast. This balancing act is one of the causes of the internal inter-generational struggle between editors and producers, how should the station serve its core audience and who should the core audience be? Younger listeners as indicated by Ofcom and the BBC or older British Asians. A clear problem is that institutionally and among some staff, the ‘Asian listener’ is conceptualised as being homogenous, and yet the listener perspectives demonstrated differences due in part to geography, age, the generation of the Asian community they belong to, socio economic differences, religious differences and education.

This research makes an original contribution to the field of media research, namely production studies, by offering an ‘insider’ perspective on working practices from the perspective of minority ethnic producers working within a public service remit and their struggle to reach out to their ethnic audience. There has been a detailed look at the challenges minority ethnic producers face as they shape and tailor their content for British Asian audiences. This type of inquiry is necessary because there is “unequal access” to the means of production and influences the voices that are heard in the media (Saha and Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 183). This study is especially important because the numbers of young British Asians working in both mainstream and ethnic media organisations is growing and consequently, the views of people who belong to third or fourth generations Asian communities inevitably differ from first generation. This study has brought to fore the inter-generational differences between older and young British Asian staff working at the BBC.

## Inter-generational conflict and identity

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One of the significant findings, to emerge from this research is the existence of the internal conflict between the older, traditional ethnic producers and the younger ethnic staff recruited by the BBC. The older ethnic staff, from the first and second-generation, are opposed to the top down BBC agenda to concentrate on the young assimilated listener because, they feel British Asians deserve a radio service that has a stronger focus on promoting Asian culture, news from South Asia and related music. Whereas the younger staff, comprised of some second generation, but mostly third generation British Asians, appear to be at ease with the attention on the young demographic, especially through digital means. I suggest that the older ethnic staff have adopted the BBC's paternalistic approach and would like the third and fourth-generation British Asian staff and listeners, to feel more deeply connected to their culture, and are frustrated that some staff and listeners do not necessarily feel this urge. I argue this is symptomatic of the struggle all immigrant communities face at some point, when they feel their distinctive heritage is becoming unacceptably diluted. This is one of the key differences that characterises the way the older production staff at the BBC Asian Network perceive the different generations that comprise their British Asian listener, they inherently want to create material that bonds the listeners to their faith, heritage and culture. They accept, grudgingly, that their young listener does not require this type of content because they are in the older staff's words 'integrated' or 'westernised', and implied through the terminology is that this undesirable. Therefore, they want the autonomy create material for listeners who are more likely to want to gaze back to their countries and cultures.

As noted in the Chapter 3, the process of identity shifts and changes as minority communities interact with a new nation (Hesse, 2000; Gillespie, 1995; Spivak, 1988). The younger generations of any minority communities increase their acceptance within youth cultures, employment and education through familiarity with other cultures and thereby dilute their distinctive identity. In the early years of Asian radio programming the BBC through the regional radio programmes and television programming sought to provide communities with information to support their settlement into Britain and to conform them to British values and standards (Matsaganis *et al.*, 2011). Ethnic media, tend to be defined as media made by and tailored for first-generation immigrants (Matsaganis *et al.*, 2011), however, in Britain the British Asian community is now in its fourth and fifth generations and these members are increasingly playing a more prominent role in employment, education and society. This is reflected by the growth of younger production staff and presenters at the BBC Asian Network.

Largely these differences are the consequence of inter-generational change within the British Asian community, the younger generations are likely to have a greater vested interest in Britain, than the first generation, but may not speak a South Asian language fluently (Ramamurthy in Price and Sabido, 2015). However, these producers, understand the lifestyle of young Asian listeners, their interests and their identity. Another related finding is that some staff are hired despite their lack of knowledge pertaining to the Asian communities, and this may have a detrimental impact upon engaging the target listener. It is significant that former senior member of staff, Alia claimed a balance has to be found to manage the social differences that are evident between staff and insinuated that this is a difficult task. Therefore, the manner in which the target audience is imagined by the senior management, the younger generations of Asian staff and the older generations of staff directly impacts how the listener is addressed. I suggest that the older staff feel restricted, because they are unable to be creative and appeal the listener they want to serve.

In contrast, the younger staff outlined an alternative view, that the BBC is chasing or 'pushing' itself to gain an audience who do not feel compelled to listen simply because they are Asian. The telephone interviewees discussed how they do not like the term 'Asian' and do not identify with it. I propose that the BBC management understand British Asians within the narrow confines of a 'nation-centric' understanding, whilst recognising their 'hybrid' identity but perhaps not serving the latter as much as it could (Wolock and Punathambekar, 2014). BBC Asian Network presenter, Bobby Friction, outlined that the desired listener the BBC is chasing is likely to be assimilated and integrated, and as a result, may not require a three-hour debate programme examining if the national curriculum adequately covers all faiths or the differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims. It appears plausible that the debate format is more likely to appeal to first and second-generation British Asians because, arguably, these groups have fought to make a space for themselves, have struggled to be heard and have challenged legislation that historically enabled inequality to pervade (Ramamurthy in Price and Sanz Sabido, 2015), whereas subsequent British Asian generations grew up during the period of multiculturalism where different faiths and communities were an accepted norm although their voices and experiences were often side-lined by the media. Due to the complex struggles to own and control media, content that examines the experiences of British Asians remains marginalised due to the existence of a rigid gatekeeping system that enables the commodification of diverse content to enable media organisations to survive in a competitive environment (Saha 2018, Hesmondhalgh 2019). Therefore, minority communities are often featured within the media in terms of their difference. This is further compounded with the



current media discourse on Brexit which normalises racism (Gayle, 2018; Virdee and McGreever, 2018). The audience, have limited power to influence or set the parameters of their representation, because ultimately the audience is viewed either from above, from the outside, or from an institutional perspective (Ang, 1991).

The BBC has imposed a young target listener on the BBC Asian Network, and changed the station's policies on music and language to make the station more relevant to younger audiences. The new BBC Operating Licence issued by Ofcom has also imposed a younger target listener on BBC Local Radio services as well (Ofcom 2017). The BBC tries to unite British Asian audiences into a distinctive, large and, presumably, profitable, ethnic group due to their shared post-colonial histories and unites them into a community of listeners through notions of "Britishness" (former Controller, Bob Shennan). Yu (2016: 5) has demonstrated that there are usually two identities for minority communities: the identity that members of ethnic communities self-identify with, in other words, authentic and reflexive, and the identity that is socially constructed and prescribed to them – in this instance, by the BBC. 'Asian' has been constructed by Britain, the media and the state as a short form to understanding a group of people who collectively form the largest minority group in Britain. The BBC Asian Network is focused upon a young listener and therefore, there is less emphasis on promoting South Asian language and music and instead British Asian music is emphasised in line with the remit. The manner in which the station envisages Asian identity acknowledges that the listener is integrated into the British way of life. However, the news agenda promoted by the BBC Asian Network, and other media, on issues such as terrorism promotes a narrative about communities (mostly Muslim) that are segregated (Abbas, 2001; Malik, 2012; Parekh, 2000; Poole, 2006; Virdee and McGreever, 2018). By doing this the BBC, to an extent continues to promote British Asian culture as seen and experienced in the terms prescribed by the dominant majority culture.

The mainstreamed version of diversity is the recognition of the hybrid culture adopted by some third and fourth-generation British Asians. However, it is important to acknowledge this version of diversity does not reflect everyone, and in fact, some of the listeners revealed in their structured interviews that they are more likely to identify with their country of heritage as opposed to a so-called 'Asian' identity. This was an unexpected finding and is a strength of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Strauss and Glaser, 1967), because ideas emerge from the data as opposed to the researching imposing their personal views. It is not possible to draw a generalisation because only seven interviews were conducted, and four of the interviewees explained that they were born abroad. This fact alone illustrates the many differences and nuances that exist within this group that the BBC tries to reflect as being broadly

homogenous and cohesive. Further detailed research is required to learn whether fourth and fifth-generation British Asians are identifying as British Indian or British Pakistani instead of British Asian, and why.

## Recruitment and gatekeeping

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The literature in Chapter 3, highlighted that the number of black, Asian and minority ethnic journalists, producers, presenters and editors remain underrepresented in the media in spite of initiatives to increase them (Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013; O'Brien *et al.*, 2016; Ofcom, 2018a). The interviews demonstrated that internal BBC practices inevitably mean often middle class, integrated and assimilated minority ethnic staff, educated to at least degree level, are hired for roles at the BBC Asian Network, even if they may have very little knowledge of Asian culture. This leads to a “class asymmetry” between the staff at the BBC Asian Network and the core audience they serve (Hesmondhalgh, in Deery and Press, 2017) and, in addition, it contributes to the rift between the staff. The gap between the social class of media workers and their audience is replicated across all media, but I suggest it is more deeply felt at the BBC Asian Network, because the listening community is largely comprised of working class Asians (Watson, 2017; Eustace, 2016). Production studies researchers have posed that the producer is able to convey their knowledge, views and identity through their work, therefore, their views contribute to the sum of knowledge and information circulated within the public sphere and society (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Mayer, 2011). As a consequence, there has been an emphasis within research to scrutinise how the production process leads to a reproduction or construction of the producer’s identity in the work created (see Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). What emerged from this study is that British Asian content producers are influenced by the generation and demographic to which they belong to - some seek to create content that evokes a connection to South Asia, whereas others craft material that embraces a diluted or hybrid identity. As consequence, the message conveyed on-air to the listeners is best described as muddled, chaotic and haphazard. This was acknowledged by the listeners in the questionnaire, with a number of them believing the station was for Asians of all ages.

What also emerged in this study, is the pressure staff are under to entice and engage the ethnic listener. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), Malik (2013), and Saha (2012, 2018) have all recognised that media organisations have been weakened by deregulation and been forced to embrace marketisation, which has had the effect of accentuating audience figures above the range and depth of content. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) contend that the corporatisation of the media has forced workers to “comprise” between maintaining professional standards in

their work and trying to offer their audience content that responds to their needs. Furthermore, because marketisation procedures are top down initiatives, they constrain producers responsible for making minority specific content (Cottle 1997). The in-depth interviews also uncovered similar issues, ethnic producers working at the BBC Asian Network are frustrated that the wider BBC promotes a racialised agenda, with disproportionate attention directed at Muslim communities, at the expense of other Asian groups. Moreover, this directly impacts creativity and innovation, because the producers are acutely aware what type of ideas will be selected. In this manner the public service broadcaster, aligned with the nation and the establishment, determines the depth and range of representation British Asian communities receive. The representation that is permitted is one where the parameters are established by social institutions, for example, the Government. Society has tended to prescribe norms, rules and histories onto minority groups and women, in most fields, so consequently, members of these groups are tacitly expected to conform to prescribed the norms or risk exclusion. This can also mean that ethnic staff maybe required to demonstrate or prove their of skills more regularly that non-minority employees. Journalists at the BBC Asian Network must must succeed in sharing their original journalism, because this is visible demonstration that they are 'good', and to achieve this they need to pitch stories that commissioners are likely to select. Key editorial decision makers in the BBC remain non-minority and male and this means that the gatekeepers maintain the practice of portraying minority communities as 'other' and 'different' in news and drama.

The fact that the BBC selected the BBC Asian Network for closure in 2010 as part of a cost saving move indicates the station is not high in hierarchy of importance. The move also indicates that serving diverse audiences is perhaps not as important or central to the mission of the BBC as the organisation would like to advocate. There is clearly a gap between top-down policies of the wider BBC management and how they embraced by some ethnic staff from the bottom up, many of whom are first and second generation British Asians, embedded and connected to the communities they serve. This is where the process of in-depth interviews with BBC journalists, editors and controllers has been fruitful; a wealth of material was gathered, which revealed different perspectives on the production process, depending upon the interviewee's role.

## Managing race and diversity in a public service remit

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Against this context, one of the research questions was to explore how the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, articulate and manage issues pertaining to race and ethnicity? The

broadcaster clearly wants to demonstrate that it is trying to recruit greater numbers of diverse staff to improve the representation of a number of groups in UK society. However, I argued in Chapter 6 that diversity targets are simplistic because they place the burden of representation and speaking for those groups upon minority staff. This means that the non minority journalists have little imperative to embrace reporting diversity or inequality in their work. Within the contemporary BBC, minority ethnic staff tend to be clustered in producer and journalism roles with fewer minority staff members in the decision-making roles (BBC Annual Report, 2017/18). In addition, the existence of rigid gatekeeping structure within the BBC, forces ethnic staff to 'rationalise' race and offer familiar ideas and framing in keeping with institutional expectations (Saha, 2018). I suggest the class divide in the BBC is unlikely to improve, with 'diversity' schemes that enable disabled or minority ethnic people to join the BBC on short-term contracts, with the promise of being trained and a potential job at the end. These schemes tend to window-dress the problem that exists in the media, as opposed to addressing the underlying issue that the staff within the press and media are not reflective of the working classes and minority communities (O'Brien *et al.*, 2016; Hesmondhalgh, 2017; Saha, 2018). There is merit in the schemes, but they do not necessarily result in a permanent job; therefore, as Saha (2018) has argued, such initiatives serve to maintain institutional whiteness of the cultural industries even when they are trying to be more inclusive.

The BBC Asian Network is uniquely placed within the BBC as the only specialist minority service. Although, initially 1Xtra was branded a 'black station', it was noted as early as 2004 by the Gardam report, commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, that the station did not play gospel music or music from Africa, and therefore the service is essentially an urban music station listened to by minority and non-minority listeners (Gardam, 2004). The contribution of ethnic and niche media is seen to be an integral part of the communications sector, but these types of media have remained in the margins of media ecology with limited attention paid to them by academics and mainstream audiences. This means that although they exist, without meaningful links to mainstream media, the role of ethnic media role is limited to speaking for a community without the majority listening (Yu and Matsaganis, 2019).

There has been limited focus on the production process and on specifically ethnic producers' experiences of creating media (Cottle 1998; Moylan, 2013; Saha, 2018, Yu and Matsaganis, 2019). This study has concentrated on ethnic producers working in radio and demonstrates how internal BBC working practices influences how they work. I argue that rigid gatekeeping of innovative ideas has restricts the potential impact of the original journalism created by the BBC Asian Network journalists. The underlying suggestion from the ethnic

producers was that they need greater autonomy to provide programme content for British Asian listeners, and they are frustrated that they are forced to prove their credentials to the wider BBC. This suggests that the skillset of BBC Asian Network staff is seen to be lacking in comparison to other BBC staff, and as a consequence, this can hinder the career development of minority ethnic staff across the BBC. More research is required on this issue. The underlying theme that emerged from the interviews is that minority staff across the BBC require increased opportunities to develop because they are hampered due to the hierarchical structure that exists within the BBC. As consequence, huge numbers of ethnic staff remain, in Hall's (1996) words, a "segregated visibility" within the BBC, meaning, they are unable to influence editorial policies. On national stories involving British Asians, the BBC Asian Network should, on occasions, be given the lead because in theory, the station is the centre of authority on Asian issues within the BBC.

Another finding is that ethnic staff at the BBC Asian Network believe that rules and practices are imposed upon the station and in this manner the BBC is not as 'responsive' to ethnic staff within the organisation as perhaps it ought to be. What was also conveyed through the interviews, although not explicitly, was a sense that the BBC Asian Network remains marginalised within the institution despite efforts at the top of the organisation to move it to the heart of radio operations. This may not be the fault of senior BBC leadership. I suggest it has resulted from the fierce internal competition that exists between the different stations and programmes in the institution. Each department wants to break an exclusive story. Journalism is an industry that has historically been characterised by competition: the need to break news, the need for the key guest on a story, the need for the stronger angle and, therefore, internally, the News at Ten fights for the strongest guest for their programme as opposed to letting Radio 1 or the BBC Asian Network have them first. There is also an underlying suggestion by from the interview material that the BBC leadership is largely out of touch with the needs and desires of young British Asians and, based on the BBC's low connection with young audiences in general, is just simply out of touch altogether (Mills, 2016).

Yu and Matsaganis (2019) have argued, minority media on any platform, tend to be marginalised because these services are on the periphery and therefore to make any real change diversity needs to be embraced by the mainstream media. The strong and original journalism from the BBC Asian Network, enabled the station to survive the proposed closure in 2011. I propose that being part of the BBC machine is hugely beneficial because the BBC brand offers journalists authority and connection to an organisation that is 'world renowned' for its objective and impartial news (Curran and Seaton, 1997). This also enables reporters to engender trust

with some communities, albeit not always with the Muslim communities. The station also offers a unique platform for British Asians to have their perspective heard and noted within the public sphere, and I suggest that commercial Asian services are unable to access or influence the public sphere in the same manner. Without the BBC Asian Network, the news and views of British Asians would largely be absent from a public service platform, however, because the service is part of the BBC this has an impact upon how the station addresses the audience and in particular, limits some of the creativity to just the BBC Asian Network. The 2016 *Royal Charter* demands that the BBC demonstrates it is distinctive, and the BBC Asian Network justifies this through the content produced and the audience it serves.

The Asian music played on the playlist has been essentially conceptualised as specialist music. This means that Asian music is only available on the BBC Asian Network, this move does appear to marginalise British Asian artists. Arguably Black artists do not face the same problem because depending upon the genre of music it is played across a number of stations. Dubber (2013) argued that radio's cultural role is to be a tastemaker and opinion leader within music, and the evidence drawn from the audience survey and telephone interviews indicates that some listeners do use the BBC Asian Network to hear new music. However, as outlined in Chapter 8, a minority of BBC staff expressed their concerns about the genres played. I argue that the BBC has adopted a 'safe' approach to music and has stuck with the 'familiar' in order to maintain audience figures (Dubber 2013). The limited experimentation that does take place is largely due to the existence of the thirty per cent UK music quota. If the UK music requirement was increased, it is plausible, given time, that the BBC Asian Network could make a distinctive offer in terms of new music and lead musical tastes (Hendy, 2000). The BBC still keeps trying to attract all British Asians which reduces the distinctiveness of the music. I suggest one reason why the station, despite its branding, remains stereotyped for an older audience because the station perpetuates and maintains a dialogue on issues that are not always relevant to the audience it is targeting

## The audience

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From the point of view of the listeners, it is evident they expect some form of recognition by the BBC due to the size of the British Asian community. The BBC Asian Network meets this expectation to an extent because the listeners believe the existence of the station contributes to building and maintaining their culture on a public service platform. A number of the older listeners believe the role of the station is to promote Asian culture to younger and future generations. A stance that is strikingly similar to that of the older ethnic staff.

Another unexpected finding from the material was the sense of ownership and pride that some listeners have in an Asian-specific service on the BBC, again this is a strength of a grounded research design which has enabled issues to emerge that may not have been previously considered. A number of respondents felt it is important to have a specific Asian service due to the size of communities and because such a service helps to build and promote the Asian community in the first place. On the one hand, this is an interesting notion – that the members of a minority group feel they require the BBC to connect them together, but on the other hand, it is not surprising, because the BBC is inherently associated with the concepts of the nation and citizenship, and therefore is well placed to contribute to building a British Asian community in the UK (Kumar, 1975; Malik, 2013). One of the telephone interviewees called for a more positive representation of minority communities, and this is further supported by the interviewed BBC staff who reported their contributors also question why the station is complicit in what they define as negative representations of their communities. This is a delicate issue, the reporters feel it is their responsibility to report on the facts, positive or negative, and in this way, rather than being seen as advocates for the communities, they want to be considered professional, impartial reporters in the same way other journalists are perceived (Matsaganis and Katz, 2014). However, because the station serves a small, defined audience in contrast to mainstream listeners, there can be an increased interdependence between the staff at the institutional level in the community, the ethnic media and the community they serve.

The current affairs content received very little attention from the listeners, and suggests that the BBC needs to innovate here. In fact, the Gardam report (2004: 47) noted that the speech content at the BBC Asian Network did “assume Asians are interested only in Asian issues.” Therefore, I pose that the music and the distinctive news coverage is in fact, at odds with each other and essentially two types of radio stations operate under one brand. This contradiction is striking, the BBC emphasises Britishness because this is the ‘common denominator’, but the BBC demands that the listener is interested in Bollywood and Asian specific news. I suggest this paradox exists because the BBC has employed a safe strategy with reference to music and journalism in order to maintain listener figures. This also suggests that whilst the BBC attempts to control a service for a minority audience it is hampered in its efforts by the lack of knowledge on part of the senior BBC executives. Therefore, I suggest the BBC Asian Network is hampered in its efforts to attract the core audience because the station is aligned with public service goals that position news and current affairs as central to the core mission.

## The BBC Asian Network – the future

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Under the management of Mark Strippel, the BBC Asian Network is making further changes to the music and on-air schedule in terms of presenters and programmes to better appeal to the younger listener they are trying to engage. Since 2017, Strippel has also managed the programme content at 1Xtra, therefore, it is perhaps not coincidental that listener figures for the BBC Asian Network have risen as he executes successful strategies and ideas from 1Xtra to the BBC Asian Network and vice versa. Also, the movement of presenters and staff between BBC Asian Network, 1Xtra and Radio 1 (all steered by Controller, Ben Cooper), indicates that some joined-up thinking and sharing of resources is taking place. Whilst the listener figures have risen since 2012 to over 6 hundred thousand before dropping to 527,000 in December 2018, it is questionable if the station can reach the 'one million listeners' threshold because the target listener the station seeks is more likely to consume other mainstream radio stations in the first instance. The BBC Asian Network continues to have the lowest listening figures among the BBC's digital stations, which all attract in excess of one million listeners to their respective services. This poses serious questions about the relevance and future of the BBC Asian Network.

In light of the findings about the existence of a rigid gatekeeping system, the internal divide between older and younger British Asian staff over whom they should be serving and how? demonstrates that the manner in which the BBC Asian Network imagines and constructs an audience is haphazard. The management appear to be trying to address this to present a stronger cohesive young British Asian identity on-air to attract the target listener. I suggest that although the senior BBC management intend to serve minority audiences through the BBC Asian Network, policies and processes need to be put into place to enable ethnic staff working at the BBC Asian Network to achieve this and offer a meaningful representation. Through the examination of the journalism, music and language policies and recruitment procedures this study has questioned if the BBC Asian Network is a half-hearted attempt at serving minority audiences or an example of innovation to connect with a group of people who are more likely to consume BBC output in the future? The answer is not simple, and I suggest that thorough processes, including greater autonomy, are required to enable staff to offer meaningful minority representations.



## Concluding remarks

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Further research is needed to better understand the prospects of promotion for minority staff working within the media because studies such as this can only highlight case study examples. It would be interesting to note what the situation is like at Channel 4, or ITV for example. What is also unclear, is the long term future and viability of the BBC Asian Network and indeed the BBC. Lord Puttnam's inquiry noted there is very little consensus on the future need for PSB. In the meantime, the move into blended language and re-branding language-specific programming as community programming are examples of innovation. The management at the BBC Asian Network need to move away from the safe approach that maintains stable listener figures, and in order to gain younger listeners, the musical output needs to be hip and edgy and this means less Bollywood. I suggest more work can be done to serve young British Asians because what is evident from the different audience strategies is that the BBC Asian Network is regularly adapting but the pace of change is slow because it is interrupted. Over a thirteen-year period, the BBC has embarked on three different audience strategies, causing confusion for both the listener and the staff.

Class and background, remain salient in understanding audiences, because media choices are not simply personal choices but reflect people's economic and cultural prowess, thereby, reinforcing Bourdieu's (1994: xix) distinctive theory, which categorises people based on their cultural tastes and social capital, suggesting tastes that are considered "lacking" are according a lowly status. I suggest that the BBC has focused upon serving Asians with social capital because this is in line with how the BBC serves the audiences more generally. Thus the BBC Asian Network needs to evaluate the topics discussed on The Big Debate programme and the news coverage because the content here disproportionately focuses upon less integrated British Asians and the perceived problems associated with this. British Asians are considered a distinctive minority audience, however, the changing nature of UK and patterns of immigration, could mean in future another group become the largest ethnic minority in Britain.

I have hoped to generate theory and points of consideration about the BBC and its engagement with British Asians. I believe the in-depth interviews combined with grounded analysis have given a strong insight into the prevailing culture and working practices that exist within the BBC Asian Network and contend this makes an original contribution to research. The findings from this study make a contribution to existing literature on production studies, Public

Service Broadcasting, radio studies and audience theory. In addition, to articulating the voice of minority programme makers this study has also offered a view from the listening community and helps to advance a debate might otherwise have remained a little more esoteric.

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## BBC Interview Reference List

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Affie Jeerh, face to face Interview, 14 September 2015

Alia, (anonymised) face to face interview, 16 June 2015

Anish Shaikh, face to face Interview, 9 December 2015

Bela, (anonymised), face to face interview, 9 November 2015

Binali, (anonymised), face to face interview, 17 June 2015

Bob Shennan, face to face interview, 11 November 2015

Bobby Friction, Skype Interview, 9 February 2016

Danish, (anonymised) face to face interview, 10 February 2016

Dips Bhamra, face to face interview, 14 December 2015

Husain Hussaini, Skype Interview, 8 October 2015

Ishani, (anonymised), 9 September 2015

Kavya, (anonymised), face to face interview, 25 March 2015

Kaylon, (anonymised), Skype Interview, 2 March 2016

Kamlesh Purohit, face to face interview, 17 March 2015

Kamran, (anonymised), face to face interview, 11 November 2015

Kevin Silverton, face to face interview, 15 June 2015

Joy, (anonymised), face to face interview, 14 December 2015

Mark Strippel, face to face interview, 15 June 2015

Nadine, (anonymised) face to face interview, 29 June 2015

Mike Curtis, face to face interview, 1 December 2014

Mya, (anonymised), skype Interview, 10 July 2015

Neeta, (anonymised) Skype interview, 15 May 2015

Noreen Khan, face to face interview, 29 June 2015

Riaan, (anonymised) face to face interview 14 September 2015

Owen Bentley, face to face interview, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015

Safia, (anonymised), face to face interview, 15 June 2015

Sam, (anonymised), face to face interview, 11 November 2015

Priya, (anonymised), face to face interview, 9 December 2015

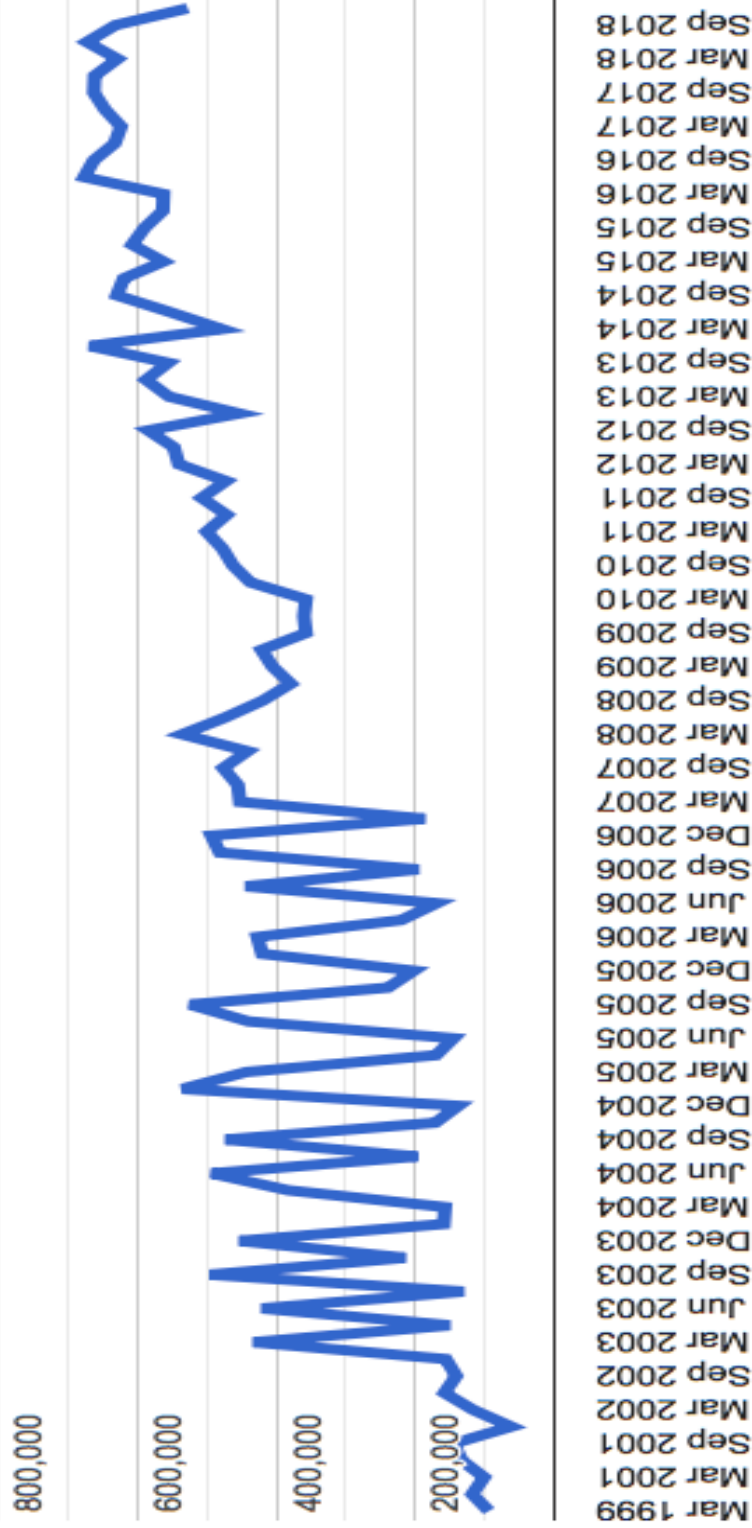
Tommy Sandhu, Skype Interview, 17 June 2015

Mithra, (anonymised), face to face interview 10 February 2016

## Appendix A

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**media.info - BBC Asian Network UK total weekly audience**



**Total weekly listeners** - total reach - represents the total amount of people who tune in to this radio station. A 'listener' is counted as an adult aged 15+ who listens for at least five minutes.