

Producing diversity in BBC Radio

Introduction

Despite the introduction of a number of strategies and targets to increase the diversity of employees, the UK radio industry continues to fail to reflect the breadth of communities living in the UK (Ofcom, 2019). The findings from the Office for Communications (Ofcom), the UK government-approved regulatory and competition authority, come at a time where all British media is under pressure to increase recruitment of staff from marginalised groups, such as disabled, ethnic minorities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) and, to improve the on-air representation of these communities. The rationale for the impetus for the enhanced reflection of minority audiences has two key principles; first, authentic representation ought to attract those communities to the output and thus enable the economic survival of media organisations; and second, for moral reasons – because it is the proper thing to do. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio has made a concerted effort to include content about minority ethnic communities within programmes and to recruit minority ethnic journalists. As a public funded organisation, with a public service remit, the BBC has been forced to demonstrate two key objectives: that it creates material that serves all audiences and that minority ethnic listeners consume the output. The Diversity and Equal Opportunities report (2019) by Ofcom praised the BBC for the increased recruitment of minority staff. This paper examines the strategic changes that have been taking place at the BBC Asian Network, a digital radio station specifically focused upon serving British Asian listeners. British Asians in the UK are defined as people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan origin who have been either born or raised in Britain. A large proportion of the staff recruited by the station are also members of these communities. The term ‘Asian’ is contested due to two weaknesses: it does not translate well outside the UK, because in the

USA the term is used to describe East Asian communities; and 'Asian' also overlooks the distinctiveness of the communities comprising this group implying they are homogenous.

Due to the multi-cultural nature of British society, a plethora of ethnic media on a range of platforms - radio, print, online and satellite - exist in a 'competitive environment' (Tsagarousianou, 1999: 60). The roles of ethnic media are numerous. It is widely accepted that they produce content by minorities for minority audiences (Matsaganis et al., 2010). Minority media facilitate the representation and participation within the host nation of marginalised communities, provide information and create opportunities for cultural and political expression dialogue, and self-definition by members of ethnic communities (Tsagarousianou, 1999: 57). As such, ethnic media play an important role within communities that are both established, such as Black Caribbean, South Asian and the Windrush generation in the UK, and emerging communities, primarily from Eastern Europe, Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria. Yu and Matsaganis (2019: 6) suggest the growing participation of younger generations of minority staff in media production roles is leading to greater opportunities to self-represent their unique identities. Therefore, the BBC and other ethnic media are also being forced to embrace the growing significance of young British Asians in the UK and innovate their content to respond to the evolving workforce and audience.

What distinguishes the BBC Asian Network from other ethnic media is that the service exists and operates according to a public service remit. This article offers an counter hegemonic perspective into radio production focusing explicitly upon minority staff working within a public service remit. A production studies approach (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Mayer, Banks J., and Caldwell, 2009) is here combined with grounded analysis (Glasser and Strauss, 1967). In-depth interviews with staff working at the service revealed differences and disagreements, between the older first and second generation British Asian staff and the younger third or fourth generation staff over the target listener and the

ambiguous British Asian identity disseminated on-air by the BBC. The older staff are worried the core listener does not relate to the Asian identity articulated by the BBC. Therefore, there is an examination of recruitment and working conventions to assess the impact they have upon the manner in which race and ethnicity is disseminated by minority ethnic production staff working at the BBC Asian Network.

Radio production within the BBC

Production studies have tended to focus upon film and television to the detriment of radio which is often side lined in such research, (there are some exceptions. See Moylan, 2013, Mitchell, 2000). Subsequently the labour of the radio producer is rarely acknowledged and the focus remains upon the presenter – who is seen to be the visible face of the station. A growing body of research suggests the producer's knowledge, perspective and identity is disseminated through the media content they craft (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Mayer, 2011, Saha, 2018). It is argued the life experiences of producers influence how issues such as race and class are understood by the wider society. The mis-representation of minority communities, the use of racialised stereotypes, and the marginalisation of communities by non-minority staff within the media has been at the forefront of research, because the media is believed to play an instrumental role in enabling the public to understand these issues (Cottle, 2005; Alia and Bull, 2005; Wilson and Gutierrez, 1999). However, Napoli (1999) suggests that although audiences are able to select the content they consume it is difficult to quantify the depth and level of their exposure to diversity. There has been a limited focus on how the production process influences the manner in which race is articulated by the media (see Saha 2018). Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the recruitment process itself, and the impact it has on who is actually hired. During the 2016 Royal Charter negotiations

diversity played an important role in discussions and subsequent goals and missions of the BBC.

The BBC has engaged in the recruitment of minority ethnic journalists, presenters and production staff in both television and radio, in an attempt to enhance the content to appeal both minority and mainstream audiences. Moylan (2013) has referred to radio content created and presented by members of the same community as ‘accented production’, because it embraces and engages the core listener. Moylan’s (2013) argues that public service norms and conventions restrict the representation of diversity on public service radio, whereas community radio or ‘accented’ programmes, which often adopt a bottom up approach allow for an authentic representation with greater opportunities for listener participation. According to Moylan, the programme is able to “function at the local level – speaking not only to the migrant communities – and at the same time articulate a transnational perspective” (Moylan, 2013: 8). Understanding and accepting that minority communities belong to British society, their ethnic group and are part of a transnational diaspora is crucial in terms of programme making. Often listeners are conceived and visualised by media workers and management within narrow strictures and subsequently media content that is created for the ‘imagined listener’ can elide essential knowledge pertaining to the community they are serving. This can result in people turning to alternative media, in particular community radio, ethnic media and social media. Fitzgerald and Housely (2007) have argued that radio stations and producers try to unite disparate listeners through the virtue of shared concerns, views or experiences. Ang (1991) has advised against viewing audiences as singular entities because this perspective ignores the socio-cultural communities they inhabit and thus reduces them to being numbers that belong to specified ethnic groups, income groups or social classes.

Scholars such as Pinselar (in Bonini and Monclus, 2015) and Lacey (2018) have also noted that the participation of listeners can be highly managed, because they are invited to

offer an opinion upon and issue deemed to be important by the producer as opposed to what the audience deem to be significant. The BBC Asian Network, like a number of other BBC stations, broadcasts a daily debate programme, offering an opportunity for listeners to ring or email their thoughts. The remit stipulates that the station offer a discussion programme to enable listeners to “explore a broad range of subjects, to share their experiences, and to be offered regular opportunities to engage in debate” (BBC Trust, 2016: 3).

Some commercial and community ethnic radio also offer opportunities for listener to debate, for example, Desi Radioⁱ a community station based in Southall, West London targeted specifically at the Punjabi-speaking community. The station tries to promote a sense of ‘community’ on-air with volunteers involved in presentation and programme making. The language spoken on-air is predominantly Punjabi, alongside music of Punjabi origin (both Bhangra and folk music) and the speech content facilitates the discussion and expression of listener opinion. Haydari (2018) noted the production of programmes in Punjabi contributes to making the volunteers and producers more conscious of their identities and history (in Follmer and Badenoch, 2018).

Although the BBC Asian Network is a national BBC radio station, the mode of address utilised is similar to other commercial Asian radio stations. For example, English is the main language used on-air in order to appeal widely to all British Asians and specific communities are targeted through community programmes which are presented in a hybrid of English and a South Asian language. The dominance of English within the remaining linguistic programmes, and the removal of a commitment to language programming from the BBC Asian Network’s remit in August 2016, illustrate the BBC’s desire to appeal to young British Asians. Yu (Yu and Matsaganis, 2019) has argued that when ethnic media broadcast or publish in non-English, they remain isolated and lack the ability to connect to mainstream media and audiences. Thus the issues affecting minorities are not heard by the majority

audience. Similarly, Mitchell (2015) has demonstrated that stories and issues articulated in community radio or non-mainstream radio are also likely to disappear especially, if they are produced by women. The presentation style adopted by the BBC Asian Network is also used by other commercial Asian stations such as Sunrise Radio, which was established in 1989 and also broadcasts in a mix of Hindustaniⁱⁱ and English speech.

Radio is considered to have an important role in terms of promoting minority languages and for cultural reinforcement, in particular for the younger generations of settled minority communities (Follmer and Badenoch, 2017: 41). Thus it is significant, that the BBC and a number of Asian commercial radio choose to present in English. Tsagarousianou (1999) argues that Sunrise Radio is compelled to address all members of the Asian community because its economic survival depends on reaching as large an audience as possible. However, Tsagarousianou also acknowledges that ethnic media struggles to attract younger members of minority groups. This is pertinent because through the interview process carried out within the scope of this research the challenges of creating content for a younger British Asian listener became evident.

Each media outlet has its own particular style and within the media it is imperative that staff adhere to the homogenising of their content in order to meet their in-house style. This institutional convention across all newsrooms is in tension with the desire and emphasis upon journalists to craft new and original material to engage and attract audiences. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) argue the media's primary objective is to monetise content, either through audience ratings or through profits. This has created a 'marketised' media environment that "makes media workers more conscious than ever of audiences and the need to please and attract them". The BBC and Channel 4 have tried to make content about minority communities more appealing for mainstream audiences through the style, tone and framing of content in order to attract large audiences. This can mean the programmes

examine issues in less detail and crucially, the framing or angle of the story is more likely to be ‘Eurocentric’ (Shohat and Stam, 2014). Saha contends this is a ‘marketized version of diversity’ whereby, structural inequality, racism, prejudice and the challenges that racialised minorities face are ignored (Saha, 2018: 106).

It is presumed programmes produced by minority ethnic staff naturally offer robust or enhanced representation of different communities and simultaneously, address the audience from their perspective as opposed to a Eurocentric viewpoint. Although it is naive to expect that the recruitment of minority staff solves the problem of misrepresentation, the existence of intercultural media systems can ensure ordinary voices from diverse groups are circulated, contested and shared across media platforms. The BBC Asian Network performs this role in terms of disseminating original journalistic content about the British Asian communities through the station and via social media. BBC Asian Network journalists, are also expected to share their stories with other BBC outlets such as: Newsnight, BBC Breakfast and News Online to reach bigger audiences. However, Saha (2012, 2018) has noted ethnic producers in television, publishing and theatre cannot always challenge normative production processes, because they are ‘steered’ or directed to maintain newsroom conventions, institutional work norms and are socialised into reproducing “reductive tropes of race and gender” in their work (Saha, 2018: 135). Saha describes this situation as a type of institutional racism, whereby entry into the industry to minority staff is not restricted but because the production process emphasises commercial objectives this means ‘otherness’ is rationalised and standardised. In addition, such work conventions can also lead to ‘the ethnocentrism of the workplace culture’ because often minority staff are not only expected to report on race and ethnicity but also to represent minority communities through their difference and thus othering them or through exotic tropes (Husband, 2005: 472).

Profile of media workers

The profile of people working in the creative industries does not align to the core audiences in the UK. Ofcom (2019) found that minority staff and disabled staff remain under-represented in radio journalism roles. Within BBC Radio, women are less likely to be in journalism roles compared to commercial groups such as Global or Bauer Media. Research by RadioCentre (the body which represents UK commercial radio) found that Black and Asian listeners spend more time listening to commercial radio than the BBC (Radiocentre, 2019: 6) and that some of the smallest community stations have the most diverse workforces, with some reporting that their workforce is comprised of over 90% minority ethnic staff. O'Brien et al., (2016) and Hesmondhalgh (in Deery and Press, 2018) have argued that the creative industries are composed chiefly of people from middle or higher social classes. Staff working in ethnic or community radio tend to be volunteers or community activists (usually unpaid), and more likely to be from working class backgrounds.

Whilst there is some data about gender, ethnicity and disability, there remains limited information about the socio economic background of media workers. In 2018 the BBC published some information about the socio-economic diversity of its staff. Employees were questioned about their parents' occupations in order to gain an indicator for social backgrounds. The survey revealed that 39% of the BBC employees are from low and intermediate income households compared to the UK average of 67% (BBC, 2018b, 5). Employers do not tend to monitor social class in similar manner to race, disability or gender (The Creative Skillset and DCMS, 2015, report a lack of information about social origins). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) and Randle (2015) contend that because work experience has been normalised across 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

BBC has recommended that people completing work experience should be paid travel expenses to enable the broadcaster to broaden participation. The media industry in the UK remains concentrated in London, despite the BBC's move to Salford and Channel 4's proposed move to Leeds. Hence, people from working class or disadvantaged groups are also forced to live in expensive areas in order to work in desirable media roles.

Mainstream journalists tend to be educated to degree level (Thurman et al., 2016) whilst volunteers or community activists may not have any formal journalism training. The onus is firmly placed upon the potential employee to ensure they have the skills required for employment, and in the UK this is frequently secured through higher education due to the scaling back of media training schemes. The most sought after or prestigious roles in journalism, and other cultural industries tend to disadvantage members of minority ethnic communities who may have the required education requirements but struggle with career progression due to their ethnic background, work experience, gender, schooling, social awareness and lack of networks. One key strategy has been the growth of short term trainee schemes targeted at minority ethnic, women or disabled people that aim to widen access to the media. However Saha (2018) contends that these schemes help maintain 'institutional whiteness,' because diverse people are hired to increase the visibility of minority ethnic staff and are often placed onto fixed term contracts or posts with limited career progression. These members of staff are the 'segregated visibility' present and visible but not in editorial roles (Hall, 1996: 471). Data from the BBC's own monitoring report reveals that the highest proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) employees are concentrated in the Professional Service and World Service Group, with very low numbers across the BBC Nations and Regions, notwithstanding that a number of BBC newsrooms are located in ethnically diverse cities such as Birmingham, Manchester and Leicester (BBC, 2018: 5). Campion's (2005) study of minority workers also acknowledged that statistical information

about staff is misleading as the figures for BAME staff also includes staff in non-production roles such as marketing, or accounting.

The BBC also notes, despite its success in attracting diverse staff to the organisation, the turnover of minority staff remains high (BBC 2018a). To examine this focus groups were organised for staff in 2018. The findings, published by the BBC, reveal some minority staff experience a sense of ‘exclusion and isolation’ working for the broadcaster, and that BAME staff perceive that their ideas are stifled by editors applying their version of creative freedom within different departments (BBC, 2018: 7). This particular finding resonates with material gathered in this study. Ofcom has only recently begun to measure and publish information about diversity in radio and television in the UK. The Creative Diversity Network (CDN) a project run by the broadcasters intended to measure and report upon diversity in UK media has been boycotted by a number of Unions because it has declined to publish information about the diversity of individual shows as opposed to genre.

Data Collection

To examine the radio production process from the perspective of minority producers 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted between December 2014 and March 2016 with staff at the BBC who occupied (or previously held) roles as editors, presenters, producers and assistants. Semi-structured interviews with production staff were chosen because they offer an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the programme making process within the BBC and enable a discussion about the barriers or challenges staff face. The goal was to get an insight into the internal culture at the BBC from the perspective of producers engaged in the production of radio within pre-determined parameters established by the BBC and other external forces. Their accounts illuminate how they negotiate and balance these forces as they

make programmes specifically for British Asian listeners. Studies of production try to understand the labour of the workers through the examination of work routines, institutional conventions and external forces such as economic or technological which influence how the media is shaped and distributed (Mayer et al., 2009). Another advantage of in-depth interviews is that they can extract information about feelings and thought processes which is difficult to obtain through other methods. The interviewees were all either working for or previously worked at the station, and as such were 'grounded' in the object of research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The material was gathered and analysed within the context of a grounded theory framework (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998). This particular approach characterises production studies research. In order to assess how the station is received by the audience, seven BBC Asian Network listeners were also interviewed in short structured telephone interviews, during 2016 and 2017. The listeners ranged in age from 19 to 40 years of age, encompassing a mix of second, third and fourth generation British Asian and lived in either London or Leicester. Four of the listeners were born abroad.

The overwhelming majority of the BBC interviewees were born in the U.K., aged between 30 and 50 years of age, and were predominantly second or third generation British Asian thus broadly representative of the staff employed by the station. A handful of the older interviewees were born outside of the U.K. but have lived in Britain for the majority of their lives. In terms of education, the younger journalists are all degree-educated and many hold post-graduate degrees in journalism, which is common in the U.K. (Thurman et al., 2016). The older employees, however may have undergraduate degrees but lack formal journalism training. Ramamurthy (in Price and Sabido, 2015) defined second-generation Asians as those who were born in Britain or arrived as children to the UK and according to Ballard (in Clarke et al., 1990) the British born second generation reached adulthood by 1990. Broadly

speaking, the third generation is likely to be aged up to 35, and the fourth and fifth generations are either children, teenagers or young adults.

Over half of the BBC interviewees requested that their participation was anonymised, particularly those in reporter, journalism or production roles whereas, in contrast most senior staff were happy to have their real names and job titles used. The option of anonymity enabled some interviewees the space to be critical of policies and conventions without fear of recrimination from the BBC. Therefore, anonymised interviewees in this paper have been given a generic South Asian pseudonym and a vague job title to conceal their identity. The listener interviews have also been anonymised. Because the voice of participants is presented in this paper all quotes have been scrutinised and edited where necessary, to remove references to situations or stories that may reveal their identity.

Getting a foot in the door

The production staff explained that in order to work at the BBC Asian Network, potential employees should have specialised knowledge about the British Asian communities, Bollywood and British Asian music to enable them to create content that not only appeals to the core listener, but commands their trust. Some of the interviewees outlined that to work at the station staff should be ‘experts’ on South Asian culture.

I think you need experts to make those programmes with specialist knowledge, and I think that here at the Asian network we have that specialist knowledge to make programmes to an Asian audience. (Riaan, Producer, 2015)

Riaan (not his real name), outlined it is important that people who possess specialist insight to curate programmes. He described this expertise as something that is ‘instinctive’ due to the ethnic background of the journalists recruited. Sam (not her real name) emphasised that

linguistic skills are essential at the BBC Asian Network as “we still need language skills, we have to translate a lot of stuff in news, it’s still very relevant”. However, Alia (not her real name) outlined that some of the journalists lack specialist cultural knowledge, “people will openly admit that they don’t know anything about Bollywood, and it’s considered funny”. A mix of ethnic staff work at the station, some employees are deeply subsumed into Asian culture whereas others as Alia has noted “do not know the Asian community because they haven’t lived in it. They probably live in a very westernised household”. The reference to ‘westernised’ suggests looser ties to Asian culture and media, faith and language. Some of the interviewees found it problematic that new staff tend to be ‘westernised’ or ‘assimilated’ and as such lack specialist knowledge. Kamran (not his real name), a former producer, argued that people who are passionate and knowledgeable about Asian culture ought to be hired but is frustrated that this does not always happen. “I guess it is easier to hire somebody who knows how to use all the facilities because then there is less training involved and it means you can get them in doing stuff quicker” (Kamran, former producer, 2015). It is essential in media roles that prospective employees are confident using recording equipment, broadcasters and have basic interviewing and writing skills because employers have scaled back training.

It is however, significant that differences exist between two groups of staff working at the radio station. The older ethnic staff, from the first and second-generation outlined in their interviews that they want to create content primarily for older British Asian listeners as opposed to a top down BBC motion to concentrate on young British Asians. The older staff believes strongly that the station should have a strong 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, is more able to focus on the young demographic, in particular through digital means. This group of staff is also more likely to belong to age group the BBC is chasing.

Head of Programmes at the BBC Asian Network and 1Xtra, Mark Strippel explained the BBC is trying to change perceptions that it is a middle class organisation by recruiting a broader range of people, “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”. It is revealing that he implicitly acknowledges there is a disconnect or at least a gap between the staff and the audiences the BBC serves. Strippel notes it is imperative people hired into posts hold a broad perspective in order to craft material that engages a range of communities in the U.K. The BBC has acknowledged that successful recruits tend to have graduated from Russell Group Universitiesⁱⁱⁱ, and these Universities are notable for admitting low numbers of minority ethnic and working class students (BBC, 2018b: 11). The notion of a gap between the staff and the BBC Asian Network listeners also emerged from the interviews, the older members of staff are concerned by the ambiguous British Asian identity articulated through the on-air content and believe it can alienate the older listeners who may not relate to it. Producer Bela (not her real name) explained that BBC Asian Network staff is strongly connected with Asian communities - “I feel like we are better at it than other [BBC] radio stations”.

The contemporary BBC Asian Network has been positioned within the BBC as a centre of expertise pertaining to British Asian communities. Journalists at the station are required to source original stories about Asian communities not only for the BBC Asian Network, but also for other parts of the BBC to help reflect communities and improve the on-air coverage of minority groups. BBC local radio, and regional television have also made a concerted effort to hire reporters from ethnic backgrounds in order to reflect the communities in the geographical areas they serve. This ongoing strategy has two benefits: the number of minority staff across the BBC increases and the reflection on-air of diverse communities is improved. However, the burden of enhancing the representation of minority communities appears to have fallen predominantly upon members who belong to those groups. This

approach also ignores individual strengths or interests that disabled or BAME staff may have, and thus enables the employee's ethnic identity to remain salient through the ethnocentrism of the workplace and routines (Husband, 2005).

A number of interviewees suggested that to improve the representation of minority communities on-air across the institution that the senior leadership of the BBC should also be more diverse. The BBC has committed to improving the representation of BAME staff in the leadership by 2020 (BBC 2018a, 4). Mya (not her real name), a reporter for the BBC, challenged this idea, highlighting that often the staff appointed into senior roles reflect the status-quo:

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. (Mya, senior reporter, 2015)

This is problematic, because if the BBC is hiring people who represent the established hierarchy, it suggests they are unlikely to have the specialist cultural insight or lived experiences their audiences have. Thus, Mya argued the only way for the BBC to connect with diverse audiences is through greater recruitment these employees into meaningful roles. The BBC invested £7.3 million in entry level schemes/apprenticeships targeted at lower socio-economic groups or minority groups in 2017 (BBC 2018b, 4). For example, The New Voices scheme ran open auditions for people with no broadcasting experience to host programmes across BBC Local Radio in 2018 (BBC, 2019, p. 13). Although this offers the opportunity for diverse voices on-air these roles lack editorial power. Essentially, ethnic presenters are recruited to allow the BBC to visibly demonstrate it is a diverse employer and is reflecting UK society.

Enhancing minority representation on-air

All the interviewees acknowledged that the BBC has more work to do to enhance the representation of minority communities. Some of the interviewees acknowledged the problem is a lack of awareness among the majority non-ethnic staff within the organisation. Kamlesh Purohit explained in his former role as a planning editor he felt he had ‘to educate the BBC’ e.g. staff on diverse issues, when he was sharing news content.

I think it’s really important that the BBC Asian Network reaches out to all parts of the BBC and says we are the experts, we have got the knowledge, please listen to us. Unfortunately in the BBC what is happening is that there are people with pre-formed ideas and pre-conceived kind of thoughts about what are the important stories for their output. Not just for the Asian audience. (Kamlesh Purohit, 2016)

Purohit further explained that the onus has traditionally been placed upon minority ethnic staff to broaden other BBC members of staff knowledge pertaining to minority communities. However, following two highly publicised mistakes in 2017-18 (the Mayor of London’s Sadiq Khan’s nationality and the use of wrong Bollywood Actor’s footage in an obituary), the BBC has admitted that more work has to be done so that all staff understand other cultures (BBC, 2018: 7). However, Purohit suggests despite efforts to embed the BBC Asian Network as a centre of expertise within the structure of the organisation the station is not fully utilised. He also suggested that some of the BBC normative work routines restrict the potential impact of original journalism about British Asian communities, due to an over emphasis upon negative content focused on Muslim communities. A number of journalists explained they are aware that Muslim news stories are more likely to be commissioned than content about Sri Lankan or Indian communities; “anything Muslim does good business, and anything else takes a real good push” (Mithra, broadcast journalist, 2016). Since September 11th, the media has focused upon the ‘otherness’, or ‘strangeness’ of members of the Muslim communities (Campion, 2005: 27).

A handful of the interviewees highlighted their frustration at the internal gatekeeping processes which requires them to possess a range of skills to effectively 'sell' their expertise, to non-ethnic commissioners, who potentially possess no knowledge of minority communities. Mithra (not her real name) emphasised that the team attempt to pitch a variety of content:

We are always getting told the BBC is under serving its audiences, yet it does very little to address that, they just think Asian stories only need to sit on the BBC Asian Network. (Mithra, broadcast journalist, 2016).

This suggests that internally some producers believe that Asian specific stories are only relevant, or suitable for the BBC Asian Network, whereas content pertaining to Muslim communities is widely selected and broadcast elsewhere. This is contentious, because on the one hand, the BBC would like the station to play an integral role in enhancing the reflection of minority communities but simultaneously some content remains marginalised. Therefore in order to get their stories on wider platforms minority journalists are effectively steered by unwritten rules and conventions into pitching and producing material that contains recognisable reductive tropes (Saha, 2018). Ursell (2000) has proposed this situation occurs because production staff try market their work by 'establishing cultural resonances' with the audience meaning they effectively market the people who are associated with the production of an individual programme and appeal naturally to the majority population.

Asian listeners have fed back to the BBC Asian Network that they are unhappy with the over emphasis of stories about Muslim communities. Producers explained they are aware that some listeners do not like the tone and angle of stories they produce. Listener A, aged 24 from London explained what she would like:

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. (Listener A, 2017)

The similarities evident within the news agendas are due to the fact that the station is part of the BBC, and therefore, adheres to the objectives of the broadcaster. Listener A reveals she feels a connection and 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 middle class values of the BBC, it inherently reflects the political agenda, as opposed to what she would like, chiefly the voices of British Asians (Creeber, 2004). Listener B, aged 28 from London, was not convinced that equal coverage is given to the various Asian communities "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" (Listener B, 2017). Listener B suggested that the producers need to give more depth on issues when they 'formulate or articulate the programme' so that the listener can learn from it. This is an interesting observation and supports some of the BBC staff claims that some journalists lack knowledge about the Asian communities.

The desire to be a successful BBC journalist does mean that some journalists respond to the internal culture by proposing stories about the Muslim communities in order to be commissioned. This move contributes to the internal division among the BBC Asian Network team. The older, first generation staff want greater autonomy and appear to want to limit content that portrays an ambiguous or negative Asian identity. Bobby Friction a presenter at the station explained the only way to appeal to younger British Asian listeners is to "make the station, musically less Asian, and make that badge of culture something that's just part of who they are, not the be all and end all". Friction, alongside other younger members of staff appear more at ease with the BBC's drive to appeal to a younger demographic.

It becomes clear that the older ethnic staff have adopted a paternalistic approach and

would like the third and fourth-generation British Asian producers and listeners to feel more deeply connected to their culture. They are frustrated that some staff and listeners do not necessarily feel this urge. This is symptomatic of the struggle all immigrant communities face at some point when they feel their distinctive heritage is becoming unacceptably diluted. The older staff inherently want to create material that bonds the listeners to their faith, heritage and culture. They accept, grudgingly, that the younger listeners do not necessarily require this type of content because they are perhaps assimilated, and it is implied that this is undesirable. Therefore, they want to create content for older listeners who are more likely to want to gaze back to their countries and cultures but feel they are not permitted to due to the drive to target young audiences.

Bela, a daytime producer, explained she feels frustrated and is caught in the middle of the BBC's objectives and the feedback from the listeners. She outlined that 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 that not all British Asians feel compelled to listen the BBC Asian Network. However, because the BBC has defined the target audience exclusively by ethnicity, there is an expectation that people in those groups should embrace the radio station. This perspective illustrates an important contradiction, although the BBC has adopted a mainstream stance to attract young listeners there is also an underlying demand that the listeners have some interest in Bollywood and British Asian culture. Subsequently, this leaves BBC Asian Network staff to negotiate how they navigate this gulf in order to appeal to listeners through the programme content. Alia, a senior member of staff, explained it is a conundrum, because media producers like herself are aware that increasingly younger listeners may opt to listen to 1xtra instead of the BBC Asian Network, because they cannot always "relate to us. They can't relate to the music, they can't relate to the language, and if you talk about Amitabh Bachchan^{iv}

they have never watched any of his movies”. This suggests that some listeners may in fact turn to alternative media because they find their concerns or identity are not being articulated, and as such the BBC needs to try harder to unite this diverse and yet disparate group of listeners (Fitzgerald and Housely, 2007). Kamlesh Purohit, who now works elsewhere in the BBC also echoed a similar sentiment about the ethnocentrism of ethnic staff working in the organisation “it’s disappointing that often people do see you somebody who is Asian rather than somebody who is a good broadcaster across the wider BBC”. Purohit’s views echo Husband (2005) and Saha (2018) sentiments that to a large extent diversity has been commoditised by broadcasters and subsequently, production staff from those communities are perhaps not seen to be a journalist first and foremost.

Conclusion

This study has illustrated some of the barriers and challenges ethnic staff working on the BBC Asian Network face in attracting their core listener in a convivial manner. The BBC wants to demonstrate that it is willing to recruit greater numbers of minority staff, women and disabled members of staff to specifically improve the overall media content. However, these initiatives are simplistic because they require minority staff to explicitly want to cover stories about minority communities. The manner in which the BBC is attempting to meet its self-imposed recruitment and on-air content targets is not mono-dimensional, however, it is deeply ambivalent, because whilst the BBC tries to enhance diversity coverage – internal working methods remain unchanged. There is also a contradiction in terms of the skills potential journalists are required to possess, and specialist cultural knowledge pertaining to Asian communities which may be secondary to journalism and broadcasting skills. This

means that the staff hired, may lack knowledge about the listeners, Asian music or Bollywood, and yet they produce programmes on an ethnic-specific service.

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 the young listener profile has been forced upon them. Studies about minority staff experiences within radio are important especially because radio has been criticised for not reflecting UK communities.

The number of 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 tried to bring to fore the inter-generational differences between older and young British Asian staff working at the BBC. The in-depth interviews demonstrate ethnic minority media workers 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 contemporary BBC Asian Network.

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ⁱ More information on key commitments available here

<http://static.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/commitments/cr000061.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Hindustani – is a the term used to describe a dialect that contains both Hindi and Urdu used in Bollywood films

ⁱⁱⁱ The Russell Group is a self-selected group of 24 universities in the UK renowned for the quality of their research. The group is sometimes perceived as representing the best universities in the country - this is disputed

^{iv} Bollywood Actor