

Executive summary

Background

Ofcom commissioned Ethnic Dimension, a research agency that specialises in working with minority ethnic communities, to conduct research to help understand awareness and expectations of broadcasting standards¹ among the audiences of TV channels and radio stations aimed specifically at minority ethnic communities in the UK. The research followed a report commissioned by Ofcom in April 2020² which found some audiences from minority ethnic backgrounds had different expectations of broadcast standards for channels and stations targeting their communities than for mainstream³ services. Ofcom considered it was therefore important to better understand the specific expectations of these audiences and of their awareness of Ofcom and its remit.

Fieldwork was conducted among participants from Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African and Arabic-speaking⁴ backgrounds and focussed on “generally accepted standards”, including Ofcom’s rules on Harm and Offence (Section Two of the Code⁵) and hatred and abuse (Section Three of the Code⁶). The fieldwork consisted of online video sessions, facilitated by a moderator of the same ethnicity who was able to converse in the participants’ mother tongue or have the assistance of an interpreter throughout.

Key Findings

The research found that channels aimed at minority ethnic communities play a key role for these communities and are highly valued by them. Most participants said that engaging with these services gave them a sense of belonging and connection to their ethnic communities. For first-generation participants⁷, content targeting their ethnic community was typically their primary viewing, while second-generation participants switched consumption between both this and mainstream content; and third-generation participants mainly used mainstream content.

For older participants these channels provided an outlet for communities to preserve their cultural, faith and linguistic heritage. For many younger participants, this facilitated shared family time, helping them connect with older relatives and enjoy content together. Younger participants enjoyed certain types of content as part of their regular viewing, typically music and film. For many, channels and stations

¹ [Ofcom Broadcasting Code](#)

² Ipsos Mori: Audience expectations in a digital world, April 2020: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand/audience-expectations-in-a-digital-world>

³ The definition of “mainstream” as used in the report can be found in Footnote 5 of the main report.

⁴ Arabic speaking participants were of Algerian, Egyptian and Tunisian heritage.

⁵ In particular Rules 2.1 and 2.3 see: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-two-harm-offence>

⁶ In particular, Rules 3.2 and 3.3 see: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-two-harm-offence>

⁷ The definitions of “first-generation”, “second-generation” and “third-generation” participants as used in the report can be found on page 6 of the main report.

aimed at minority ethnic communities also provided content to which those communities could relate, in which participants saw “people like me”.

Expectations of broadcast standards differed for channels and stations aimed at minority ethnic communities compared with those for mainstream services. There was a tendency to be less critical of channels and stations aimed at minority ethnic communities but there were common concerns regarding areas of potential harm and offence. Many had concerns about the protection of children, and all felt that hateful content that might seriously impact community or religious cohesion had the potential to be harmful and offensive. Radio content was referred to much less than television content when discussing potential areas in which offensive or harmful content might be broadcast.

A number of key areas of concern about content on channels aimed at minority ethnic communities emerged across all of the participants we spoke with. These included:

Violent or graphic content in news. Participants considered that news and current affairs programmes on some minority ethnic channels sometimes contained explicit and graphic images of violence. They observed that this footage was often looped throughout the day without warnings or frequently carried what they thought were inadequate warnings. Participants were concerned about the impact this could have on children in particular, who could inadvertently come across this content.

Depictions of violence and domestic abuse. Violence in soaps and dramas on these channels was identified as potentially upsetting by all groups, although many participants felt they had become used to seeing violent and abusive content in programmes within these genres. Specific areas of concern related to violence against women and children and violence within extended families, which was agreed to have potential to cause harm and offence. Participants felt that it was important that broadcasters aimed at their ethnic communities put in place protections and mitigations to reduce potential harm and offence as they recognised the importance of difficult and challenging storylines being included.

Depiction of sexualised content. Some participants were also concerned about content they considered to be over sexualised on these channels and wanted broadcasters to ensure this content was appropriately scheduled to protect children.

Potential to damage community cohesion. Many participants said that some current affairs discussion programming on these channels could include behaviour that was aggressive or seen to be bullying in nature. Participants found this content to be offensive when the language or associated actions came across as insulting, prejudicial or part of what was interpreted as a verbal attack. Some thought that there was a potential for this content to create tensions between communities in the UK and could, in some instances, encourage a lack of tolerance and stifle open debates.

When discussing how broadcasters might mitigate against harm and offence, most participants felt it was important that these services put in place the same protections as would be expected for mainstream broadcasters. Participants referenced

appropriately scheduling content to protect children and providing clear and relevant warnings, as well as signposting to support networks or organisations. Participants shared a belief in the value of protecting freedom of expression and agreed that content should not be removed to avoid offending or upsetting people. There was concern among some participants that Ofcom would not have sufficient cultural understanding of broadcasters aimed at their minority ethnic communities and were concerned complaints might result in unfair regulatory action.

Awareness of Ofcom as the UK's broadcasting regulator was generally low across all groups and generations and there was very little knowledge of Ofcom's role in regulating services aimed at minority ethnic communities. Knowledge of Ofcom was limited to a minority, mostly third-generation participants, who had some awareness of recent high-profile cases⁸. Despite awareness being higher among this group, understanding of Ofcom's role was limited and in the main not informed by actual experiences with the regulator.

Once explained, there were mixed responses towards Ofcom and these varied both across generations and minority ethnic communities. Most participants initially said they would be unlikely to complain to Ofcom about any content. Some, however, said that taking part in the research had made them more likely to complain and felt that it was appropriate for their community to have a voice.

⁸ For instance, some participants discussed Ofcom's [published assessment](#) of the British street dance troupe, Diversity's, performance of a routine inspired by the Black Lives Matter political movement on Britain's Got Talent, ITV on 5 September 2020.