



MUSLIMS IN THE EUROPEAN MEDIASCAPE

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Introduction

Growing diversity in European societies

Over the past two decades, **the shape and fabric of European societies have changed dramatically**. In countries like the UK, net migration has substantially increased since the beginning of the 1990s, with the foreign born population rising from 3.8 million in 1993 to over 6.5 million in 2010 (Rienzo & Vargas-Silva 2011). Though Germany's foreign born population has remained constant in recent years, its long history of immigration has seen a rise in diversity, with the so-called second generation accounting for a growing share of the overall population. Other countries, such as those in Scandinavia and Southern Europe, with less experience of immigration, have undergone unprecedented levels of immigration over a very short timescale. **These trends have led to concerns about the development of social, economic, and cultural separation and, ultimately, the drift towards parallel societies.**

At the local level, a number of towns and cities across Europe have experienced problems as a result of the strains placed on different communities trying to live side by side. These fissures are represented at the national level, too, as politicians and public leaders struggle to handle sensitive discussions about difference, integration, cohesion and the need to find new ways to live together. These tensions are only likely to be intensified as the economic forecast for Europe continues to be bleak.

Within this context, **the media plays an important role in helping to define, shape and reflect the shape of society, the place of different minority communities within it, and relations between them.** Whether through the way the news is crafted, edited and presented via current affairs coverage, or through entertainment programming and features, the media sits at the heart of debates about identity, relations, and cultural understanding.

The shifting 'mediascape'

Over this period, a correspondingly dramatic shift has occurred within the media landscape – or 'mediascape' – across Europe. From the explosion of television channels due to satellite and cable broadcasting to the transformation of the media economy as a result of the Internet, the way in which we receive news and entertainment has been completely transformed. The consequences of these changes are far-reaching. They impact upon the type of content that is created, by whom and how, along with consumption patterns and our changing attitudes towards paying for content.

A number of changes to the mediascape are particularly relevant to the focus of this report, the most significant of which is **media diversification** [Cottle, 2000]. Where once a majority of viewers watched a handful of television channels, there are now hundreds of channels catering to a growing number of increasingly narrowly defined audiences or interest groups. The Internet enhances the potential for specialisation, allowing users to tailor their content via specialist blogs, YouTube channels, and Twitter feeds, for example. The print media struggles to keep pace with online reporting, which is now also challenging even the 24/7 broadcast media as the pressure mounts to rely on real-time, user generated online content – especially during a crisis – which pushes editorial decision making and source checking to the limit.

One specific form of diversification is central to this research – **the rise of media to serve faith communities, most notably Muslims.** Media designed to serve minority communities is not a new phenomenon; for example, *Attitude*, the magazine for gay people, was founded in 1994, and *The Voice*, the newspaper aimed towards the British African-Caribbean community has been running for over twenty years. However, in recent years a number of media

channels – broadcast, print and online – have emerged to serve Muslim communities specifically in both the UK and Germany. Both countries have print titles, such as *Muslim News* in the UK and *Islamische Zeitung* in Germany; there is busy online scene in both places, such as Islam.de in Germany and MuslimNews.co.uk in the UK; and both countries have dedicated television channels, such as The Islam Channel. International channels, like Al-Jazeera, also do well in the UK and Germany.

While this is a positive development in terms of audience choice, it also raises **concerns about whether the availability of such media outlets leads us towards increasingly narrow patterns of consumption and less exposure to challenging views or ideas, and whether this by extension erodes trust, solidarity and tolerance of difference.**

There is also a danger that this trend will intensify with changes in the way that online searches operate. Filtering – whereby search engines get to know a user's online behavior – are becoming increasingly common. Through this process, search engines tailor results based on historical patterns, which means that over time the content we are directed to becomes narrower. This reinforces our existing patterns of consumption without us knowing (Pariser, 2011).

The second major shift in the mediascape in Europe relates to **changes to the media economy**, which have tended to result in a heightened desire towards sensationalist stories. The print media is on the frontline of this trend [Shirky, 2008]. This has happened for two main reasons. First, the growth of free content on the Internet has led to a growing migration from print to online news consumption. For some newspapers, the decline in sales has been gradual and covered in part by online advertising revenue, but the economics of the situation are increasingly hard to ignore.

Second, the diversification trend described above has presented a further threat to the survival of both print and broadcast media that rely upon audience share for advertising revenue. The result is that many major media outlets are in a far more precarious position than at any time in their past. Their budgets for training and paying journalists are significantly diminished. At the same time, there is a growing desire to produce coverage that will generate larger audiences. Frequently, this equates to sensational stories with heroes and villains and preferably a few celebrities thrown in.

Concerns about media diversification

Media diversification is leading to a shifting locus of power and control from a small number of producers to an expanding cadre of both professional and amateur content creators, which includes 'consumers' themselves. It would be easy to overstate the case; the editors of national newspapers and producers of nightly news programmes on terrestrial television channels continue to wield enormous agenda-setting power. Over time, though, this will continue to decrease. As a result, it would be too simplistic to assume that those expressing concern about diversification have self-interest at heart, but there are a number of understandable concerns to be addressed.

First, the **"mass media" can deliver some important and positive cohesion outcomes.** As European societies have become more diverse, for instance, mass media has played a significant role in **diminishing the ignorance about immigrants** and has contributed to the creation of a climate in which overtly racist behaviour has gradually become stigmatised or even criminalized (Cottle, 2000). It can also help to promote cohesion between different communities by creating shared moments and meeting points; while people are getting their news and entertainment from the same places, there is the potential for the **creation of shared cultural reference points among even those from very divergent backgrounds** (Georgiou, unpublished). There are also examples of mainstream media **seeking to maintain calm in the face of events that might otherwise produce tensions between communities.** For example, in the immediate aftermath of the 7th July 2005 bombings in London, the British newspaper, *The Sun*, ran a leader explaining why Islam as a faith was not to blame for the attacks and urged people not to hold British Muslims in general responsible.

Second, according to "contact hypothesis" **the best way to diminish fear and discrimination between communities is through exposure to one another** on the assumption that contact provides direct experience to counter stereotypes or misperceptions (Brinson, 1991). Research seems to show that in the absence of contact, positive coverage and representation of minority communities in the media can serve to break down the barriers that stem from ignorance of the unknown. A **shift away from mainstream towards specialist media produced by "people like me" runs the risk of diminishing this potential.**

Third, **mass media depictions of minority communities can help them to find their own voice** amidst the other, more dominant voices in the mainstream. This can often be a difficult experience for the individuals involved, reflected in the responses from participants in this research. But when minority communities do establish their presence within mainstream media settings – both news and entertainment – it can mark an important milestone in the process of **establishing themselves as accepted in the eyes of society and also in their own sense of belonging.**

About the research

In the light of Europe's increasingly diverse societies and the shifting European mediascape, **this report seeks to understand the relationship between media production and consumption and community relations.** Based on research conducted by academic teams in the UK and Germany, it explores the following questions:

- Are we witnessing the emergence of parallel or segregated media societies, especially in relation to Muslim communities?
- In view of popular narratives and fears around Muslims' use of the media, how do Muslim media consumption patterns differ from overall patterns?
- Compared to other media, how does the growing body of Muslim-targeted media in Europe address issues of intergroup relations, participation, identity and cultural difference? How might they impact on intergroup relations?
- How do media consumers from diverse backgrounds relate to and engage with media content featuring cultural and religious difference and identity?
- Compared to other media users, how do media users from Muslim backgrounds make decisions about their consumption of media, and how do these choices vary according to variables such as ethnic origin, class and socio-economic status, age and gender?

In answering these questions, researchers from the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (Bielefeld University, Germany) and Keele University

in the UK employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods. A full account of the methodology is outlined in Appendix 1:

- They conducted a series of interviews and focus groups with journalists working in the mainstream media and 'Muslim media' in the UK and Germany.
- They conducted a series of focus groups with media consumers in the UK and Germany, both Muslim and non-Muslim. The groups consisted of different compositions of both mixed and homogenous groups for the purpose of comparison.
- They conducted a non-representative online survey of Muslim and non-Muslim media consumers.

A full and detailed account of the findings of both research teams is available to download at www.strategic-dialogue.org

A focus on Muslims and 'Muslim media'

One of the first challenges was defining the term '**Muslim media**', which for the purpose of this report is understood to refer to **media produced by and/or mainly consumed by Muslims.** In practice, the term was relatively well accepted and understood in the UK, although many participants in the research did not use the term themselves prior to their involvement in the project. In contrast, researchers in Germany had to revert to the term 'specialist media' due to significant challenge to, and unease about, the term. In fact, **one of the main conclusions of the report is the fact that Muslim media, per se, does not appear to be a recognizable media category,** even for those we might consider work within it based on this report's definition of the term. This in itself suggests that fears about a parallel media society are exaggerated.

The research does not seek to single Muslims out as a special case or imply that their experiences are vastly different to those of other communities. However, one cannot avoid the fact that, since 9/11, Muslims in Europe have been subject to increasingly negative media coverage. Coverage has differed between countries, but in both the UK and Germany Muslims report displeasure at the

way the media has handled issues relating to Islam as a faith and Muslims as a community.

It is also true to say that they have experienced some of the worst sorts of exclusion and marginalization; in the UK, people with South Asian heritage experience higher levels of poverty, do less well in school and are more likely to experience ill health than any other ethnic group (Poole, 2002); and in Germany, Turkish people are more likely to experience social exclusion (Economist, 2008; Gestring, Janßen & Polat 2006). However, it is the security situation that means marginalization of Muslims in general and their treatment by the media in particular is of special interest in a project of this kind. As a male media consumer said in a focus group in London, 'If you look at the Norway bombings, they thought straight away when they thought it was a Muslim people had done it, straight away that story got picked up they were showing it in every country'.

Structure of the report

This report is organized into the following sections:

Chapter one: Media Consumption Patterns of Muslims and non-Muslims – outlines the study's results about media consumption patterns in Germany and the UK, highlighting the similarities and differences between the two countries. It finds that:

- Mainstream media sources are still central to news and current affairs consumption;
- Most claim to be critical media consumers;
- Muslims do not feel that the mainstream media caters to their needs;
- Social media is increasingly important, but not primarily as a source of news and current affairs;
- Specialist media is important among all groups, but only alongside mainstream media;
- Muslims who are using specialist media may do so for a variety of reasons, including language, to get news from a diaspora country, to ensure the appropriateness of the

content they receive, and due to a lack of trust in western news sources.

- The idea of 'Muslim media' does not appeal to the majority of participants, especially in Germany where it was rejected by participants.

Chapter two: Representation, Muslims and the Media – looks at differing views about the representation of Muslims in the media in Germany and the UK and the impact of these experiences on different communities. It finds that:

- Muslims are stereotyped in the mainstream media;
- The media portrayal of Muslims is predominantly negative;
- Participants struggled to recall positive stories about Muslims, but not negative ones. Participants in the UK, though, were on the whole more positive than their counterparts in Germany;
- There was a sense that the media somewhat treats the religion of Islam with disrespect;
- Muslims are underrepresented in mainstream media, but this is felt more in Germany than the UK;
- A majority wanted the media to report more on prejudice against Muslims, but this was felt more strongly in Germany than the UK.

Chapter three: Muslims in the Media: The question of production – presents the experiences and behaviours of Muslim and non-Muslim journalists working for a range of mainstream and specialist outlets, and looks at the relationship between their experiences and the content they produce. It finds that:

- Muslims and other ethnic minorities are underrepresented within the mainstream media;
- Muslims face challenges in forging a career within mainstream media;

- Few organisations in either mainstream or specialist media have diversity policies;
- There were mixed views about whether having Muslims in the newsroom would change reporting;
- Most journalists agree that media coverage of Islam and Muslims is negative;
- The poor use of sources can exacerbate negative coverage and stereotypes;
- Most journalists did not recognize 'Muslim media' and there were mixed views about whether it's supposed emergence was a positive or negative development.

Conclusion – draws out the key findings and recommendations for policy makers, media professionals and others. These conclusions and recommendations are drawn by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue based on research conducted by the UK and German research teams, but do not necessarily reflect their views.

Chapter four: The Impact of the Media on Community Relations – analyses the impact of these findings on community relations and inter-group tensions. It finds that:

- Respondents felt that the media has a negative impact on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims;
- Negative media coverage of Muslims impacts on the attitudes of non-Muslims;
- Negative media coverage of Muslims could increase attacks against Muslims and other minority communities;
- All journalists feel a pressure to report responsibly, particularly those from specialist media outlets and local media;
- Their negative experiences could make Muslims more critical media consumers;
- The majority of respondents believe that the media can also be a force for good;
- Muslim and specialist media can help to promote good community relations;
- There are limits to the power of Muslim or specialist media in this domain.

Chapter 1:

Media Consumption Patterns of Muslims and Non-Muslims

Introduction

This research rests on an assumption that the media is becoming more diversified, catering to increasingly narrow groups and that in recent years there has been a rise in what might be termed 'Muslim media'. There are those that might argue – for the reasons already outlined – that such trends are negative because they increase the risk of parallel media societies, which can lead to social divisions of various kinds. This research supports the view of media diversification and the increased use of specialist media of many varieties, but finds that both Muslims and non-Muslims predominantly rely on mainstream media sources for news and current affairs. It also questions the notion of a Muslim media; most research participants – both Muslim and non-Muslim – were not familiar with this term. Even once it had been described, most did not on the whole find it to be a useful or meaningful concept, and only a minority of Muslims said they consumed media aimed at them as Muslims.

Mainstream media sources are still central to news and current affairs consumption

The research showed overwhelmingly that **most participants in both Germany and the UK rely on mainstream media sources for news and current affairs**. In the UK, both Muslims and non-Muslims referred mostly to **television as their main source**, with most quoting the BBC or Al Jazeera, and there was surprisingly little mention of either newspapers or radio. Older people proved an exception to this, and were more likely to read a daily or weekly newspaper. **German respondents mentioned a variety of news sources**, across all mediums. Most said that they are as likely to access these mainstream media channels via their website, highlighting the importance of online news coverage.

Most claimed to be critical media consumers

Many of those who took part acknowledged the shortcomings of mainstream media, and **claimed to consult a number of media sources** to ensure they understood a story from a range of perspectives. They also talked about the **need to move between mediums**, from television and radio, to newspaper and the Internet. In fact, many cited **the need for balance as a key driver for consuming news and current affairs online**.

Muslims do not feel that mainstream media caters to their needs

Muslim respondents were most vocal about the limitations of mainstream media. Almost **three-quarters (71.4%) of Muslims in the UK feel that mainstream media does not cater for their needs**, compared to **four-fifths (83.5%) in Germany**.

Growing importance of social media – but not primarily as a source for news and current affairs

In both the UK and Germany, almost **all participants use social media**, but the proportion is **higher among Muslims than non-Muslims** in both countries. In the UK, 90.5% of Muslims use social media compared to an average among all participants of 78.4%. In Germany, 89.7% of Muslims use social media versus 77.2% non-Muslims. However, in both places, **non-Muslims are more frequent users**, perhaps relating to access to the Internet. It is interesting to note that, of those surveyed, the **majority uses social media primarily for social reasons rather than to access news and current affairs**, although Muslims are more likely to use it for news than non-Muslims.

Importance of specialist media among all groups – but only alongside mainstream media

Across both countries, around a **half of those surveyed said they accessed specialist media for news and current affairs**. In the UK, the level was similar for Muslims and non-Muslims, although actually slightly higher for non-Muslims; 57.1% of Muslims do not access specialist media compared to 50.6% non-Muslims who do not. However, among those that do consume specialist media, **Muslim use is more frequent** than among non-Muslims. For example, 44.4% of these Muslims do so on a weekly basis versus 19.4% of non-Muslims, and over half (55.6%) of Muslims access it on or daily basis versus one-third (35.5%) of non-Muslims. **Those born outside the UK have a slightly higher use and are more likely to use specialist media weekly.**

Levels are similar in Germany, although among German Muslims consulted the number using specialist media for news was much higher at 63.9%. Only 13.4% of Muslims said they only rely on specialist media for news and current affairs and of those that access specialist sources, twice as many mentioned Internet sites as newspapers. The main reason given across the whole German dataset for the use of specialist media was specialist interest (65.5%), with only one-third (33.9%) citing language reasons or access to information about countries with a family connection (35.2%).

The idea of 'Muslim media' does not appeal to the majority of participants

One of the most striking findings of the research is the fact that the **idea of 'Muslim media' did not appeal to the research participants**. In both countries, the term was not known by the consumers surveyed and interviewed, and the majority found it to be an unattractive term. Interestingly, **negative reaction to 'Muslim media' was greater in Germany, but significantly more Muslims in that country (57.7%) claimed to consume media aimed at them primarily as Muslims, compared to Muslims in the UK (33.3%)**. In both countries, Muslims struggled to name many Muslim media sources apart from Al Jazeera, and of those that were given they were usually only mentioned by a very small number of people (for instance, Emel, Islamische Zeitung and Peace TV).

There was a general feeling, especially in the UK, that **Muslim media does not cater to specific needs and is unnecessary and irrelevant for most of those surveyed**. While many acknowledged the importance of alternative sources of news, such as Al Jazeera, the feeling was that the World Service catered well to any special needs they might have. For example, one young Muslim woman at a focus group in Staffordshire said that mainstream media seemed to have more relevance, "[...] the thing about the older generation, with me I don't watch most of the Asian channels because I live here I'm more focused on what is going on around me here and what's going to affect me now and in the future"

There were also **some negative views about Muslim media among non-Muslim participants** in both the UK and Germany. Only a few had had experience of these sources, but were concerned about its emergence. One even said they worried that it would provide a forum from which extreme voices could emerge. On the whole, non-Muslims in the UK used negative words to describe it, such as '**narrow minded**', '**segregation**', '**insular**' and '**not free**'. Only a handful gave positive evaluations of Muslim media, using words such as 'professional' and 'promoting acceptance'.

Among some groups, there was also a degree of sympathy for the idea that Muslims would "want or need media tailored to their needs and interests", although that varied according to other characteristics of the group asked. In the UK, **for instance, younger people under 50 years were significantly more likely to be positive about Muslim media** than those who were older. A similar – although not identical – pattern was also in evidence when UK residents were asked whether "immigrants in Britain should maintain their culture of origin".

Explanations for the use of specialist or Muslim media among Muslims

Although the research showed that consumption of Muslim media was not at significant levels and that a tiny minority relies solely on such sources, the project does illustrate the fact that Muslims (like non-Muslims) consult a range of media outlets in their search for news and current affairs. There are a number of factors that might help to explain that:

- **Language:** In both Germany and the UK, members of Muslim communities are disproportionately likely to be members of minority language groups. Language was sometimes a factor in choice of news sources, but given the high education level of the sample was likely to be underrepresented in the findings.
- **News from the diaspora/country of origin:** both British and German Muslims are likely to have some connection to a country other than the one in which they live. The survey found that a high proportion believed that staying informed and retaining a sense of belonging to countries of origin (or one's parents' or grandparents' country of origin) was an important part of their lives. Given low coverage in mainstream media, this might draw Muslims to alternative news sources.
- **Appropriateness of content:** For some Muslims, content on mainstream media may sometime appear inappropriate due to sexual content or nudity. For them, turning to media outlets tailored specifically to Muslim audiences is an easy way to ensure they do not stumble on content they do not wish to come into contact with.
- **Trust in western news sources:** Many Muslims consulted were dissatisfied with reporting on Muslims, Islam and events in the Muslim world. Some of the most acute mistrust appeared in the focus group in London, conducted with Muslim women. They described themselves as having almost no faith at all in the media, and their views bordered on conspiracy theories. Even where mistrust was less deeply felt, there remained a clear sense that the way in which western news outlets were likely to report was likely to present a biased view. This drove participants to go elsewhere for their news.

Chapter 2:

Representation, Muslims and the Media

Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the fact that a majority of the Muslims in both the UK and Germany surveyed as part of this research are dissatisfied with representations of Muslims within mainstream media. As a result, some are turning to specialist media sources for alternative views, although most are not deserting mainstream media entirely and their search for specialist media is on a par with that of non-Muslims. Both Muslims and non-Muslims acknowledge the shortcomings of mainstream media; they believe that Muslims are stereotyped within the media, and that it presents generally negative views of Muslims and Islam. Participants also feel that Muslims are under-represented and that there should be more coverage of Islam, especially among Muslims. As the previous chapter showed, most of those surveyed feel they are critical media consumers, understanding the bias of mainstream media and consulting alternative sources to see a given story in a more rounded way. However, many went on to repeat stereotypes and dominant views in an uncritical way during interviews and focus groups. There is a consciousness about the problem itself, but many still slip into these positions.

Muslims are stereotyped within Mainstream media

Overwhelmingly, the research found that **most people – Muslims and non-Muslims – felt that Muslims were poorly represented in the mainstream media**. In Germany, four-fifths (83.2%) of those surveyed thought that Muslims were stereotyped in the media. This figure was **higher among Muslims**, of whom 61.9% strongly agreed and 27.8% agreed (total 89.7% agreement). Muslims were

more likely than non-Muslims to strongly agree with this statement. This was also reflected in focus groups. For example, a female Muslim from Dortmund commented, “It does not come across that Muslims are positive. It just comes across that Muslims are always negative, that they don’t speak out, that they don’t integrate themselves.” In UK most of those surveyed thought that Muslims are stereotyped in the media, although the figure was higher among Muslims than non-Muslims.

Media portrayal of Muslims is overwhelmingly negative

The view across Muslims and non-Muslims surveyed in both countries was that the **mainstream media predominantly portrays Muslims in a negative light**. In Germany, an overwhelming majority agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “the mainstream media portrays a negative view of Islam”, with nearly half agreeing strongly with this statement. Respondents also supported the idea that, “the media convey a distorted idea of Islam”. Non-Muslim participants in Germany were more ambivalent about whether or not the mainstream media treated Muslims disrespectfully; although a majority agreed that they did, they did not agree strongly, and more than a third did not feel this statement was true.

In the UK, both Muslims and non-Muslims consulted agreed that media representations of Muslims are negative. Many Muslims referred to being ‘stereotyped’ and ‘targeted’, and in doing so there was little attempt to differentiate between media forms. When pressed, though, the **tabloid press was singled out for criticism** while some identified *The Guardian* and the Independent as being unbiased. Many also felt that television was less biased than newspapers.

There were, however, **differing degrees of feeling** among participants about this. For example, **twice as many non-Muslims (24.7%) as Muslims (9.5%) disagreed with the statement, ‘the mainstream media portrays a negative view of Islam’,** and young Muslims (age 16-20 years) were less likely to agree with the statement ‘the media convey a distorted view of Islam’ than Muslims as a whole.

Participants struggled to recall positive stories about Muslims, but not negative ones – although those in the UK were slightly more optimistic

When asked to recall negative or positive stories about Muslims in Germany, almost four-fifths (79.4%) of Muslims could think of a recent negative story, and around the same proportion (84.5%) could not think of a recent story that had challenges stereotypes about Muslims. The negative stories that were mentioned included the Sarrazin debate, the Arab Spring, the wearing of the headscarf by Muslim women, integration and the minaret ban.

Participants described the way in which “good” stories about Muslims tended to focus on aspects of their identity other than their faith, while “bad” stories frequently used their faith as a descriptor. One German producer working within a specialist national newspaper told a story about a conversation with his son about the film director Fatih Akin winning an award:

[The son said:] “‘The man said the German director Fatih Akin got it’. I said: ‘Yes, what about it?’ – ‘It’s the wrong way round’ – ‘But it’s right. Fatih Akin is German’. My son said: ‘Yes, that is already true. But if you would have done something bad – then they would not have said the German Fatih Akin but the Turkish Fatih Akin.’”

Muslims surveyed in the UK were slightly more positive about their treatment in the press than their German counterparts. Fewer (71.4%) were able to think of a recent negative story about Muslims, and fewer (61.9%) were unable to think of a recent story that challenged prejudices against them. They felt that **the dominant image of Muslims was the ‘Islamic terrorist’,** and other stories they mentioned touched upon 9/11, the July 2005 London bombings, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, jihad, the

death of Osama Bin Laden, the treatment of women in Islam and women’s rights, capital punishment, restrictive practices in schools, Sharia law, a negative focus on converts, and Muslims involved in criminal activity.

Participants in focus groups in the UK pointed to the fact that the media jumped to the conclusion that the July 2011 attacks in Norway had been carried out by Muslims before any evidence was known, and they criticized the media for using extremist sources in their reporting, which reinforces negative stereotypes of Muslims. Muslim participants felt the main reasons for this negative coverage was a lack of knowledge and understanding about Islam, followed by economic reasons (ratings and profits), and then lack of regulation. There was also an assumption by some that the media has an ‘agenda’.

There was also recognition among non-Muslims consulted in the UK that media coverage of Muslims tends to be negative, who also stressed the link that is made in the media between Muslims and terrorism or extremism, especially since 9/11 and the 2005 London bombings. As one white focus group participant in London said, “Women were wearing Burkas a long time ago and nobody ever bothered about it. But since this sort of almost demonization of British Muslims...it becomes sinister then.”

When seeking to rationalize this negative coverage, many non-Muslims were resigned to the fact that there will always be a bias in favour of the dominant norms and values of society. Participants also talked about the link between negative reporting and the **media economy.** For example a white female from Staffordshire commented, “You can’t say Islam is wonderful, Christians and [Muslims] get on. Who’s going to buy that? Who’s going to turn the TV on and watch that?” Another white female from London talked about it in terms of the media’s need to label people, saying “I think the press can’t really function without labeling people, they have to have a label or a box.”

Both Muslims and non-Muslims struggled to recall positive news stories about Muslims, but both groups mentioned the positive way in which Muslims had been described in the reporting of the deaths of three Muslim men in Birmingham during the riots in the August 2011. Tariq Jahan, father of one of the men that died, called for calm in the wake of his son’s death and was credited with defusing what could otherwise have developed into heightened tension in the city and beyond. He was widely described as being a Muslim, but this was marked out as unusual. One female Muslim participant in Staffordshire

said, “As far as positive stories are concerned, I was really shocked after the riots in Birmingham about some of the positive aspects of the community that have come out in some of our tabloid papers after the killing of three Muslims and the way their families came out... I can’t think of another positive Muslim story.”

There was a sense that the media tends to treat the religion of Islam with disrespect

There was agreement among Muslims and non-Muslims surveyed in Germany that Islam is treated with disrespect by the mainstream media, with older Muslims seeing Muslims and Islam treated more disrespectfully in the media than younger Muslims on the whole. However, Muslims felt this more keenly than non-Muslims. For example, when asked whether ‘media reporting of Islam is fair and balanced’ Muslims and non-Muslims disagreed in about the same measure, although Muslims disagreed more strongly. The same is true in relation to whether ‘there should be more coverage of Islam-related stories in the mainstream media’, with three-quarters (76.2%) of Muslims but only half (56.7%) of non-Muslims agreeing. Muslims were also more likely than non-Muslims to feel their religion was treated disrespectfully by the mainstream media, three-quarters of Muslims felt this (77.4%) compared to 9.2% of non-Muslims.

The pattern in the UK was different, with far more people agreeing that both Muslims and Islam were treated disrespectfully by the media. The Muslims surveyed believed more than others that their own religion was treated disrespectfully by the mainstream media (71.4%), and non-Muslims agreed that Islam and Muslims were more likely to be treated disrespectfully (48.1%) than their own religion (26%). Most disagreed with the statement, ‘Media reporting of Islam is fair and balanced’ (75.5% overall, 90.5% Muslim and 71.6% non-Muslims).

Muslims are under-represented in mainstream media – but this is felt more in Germany than the UK

Hand in hand with the problem of misrepresentation came the question of under-representation. In Germany, more than two-thirds of respondents agreed that there

should be more coverage of Islam-related stories in the mainstream media, and a similar proportion agreed that the media should report more on Islam. Agreement with this view was weaker in the UK, with the split between those who agreed and those who disagreed fairly even on the statement regarding “there should be more coverage of Islam related stories in the mainstream media”. Around half disagreed that media should report more on Islam. Among Muslims, this pattern was also borne out. German Muslims interviewed wanted to have more media representations of their group in the media, where UK-based Muslims did not want more coverage.

A majority wanted the media to report more on prejudice against Muslims – but this is felt more strongly in Germany than the UK

The majority of respondents in both countries – both Muslim and non-Muslim – thought that the mainstream media should report more about prejudice against Muslims. However, this feeling was stronger among Muslims than non-Muslims overall, and was more deeply held in Germany than the UK. In Germany, almost all respondents (91.7%) agreed that the ‘media should report more on prejudices against Muslims and Islam in Germany’, compared to three-quarters of non-Muslims (73.1%). In the UK, two-thirds (64.7%) felt the media should report more on these issues, and the difference between the overall and Muslim-only view was much smaller, with just over two-thirds (66.7%) of Muslims sharing this view. Most respondents in both countries felt that the media could reduce prejudices against Muslims and Islam.

Chapter 3:

Muslims in the Media:

The question of production

Introduction

The research sends a strong message that media consumers – Muslims and non-Muslims – believe that media coverage of Islam and Muslims is overwhelmingly negative. It presents stereotyped views of Muslims, associates Islam with negative factors such as terrorism and the repression of women, and in much coverage Islam has become a pejorative. There was also a sense among Muslim consumers that the mainstream media is something that lies outside their control; it fails to represent them, actively misrepresents them, and does not cater for their needs. Whether people are discontented from what it offers or not, there was a clear implication that “they” produce it, and that “they”, by and large, are not Muslims.

On the whole, journalists working within mainstream and specialist media shared these views, especially the latter. They also reflected on inner working practices of media organisations in an attempt to help explain why the current situation has come about. A picture emerged of mainstream media organisations dominated by white, middle class men, and specialist media organisations staffed by journalists of minority ethnic backgrounds, and both had little in the way of diversity policies to tackle the entrenched homogeneity within.

Many Muslim journalists felt that they suffer from pigeonholing because they are more likely to be asked to cover stories about Islam or Muslims. There was considerable reflection on whether a journalist’s identity impacts on the choice of story, their ability to access sources and background knowledge to heighten nuance, and their ultimate editorial line. On the whole, journalists were nervous about this potential division of labour, although those working in mainstream media were more forceful in their assertion that good journalists can cover any story well. There were also those within specialist media outlets who worried about getting too close to the story and failing to be objective.

Like consumers, journalists did not recognise the label ‘Muslim media’, even those working within specialist outlets. Some saw the possible positive effects it could have in rebalancing coverage of Islam and Muslims, but within mainstream media in both Germany and the UK many were concerned about its potential negative divisionary effects.

Muslims and ethnic minorities are underrepresented within the mainstream media

Throughout the research with producers, there were countless references to the extreme **difficulty faced by Muslim journalists finding a way into mainstream news organizations**. In the UK, newsrooms were frequently described as “white, male and middle class”, a fact that was recognized by mainstream producers, too. This was also the case in Germany, where both Muslim and non-Muslim journalists in mainstream and specialist media remarked how unusual it was to see journalists of migrant backgrounds within mainstream news organisations. For example, one interviewee described how in his outlet of two hundred employees, she could identify only five who had a migrant ethnic origin. Many mentioned **social media in this context as being a positive development, as it helped to extend coverage and could provide an alternative route into the media for minorities**.

Forging a career: challenges faced by Muslims in the media

Muslim journalists who currently or previously worked in the mainstream media were very clear that their faith identity had an impact on the way their career took shape. They identified various challenges they had faced during their careers. Some talked about there being an implication that they would be unusually posi-

tive and biased in their coverage of Islam- or Muslim-related stories. One journalist working in Germany described feeling that he was **viewed skeptically when it came to stories about Muslims or Islam**, because there was some suggestion that he would not be independent or objective in his journalism. He contrasted this with Christian journalists who he said rarely faced the same levels of doubt from colleagues when covering a story relating to their faith.

Many of the journalists interviewed for the research described the way in which they found themselves **limited to covering stories about Muslim-specific issues**, especially as stories relating to the “terror threat” moved up the news agenda. Leaving aside the personal frustrations for these journalists, their tight focus on “Muslim” issues within the mainstream media has led to an even greater paucity of opportunities for Muslims to report on non-Islam-specific issues. As these journalists are increasingly driven into such narrowly defined reporting roles, they are less likely to find perspectives that echo their own within the mainstream media.

Few organisations in either mainstream or specialist media have diversity policies

Among those interviewed and surveyed for this research, **few journalists were aware of diversity policies within their own organisations**, whether mainstream or specialist outlets, and there was **slightly more awareness in the UK than Germany**. Within mainstream media journalists in the UK, most were only aware of such policies at the BBC and most observed that other than this there was mostly tokenism in relation to representation of diversity within the newsroom.

There appeared to be a **distinction between print and broadcast media**. Those who had worked in **mainstream print media outlets were less likely to be aware of diversity and equality policies** and the culture was more based on the independence of journalists with an editor only intervening when absolutely necessary. In contrast, those who had worked in broadcasting felt it was much more geared towards meeting regulations and quotas, for example, in relation to having more ethnic minorities represented on screen. One producer said, “Yeah, yeah, that’s why you’ll find a lot of presenters not on the main show for example, *London Tonight*, but the late bulletin or the early bulletin, a black or Asian and why do you think that

is. Because they have this kind of quota where they’ve got to tick boxes – how many Asians or black people...how many women, and they’re very strict”

The specialist media outlets also, on the whole, failed to have comprehensive diversity policies. This was explained in terms of their small size and the fact that most were heavily reliant on volunteers rather than paid staff, and on freelancers. They also tended to have a greater proportion of journalists of ethnic minority background because of the nature of their focus and target audiences.

Some participants felt that local media was better at diversity because of its inherent need to appeal to the demographics of its local audience. For example, one mainstream producer commented of his time working on local television in London, “there was much more of an awareness that we have a mixed audience in London in particular and I found their stories quite balanced and the coverage quite balanced and there are a lot of stories about ethnic minorities, not really pushed by the editor.”

There were mixed views on whether having Muslims in the newsroom would change reporting

Journalists were undecided as a whole about whether a lack of Muslims in the newsroom had a substantial impact on the level and nature of coverage of stories relating to Islam or Muslims. On the one hand, there were those who felt that a journalists’ identity was irrelevant. For example, one national broadcast editor working within the mainstream media in the UK commented, “If the journalist is a good journalist I don’t think their background should hinder them” Some also felt that it was **potentially problematic for mostly Muslims to cover these stories** as they might struggle to maintain emotional distance and a sense of independence in their reporting. For example, one producer working within Muslim media in the UK commented, “I think it helps when you’re trying to get stories and access. I think sometimes they may hinder you because you become too attached, so when you feel like an attack taking place on Muslims, it’s hard to detach yourself from that” Another German journalist working as an editor within a specialist media print magazine talked about the importance of ensuring non-Muslim journalists cover these stories or order to have a fresh perspective, “I think when it comes to the topics of Muslims and Islam...I find it important that not only

Muslims write about it but also non-Muslims to pick up on this change perspective.”

On the other hand, a number of those consulted felt that **journalists from minority backgrounds brought a number of strengths to their work**. Several pointed to **language skills** that would allow them to access a particular community, an **understanding of social mores**, a sense of **acceptance** within those communities, and enhanced **background knowledge** to bring nuance to the story. As a German journalist working within a specialist national press outlet said about non-Muslims working on such stories, “Their own competence lacks – he cannot classify whether this information is qualitatively right or wrong.” Journalists from ethnic minorities working within mainstream media in the UK had mixed views; on the one hand they recognized these strengths, but on the other they often felt pigeonholed, and some had experiences of resentment from colleagues.

Most journalists agree that media coverage of Islam and Muslims is negative

There was agreement among all journalists that **mainstream media coverage of Muslims was negative**, and it was the most prevalent line of discussion at the behest of journalists themselves. This was a more strongly held view among journalists working within Muslim or specialist media. Participants noted the increased volume of this kind of simplified, de-contextualised, formulaic coverage. They described much of it as being reactionary and xenophobic, with a tendency to focus on extremism, radicalism, barbarism, and sensationalism.

Participants referred to stories that highlighted the religion of protagonists; focused on narratives of violence; portrayed Muslims as fifth columnists, sexual predators, or as lacking a sense of humour; that looked at issues such as Sharia law and integration; and they recognized the fact that the media tends to paint a binary distinction between the good and bad Muslim. As one producer working within Muslim media in the UK commented, “and to see that if our mainstream media organisations continue to just go for really cheap binaries, the easy way out, the de-contextualised good Muslim-bad Muslim dynamic then we’re all screwed.”

Journalists in the specialist media in the UK were especially critical of outlets and programmes, such as the *Daily Star*, Fox News, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Tel-*

graph, the Murdoch media, Newsnight, Dispatches, and some outspoken right wing commentators. One freelance producer within the mainstream media who had previously worked on a national tabloid newspaper talked about the way in which his publication had almost proactively sought out stories that portrayed Muslims in a negative light. He said: “I would say that on an almost daily basis there would be a story about Muslims negatively in the paper. It was certainly something that you look out for; and it was certainly something that got good coverage in a way that no story about Jews or Sikhs or any other religion was ever covered.” **Journalists within mainstream media in the UK tended to say they felt that their own organisation’s coverage of stories relating to Islam or Muslims was even handed, but acknowledged that negative representation existed elsewhere** within sections of the media, especially the tabloids.

Journalists thought a range of factors helped to explain this negative coverage, such as systematic prejudice within media organisations, the bias of the profession towards white, middle class men who produces what one called ‘an editorial echo chamber’, a media culture that looks for easy copy due to production and commercial pressures, as well as wider factors, such as xenophobia within society at large.

Within Germany, there was a similar picture. However, there was much more of a sense there that ‘Muslim’ was now a pejorative term that had become synonymous with ‘immigrant’ or ‘Turk’. Like the UK, there were associations with security issues, such as terrorism, as well as concerns about social or cultural behaviours presumed to be associated with Islam specifically or Muslim communities more generally. One mainstream press producer said, “The terrorists managed that we do not talk about Turks anymore, but about Muslims. That is perhaps their greatest victory.”

Poor use of sources can exacerbate negative coverage and stereotypes

One of the biggest sources of frustration among consumers in terms of journalist practice relates to the choice of sources. As has been highlighted, **Muslim media consumers are angry that journalists choose extreme and unrepresentative Muslims** to comment publicly and their views are then seen to represent all Muslims. This also leads to sensationalism around these stories. **Some**

journalists admitted that they had seen this used as a specific tactic. For example, one former British tabloid reporter said that in his experience, some mainstream outlets would specifically search for potential advocates of violent extremism. He explained, “Omar Bakri or Anjem Choudary: I mean, I’ve got their mobile phone numbers in my phone, you’ll call them up in the morning and go, “how you doing mate....got anything for us today...give us a line, you know, something outrageous...”

On the whole, the journalists consulted understood the frustration of Muslims in relation to their choice of extreme sources. Some explained it in terms of a structural problem within mainstream media, others talked about a lack of effective media strategy among moderate Muslims that leaves them out of the spotlight. As one mainstream media editor from the UK said, “There are quite a few so-called Muslim community leaders, so-called representatives that are just rabble rousing attention seekers, they’re...allowed to dominate headlines...they are no more representative of Muslim communities than the grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan represents Christian communities.” Some journalists also talked about the tendency to go back to the same sources; although the larger organisations had a planning desk where journalists could go for sources, most tended to use their own trusted sources.

Most journalists did not recognize ‘Muslim media’ and there were mixed views about whether its emergence was a positive or negative development

Like consumers, media producers had little concept of ‘Muslim media’, and in Germany it was rejected outright. Many were ambivalent about its apparent growth, but a few – in both mainstream and Muslim media – were concerned that outlets were sectarian, pursued a more aggressive stance in relation to ‘Muslim-issues’, and would encourage communities to “talk to themselves”. Issues were also raised about the editorial process and approach to choosing stories, with most admitting these were random operations usually dominated by one person within the organization. Some talked of the need for Muslim media to “up its game”.

Chapter 4:

The Impact of the Media on Community Relations

Introduction

The research has shown that participants felt that media coverage was very negative about Muslims, promoted stereotypes, and tended to be disrespectful of Islam as a religion. Overall, every group shared these views, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, consumers or producers, although each in different measure. What perhaps matters even more, though, is whether and how this has an impact on community relations, discrimination, equalities, or self-perception. Proving cause and effect is, of course, almost impossible, especially in a study of this kind with a small sample size, based on perceptions, and not combined with detailed media content analysis. The findings outlined in this chapter are, therefore, purely perceptual.

Overall, respondents felt that the media had an impact on community relations, both in terms of influencing the views of non-Muslims on Muslims, impacting on the self-perception of Muslims themselves, and stirring up tensions between individuals and groups on the ground. All journalists agreed about the importance of acting responsibly, but there was a strong sense among Muslim media producers in the UK of the need for them to modify their coverage – both in terms of frame, editorial line, and whether or not to cover a particular story at all – in order to guard against negative impacts. Those journalists working in mainstream media were less inclined to modify their behaviour. Interestingly, as well as acknowledging the negative impact of the media, respondents across all groups also felt that the media could play a positive role in improving community relations.

Respondents felt that the media has a negative impact on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims

There was universal agreement among all respondents that the media has an impact on relations and attitudes between different groups. This was felt more by Muslims, and more in relation to the mainstream media. Most felt that the net overall effect of media was negative. For example, in the UK four-fifths (41.2%) of respondents disagreed with the statement ‘the media I consumer has a positive effect on relations between Muslims and other Britons’, with only a quarter (24.5%) agreeing with this statement. More Muslims than non-Muslims disagreed with the statement, and disagreement was higher still when the question was asked specifically in relation to mainstream media. For the latter, three-quarters (76.5%) of all respondents disagreed that mainstream media has a positive impact on relations between Muslims and other Britons, slightly lower than Muslims (81%).

Negative media coverage of Muslims impacts on the attitudes of non-Muslims

Respondents unanimously agreed that **negative media coverage of Muslims impacts on the how Muslims are perceived by non-Muslims**. A Muslim woman from Bielefeld commented, “There is this association in the mind. And when one sees it often [in the media]: woman oppressed, Muslim teenagers as a danger for society, and that is always in relation to Islam, then that becomes one’s first association... Attitudes are difficult to change. And that is the danger.” Another said that she is regularly asked when her parents would choose her husband

because there is a perception in media coverage of Muslims that women are not allowed to make these kinds of choices for themselves.

Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK echoed these views. Muslims agreed that the media was the largest influence on attitudes towards them among non-Muslims. Interestingly, most agreed that the UK was a welcoming and positive country, but that because of the negative media coverage they found themselves having to work hard to disprove these stereotypes and misperceptions. A non-Muslim male from London affirmed this view, “I think we soak in this thing, for a lot of people every time they hear the phrase British Muslim is with a negative association that we’ve heard the news in the background or reading it that it’s suspected terrorism.”

There was also evidence of the **mainstream media’s choice to ignore positive news about good community relations**. For example, a Muslim man from London talked about the fact that in his area during the 2011 riots the Muslims and Sikhs had worked together to protect the area. He says, “...it didn’t really get put on BBC News or anything – I had to see it from a Sikh channel...”

Negative media coverage of Muslims could increase attacks against Muslims and other minority communities

What is perhaps more disturbing is the fact that respondents were able to point to ways in which **negatives views of Muslims and/or their perceptions of anti-Muslim feeling impacted on their daily lives and even their physical safety**. It is not possible to draw a causal link between this and media coverage, but it is fair to conclude that they are not entirely unconnected. A Muslim man from Dortmund talked about the experience of an Arab colleague, “he had a beard and a prayer cap...He entered the tram and one of the passengers shouts to him, ‘Do you want to blow us up?’” A Muslim male taxi driver from Staffordshire told researchers that he was attacked by white youths around the time of the Bradford riots in 2001. He thought the media coverage at the time must have had something to do with it because inter-community relations had been positive before this time.

There was an **age differential** among Muslim respondents. Older Muslims in Staffordshire talked about feeling safe within their own area of town, but being nervous

about venturing outside it. When talking about his area, one man said, “...we live in a bubble.” On the other hand, young Muslim students in both Staffordshire and London felt less affected and claimed they maintained good relations with people from different backgrounds. However, some acknowledged that discrimination might become more of an issue for them after they graduated. One female student from Staffordshire said, “...I think because we are a younger generation and we start studying, it [discrimination] hasn’t affected us as much...probably when we’ve graduated and we start applying for jobs, maybe it will probably hit us then...”

On the whole, non-Muslims shared the view that the media has a negative impact on community relations and attitudes, but were more likely to qualify this with mixed view about whether the media is merely a mirror on the world and reflects the reality of society or whether it exaggerates or invents problems for its own commercial ends. A number of non-Muslim participants felt that the media played up conflicts to increase viewers and readership. There were also positive statements about the importance of maintaining the independence and freedom of the media, and that it should be able to air a range of views regardless of whether they are popular or mainstream. Others felt that the media reflects society and merely offers consumers what they want.

The research also offers evidence to show that there is a **correlation between feeling threatened by reports on Islamophobia and a lack of belonging**. For example, almost three-quarters of Muslims surveyed said they felt threatened by such reports (interestingly men were slightly more likely than women to feel threatened). These people are less likely to feel attached to the UK and are likely to be more frequent consumers of specialist media.

The same pattern was observed in Germany, although fewer German Muslims (58.7%) said they felt threatened by reports on Islamophobia. Those that did considered themselves to be less German, said it was less important for them to define themselves as German and felt more attached to their parents’ country. They also believed more strongly in the positive effect of the consumed media on the relation between them and non-Muslims, and felt more strongly that the media conveyed a distorted ideal of Islam and treated Muslims and Islam disrespectfully.

The majority of journalists feel a pressure to report responsibly, particularly those from specialist media outlets

There was unanimous agreement among journalists that the media has an impact on community relations and that, as such, they have a responsibility to report in a way that does not ignite tensions. Among journalists working within the mainstream media, there was reticence about having this concern override their role as journalists and impact too much on the way they work. Many felt that they must be able to cover stories regardless of the impact, although most conceded that they always tried to do so in a way that would not materially impact on conditions on the ground.

Some believed that local media outlets were more likely to be sensitive to these concerns. An editor for a local paper said, "...we know that we are somehow shaping what people think and talk about and therefore the responsibility is very heavy to make sure that we do that in a sensible sensitive way, that it is fair and balanced and that we don't have particular policies where certain sections of the community or certain organisations are being victimized."

There was a much clearer sense among journalists working within the Muslim media that they felt compelled to shift the way they worked to avoid sensationalism or negative impacts on community relations. Most journalists in this category in both Germany and the UK said they had adapted or carefully considered the way they covered a story because of community tensions. One editor from the Muslim media was asked whether there had been occasions when he had not reported or been careful about the way he edited a particular story because of concerns about potential impacts on community tensions. He said, "Yes, absolutely. The major very, very sensitive thing is desecration of the Koran. As someone who spends a lot of time in Pakistan and is involved in minority rights and human rights work in Pakistan I am very aware that the actions of a mob and the actions of lunatics wanting to create a response in Europe leads to the reactions and a consequential impact of activity of mobs in Karachi and Lahore, do we tread very carefully because some of these things are incendiary and have an impact on the streets."

Their negative experiences could make Muslims more critical media consumers

It has already been highlighted that critical consumption is an essential skill in relation to the media, and it may well be that some parts of the Muslim community have a head start in this regard. The personal experiences of some Muslim research participants reminded of the fact that there are many countries where to trust the official version of events would be the height of naivety. In addition, their own experiences of poor representation seemed to make Muslims in both the UK and Germany much savvier about the limitations of the media as a whole.

The majority of respondents believe that the media can also be a force for good

Almost all consumers – both Muslim and non-Muslim – believe that the media can play a positive role in changing attitudes towards different groups. In the UK, 89.2% believed that the media could play a role in reducing prejudices against Muslims in the UK, which equated to all (100%) of Muslims and 86.4% non-Muslims. In Germany the figures were slightly lower but comparable, with 89.7% Muslims and 86.0% non-Muslims agreeing with this statement.

Some have pointed to the fact that positive media coverage might encourage non-Muslims to be more open and approachable towards Muslims. As a Muslim woman from Dortmund said, "Because when for example something positive is covered about a Muslim, maybe the non-Muslims...would be more open towards new things, when they hear something positive, and would approach me or want to get to know me better. That would contribute something positive absolutely. So media play a big role."

Others have talked about the fact that the media could help by providing a voice and platform for Muslims within the sphere, which they felt would encourage acceptance and integration, and also a channel for the frustrations of Muslims. For example, in Germany Muslims have rallied against the Sarrazin debate and turned negative coverage of Muslims on its head by making fun of it. One such example is the growing use of the term 'Kopftuchmädchen' or 'headscarf girl' to mock the way headscarves have become such a negative symbol within public debates in Germany.

Debates about integration often understandably concentrate on bridging capital; in other words, links between people who are different from one another that can help to increase mutual understanding, break down barriers and promote contact. It is also important, though, to promote bonding capital, which is about the ties between similar, homogenous groups of people that can be essential to taking steps into the relative unknown, into relationships with people who differ from ourselves.

For any community, a strong sense of their own identity is not just a nice extra; bonds within the community are an essential precursor to those outside it. The insecurity created by much of the negative coverage of Muslim communities makes these internal ties especially important, and media that addresses itself specifically to Muslims can help to underpin this process. For that reason, it is just as likely to be a tool to create cohesion, as a wedge to further divide separated communities.

Muslim and specialist media can help to promote good community relations

The research indicates that the **emergence of a stronger Muslim or specialist media in Germany and the UK can have positive impacts on community relations**. For example, increasing the media offer to Muslims could **help to nuance the way in which Muslims are viewed within wider society**. As noted above, some Muslims interviewed for the research described ambivalence about their own identity when confronted with much of the negative representation in the media. A Muslim producer described the converse effect emerging from his involvement with the Muslim media, saying it had significantly increased the extent to which he felt positively about his Muslim identity. The breadth of Muslim media content – from Al Jazeera to Muslim lifestyle magazines, such as Emel – also starts to expose the limitations of stereotypes about Muslims.

There are limitations to the extent to these benefits; Muslim media is not widely consumed by non-Muslims and, when it is in a minority language may engender suspicion rather than enhance understanding. Similarly, these niche media outlets may entrench divisions between a person's faith identity and their national identity – rather than helping to find the common ground between the two.

However, as the research results showed, this media is viewed by non-Muslims, albeit in fewer numbers and less often. For example, Al-Jazeera is fast becoming 'mainstream' – in fact it proved difficult to classify as either 'specialist' or 'mainstream' as part of this project. Increasingly, recognizable faces from other news outlets are being recruited to the channel, cementing its position in the mainstream. These sorts of interactions conceivably do more to dispel myths than any amount of carefully constructed coverage of festivals and the like.

There is also the potential for Muslim media to **impact on mainstream coverage of Muslims**. Respondents consistently complained about the negative and stereotyped coverage of Islam, Muslims and 'Muslim issues' in the mainstream media. Specialist media are more likely to cover a wider range of stories in a more nuanced way, and as mainstream media outlets reduce their reporting staff while needing to fill more airtime and print space they are bound to rely more heavily on picking up stories from specialist outlets to meet these demands. In time, this could improve the quality and range of coverage.

It is also likely that, as Muslim and specialist media grow, the **barriers to entry for those from religious and ethnic minorities in the media will lower**. This would provide a vital training ground for young Muslim journalists, enhancing their chances of finding a role later within mainstream media.

There are limits to the power of Muslim or specialist media in this domain

There are clearly limitations to the positive role that Muslim and specialist media can play in promoting good community relations. Very few of outlets engage in their own newsgathering activity; most focus on offering commentary drawn from the mainstream newsgathering agencies or outlets; very few have reporters in situ; and most rely on volunteers, which reduces the opportunities for paid employment and means their resources are tightly stretched.

Conclusions

In the light of Europe's increasingly diverse societies and the shifting European mediascape, **this report has sought to understand the relationship between media production and consumption and community relations.** In particular, it has been concerned with the supposed rise of 'Muslim' media as a form of specialist media, particularly given the fact that concerns have been expressed about its potential to result in parallel media societies. It has outlined findings about media consumption, media production, and the impact of the media on community relations.

It generates a number of key conclusions.

Concerns about a parallel media are unfounded

There is no evidence to support the idea of the emergence of a parallel media society, although it is fair to say that a significant proportion of people – Muslims and non-Muslims – are consulting specialist media. The research showed that mainstream media is still the predominant source of news and current affairs for the majority of Muslims and non-Muslims surveyed in the UK and Germany, and only a tiny minority of people only consulted specialist media for their news. This is despite the fact that most Muslims in the UK (71.4%) and Germany (83.5%) feel that the mainstream media does not cater to their needs and feel underrepresented within it.

More specifically, **there was widespread rejection of the term 'Muslim media' in both countries, but especially in Germany.** Neither Muslims nor non-Muslims recognized the term, and it was not even used by journalists deemed to be working within in according to this project's definition of the term. There was a general feeling, es-

pecially in the UK, that **Muslim media does not cater to specific needs and is unnecessary and irrelevant for most of those surveyed** and some were negative about its development, describing it as 'narrow minded' and 'insular'.

The Internet and social media are of growing importance among all groups

There was strong evidence to show the **growing importance of social media, with almost all participants using it.** The proportion that used it was higher among Muslims than non-Muslims, but among those that do non-Muslims were more frequent users. However, **social media is primarily used for social reasons rather than as a source of news and current affairs.** The Internet was an important source of news and current affairs for most respondents, and many cited the shift towards the Internet as part of their **quest for more balanced coverage.**

Mainstream media portrays Muslims in a negative light and this was felt more strongly in Germany than the UK

There was **overwhelming evidence from both consumers and producers that media portrayal of Muslims is negative and stereotyped,** and that it treats Islam with disrespect in a way it does not of other faiths. While most agreed with this, the sentiment was less strongly held by non-Muslims and young people. Participants – journalists and consumers, Muslims and non-Muslims – were easily able to recall negative stories about Muslims and Islam, but all struggled to name a single positive story. This was

blamed on the agendas of specific media outlets, a lack of knowledge among journalists, the poor use of sources, and pressures for sensationalism within the media economy. Non-Muslims and journalists within the mainstream media were more accepting of the fact that this was inevitable, and while mainstream journalists accepted it was true they tended to qualify this by stating that their own outlets were more balanced in their coverage.

The majority of respondents in both countries thought that the mainstream media should report more about prejudice against Muslims. However, this feeling was stronger among Muslims than non-Muslims overall, and was more deeply held in Germany than the UK.

Both consumers and producers believe that this negative media coverage has an impact on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims

There was universal agreement among all respondent that the media has an impact on relations and attitudes between different groups. This was felt more by Muslims, and more in relation to the mainstream media. They felt this had an impact on how Muslims are perceived by non-Muslims, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, and some even felt this could have a tangible impact on their daily lives and even on their physical safety.

There is a growing understanding of the need for critical media consumption – but also critical media production

Most people claimed to be critical media consumers. They acknowledged the shortcomings of mainstream media, and claimed to consult a number of media sources to ensure they understood a story from a range of perspectives. They also talked about the need to move between mediums, from television and radio, to newspaper and the Internet. There is some evidence to suggest that their negative experiences could make Muslims more critical media consumers.

Journalists also seemed to understand the need for them to be more critical actors in their work covering Muslims and Islam. All said that they felt a pressure to report responsibly, particularly those from specialist media outlets and local media. Furthermore, there was a much

clearer sense among journalists working within the Muslim media that they felt compelled to change the way they worked to avoid sensationalism or negative impacts on community relations.

Mainstream media has a dearth of Muslims, both 'on screen' and 'behind the camera'

Most consumers felt that Muslims were underrepresented on the mainstream media. This view was held more strongly in Germany than the UK, and a larger proportion of Germans than Britons felt that the media should address this with greater coverage. Muslims in both countries also talked about the obstacles facing Muslims seeking to break into mainstream media, which – along with specialist media – seemed to have few visible diversity schemes, especially in print rather than broadcast media outlets. They also described being pigeonholed into coverage 'Muslim' or 'minority' issues, which could negatively impact on their career prospects.

There were, however, mixed views about whether having Muslims in the newsroom would impact on the choice of stories, editorial lines, or the style and approach to reporting. Many felt that the principles of good journalism trumped representation, and that aligning journalists to stories based on identity characteristics can be challenging due to the problems of getting emotional distance from the story. Some pointed to the ways in which social media could be a positive development, helping to provide an alternative route into the media and providing space for coverage of a broader range of issues and voices.

Finally, the majority of respondents felt that the media could also be a force for good; an overwhelming majority believed it could play a role in reducing prejudices against Muslims. However, respondents were not clear that Muslim or specialist media was a universally positive development in this regard. As many producers working in these outlets freely acknowledged, they are working on limited budgets, often drawing on content for which producers are not paid. This not only has potential implications for quality and rigour, but also represents another sort of limitation: there may be more accurate portrayals of Muslim communities, but other journalistic checks and balances suffer because of restricted resources and expertise.

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Annex 1: Research Methodology

About the research

This research aimed to examine the relationship between media production and consumption and community relations. Based on the assumption that the media is becoming more diversified, this research aimed to assess claims that the media is catering to increasingly narrow groups and contributing to the risk of social divisions and parallel media societies.

Researchers at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the University of Keele in the UK and the University of Bielefeld in Germany developed the research methodology, which was based on grounded theory. The research was conducted by academic partners in the two universities between March and October 2011.

The researchers aimed to generate high quality, in-depth qualitative data which would explore questions about media consumption and production, while also exploring the impact of these issues upon relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Germany and the UK. In each country, data was collected through three methods:

- Interviews with media producers;
- Focus groups with media consumers;
- An online survey of media consumers.

Interviews with media producers

For the purposes of this research, producers of “mainstream” media and producers of “Muslim” media were differentiated to allow researchers to investigate commonalities and differences between practices and attitudes within these groups. Interviewees included press and broadcast editors and reporters, documentary filmmakers, and online content providers. The research teams

approached individuals working in mainstream national and local publications and broadcast media, as well as producers and editors from the minority media, which were predominantly web-based publications. There was, in the UK case, obvious bias in favour of liberal media organisations.

Across both countries, the gender division was largely skewed toward male respondents, but this is perhaps representative of the newspaper industry in general. In terms of ethnic division of respondents, a number of UK participants chose not to reveal their ethnic or religious background. However, the UK research team reported an unrepresentatively high uptake from ethnic minority media producers, perhaps due to the nature of the project.

Consumer focus groups

Consumer focus groups were held with participant groups characterised as ‘Muslims’, ‘monocultural’ and ‘mixed groups’. In the UK, a total of eight focus groups took place over two locations (Staffordshire and London). Two focus groups in each location were conducted with either male or female Muslims of varying ages; one group was mixed in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and faith; and one group identified as white British. In Germany, nine focus groups were conducted with a total of 41 participants in three different locations, Bielefeld, Dortmund and Essen, under a similar model to the British focus groups.

Online Consumer Survey

The online consumer surveys aimed to provide a further, statistical dimension to the findings from the focus groups data. This was sent to a range of Muslim and non-Muslim participants in order to generate a demographic

sample. The UK survey generated 102 respondents with a fairly equal share of males and females. Current demographic data shows that Muslims account for 4.6% of the total population (<http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/?p=598>). The proportion of Muslims represented in this sample is 21.4%. The German survey generated 268 respondents, and was skewed towards female respondents. Muslims accounted for 33.6% of the German survey results. In both countries, the sample favoured those employed and those with higher degrees, due largely to the dissemination methods for the survey.

Impact on results

As noted above, these methodologies did not produce consistently skewed results. For example, in some stages females were over- or under-represented, while Muslims and ethnic minorities tended to be over-represented, when compared to national demographics, consistently. As the interviews, focus groups and online survey did not use representative sampling, the findings of this research can be generalised only to the population from which the sample was taken.

Categories, including 'Muslim,' 'non-Muslim,' and 'monocultural,' used to identify and distinguish between producer or consumer groups were simplified for the purpose of the research, and it must be noted that participants may have associated with more complex or multiple identities.

However, the report's findings do represent an interesting insight into modern consumption patterns of Muslims and non-Muslims in Germany and the UK. The aim of the research was to identify emerging threads in the discussion about the diversification of media, the apparent emergence of "Muslim" media and the impact this has on communities for further future investigation.

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