
British Asians and Football Spectatorship:

Exploring ways in which football clubs can attract more
British Asian supporters to attend live matches

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August 2019

Executive Summary

“Contrary to popular belief, British Asians love football... they follow passionately the fortunes of their teams, buying replica shirts, watching games on satellite television and contributing to fan sites and message boards... yet despite their evident interest in the game, they are still rarely present at the spectacle of the ‘live’ match” (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012, p.105).

In recent years, it has become clear that British Asians are just as passionate about football as their white counterparts. Like their peers of other ethnicities, they engage widely in various forms of fandom and football consumption and wear proudly the colours of their team. However, despite evidence of their increasing interest in football, very few British Asians ever attend the spectacle of a live football match. This research seeks to explore the reasons why this demographic has typically avoided the ‘live match experience’ and identify ways in which football clubs can address these issues and attract more British Asians to attend games.

Making use of a qualitative research approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 British Asian football fans (15 that attend and 15 that do not) and three industry experts who have worked with professional football clubs to help them attract more BAME supporters. Their thoughts and ideas were intertwined with data collected from previous research on this topic to identify the following: the key barriers to attendance for British Asian fans, the key barriers for football clubs trying to attract British Asian fans, and the different solutions and initiatives football clubs can adopt to reduce these barriers and start attracting more British Asian fans.

The findings suggest that there are a number of key barriers that deter British Asian fans from attending live matches – from the threat of racism and feelings of not belonging, to the price of tickets and the lack of British Asian players – and that more often than not it is a combination of these factors that discourage them, rather than one specific issue. The results do indicate, however, that many of these factors are ‘perceived barriers’, which are built on negative stereotypes of match-going fans and past experiences of British Asians in football. The findings also suggest that it is predominantly ‘local’ football clubs that struggle to attract British Asian fans, and that there are several key barriers that prevent from doing so. The biggest barrier for these clubs seems to be that British Asians appear to be only interested in supporting the ‘top teams’ who have the most success and brand appeal. Difficulties in marketing to this demographic and the lack of visibility that they have within their local British Asian communities also appear to be significant barriers that these clubs face.

Finally, the findings indicate that there are a number of service and marketing solutions that football clubs can adopt to reduce these barriers to attendance and attract more British Asian fans to attend. Of the solutions proposed in this study, British Asian supporters’ groups, community ambassadors, targeted marketing strategies and culturally sensitive/tailored spaces within the stadium received the most support from the British Asian fans themselves. Overall, it was clear that football clubs need to take a holistic approach to tackling the barriers that exist and need to address fans’ perceptions just as much as actual issues in the match day service. The report concludes by recommending that football clubs take a coherent, joined-up approach to attracting British Asian supporters, which is developed and implemented over a sustained period.

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Introduction

1.

“The thing about football in Britain is that it is not just a sport that people take to, like cricket or tennis. It is built into the urban psyche... it is not a phenomenon, it’s an everyday matter” (Arthur Hopcraft, 1968, p.1).

Tracing its history back as far as the nineteenth century, football has been a hugely important part of living within Britain. Acknowledged as the country’s ‘national game’, it has been, and still is, played and watched by millions, receiving unrivalled media attention. Yet, until recently, it has been seen as a game only for ‘white working class males’ (Middleton, 2009). It is only over the last few decades that people of all races and ethnicities have started to embrace this ‘footballing culture’, not least the ‘British Asians’ (Bains & Patel, 1996; Bains & Johal, 1998; Burdsey, 2007; Saeed & Kilvington, 2011; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012).

Contrary to historic beliefs that ‘Asians do not like football’, recent evidence suggests that it is now the most popular sport amongst South Asian communities in the UK, overtaking their native sport of cricket (Bains & Patel, 1996; Middleton, 2009). Such is their ‘newfound’ enthusiasm for playing and watching the game, some studies even suggest that their interest in football has surpassed that of many of their white male counterparts (Bains & Patel, 1996; Lewis, 2015). However, despite their evident interest and passion for the sport, British Asians are still virtually ‘non-existent’ throughout the professional football industry in England.

Despite black players representing nearly a quarter of all professional footballers in English football (Kessel, 2010), there are currently only six British Asian players in the entire English Football League (EFL), equating to less than 0.2% of all professional players in the country (Middleton, 2009). This a huge disparity with the UK population, of which British Asians make up nearly 7% and the black community only 3.4% (Office for National Statistics, 2011). However, whilst their clear underrepresentation on the pitch has received considerable academic attention in recent years, little thought has been given to their absence from other areas of the professional game. One area that has been particularly overlooked in academia is their non-attendance as spectators. Despite evidence suggesting that they regularly consume football through television and other mediums, British Asians rarely spectate at live football matches (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Lewis, 2015). Research suggests that as little as 1% of some EFL crowds are made up of British Asian spectators, despite the British Asian population in some of these areas being as high as 20% (Bano, 2013).

This study will focus, therefore, on the under-researched issue of British Asians and football spectatorship, and will investigate why, despite the popularity of football amongst British Asian communities, so few British Asian fans attend live football matches. Specifically, this study aims to achieve the following:

- 1) To explore and evaluate the barriers which prevent and/or discourage British Asian football supporters from attending live professional football matches.
- 2) To identify potential service and marketing solutions that football clubs can adopt to reduce these barriers and attract more British Asians fans to attend matches.

In order to focus this investigation, the study will attempt to answer three key research questions, which are all pertinent to the aims of the research:

- 1) What are the key barriers to attendance for British Asian football fans?
- 2) What are the key barriers that football clubs face in trying to attract British Asian supporters?
- 3) What service and marketing solutions can football clubs adopt to reduce these barriers and attract more British Asian fans to attend?

Although the study will be focused on the national problem of British Asian under-representation at football matches, there will be a significant focus on ‘local clubs’, as research suggests that it is these clubs which struggle most in terms of attracting British Asian fans to attend (Lewis, 2015; Kilvington, 2017).

Whilst a number of explanations have already been posited in past research as to why British Asians choose not to attend live matches, very little academic attention has been given to how this might be challenged. This research will, therefore, address this significant gap in literature, by not only examining the reasons why British Asians do not to attend (*confirming and rejecting previous explanations, and also identifying new explanations*), but by exploring the ways in which football clubs can address these issues and attract more British Asians to attend. The outcomes of this research will not only make a significant contribution to the academic knowledge on this issue but also to the understanding of football clubs in how they can target the British Asian market and grow their customer base. This research perhaps takes on greater significance at a time when match day attendance is currently down by 5% across British football (Deloitte, 2013), due primarily to competition from the ever-increasing number of televised games (Lewis, 2015). The British Asian market, therefore, represents a fantastic opportunity for clubs to increase attendances and generate much-needed revenue.

Another significant failing of the limited research that has looked at the non-attendance of British Asian fans, is the lack of involvement of British Asian fans themselves. The failure of previous studies to engage with British Asian fans, particularly those that do not attend, is a missed opportunity, not only in establishing what the true reasons for their non-attendance are, but in understanding what could be done to address these barriers and make them more likely to attend. This research, therefore, aims to fill this gap in the literature by conducting interviews with a number of British Asian fans, including some fans that do attend games and some that do not attend. The study also calls upon the expertise of three industry experts who, in different capacities, work with professional football clubs to help them attract more BAME supporters from the local community. The thoughts and ideas of both groups will be intertwined with the data collected from previous research to provide answers to the three key research questions outlined above.

The study will begin with a review of the existing academic literature on this topic and in other related fields. Presented here will be the relevant research on British Asians and football spectatorship, and the surrounding current debates, which will provide a background of information that can be used throughout the paper. The following chapter will then outline the research methods used throughout the study, providing justification for the research and sampling techniques used to gather the qualitative data, and the method of analysis applied to

interpret it. Chapter 4 then returns to the research questions and sets about answering each one individually using both the primary and secondary data collected. This section will outline and analyse the key themes pertinent to each question that emerged throughout the interviews and the literature review. The concluding chapter encapsulates all of the data analysed and proposes a number of business solutions for professional football clubs, particularly ‘local clubs’, to consider, which will assist them in reducing the barriers to attendance and attracting more British Asian fans to attend their matches.

Literature Review

2.

Introduction

The sport of football is widely recognised as a ‘global phenomenon’ (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). It is something which, according to Kilvington (2017, p.74), “*permeates and influences people’s lives across the world*”, and the English Premier League (EPL) is perhaps the most pertinent example of its worldwide influence. The EPL is now a multi-billion pound business and is exported in nearly every single country in the world (Duke, 2009). Because football has become a “*global game*”, and a global product in many ways, “*it is believed to have transcended sociocultural differences*” (Kilvington, 2017, p.74). However, in the EPL, and in British football collectively, this is not strictly the case.

Many aspects of British football still uphold local exclusions (Bains & Patel, 1996; McGuire et al., 2001; Burdsey, 2007; Bradbury, 2010; Saeed & Kilvington, 2011; Kilvington, 2013). One aspect of the game where these exclusions are particularly apparent is in the stands (Kilvington, 2017). According to Lewis (2015, p.13), “*in terms of football spectatorship, integration of different ethnicities has not filtered down onto the terraces of many British football clubs.*” One ethnic group that is particularly underrepresented in British football crowds is the British Asians. Despite their rapidly growing population in the UK, and evidence of their increasing interest in football, British Asians are seldom present at the spectacle of a live professional football match (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Lewis, 2015; Kilvington, 2016).

However, their omission from the match day experience is not a new observation. It has been well-documented that “*British Asian football fans have traditionally been excluded from the so-called beautiful game*” (Kilvington, 2017, p.74). Yet, while various explanations have been posited as to why British football stadia remain largely white male spaces, there is little in the way of scholarly work that has looked, pragmatically, at how this might be challenged (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012). The focus of this research will, therefore, be to identify and evaluate the barriers that deter British Asian fans from attending live games, and to also explore the opportunities for football clubs to reduce these barriers and attract more British Asian supporters to the match day experience.

The first section of this literature review will look at the historical exclusion of British Asian football fans from the ‘live match experience’, and it will also explore the rapid rise of the

British Asian community in the UK and the fantastic opportunity that this consumer group presents for football clubs, in terms of increasing match day attendance and generating much-needed revenue. The second section will focus on the barriers to attendance for British Asian fans at live football matches, looking at factors from the consumer's perspective (*British Asian supporters*) and the company's perspective (*football clubs*). The final section will explore the solutions and suggestions that have already been proposed by scholars and practitioners, as to the ways in which British football clubs can start to combat the barriers to attendance for British Asian fans, and start attracting more to attend at live matches.

Section 1

The growth of British Asian consumers

The ethnic population in the UK is growing at a rapid rate¹ and now represents a significant proportion of the total population. According to the 2011 census, ethnic minorities now account for over 13% of the UK population (Office for National Statistics, 2011). The largest segment of that ethnic community are the British Asians (*those with South Asian heritage which originate from countries such as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh*) who make up 6.8% of the British population.

The British Asian community is the fastest growing ethnic group in the UK (Tran, 2010). Between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, the number of South Asians in the UK grew by 65%, from 2.3 million to 3.8 million. As well as being the fastest growing ethnic group, the British Asian community also has the lowest age structure of any demographic in the UK (Krug, 2008). At the time of the 2001 census, 58% of British Asians were under the age of 24, compared with only 31% of the white population (Commission for Racial Equality, 1999). Even now, the median age of the British Asian community is 31.6, compared to 42.5 for the white British community (Office of National Statistics, 2011).

As well as their rising population and younger age profile, the spending power of British Asian consumers, and ethnic minorities in general, is also increasing (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998; Curtis, 2001; Fletcher, 2003; Krug, 2008). In 1998, Nwankwo and Lindridge claimed that the ethnic population in the UK was making “*steady upward movement in Britain's socio-economic hierarchy*” (p.204). Ten years on, their combined disposable income was over £32 billion (Krug, 2008). Nwankwo and Lindridge also claim that British Asians, and the Indian community particular, have now overtaken the white British, as the people most likely to possess professional qualifications and run their own business. In addition, second and third generation British Asians have much higher qualification levels than the first generation, which has a significant impact on their future success in the labour market (Simpson et al, 2006).

Ethnic minorities, and British Asians in particular, therefore, represent a “*significant cultural and consumer force*” in the UK (Fletcher, 2003, p.2). According to Considine, these markets represent “*a vast, untouched potential*” and by not tapping into them, businesses are missing

¹ Lewis (2015) claims that the ethnic population in the UK is growing by 2.5% year on year.

fantastic opportunities to generate top-line growth (cited in Krug, 2008, p.3). Despite this, many British companies, including lots of professional football clubs, continue to ignore its potential and have invested very little resource in penetrating the British Asian market.

British Asians and football spectatorship

“The point about football in Britain is that it is not just a sport people take to, like cricket or tennis. It is built into the urban psyche...It is not a phenomenon: it is an everyday matter... The way we play the game, organise it, and reward it reflects the kind of community we are” (Hopcraft, 1968, p.1).

Acknowledged as the country’s national game, football is a massively important part of living within Britain. It is played and watched by millions and receives unrivalled media attention (Middleton, 2009). It is, therefore, no surprise that, in line Nwankwo and Lindridge’s (1998) theory of ‘acculturation’², football has risen in popularity amongst younger generations of British Asians.

According to several authors, in recent years it has become increasingly evident that, like their peers of other ethnicities, many British Asians have a strong interest in football (Burdsey, 2007; Bhana, 2008; Kilvington, 2012). Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.105), for example, suggest that many British Asians engage widely in various forms of modern day football consumption: *“they follow passionately the fortunes of their teams, buying replica shirts, watching games on satellite television and contributing to fan sites, blogs and message boards on the internet.”* Bains and Patel even suggest that *“many Asian communities are more interested in football than their white counterparts”* (cited in Middleton, 2009, p.3).

However, despite evidence of their increased interest in football, British Asians fans are still rarely present at live football matches and have historically been excluded from the match day experience (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Kilvington, 2017). As a result, British football stadia *“remain largely white (male) spaces”* (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012, p.105) that are in no way reflective of the multi-cultural make-up of British society (Earl, 2013). In 1999, for example, the EPL Fan Survey revealed that only 0.5% of spectators in the EPL were from a ‘British Asian background’ (cited in Earl, 2013), despite British Asians making up just over 4% of the total UK population at the time (Office of National Statistics, 2001).

Although improvements in the attendance of British Asians, and ethnic minorities in general, have been seen since then in the EPL³, these are primarily in relation to the so-called “top

² According to Nwankwo and Lindridge, acculturation is *“a process in which ethnic consumers move along a theoretic continuum from low acculturation, where they maintain the cultural values of their ethnic origin, to the other extreme, high acculturation, where they have adopted the cultural values of the dominant culture”* (p.205). Their theory is, therefore, that that second and third generation British Asians will be more acculturated due to their length of stay in the UK, and thus relate more to mainstream culture than first generation British Asians.

³ Kilvington (2017, p.74) suggests that *“the number of minority ethnic fans attending live EPL matches is increasing”*. He cites figures from the anti-racism organisation ‘Football Unites Racism Divides’: *“98% of fans in 1997 were white, in 2001/02 97.3% were white, in 2005/06 it was 96%, in 2006/07 95% and in 2007/08 it was 94%...8% of all attendees at EPL games in 2008-09 were from ethnic-minority backgrounds”*.

teams”, who have huge global brand appeal and social status attached to them (Lewis, 2015, p.64). Smaller clubs (*in terms of success, finances, visibility and fan base*) in the EPL, and even more so in the lower leagues (*EFL*), continue to struggle to attract British Asian supporters (Kilvington, 2017). Described by Lewis (2015, p.72) as “*local clubs*”⁴, these clubs rely heavily on the support of the local community. Evidence suggests, however, that only a very small proportion of the local support at these clubs is of Asian ethnicity – even at those based in well-populated Asian areas. Bano’s study in 2013, for example, highlights a number of EFL clubs in the North West, including Oldham Athletic, Rochdale and Burnley, whose home crowds comprise only 1% of British Asian supporters, despite the Asian community in each area representing nearly 20% of the total population.

The importance of fan attendance (*match day revenue*)

According to Lewis, “*professional football clubs are under increasing pressure to sign up the best footballers, regardless of price in an attempt to remain competitive and keep supporters happy*” (2015, p12). In order to facilitate the purchase of the best players, to remain competitive both ‘on’ and ‘off’ the pitch, clubs need to increase their total income (Deloitte, 2013). Lewis (2015) suggests that football clubs generate income through three main revenue streams: broadcasting revenue (*television and media organisations such as BskyB and British Telecom*); commercial revenue (*sponsorship, naming rights and merchandising*); and match day revenue (*gate receipts, food and drink*).

One of the main revenue streams that football clubs have, and the one they possess most control over, is match day revenue (Deloitte, 2013; Lewis, 2015). According to Zhang et al (1996), match day sales contribute as much as 75% to the overall revenue of some sports teams. Lewis (2015) also suggests that match day attendance is pivotal in driving other revenue opportunities in addition to ticket sales, such as: food and beverage sales, advertising, sponsorship, shirt sales and media rights. Match day attendance is, therefore, vital to professional football clubs remaining competitive and profitable, and clubs now more than ever need to maximise attendance at matches to increase the revenue they generate from their supporters (Deloitte, 2013; Lewis, 2015).

However, evidence suggests that match day attendance across British football is in decline (Deloitte, 2013; Lewis, 2015). A report by the financial company Deloitte in 2013 revealed that on the whole, attendance at British football games had fallen by 5%, and that in leagues such as the Championship, which is formed of predominantly ‘local clubs’, the drop in average attendance had been as high as 14%. In response, the National Fan Survey in 2013 established that average fan attendance in England had been gradually declining since 2008 and, as a result, so too had match day revenues. Deloitte suggest that the average revenue currently generated at football matches in the UK is around the same level that it was in 2006/07, which has led to a significant decline in the operating profits made by most clubs, given the rising costs of everything else in the industry (Deloitte, 2013).

⁴ Lewis describes “*local clubs*” (2015, p.72), as clubs which rely heavily on the support of the local community, that do not possess the finances, fan base, visibility, or the social status, to attract supporters from afar whom have little or no connection to the local community or the region which within it is based.

Given the decline in attendance throughout British football and the pressure on clubs to generate greater income, the British Asian community presents a fantastic opportunity for professional football clubs to increase attendance and generate more revenue (Lewis, 2015). It is, therefore, vital to identify the barriers that are deterring them from attending, and also to highlight the barriers which are preventing many 'local clubs' from attracting them. The next section will explore the literature in these fields.

Section 2

Barriers to attendance for British Asian fans

Given the evidence of football's increasing popularity amongst British Asian communities, it is somewhat surprising that British Asians still rarely spectate at live football matches. The fact that they regularly engage in other forms of football consumption, such as watching games on television and following club activity online (Burdsey, 2007; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012), suggests that there must be barriers which are deterring British Asian fans from consuming football through the 'live match experience'. Identifying what these barriers are is vital for football clubs and their marketing teams, to develop strategies that can attract more British Asian supporters to their terraces. In order to identify and challenge these barriers, it is important to understand how British Asians perceive the match day experience and to understand how the culture of British football may conflict with the culture and values of British Asian communities. A number of explanations have been posited as to why British Asians fans have traditionally avoided the live match experience, and these will be explored and analysed below.

Racism

It is clear from the existing research that the most significant barrier deterring British Asians fans from attending live games is the enduring issue of racism in football (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Kilvington, 2016). The threat of racism, along with notions of racial exclusion and marginalisation, have been widely posited as the most influential factors in the non-attendance of many British Asians fans (McGuire et al, 2001; Burdsey, 2007; Bradbury, 2010; Kilvington, 2017).

Despite being viewed as a "*global and inclusive game*", British Asians and other ethnic minorities, have traditionally been excluded from the practise of football fandom in the UK, and have been made to feel unwelcome and marginalised in the stadium environment (Kilvington, 2017, p.74). Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.105) suggest that the situation facing British Asian supporters can be characterised as one of "*racialised exclusion*" and believe that many feel restricted from accessing the stadium setting due to "*broadly racialised notions of fandom that demarcate minority ethnic groups as 'out of place' and not belonging*" (2012, p.106). Moreover, Kilvington has describes the stadium environment as a:

"racial 'no-go' area – whereby 'race' becomes a marker of territory and the 'true' locals, a synonym for whiteness, symbolically own the game, the ground, and the match day experience...outsiders, in turn, do not belong" (2017, p.79).

Subsequently, British Asians, and other ethnic minorities, have traditionally been targets for racist abuse in and around the stadium (Back et al, 1998; Burdsey, 2007; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012). Back et al (1998), for example, discuss how British Asians, and Muslims in particular, have historically been positioned as a ‘despised other’ in certain football chants. Although through the use of tougher sanctions, clubs have managed to reduce the amount of overt incidents like this in recent years, the issue of racism still exists (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Earl, 2013; Kilvington, 2017). Kilvington (2017, p.75) claims that many British football stadiums, particularly those in the lower leagues, can still be “*hostile, intimidating and unfamiliar spaces for British Asian fans*” and empirical evidence supports this. A survey of 2,500 fans in the EFL found that almost half had either experienced or witnessed some form of racism at matches between 2010 and 2012 (Doidge, 2013).

While these figures may represent a vast improvement in comparison to British football stadia in the 70s and 80s, the “*continuing, though less frequent racial abuse*” which still occurs, remains a significant barrier to the willingness of British Asians to attend (Earl, 2013, p.11). In addition to that, the history of racial abuse in the terraces has contributed to a climate of fear around the idea of the live match experience for many British Asians (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012), and what is apparent from past research, is that perceptions of racism can deter British Asian fans from going to games just as much as any ‘actual’ experiences (Earl, 2013; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012).

Religio-cultural barriers

Religio-cultural issues have also been focused on as a major reason for the underrepresentation of British Asian fans. According to several authors, the religio-cultural values of many British Asian communities can be significant barriers to their attendance at live football matches (Middleton, 2009; Kilvington, 2012; Lewis, 2015). The reason for this is that many elements of the live match experience conflict with the religious and cultural needs of these communities (Lewis, 2015). These conflicts can often result in uncomfortable experiences for British Asian fans, and can in fact, make it almost impossible for certain religious groups to attend (Burdsey, 2007; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012).

Numerous scholars, for example, highlight the presence of alcohol as a significant deterrent for many British Muslims (Randhawa, 2011; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Lewis, 2015; Kilvington, 2017). Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) suggest that “*passing through the concourses at many British football stadia frequently resembles being in a rowdy pub*” (2012, p.107), and note that it has become habit for fans of some clubs to throw beer around in the concourse at half time. They claim that “*this not only creates an unpleasant, intimidating atmosphere for those not partaking, but makes visiting the refreshment areas impossible for strict Muslim supporters*”. Kilvington (2017, p.79) likewise claims that this has created a feeling of “*unease*” and “*apprehension*” around the idea of attending games for many Muslim supporters, and has significantly impacted the service that they receive. Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) further suggest that match day service fails to meet other Muslim customer needs, such as the lack of halal products and other vegetarian food options available at games.

Other religio-cultural barriers to attendance, according to the literature, are more enforced by the ‘structure’ of mainstream football provision, rather than the match day service itself (Lewis, 2015). For example, the times of live matches (*which are decided by the games governing bodies*) have traditionally clashed with the religious commitments of British Asian supporters. Religious practices such as attending mosque, prayer times and the celebration of religious festivals, are not currently considered in the planning of match times, and, as such, often conflict, restricting the attendance of many British Asians and Muslims in particular. The inability of the match day service to fulfil these religious needs is a significant barrier to attendance because, as Lewis discovered in his 2015 study, most British Asian fans place religious needs before any desire to spectate at live matches. In his research into barriers of attendance, he found that most British Asian supporters preferred to watch the game on television in the comfort of their home, where they could satisfy both their religious needs and their consumption needs.

By not addressing many of these conflicts, British football clubs have shown a lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity towards British Asian supporters (Hamlett et al, 2008; Larson & Steinman, 2009; Lewis, 2015). Considine (2003) suggests that the reason most of these conflicts still exist, is simply due to the lack of knowledge and understanding that football clubs have of the specific religious and cultural needs of ethnic consumers. As a result, many football clubs continually fail to meet the needs of British Asian consumers. This factor, as it would with any other purchasable service, is a significant barrier to British Asians consuming the live match experience.

Lack of role models (*institutional racism*)

Another widely cited barrier to the attendance of British Asians at football matches, is the lack of identifiable role models for British Asians throughout the professional football industry. Several authors suggest that the lack of British Asians in professional football in the UK – as players, managers and directors – has a significant impact on their interest in attending live matches (Middleton, 2009; Lewis, 2015; Kilvington, 2013). Middleton (2009) highlights that there are currently no British Asian managers and only six British Asian players in the entire EFL (*equating to less than 0.2% of all professional players in the country*) and states that it is of no surprise, therefore, that this underrepresentation has also filtered down onto the terraces.

Middleton’s (2009) notion of linking representation on the pitch to attendance in the stands is supported by a number of empirical studies, including a survey undertaken by indianfootball.com in 2004, which concluded that “*significantly more*” British Asian fans would make the effort to attend live games if there were more British Asian players on the pitch. This premise can also be seen in other sports such as cricket, where there is an abundance of role models, by the way of coaches, managers and top players, and consequently, the attendance of British Asian spectators at live cricket matches is considerably higher (Lewis, 2015).

Several authors, however, suggest that this barrier is much deeper than just ‘a lack of role models’ (Middleton, 2009; Lewis, 2015), and refer to it more as an “*institutional barrier*”, which is restricting British Asian communities from engaging with the professional game in

all its forms (*as players, coaches, directors and spectators*) (Middleton, 2009, p.22). Some scholars have even gone as far to suggest that the British football industry is ‘institutionally racist’ (Kilvington, 2013; Burdsey, 2007; Lewis, 2015). Middleton (2009, p.22) points to the fact that there is no ethnic minority representation on the FA Council – “*the ultimate policy making forum for the English game*” – as a clear demonstration of the institutional racism that exists in the industry.

According to Merkel and Tokarski (1996), where racism exists within an institution, the structures and ethos of the industry and the organisations within it, will prevent those that are discriminated against from having access to the same opportunities as others. Johal (2002, p.157) suggests that this is the case in the British football industry:

“The FA as the gatekeepers of football to clubs boardrooms all the way down to scouts and coaches, have shackled and ignored the input and ambition of Asian communities towards the national game.”

Evidently then, the structure and management of the industry and the organisations (*clubs*) within it, are a clear barrier to not just the attendance of British Asian supporters, but to their engagement with the game all together (Burdsey, 2007; Kilvington, 2013; Lewis, 2015).

Socio-economic disadvantage

The accessibility of the match day experience for many British Asian supporters is also a key theme within the literature in this field. Despite the growth of the ethnic pound and the increasing spending power of British Asian consumers in the UK (Curtis, 2001; Krug, 2008), substantial sections of the British Asian population still experience “*severe socio-economic disadvantage*”, which according to Burdsey and Randhawa “*is highly likely to impact on their ability to purchase (increasingly expensive) match tickets*” (2012, p.107).

According to McGuire et al (2001, p.65), “*only about half of Bangladeshi and Pakistani adults are economically active and these groups have poverty rates four times those of whites*”. Similar figures were also found by Palmer (cited in Lewis, 2015), who found that around 60% of the Pakistani population and 70% of the Bangladeshi population live in low-income households, compared with only 20% of white British population. The current socio-economic status of many British Asian communities is, therefore, another significant barrier to their attendance at live matches, especially given the ever-increasing cost of admittance into games (Middleton, 2009).

Since the formation of the EPL in 1992, and the huge influx of broadcasting money which came with that, British football has seen a significant rise in ticket prices for spectators. Liverpool, for example, has seen its cheapest match day ticket increase from £4 to £46 (Wilson 2014). According to several authors, this has made attending EPL matches almost impossible for poorer working class supporters, which the majority of British Asian followers are (Giulianotti, 1999). Walsh (2012) even suggests that attending live EPL matches has now become a ‘middle class past time’, as only the higher classes of society can afford to partake.

Burdsey and Randhawa (2012), on the other hand, suggest that some British Asian fans, particularly those of Indian descent, do not have a problem with affording tickets; it is instead the availability of tickets which has presented the most significant barrier. Many British Asian fans involved in their study, indicated a desire to attend matches more regularly, but were often prevented from doing so because of their inability to get tickets due to longstanding loyalty and priority schemes, and the ways in which season-tickets are passed down through families.

Generic barriers

One final consideration in the literature, is that many of the aforementioned scholars also state that it is often the case that British Asian fans who do not attend matches, do so for the same reasons as other football supporters, regardless of ethnicity (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Lewis, 2015). Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) propose that factors such as: work and family commitments; the cost and time of travel; and as mentioned above, the price and availability of tickets, are all generic barriers which restrict the attendance of all supporter groups.

Barriers to attendance for ‘local clubs’ (*the struggle to attract British Asian supporters*)

In addition to exploring the barriers from the consumer’s perspective, it is also worth considering the barriers that football clubs and their marketers may face themselves when trying to attract more British Asian supporters. Evidence suggests that ‘local clubs’ continually struggle to attract British Asians fans, despite many being based in well populated Asian areas. Bano (2013), for example, found that less than 1% of fans at ‘local clubs’ in the North West of England are of British Asian ethnicity, despite British Asians making up to 20% of the population in certain North West boroughs. “*Top teams*” in the EPL, on the other hand, have no problem attracting British Asian fans and boast crowds which are now representative (*and often over-representative*) of the Asian population in the UK (Kilvington, 2017, p.74). This discrepancy suggests that there must be influencing factors which are restricting ‘local clubs’ from attracting more British Asian fans. As there is limited research which has looked at the non-attendance of British Asians from the clubs perspective (*from the inside looking out*), only two key barriers will be explored below; one related to specifically to local football clubs, and one more broadly linked to the struggles of UK businesses in general in trying to attract British Asian consumers.

Attraction to the top teams

Perhaps the most significant barrier to ‘local clubs’ attracting more British Asian supporters, is the substantial evidence which suggests that British Asians, on the whole, are only attracted to the biggest, most successful clubs (Lewis, 2015; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Kilvington, 2017). In Lewis’ (2015, p.68) study of 30 British Asian football supporters, for example, not one participant expressed an interest in following their ‘local club’, leaving him to conclude that “*British Asians seem only to be attracted to the very best teams, those who have the best players, who play in the best leagues and arguably have the most brand appeal.*”

Several authors suggest that the ‘prestige’ and ‘social value’ of the top EPL teams (Burdsey, 2007; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Kilvington, 2017) is “*a predominant factor that influences their [British Asians’] attraction to a particular team.*” (Lewis, 2015, p.92). According to Lewis, British Asian fans “*want to be associated with the top EPL teams that have the greatest perceived value amongst their social circles*” (2015, p.92). It is clear, therefore, that the most successful and prestigious clubs have a social value attributed to them, which has a significant influence on British Asians’ attraction to them. Research also suggests that British Asians’ attraction to the ‘top teams’ is a product of them wanting to be associated with success. One British Asian respondent in Lewis’ study, for example, claimed that:

“South Asians have never been associated with any success so anything they can get themselves associated with or get them affiliated to they will jump at that chance. That’s perhaps why we love cricket so much as we are very good at it” (Respondent I3, cited in Lewis, 2015, p.73).

The attraction of star players has also been noted as a factor which has a significant influence over the teams that British Asians support. Lewis (2015) suggests that in some cases, it could be argued that the club is secondary to the players that the team possesses.

All of these factors present a significant barrier for local clubs, who do not have the financial resources to acquire the best players, to compete at the highest level and to achieve the success of the ‘top teams’. Their limited finances, in fact, make it very difficult for local clubs to ever breakthrough and achieve the same status and prestige that the ‘top teams’ enjoy (Lewis, 2015).

Marketing barriers

The other significant barrier that football clubs and their marketers face in trying to attract more British Asian supporters, is the difficulties of marketing to ethnic minority consumers in the UK. According to the literature, British companies in general have struggled in marketing to ethnic minority groups, and are considerably behind countries like the United States when it comes to ethnic marketing (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998; Krug, 2008). Research suggests that there are two major barriers which UK companies face when trying to market to ethnic consumers:

- 1) The first significant barrier which businesses face, is that in order to effectively reach ethnic minority consumers they must develop ‘targeted (*segmentation*) marketing strategies’. Research suggests that many ethnic minority groups, particularly those less acculturated⁵ like first generation British Asians, do not relate with, or respond well to mainstream marketing communications (*mass marketing*) (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998; Krug, 2008). Instead, targeted ‘ethnic-based’ marketing communications, which take into account their cultural differences, are far more effective and much more likely to generate interest and response (Jamal, 2003; Considine, 2003; Krug, 2008). Indeed, Burton (2002) claims that

⁵ Those with low levels of acculturation are those that have not acculturated to British culture and, as such, relate very little to mainstream culture (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998).

the only way that UK companies can take full advantage of the growing ethnic markets is by deploying ‘ethnically based marketing strategies’.

The need to develop such strategies presents a significant challenge for British companies – particularly smaller ones like ‘local football clubs’, who have limited financial and marketing resources to devote to the development of additional targeted marketing strategies, on top of their mainstream marketing strategies. In comparison with mass marketing⁶, which is the approach adopted by most local football clubs, segmentation strategies are considerably more expensive and require much more marketing resource to fulfil (Bolton & Myers, 2003). Even Claycamp and Massy (1968, p.388), who were early pioneers of marketing segmentation, admit that the strategy can cause significant issues in the “*allocation of already scarce marketing resources*”. In addition, differentiated marketing strategies can also lead to audience and message fragmentation, which can make mass appeal products and mass communications less viable (Fletcher, 2003). Such strategies can also cause inconsistencies in message which can be a significant threat to a company’s ability to convey a clear brand image.

- 2) The second major barrier for British companies is the lack of research and data available on ethnic consumers in the UK. According to Krug (2008, p.2), “*companies in Britain are attracted to the idea of targeting the ethnic market but are uncertain of how to go about this*”. This is primarily due to the lack of knowledge and understanding which exists about ethnic markets in the UK and their consumption behaviours (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998; Considine, 2003). The absence of such information is, therefore, a significant barrier to a firm’s ability to develop and implement effective ‘targeted marketing strategies’ for ethnic minority groups.

Many scholars argue that in comparison to countries like the United States, ethnic marketing in Britain is still at an “*embryonic stage*” (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998, p.200). According to Krug (2008), it has received little attention in either marketing theory or practice, and consequently, there exists a significant gap in knowledge regarding the specific purchasing patterns of ethnic subcultures in the UK. As a result of the lack of ethnic data available, whereas companies in the United States are growing more and more disposed to meet the needs of ethnic minority groups (Holland & Gentry, 1999; Burton, 2002), “*UK businesses have been comparatively slow to target ethnic minority markets*” (Krug, 2008, p.1).

The lack of research into the ethnic markets in the UK has, therefore, had a clear impact on the confidence of British companies to target these markets, and this is reflected in Krug’s study (2008, p.1) which found that “*only one fifth of British companies are reaching out to ethnic minority consumers with ethnically-based strategies*”. Moreover, Krug (2008) suggests there is a climate of ‘uncertainty’ and ‘apprehension’ around the practise of ethnic marketing strategies. One of the biggest fears that marketers have is offending or unintentionally marginalising ethnic minorities through being “*racist, stereotypical, tokenistic and patronising*” (Fletcher, 2003, p.3). Nwankwo and Lindridge (1998, p.205)

⁶ Mass marketing is the adoption of one single marketing strategy which is tied into one single value proposition for everybody (Fahy & Jobber, 2012).

state that because of the lack of cultural research which exists, British marketers face “*a dilemma in relating to ethnic minorities*”. They suggest that “*attempting to develop ethno-marketing strategies on the one hand, and seeking to avoid a possible but unintended racial segregation embroilment on the other, is proving to be a tough balancing act for many companies*”. Due to the damage that can be done to a brands image and reputation if offence is caused, many UK companies have steered away from implementing their own targeted ethnic strategies (Nwankwo and Lindridge, 1998).

Section 3

How clubs can challenge these barriers and attract more British Asian fans

Although a number of explanations have been posited as to why British Asian fans have traditionally avoided the live match experience and as to why ‘local clubs’ have struggled to attract British Asian supporters, very little academic attention has been given to how these barriers might be challenged. As a result, there is little in the way of ‘off-the-shelf solutions’ available in the literature for football clubs to address this problem. The marketing literature in this field does, however, present some theoretical considerations for football clubs, as to how they might combat these barriers and attract more British Asian fans, and these will be explored below. These proposals are, however, very much at a conceptual (*unsophisticated*) stage and need to be explored and developed by football marketers in much more depth.

Racism

In 1998 the Football Task Force observed that “*the threat of racism is the single most powerful deterrent to black and Asian people wishing to attend football matches*” (cited in Earl, 2013, p.19). Although the amount of overt racist abuse has considerably decreased since then, racism and perceptions of racism are still widely thought to be the most significant barriers to attendance for British Asian fans (McGuire et al, 2001; Burdsey, 2007; Bradbury, 2010; Kilvington, 2017). For this reason, racism (*including notions of exclusion and marginalisation*) has received more attention in the literature than any other barrier, and has consequently had the most solutions put forward as to how it can be challenged.

Adopting an Educational approach to racism

Several authors argue, that in order to completely eliminate racism from the match day experience, football clubs need to adopt a more educational approach to challenging racism among supporters (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Earl, 2013; Cashmore & Cleland, 2014). According to Earl (2013), the overriding aim of football clubs in recent years has been to restrain incidents of overt racism inside the stadium (*through the use of sanctions and punishments*). As a result, “*restrictions on fan behaviour have taken precedence over educating supporters*” (Earl, 2013, p.17). Whilst Earl acknowledges that this approach has been successful in reducing the amount of overt racial abuse that occurs at matches, he argues that “*these measures have done little to change fans’ underlying racist attitudes, which continue to cause expressions of racism to occur*” (Earl, 2013, p.18). He argues, therefore, that by focusing on behavioural forms of racism (*overt*), rather than attitudinal forms (*covert*), clubs have limited their effectiveness in fully erasing racism among

supporters. John Barnes, former England international footballer, holds a similar view about the approach adopted by British football clubs:

"The way we're trying to deal with it is wrong....only through education and making people know why it's wrong will we get rid of it. Just by saying to people 'you're not allowed to do it' without explaining to them why... Or by fining them when they do it...is not getting rid of it. Do we want to get rid of racism? Or do we want just not to hear it? What football is saying, by fining and banning people, is 'You can be as racist as you want, but as long as you keep your mouth shut its fine'" (cited in McGowan, 2014).

Anti-racism organisation 'Kick it Out', likewise agree that in order to tackle the full face of racism, clubs need to do more than just prohibit racist behaviour. They argue that "*clubs need take a unified stand against discrimination... by hosting various events and activities they need to raise awareness and educate about the importance of equality and diversity in football"* (Alleyne-Lawler, 2016). Earl (2013) highlights Sheffield United as a good example of a club who have tried to tackle societal racism in the community; since 1999 the club has been hosting 'community days' which teach supporters about the importance of equality and diversity in football, and celebrate the cultural differences within their communities.

In addition, UEFA's (*the governing body of European football*) guide to '*Tackling Racism in Club Football*' (2006, p.26) also states that "*the longer-term solutions to racism lie in strategies that draw on campaigning and education"*. UEFA lists a number of means through which clubs can educate their supporters and challenge underlying racist attitudes. They suggest that enlisting the support of players and managers (*icons of the game*) and encouraging them to speak out publically, is crucial to the effect and success of educational messages: "*an appearance by a player at a community event or school, supporting the message, will often do more to communicate the message than months of campaigning can achieve"* (2006, p.18). They also propose that clubs should be supporting the production of educational resources on equality and diversity for local schools, or working with education authorities to produce their own materials.

Creating and promoting a welcoming and inclusive environment

Earl (2013, p.10) argues that because of the "*preoccupation*" that football clubs, governing bodies, and anti-racism organisations have had with tackling 'overt racism', very little attention has been afforded to how the fears and perceptions of racism that exist among many British Asian fans, can be dealt with, despite these being as big a deterrent to attendance as actual experiences of racism (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012). According to Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, P.108), "*there is a residual perception within sections of British Asian communities – particularly among older generations – that football spectatorship is a dangerous and threatening activity, primarily due to its associations with racism, violence and alcohol"*. Given their absence throughout British football – as players, coaches, directors and fans – there is also a strong perception amongst British Asian's that they are not welcome or valued in the stadium environment (Burdsey, 2007; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012).

In order to combat these perceptions, Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.108) propose that the initiatives that clubs adopt, and the dialogue that they have with British Asian communities, “*should not just strive to point out that racism will not be tolerated; they should emphasise that diverse cultures are welcome and valued, both within the stadium and the fan collectivity in general.*” They state that it is only when British Asian fans feel welcome and valued that they will begin the process of developing attachment and belonging to a club, which will in turn make them much more likely to attend live matches. Indeed, such belief is reflected in the findings of the 2011 FA Premier League Fan Survey, which revealed that 69% of Muslim British Asians and 53% of non-Muslim British Asians would be “*much more likely*” or “*more likely*” to attend matches if they felt that clubs had a more “*welcoming attitude towards ethnic minority groups*” (2011, p.23). An initiative introduced by Wolverhampton Wanderers in 2008 provides a perfect illustration of how clubs can transcend a positive and welcoming attitude towards these groups (Hayer, 2009). They were the first British club to allow Sikhs to bring the Kirpan⁷ into the stadium, showing a clear understanding of its importance to that religion and emphasising that ethnic minority groups are welcome and valued at the club.

Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) also suggest that clubs should look to engage with British Asian communities in a range of ways in the first instance, to try and break down these perceptions, before any efforts are made to attract them to games. They suggest that clubs need to “*develop an appreciation of the range of ways through which they can facilitate links with British Asian communities....attempts to encourage them to come to games can then be developed subsequently*” (p.109). Football clubs and their stadia, for example, are perceived by many British Asians as “*alien environments*” and “*historically spaces to avoid*” (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012, p.109). Clubs, therefore, need to explore ways in which these perceptions can be broken down, so that British Asians are more confident and open to the idea of the match day experience, and are more susceptible to subsequent marketing attempts to try attract them to games. Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) propose, for example, that by opening up the stadium for other activities, such as conferences, meetings, weddings and other religious and cultural ceremonies, it can help to make the stadium environment a more familiar space for British Asians, and help to foster new relationships and new channels of dialogue with the British Asian community. They claim that these alternative channels of dialogue will help to breakdown and overcome many of the perceptions that British Asians have about football clubs and their stadia, reducing a significant barrier to their attendance at matches.

British Asian supporter groups

Another initiative that football clubs should explore to help reduce the barriers of racism and exclusion, is the development of British Asian fan groups. A number of British Asian supporter groups have emerged in recent years, such as the Punjabi Wolves (Wolverhampton Wanderers), the Bangla Bantams (Bradford City) and the Punjabi Rams (Derby County), and according to Kilvington (2017) they have all had significant success in increasing the number of British Asian supporters spectating at these clubs. These groups

⁷ The kirpan is a sword or knife carried by Sikhs. It is a religious commandment given by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699, that Sikhs must wear five articles of faith at all times, the kirpan being one of five Ks.

offer multiple benefits for British Asian fans, many of which counter the aforementioned barriers of racial exclusion and marginalisation (Kilvington, 2017). The following quotes from Kilvington’s research state why such groups were created (table 1).

Supporter group	Quote	Who
Bangla Bantams	<i>“It’s about going to a match as a group, in a safe and comfortable way really.”</i>	Chairman (2015)
Punjabi Wolves	<i>“If some people felt intimidated going to matches, we wanted them to come along with us and show that you know we’re all one when it comes to football”</i>	Committee Member (2015)
Punjabi Rams	<i>“A lot of people have that fear factor of going to away games, or even home games...I think that the ‘safety in numbers’ kind of concept has definitely helped”</i>	Founder Member (2015)

(Table 1 - adapted from Kilvington, 2017, p.81)

The comments above suggest that these groups make British Asian fans feel much safer and less intimidated inside the stadium environment. Kilvington (2017, p.81) claims that these groups *“challenge the hegemonic whiteness, intimidation and fear [of the match day experience] by allowing British Asian supporters to attend matches while feeling ‘safe in numbers’”*. Ratna (2004) suggests that attending matches in numbers mobilises a collective power that acts as a ‘racial coping strategy’ for many British Asian fans (Ratna, 2014). Similarly, Kilvington (2017, p.82) states that *“British Asian fans who attend matches individually or as pairs run the risk of intimidation and/or racism, whereas attending matches as part of a collective arguably empowers British Asian supporters”*.

British Asian fan groups have, however, attracted some criticism for being separatist (Bradbury, 2010; Kilvington & Price, 2013; Phillips et al, 2007). Kilvington (2017, p.83), though, argues that such criticism fails to acknowledge the *“complex barriers that affect British Asian communities in the traditionally whitewashed sport of football”*. He states that *“although the terms ‘Bangla’ and ‘Punjabi’ appear exclusionary, they directly refer to groups that have historically been excluded and therefore these networks actively attempt to invoke feelings of belonging and community”* (2017, p.83). The following quotes from Kilvington’s research illustrate these criticisms:

Supporter group	Quote	Who
Punjabi Wolves	<i>“You get it [abuse] from your own fans sometimes...Why is there a Punjabi Wolves supporter group? Why isn’t there an English supporter group?”</i>	Committee Member (2015)
Punjabi Rams	<i>“We’ve had a few Derby fans who’ve said, ‘why are you guys setting up? Why are you trying to separate or ostracise yourselves away from the rest of us?’”</i>	Founder Member (2015)

(Table 2 - adapted from Kilvington, 2017, p.83)

According to Kilvington (2017), these groups are growing rapidly in popularity and show no signs of slowing up; even just last year, a new British Asian supporter group ‘Apna Albion’ was formed to help increase British Asian support at West Bromwich Albion.

Moreover, Kilvington (2017, p.85) believes that these groups will play a significant role in redefining the image of British Asian fans within “*the collective consciousness of the traditional white supporter*”; to the point where instead of being viewed as “*outsiders*”, they may one day be considered “*authentic fans*”. Football marketers should, therefore, seriously consider taking an active involvement in creating, or at least supporting the development of a British Asian fan group at their clubs.

Religio-cultural barriers

Another significant deterrent which needs addressing is the large number of religious and cultural barriers that exist, as a result of the lack of cultural understanding that many football clubs possess. Scholars and practitioners in the field of ethnic marketing, have stressed the importance of club’s needing to reduce these barriers and better meet the cultural and religious needs of British Asian supporters; their failure to do so, according to these authors, will see them continually struggle to attract British Asian fans, and strict Muslims in particular (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Lewis, 2015).

Co-developing initiatives with local British Asian communities

Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) suggest that in order to erase many of the religio-cultural barriers which exist in the ‘traditional match day service’, football clubs need to engage more with British Asian communities and work with them to co-develop effective solutions. According to Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.109), many of the initiatives that clubs have introduced in recent years to try and create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for British Asian supporters, have been built on “*cultural stereotypes and assumptions*”, and developed without input from British Asian fans themselves (Burdsey, 2011). They argue that “*these ideas, usually dreamed up by well-meaning marketing staff, have frequently misread, and arguably trivialised, the reason of British Asians’ absence from the stadium*”. Moreover, they suggest that “*it is completely unacceptable –practically and politically – for British Asians still to be marginalised from any consideration of their own exclusion*” (2012, p.109).

Developing initiatives without input from the customers themselves can be a difficult process to get right and can often have adverse effects, as “*the line between stereotypical interpretation and informed intervention is very fine*” (Murji, cited in Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012, p.109). Several clubs in recent years, for example, perceived that selling “*anglicised versions of traditional South Asian cuisine, such as Balti pie and bags of onion bhargi’s*”, would attract more British Asians to attend (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012, p.109), however, such initiatives have been heavily criticised by British Asian communities (Burdsey, 2011).

Clubs, therefore, need to cooperate with British Asian communities to identify the real reasons for their non-attendance and to co-develop appropriate initiatives to address them. In addition to this, Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) suggest that clubs need to start acting on some of the market research that already exists. The FA Premier League Survey in 2011 (p.23), for example, found that 75% of Muslim British Asians and 56% of non-Muslim British Asians were “*much more likely*” or “*more likely*” to attend games if clubs had alcohol free areas inside the stadium. Yet despite this being an initiative that British Asian

communities have clearly endorsed, to date no clubs have adopted the provision of alcohol free zones inside the stadium concourse. The same survey also highlighted importance of food and refreshments inside the stadium, in attracting ethnic fans. Lewis (2015) suggests that, although most EPL clubs offer a mix of dining opportunities to meet the needs of all its supporters, most lower league 'local clubs' serve food and beverages only "*geared towards its mainstream supporters...namely alcoholic beverages, fast food products, coupled with traditional mainstream snacks of pies and chips...which are unlikely to appeal to South Asians*" (Lewis, 2015, p.31). Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) suggest that the provision of some halal products and more vegetarian options would significantly assist strict religious supporters seeking hot food.

It is also well documented that the clash between match times and Muslim prayer times, is a massive barrier for strict Muslim supporters⁸. Despite this, only a number of clubs have taken action to reduce this barrier. A number of clubs in recent years, including Blackburn and Aston Villa (Lewis, 2015), and a number of EPL clubs (Din, 2015), have built prayer rooms within their stadia to enable Muslims, and supporters of other religions, to fulfil their religious needs whilst attending the game. This has been received extremely well by the British Asian supporters at those clubs and has removed one of the most significant barriers to attendance for religious British Asian supporters (Lewis, 2015).

Lack of role models (*institutional racism*)

It is widely acknowledged that football clubs need to increase the number of British Asian people working within their organisations (Middleton, 2009; Lewis, 2015). Whilst research indicates that it would mainly be an increase in players on the pitch which would have the greatest effect on British Asian fans' motivations to attend matches, efforts should be made by clubs to increase British Asian presence in other positions at the clubs – particularly at clubs based in well populated Asian areas. Whilst the recruitment process of players, coaches and other staff members is a different debate⁹, there are some measures that marketers can take to address the lack of British Asian role models and increase perceptions of British Asian presence within the club.

Asian Ambassadors

According to Lewis (2015, p.97), "*having people from within the South Asian community directly involved or associated with the club, can be particularly effective in encouraging more people from within the community to engage with the club*". It has been proposed that one way football clubs could do this effectively is through the use of 'club ambassadors'

⁸ There are five obligatory daily Muslim prayers: Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib and Isha. The Fajr prayer is before sunrise, and the Isha prayer at night. It is the timings of the middle three, Zuhr, Asr and Maghrib, which can challenge the matchday thought process of Muslim fans. During the short winter days, and coupled with a lunchtime kick-off, all these three prayers can come into play when the match is in play.

⁹ Most professional clubs have now committed to new recruitment processes of players and coaches, to try and increase the number of British Asians within the game. According to Lewis (2015), "*most professional clubs and scouts now state that the ethnicity of potential player is not a factor in the recruitment process, they just want to attract the best new talent to their football teams regardless of ethnicity*". In June 2016, EFL clubs also approved changes to their recruitment practices to address the under-representation of BAME coaches at Academy and first-team level (EFL, 2016).

from the British Asian community (Krug, 2008; Lewis, 2015;). There is a significant amount of research which suggests that British Asian consumers respond better to spokespersons of their own ethnic background (Kwai-Choi et al, 2002; Krug, 2008). Clubs, therefore, should look to acquire ‘Asian ambassadors’, who can help to reach and build connections with British Asian communities and deliver messages more effectively, and at the same time, increase British Asian presence within the club.

Krug (2008) suggests that in order for most British Asian customers to build an emotional connection with a brand, strong brand ambassadors from their community are often required. He suggests that these ambassadors might include “*people who are a mirror reflection of the communities being addressed or have made a visible investment through deeds and actions that positively impact these communities*” (2008 p.308). Whilst such ambassadors would increase the visibility of British Asian role models within, or associated with the club, they would also transfer trust to other consumers in their communities (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Krug, 2008).

Socio-economic disadvantage

The cost and accessibility of match day tickets for British Asian communities must also be seriously considered by football clubs and their marketing teams. Although it appears that little can be done to halt the ever increasing price of tickets, given the astronomical sums of money being spent on player transfer fees and wages, there are marketing initiatives that have been developed to improve the accessibility of tickets for British Asian consumers, and other disadvantaged communities.

A nuanced approach to the accessibility and availability of match day tickets

Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.110) propose that clubs need to adopt a more “*nuanced approach*” to the accessibility and availability of their tickets, if they are to increase the number of British Asian fans attending matches. Kilvington (2017) notes that several clubs have used a blanket policy of offering free and/or discounted tickets for British Asian groups and suggests that more clubs should adopt this approach. He states that this has been crucial in helping those disadvantaged socio-economically, while also providing an important taste of the match day experience for these communities.

Clubs must also consider the availability of their tickets for British Asian supporters. For some British Asians, cost is not the issue, it is instead club loyalty and priority schemes which make tickets, and season tickets in particular, hard to access. While the business rationale behind such schemes makes complete sense, Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.110) suggest that “*additional means through which ‘non-traditional’ fan groups could qualify for tickets would be welcome*”. Quite how this would look is not yet clear but it is something that football clubs and their marketers should be exploring.

Attraction to the top teams

As mentioned earlier in the paper, very little attention in marketing literature has been afforded to the barriers that clubs themselves face when trying to attract more British Asian supporters. However, one significant barrier that is apparent for ‘local clubs’, is the overwhelming evidence which suggests that British Asian fans are only interested in supporting the biggest and most successful clubs (Lewis, 2015). Although it is commonly accepted that ‘local clubs’, given their inferior resource, are highly unlikely to ever be able to compete with the top teams and attain the same levels of success, prestige and mass appeal, there are some measures that they can take to enhance their appeal amongst local British Asian communities.

Enhancing visibility in the local community

Aside from the success and prestige of the top teams, and the fact that British Asian communities have little affiliation with their local teams (Bains & Johal, 1998), one of the key reasons why British Asians become more attracted to the top clubs, is the lack of awareness that British Asian communities have of their local clubs (Lewis, 2015). According to Lewis (2015), the lack of visibility that these clubs have within their local British Asian communities is a major factor in why so many British Asians become attracted to the top clubs in the Premier League, whose presence is far more visible due to their unrivalled mainstream media coverage.

Enhancing the visibility of the club and generating awareness amongst local British Asian communities is, therefore, the only real way that local clubs can challenge the presence of the ‘top teams’, and start to attract more British Asians from the local community. In order to increase their presence within these communities, Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.108) suggest that local clubs “*need to make a more significant, apposite and targeted impact in British Asian communities.*” Today, almost all football clubs have ‘Football in the Community’ departments, however, Burdsey and Randhawa claim that these differ significantly in terms of “*their quality, how they are utilised and who they target in their provision*”. One area which is consistently poor across these departments and is in need of significant improvement, is their engagement with ethnic minority communities (Burdsey, 2007; Ratna, 2010; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012). Burdsey (2007) suggests, however, that these departments present a fantastic opportunity for local clubs to enhance their interaction with British Asian communities, and subsequently generate awareness of the club amongst these groups.

Kilvington (2017, p.80) suggests that in order for these departments to do this successfully “*they need to look further afield...rather than targeting British Asian communities via traditional routes, new relationships should be formed*”. Likewise, Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.108) propose that clubs need to go beyond their “*traditional associations with schools and youth programmes*” and look to engage with young British Asians in a range of other settings. The Asian Football Network (AFN), for example, found overwhelming evidence to suggest that the majority of British Asian football participation takes place outside mainstream (*affiliated*) football provision. Clubs, therefore, should be looking to create ties with these informal and casual forms of the game (*e.g. five-a-side*), as a way of engaging with sections of these communities that are already interested in the sport (Randhawa, 2011). Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) suggest that the local clubs should also target a range of different youth groups, and religious and cultural institutions, but note the

difficulties of attracting young people to football through religio-cultural institutions (Ratna, 2004).

In addition to targeting new routes and channels, clubs also need to explore more imaginative means of engagement with these communities. The AFN, for example, have worked with a number of clubs in recent years to develop more creative initiatives to target British Asian groups. A particularly successful example was Chelsea Football Club’s annual ‘*Search for an Asian Star*’ talent competition (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012). This community scheme, which was launched in 2009, aims to encourage Asian kids in the community to take part in grassroots football but also provides them with a rare opportunity to be identified by top scouts from across the country. This initiative is, therefore, making a positive difference in the local Asian community and is a much more effective and appreciated form of engagement with these communities.

British Asian supporter groups

As well as being an effective initiative in reducing the barriers of exclusion and marginalisation, British Asian supporter groups can also be an effective tool for the clubs themselves, in attracting more local British Asian supporters. Kilvington (2017) suggests that in addition to making British Asian fans feel safer and less intimidated in the stadium environment, these groups also play an influential role in encouraging them to support their local clubs. His 2017 study highlights the active role that these groups are playing in trying to attract members of the local British Asian community to come and support their local club (table 3).

Supporter group	Quote	Who
Punjabi Wolves	<i>“We want kids supporting Wolverhampton Wanderers. Any team within a 15 mile radius – that’s the teams you should be supporting. We don’t want kids supporting Chelsea, Man City, Man United”</i>	Committee Member (2015)
Punjabi Rams	<i>“We wanted to try and encourage the younger generation of fans to come to games. I suppose my generation are Man United, Liverpool, Chelsea but they don’t have a connection with those teams. This is something we have been keen to change”</i>	Founder Member (2015)

(Table 3- adapted from Kilvington, 2017, p.82)

Bains and Johal (1998, p.118) suggest that for previous generations, the top teams like Liverpool and Manchester United have been “*far and away the most widely supported, followed and recognised clubs*” among British Asian communities, due to popular media coverage and the fact that British Asian communities harboured little connection with their local team. Kilvington (2017, p.82) suggests, however, that British Asian supporter groups challenge this and attempt to “*create, foster and strengthen an enhanced level of local pride among British Asians*”. Strengthening their connection and affiliation with the local community, in the words of Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.108), is the only way British Asian supporters will “*begin the process of attachment and belonging to their local club*”.

Marketing barriers

In terms of addressing the difficulties that football marketers face themselves in trying to reach and attract more British Asian consumers, the development of ‘tailored and dedicated marketing strategies for British Asian communities’ is the overwhelming solution proposed in the literature. Although the need to develop segmented marketing strategies was earlier highlighted as a barrier to local clubs, given the cost and marketing resource required to fulfil them, academics and practitioners universally agree that if companies continue to rely on one overarching ‘catch-all’ strategy to reach ethnic communities, they will continually struggle to grow their ethnic customer base (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998; Burton, 2002; Krug, 2008). A number of initiatives from existing ‘ethnic marketing’ research will be explored below, which should assist football marketers in developing effective targeted strategies for British Asian communities.

Nuanced and culturally-relevant marketing

According to Fletcher (2003, p.3), British Asian communities are “*as internally diverse as they are distinct from mainstream culture*”. It is, therefore, vitally important that marketers understand and appreciate the internal diversity of the British Asian community, and avoid considering it as one homogenous subculture (Emslie et al, 2007; Krug, 2008). Nwankwo and Lindridge (1998, p.207) argue that there is “*limited value*” in making generalisations about the British Asian community, and that targeting it as “*one group*” can have detrimental effects. Although it is not feasible, financially or resourcefully, for most companies to develop separate marketing strategies for each British Asian community, showing “*an acknowledgement of relevant cultural characteristics in marketing campaigns*” can be equally as effective (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998, p.213). Fletcher (2003, p.3) likewise suggests that there is a need for companies to develop more “*culturally relevant marketing campaigns*”, to enhance their brand image within the different ethnic communities. In addition, he claims that there is now an expectation from ethnic minority communities that brands should behave in an “*inclusive fashion*” and suggests that marketers need to start “*augmenting existing, mainstream campaigns with more focused targeting, sympathetic to culture – such as special offers, in keeping with major festivals like Eid and Diwali*” (2003, p.3).

Tailored advertising

While all elements of the marketing mix need to be considered when developing these strategies, ‘promotion’ has received the most attention in ethnic marketing research. According to Nwankwo and Lindridge (1998, p.210), “*advertising is singled out because most of the goings-on in ethnic marketing revolve around it*”. Below are four considerations for marketers to keep in mind when creating tailored advertisements for British Asian communities:

- 1) *Clear and to the point messages* – research suggests that non-literal communications are largely ineffective with British Asian consumers (Fletcher, 2003; Lewis, 2015). Fletcher (2003) recommends that adverts targeted at these groups need to be clear and to the point.

- 2) *Increased representation in advertising* – past studies have shown that the use of British Asian models in advertisements positively influences the attitudes of British Asian consumers towards the firm and their intention to buy the product or service (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998; Fletcher, 2003; Krug, 2008). Despite this evidence, Nwankwo and Lindridge (1998, p.212) claim that British companies “*have continued to play down the fact that ethnic consumers have been proved to show a preference for spokesperson of their own ethnic group...[and as such] relative to their population, ethnic minority groups have been grossly under-represented in advertising campaigns in Britain.*” Fletcher (2003, p.3) has also criticised the effectiveness of visual advertising in the UK (e.g. TV, online, print, posters) in connecting with ethnic minorities, in terms of it reflecting “*diversity only in the background*” and being “*manifestly diverse only at ‘headcount level’*”. He suggests that there is a disproportionately low number of “*dominant character representations*” from ethnic minority communities and that any non-white ethnic minority characters that do feature in a prominent role, are disproportionately black rather than Asian (2003, p.3). Football clubs should, therefore, consider increasing British Asian representation within their advertisements, particularly in dominant character roles, not just in the background.
- 3) *Advertise approval from relevant others* – Krug (2008, p.301) suggests that when targeting British Asian consumers, marketers should advertise recommendations and endorsements of products and services from “*relevant others within the British Asian community*”. According to Krug (2008), the reach and impact of advertisements which communicate through “*respected spokespersons in the British Asian community*” is far greater than any other form of advertisement. This is primarily a result of the trust that is transferred from the respected spokesperson down to the consumer, ultimately increasing their confidence in their purchase decisions. These suggestions are in line with the vast research which highlights the importance of ‘word of mouth’¹⁰ in British Asian culture. A study by Synovate (2010), for example, established that “*word of mouth is the most trusted medium in Indian and Pakistani culture*” and is, therefore, imperative in most significant purchasing decisions. Furthermore, Lewis (2015, p.22) suggests that increasingly the perception of products, services and brands amongst British Asian communities is shaped “*more by what others say and do, than by, what they [companies] say and do themselves*”. Drawing focus to the approval of “*relevant others*” is, therefore, one of the most effective ways of attracting British Asian consumers to a product or brand (Krug, 2008, p.282).
- 4) *Bilingual/ethnic advertisements* – several authors suggest that in order to reach and attract older generation and weak acculturated British Asians, marketers should be utilising ‘bilingual advertisements’ because of their limited English proficiency (Palumbo & Teich, 2004; Krug, 2008). It is also advised that marketers should be targeting these groups through ethnic media channels, which are often less expensive than mainstream media channels in terms of advertising (Cui, 1997). According to Krug (2008, p.302),

¹⁰ Why it’s so important - Sahai (2014) suggests that this is because recommendations are not given lightly within these cultures, as there is fear that their reputation within the community may be damaged if others have a bad experience with the product or service.

ethnic minority media in the UK provides considerable opportunities for advertisers; he states that there are “around 100 press titles and 15 digital channels targeted specifically at British-Asians” that marketers should be taking advantage of. These proposals are in line with Cui’s (1997) research which found that “even when ethnic consumers do not have specific preferences for certain products features, as is the case for mobile phones, they are still more receptive to advertising which incorporates their ethnic identities and cultural heritage” (cited in Krug, 2008, p.302). It is worth noting, however, that previous research has highlighted that British Asian consumers often have different mass media usage patterns dependent on their level of acculturation (Cui & Powell, 1993). Whereas older and weakly acculturated generations mainly rely on ethnic media for product consumption information, younger generations and more acculturated British Asians can be reached through regular, mainstream channels (Webster, 1992; Cui, 1997). Clubs should consider both approaches, considering that younger generations are more likely to be interested in football and attending matches, however, approval would also need to be gained from parents and more senior family members to take them or allow them to go (Krug, 2008; Lewis, 2015).

Methodology

3.

Introduction

This section concentrates on the specific research that was undertaken in this study, and illustrates the methods that were used to attain the answers to the three key research questions. It will evaluate key debates on the use of differing philosophies and approaches in Business and Management research, providing justification for the methods adopted in this study, and highlighting the difficulties and limitations that were encountered throughout.

Research philosophies – positivist vs interpretivist

Saunders et al (2016) propose that there are five major research philosophies: positivism, pragmatism, postmodernism, cultural realism and interpretivism. The two most commonly used in business and management research are positivism and interpretivism, both of which contrast significantly. Positivist research can be described as a systematic investigation which seeks to “confirm and generalise results”, whereas interpretivist research is seen as an in-depth investigation which seeks to “add to the knowledge which already exists in the field” (Saunders et al, 2016). As this study is aiming to create new richer understandings of the barriers that British Asian fans face, and is seeking to develop new theories and solutions which can assist football clubs in attracting more British Asian fans to attend (*rather than testing or generalising existing ideas*), an interpretivist philosophy was a far more suitable approach for the purposes of this research.

Research approaches – deductive vs inductive

According to several authors, interpretivist research is often more effective in achieving its research aims when coupled with an ‘inductive’ research approach. An inductive approach starts with the collection of primary and secondary data to explore a topic or phenomenon, before theories and recommendations (*which add to the literature in the field*) are then subsequently developed. A deductive approach conversely begins with a theory or hypothesis (*which is developed from existing literature in the field*) and then the design of a research strategy which tests and proves or disproves it. Since there is limited research in this field from which to develop a theory or hypothesis that can be tested, and as this research is following interpretivist philosophy in that it aims to add to the knowledge in this area, an inductive approach was a much better fit for this investigation. This excerpt from Saunders et al (2016 p.147) provides further support for this decision:

“With research into a topic that is new and on which there is little existing literature, it may be more appropriate to work inductively by generating data and analysing and reflecting upon what theoretical themes the data are suggesting”.

Research methods – Qualitative vs Quantitative

There has also been considerable debate over the merits of both ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ research methods within the discipline of Business and Management. Glaser and Strauss argue, however, that because both methods can be used to either prove or reject a theory (*positivist*), or to generate a new theory (*interpretivist*), the decision of which approach to adopt “*ultimately lies in the objective of the study, and what the research questions seek to answer*” (cited in Middleton, 2009, p.26). This study will utilise qualitative research methods for three key reasons:

- 1) Firstly, having reviewed the literature in this field, it became apparent that there was a significant lack of qualitative data. The majority of the empirical studies that have looked at the exclusion of British Asian football fans, such as the annual EPL fan survey, are quantitative, and with the exception of Lewis (2015), to date no researchers have actually given British Asian fans a voice in their studies, despite them being the subject of the research. As such, there is a significant lack of primary data from British Asian fans themselves, in terms of their feelings, opinions and experiences, which makes it extremely difficult for football clubs to currently identify the real reasons for their non-attendance, and develop effective solutions to address them. Qualitative methods were chosen, therefore, in order to fill this gap in the literature.
- 2) Secondly, several authors suggest that qualitative methods are best suited to ‘social studies’¹¹ (Silverman, 2001), where the research seeks to understand the experiences of a given group or situation (Thompson, 2004), as is the case in this study. Merriam (2009, p.5)

¹¹ Moreover, Silverman (2001) argues that quantitative methods often neglect social and cultural variables, both of which are pivotal to the research questions in this study (Silverman, 2001).

suggests that qualitative research is typically “*interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences*”. Qualitative methods were, therefore, the most fitting approach from which to establish the feelings and opinions of British Asian fans towards the ‘live match experience’, which is vital to the aims of this research.

- 3) Finally, although both qualitative and quantitative methods can be applied to either test existing theory or develop new theory, most authors suggest that quantitative methods are typically associated with positivist research and a traditional deductive approach, where the focus is on using “*measureable data to confirm or reject theory*” (Saunders et al, 2016, p.166. Burns (2000, p.9), for example, suggests that quantitative research “*usually involves the systematic creation of a hypothesis before subjecting it to an empirical test*”. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is believed to go ‘hand in hand’ with an interpretivist approach and is essential to the success of most ‘inductive’ studies, where the aim of the research is to generate new rich data from which to develop new theories and recommendations.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research attempts to “*approach a topic with few or no preconceived assumptions; as these are expected to appear out of the data as they are collected and studied*” (McNabb, 2004, p.226). Silverman (2004) suggests that qualitative research can be split into two main categories: secondary data (*data that is collected from books, journals and other public documents*) and primary data (*data collected through observations, focus groups and interviews*), both of which will be undertaken in this study. Further to this, McNabb (2004) proposes that there are three key ways of conducting qualitative research (table 4).

Qualitative approaches	
Explanatory research	Explanatory research aims to go beyond the descriptive designs of the positivist approach and provide a ‘casual explanation’ for why some social phenomenon occur. It aims to interpret a cause-and-effect relationship between two or more variables, and explain the differences in two or more groups’ responses. White (1999, p.44) suggests that explanatory research “ <i>strives to build theories that explain and predict natural and social events.</i> ”
Interpretive research	The primary objective of interpretative research is to establish the meaning of a circumstance, event or social situation. It goes beyond simple description and explanation in aiming to enhance people’s understanding of the beliefs, feelings, or attitudes of the people in the study situation (White, 1999).
Critical research	The overriding aim of critical research is to help change people’s beliefs and actions, and bring about ‘social change’ (White, 1994). According to McNabb (2004, p.X) “ <i>criticism points out inconsistencies between what is true and false and what is good and bad, and it aims to bring to actions that commensurate with accepted truth and goodness.</i> ”

(Table 4)

This research is primarily ‘interpretive’ because in order provide answers to the research questions in this study, an understanding of the meaning behind the given social situation is required (Saunders et al, 2016). In addition, interpretive research is an effective vehicle for

gaining insights into consumer behaviours and preferences (Susan & Lee, 2014), which is vital information to be able to develop effective solutions that will attract more British Asian fans. This study also lends itself to elements of a critical approach. According to McNabb (2004, p.106), critical research is concerned with “*exposing the harmful or alienating social conditions a section of the population is exposed to*”, which is relevant to the aims of this study. It could also be argued that this study is aiming to bring about social change – in terms of changing the attitude and approach of football clubs towards British Asian consumers – which is a central construct of critical research. McNabb (2004) suggests that combining interpretive and critical approaches is an effective research method because of the close links between the two. He suggests that interpretative research plays a vital role in critical research, as it provides the common understanding that is necessary to bring about successful attitude change.

As this study is aiming to “*make improvements to a certain social environment*” (Denscombe, 2002, p.26), ‘action’ research methods were also employed. Action research methods “*involve members of the group affected in on the research process*”, which in this case was British Asian football fans. McNabb (2004) demonstrates how this qualitative approach is an effective way of developing a deeper understanding of a group’s feelings and attitudes towards a social situation (*interpretive*) and of helping to bring about change to that environment (*critical*). Such methods have also been described as ‘empowerment research’, which according to McNabb (2004, p.420) is concerned with “*groups or individuals who are excluded by the majority on the basis of their demographic characteristics*”. This approach starts by identifying a group which has been isolated (*British Asian fans*) in a community or organisation (*professional football*), and then helps these ‘outsiders’ to understand the underlying issues behind their exclusion and concludes by giving them a voice in the decisions that will affect them, which is the exact purpose of this study.

Secondary data collection (*literature review*)

The study looked firstly in depth at the existing literature resources available on this topic, and the surrounding subjects, extensively reviewing a range of books and journals, and various other academic materials. The results of these findings can be found in the literature review, however, some of these findings will be discussed and analysed further in the next chapter.

Primary data collection (*interviews*)

Following a review of the existing literature in this field, the study looked at collating primary qualitative data through a number of semi-structured interviews. Eyles (1988) describes interviews as ‘conversations with purpose’, which allow the researcher and participant to conduct concentrated dialogue using questions related to the research aims and objectives, thus allowing the researcher to collect extensive information from the participants pertinent to the research topic (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Sayer (2002) suggests that interviews can be conducted ‘extensively’, using a wide range of persons to look at a variety of points, or intensively, as in this study, where one seeks insights and causes from just a few in-depth interviews. This study adopted an intensive approach and in total, thirty-three interviews were conducted.

The interviews took the form of semi-structured interviews, where an outline of questioning was followed, but allowed for the probing of the responses made by the participant. The questions were as open-ended as possible to allow the participant to freely express their own beliefs and opinions (Fowler, 2002) and constructed under a more emotionalist view, thereby allowing the participants to build their own subjective views on the topics (Silverman, 2002). The interviews were broken down into two sections pertinent to the outlined research aims; focusing firstly on the barriers to attendance for British Asian fans and secondly on what football clubs could do to reduce these barriers and attract more British Asian supporters. Many questions were replicated during the interviews to establish different individual perspectives on particular topics, but were in parts tailored to the specific background and experiences of the participants.

Sampling technique

All of the sampling techniques used for the primary data collection were ‘non-probability’ methods. The participants were selected using a mix of ‘purposive’ and ‘snowball’ sampling techniques, where a number of characteristics were identified that participants needed to meet based on the objectives of the research and these were then selected through my own networks (purposive); further participants that also met this criteria were then recruited through acquaintances of the existing participants (snowball) (Saunders et al, 2016). ‘Probability sampling’ methods, where participants are selected at random, would have been inappropriate for this study because my research questions are related to a specific group of the population – the British Asian community (Saunders et al, 2016).

Initial interviews consulted with three industry experts, who each work with professional football clubs in some way to help them attract more BAME supporters from the local community (see table 5). It was important to gain insights from people within this field of work, to call upon their knowledge and experience of what has worked and what has not worked in the past in terms of attracting British Asian supporters. These participants were recruited by contacting them via ‘LinkedIn’, establishing an initial relationship, and then conducting a telephone interview with each of them.

Name	Professional background
Riz Rehman	Riz is an Education Advisor at the Professional Footballer’s Association (PFA), helping to deliver the PFA’s Diversity Programme across all 92 professional clubs in England. He is also a trustee for the Zesh Rehman Foundation – a charity that works closely with the football governing bodies to help change perceptions surrounding British Asians and address the imbalance in the number of British Asian players, coaches and fans in football.
Anwar Uddin	Anwar is the Diversity and Campaigns Manager at The Football Supporters’ Federation, which works in partnership with ‘Kick it Out’ to eradicate racism from professional football. He is also the Campaigns Manager for ‘Fans for Diversity’, which helps clubs to increase the number of people from the local community attending matches, from all different backgrounds and ethnicities.
Humayun Islam	Humayun is the Founder and Chair of the Bangla Bantams, which is Bradford City’s official Asian supporters’ group. He is also the CEO of the BEAP

(Table 5)

Following this, a series of thirty semi-structured interviews with British Asian football fans were conducted (see table 6 and 7). The fans were all male adults of either British Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin, as these ethnicities represent the main segments of the British Asian population in the UK. Half of the participants were football fans that do attend matches and the other half were supporters that do not go to games. Interviewing British Asian fans that do not attend games was pivotal to the aims of this research because they are the subject of the research. Gaining insights from these participants was vital in order to establish what the true reasons are for their non-attendance and to understand what they feel could be done to address the issues and make them more likely to attend. It was also important, however, to interview British Asian fans that do attend games to understand how they overcame the barriers and what factors attract them to attend matches. In addition to this, an even split of religious fans and non-religious fans was also achieved and this was done in order to identify whether religious factors were more pertinent than some of the other proposed barriers. Unfortunately, a diverse range of religions were not able to be attained; I was only able to access two Sikh's and no Hindus. The majority of the volunteers at my disposal were Muslim, which has resulted in a slight bias throughout the study towards issues that are pertinent to Muslim fans, rather than British Asians as a whole.

British Asian fans that attend matches

Participant	Ethnicity	Religion	Age	Generation
Participant Y1	British Pakistani	Muslim	31	3 rd
Participant Y2	British Indian	Non-religious	25	3 rd
Participant Y3	British Pakistani	Non-religious	43	2 nd
Participant Y4	British Indian	Sikh	47	2 nd
Participant Y5	British Pakistani	Non-religious	49	2 nd
Participant Y6	British Bangladeshi	Muslim	30	2 nd
Participant Y7	British Pakistani	Non-religious	26	3 rd
Participant Y8	British Indian	Non-religious	18	3 rd
Participant Y9	British Pakistani	Muslim	27	3 rd
Participant Y10	British Indian	Non-religious	25	3 rd
Participant Y11	British Bangladeshi	Muslim	20	3 rd
Participant Y12	British Pakistani	Muslim	31	3 rd
Participant Y13	British Indian	Sikh	39	2 nd
Participant Y14	British Pakistani	Muslim	29	3 rd
Participant Y15	British Indian	Non-religious	41	2 nd

(Table 6)

British Asian fans that do not attend matches

Participant	Ethnicity	Religion	Age	Generation
Participant N1	British Pakistani	Muslim	18	3 rd
Participant N2	British Bangladeshi	Non-religious	21	3 rd
Participant N3	British Pakistani	Muslim	21	3 rd
Participant N4	British Indian	Non-religious	49	2 nd
Participant N5	British Pakistani	Muslim	41	2 nd

Participant N6	British Pakistani	Muslim	35	2 nd
Participant N7	British Indian	Non-religious	32	3 rd
Participant N8	British Pakistani	Muslim	25	3 rd
Participant N9	British Indian	Non-religious	31	3 rd
Participant N10	British Pakistani	Non-religious	22	3 rd
Participant N11	British Bangladeshi	Muslim	24	3 rd
Participant N12	British Indian	Non-religious	36	2 nd
Participant N13	British Pakistani	Muslim	37	2 nd
Participant N14	British Bangladeshi	Non-religious	26	3 rd
Participant N15	British Pakistani	Muslim	38	2 nd

(Table 7)

Method of analysis (*thematic analysis*)

The data collected from the interviews and the secondary sources were then analysed using a ‘thematic analysis’. This method of analysis analyses and reports patterns within the data and helps to organise and describe the main themes that emerged from the data (Boyatzis, 1998). According to Ryan and Bernard (2000), a thematic analysis begins when the researcher starts to look for patterns or meaning from the data collected. Conducting a thematic analysis was pivotal the aims of this research, as it enabled me to capture important data relevant to each of the research questions.

All thirteen of the interviews were recorded and transcribed; these transcripts were then evaluated, drawing together themes pertinent to the barriers to attendance for British Asian fans and the barriers to attracting British Asian fans for football clubs, and then the themes pertinent to the potential solutions that can reduce these barriers and attract more British Asian fans to attend live matches. The analysis considers which themes are consistent with the themes presented in the existing literature, and also identifies emerging themes from the interviews which are new to the literature in this field. The themes will be then be reviewed and analysed against the research aims and objectives, and a number of business solutions will be proposed.

Discussion of Findings

4.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the research undertaken in this study and is divided into two sections, pertinent to each of the research aims. The first section focuses on the reasons why British Asians typically avoid the live match experience and intertwines the data collected from the interviews with the secondary data, to identify the key ‘barriers to attendance’ from both the fans perspective and the clubs perspective. The findings from the interviews will be arranged firstly into the themes (*barriers*) which are consistent with the existing literature, and

then by the themes (*barriers*) that have emerged which are new to the literature. The second section concentrates on what football clubs could be doing to attract more British Asian fans to attend and proposes a number of service and marketing solutions. These suggestions are based on a combination of the theoretical concepts proposed in the literature and the ideas discussed in the interviews with the industry experts and the British Asian fans.

Section 1

Barriers to attendance for British Asian fans

(Findings consistent with existing literature)

Racism

Previous research suggests that the most significant barrier to the attendance of British Asian fans at live football matches, is the historic issue of racism inside the stadium (McGuire et al, 2001; Burdsey, 2007; Bradbury, 2010; Kilvington, 2017). Football fandom in the UK has a longstanding association with racism, and this, according to the 1998 Football Task Force, “*is the single most powerful deterrent to black and Asian people wishing to attend football matches*” (cited in Earl, 2013, p.19). Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.105) suggest that the barrier facing British Asian fans goes beyond just the ‘threat of racial abuse’ and can be characterised as one of “*racialised exclusion*”, which has made many British Asians feel “*unwelcome and restricted from accessing the stadium environment*”. Similar feelings were reflected in this study during the interviews with the British Asian fans that do not go to games, who all noted ‘racism’ and ‘exclusion’ as significant reasons for why they do not attend. These oral testimonies typify the significance of racism as a barrier to attendance for these fans:

“The biggest barrier for me is definitely the racism that goes on at the games. From a young age I’ve never felt comfortable with the idea of going to games...as a small Asian guy, being around drunk, angry fans who probably don’t want me there, it’s a very scary and intimidating prospect, so for me I’m more than happy to continue watching it from the comfort and safety of my own home” (Participant N5, interview).

“As a Muslim it’s just a really threatening environment and one that I wouldn’t feel comfortable putting myself in. Obviously with what’s happened in the last 12 months [UK terror attacks] there seems to be a lot more islamophobia and racial hatred and I just wouldn’t want to put myself in an environment that is so majority white, where I’m outnumbered and such an easy target for a racial attack” (Participant N1, interview).

“I’ve been once and remember feeling very aware. I constantly felt like do I belong here, am I welcome, does the guy next to me, the white skinhead guy shouting, does he like the fact I’m here? Having that hanging over you makes it very difficult to just relax and enjoy the game... that feeling of not belonging in that environment is probably the main reason I don’t go to be honest” (Participant N9, interview).

Here you can see clear confirmation that the threat of racism is a major factor in why so many British Asian fans avoid the live match experience, and you can also see evidence that many of them do “*feel restricted from accessing the stadium environment on account of broadly racialised*

notions of fandom that demarcate them as 'out of place' and not belonging", as postulated by Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.106).

The views of the British Asian fans that do attend matches, however, differ significantly. Based on their own accounts of the live match experience, there was a common belief amongst these fans that racism is no longer a barrier and that the stadium is an accessible space for British Asians. These extracts from the interviews exemplify their contrasting views on racism as a barrier, with one supporter even suggesting that the 'stadium' is now one of the safest environments you can be in, in terms of being protected from racism:

"I've been a season ticket holder at Man United for 8 years and never once experienced racism, no funny looks, no special treatment, I've been treated just the same and completely welcomed ... I may have been a little nervous the first time but once you experience it, you soon realise that it's no different to any other event and that all the stereotypes about racist fans don't apply... I've even been going on my own the last few seasons, that's how comfortable I am" (Participant Y10, interview).

"Fearing racism and being worried about fitting in has never really been an issue for me because I know that 95% of the people there don't have a problem with me and know I'm a fan just like them. In fact, being part of the home support, I feel as safe in that environment as any because I'm part of the majority and I know that if something did happen it wouldn't be tolerated by the club or the other fans and that is a level of protection Asians probably wouldn't get anywhere else" (Participant Y1, interview).

These beliefs were also echoed by former professional footballers and industry experts Riz Rehman (*Professional Footballers' Association*) and Anwar Uddin (*Football Supporters Federation*), who both currently work with professional clubs to try and help them to attract more BAME fans from the local community. From their own experiences and their interactions with British Asian supporters, both suggested that racism was becoming less and less of a deterrent for British Asian fans:

"I've been attending live matches for the best part of 25 years and have not personally experienced any racism and from speaking to other fans, I think that's the case for 99% of other Asian fans that go... because of the very public effort that's been made to kick racism out of the game, I think the fear of racism of among Asian fans has reduced... I'd be surprised if racism was the main reason they are reluctant to go now, it's probably more down to the cost" (Riz Rehman, interview).

"Racism definitely was a barrier for Asian fans but things have changed for the better now... don't get me wrong there's still a long way to go and there are still incidents we hear about but these are becoming fewer... so for me it's no longer a major barrier" (Anwar Uddin, interview).

These opinions are clear evidence of the significant improvements that have been made in recent years with regards to the issue of racism at British football matches. According to Cashmore and Cleland (2016, p.40), "*British football does not witness anywhere near the level of racism that affected the sport in the 70s, 80s and 90s*". Kilvington (2017, p.77) suggests that racism

at matches is now “*uncommon rather than expected*” and this is backed up by statistics collected by the Home Office in 2014, which revealed that during the 2013-14 season, only 0.01% of all fans in attendance at British football matches (*1 in every 16,800 fans*) were arrested for racist behaviour. Such evidence has led authors such as Kilvington (2017, p.77) to suggest that “*football has entered a new ‘post-racial’ era in which racism is no longer considered the norm or embedded within fan cultures*”. The fact that in 2016, FIFA (*the international governing body of association football*) decided to disband its anti-racism taskforce, claiming that its mission had been “*completely fulfilled*” (Bland, 2016), offers support for such claims.

Clearly, therefore, the likelihood of experiencing racism at a live match has reduced considerably, which suggests that the main barrier that is deterring many British Asian fans is not ‘actual experiences of racism’, but rather the ‘perceptions of racism’ that they have attached to the idea of attending live matches. It is clear from the interviews with the fans that do not attend, that they have built up negative perceptions of what the live match experience will be like, based on what they have heard about the history of racism and violence at football matches. These excerpts from non-attending fans evidence that it is these perceptions, rather than actual experiences of racism, that prevent them from going to games:

“Having grown up in the 80s and 90s, I saw a lot of racism and violence going on in football on the TV and that’s just stuck with me really...it’s created a fear which I’d find hard to budge without actually experiencing a match for myself... but building myself up to take that risk just doesn’t seem worth it to me” (Participant N13, interview).

“When you’ve heard stories about what’s happened in the past and you hear about that kind of legacy of racism in football, it’s very hard not to have those doubts in your head about going... I love football and would love to be able to see it live but at the moment it’s still a very scary idea for me” (Participant N9, interview).

“The real barrier is not knowing... for me and a lot of other Asians, there is a big fear that we’ll be targeted and that we might get abused or attacked because in our heads it’s a very intimidating environment... but apart from knowing that it’s dominated by whites and there’s alcohol, we don’t really know what it’s like...since I was a kid I’ve been told by everyone that football isn’t for us, that it’s dangerous, so it’s hard to remove those thoughts no matter how much I love the game” (Participant N2, interview).

These insights provide clear support for Burdsey and Randhawa’s (2012, p.106) suggestion that “*perceptions of racism can inhibit British Asian fans from attending games just as much as any actual experiences*” and are very much in line with the thoughts of Anwar Uddin:

“There are so many [British Asians] that love watching football but never actually go and watch it live... a big factor in that is that large parts of these communities that have never experienced live football, base their opinions on what it would be like from what they have seen and heard from the past... and if I’m honest that probably wouldn’t paint a pretty picture... but it’s vital now that we work to try and challenge these perceptions because things have changed” (Anwar Uddin, interview).

It is clear, therefore, that those within the industry and those that actually attend games, believe that racism is no longer a significant barrier to the attendance of British Asian fans. Those that do not attend, however, do still see racism as a barrier, but admit that this barrier is built more on what they have heard from others rather than any actual experiences. This confirms Burdsey and Randhawa's (2012) claim that it is the 'perceptions of racism and exclusion' that many British Asian fans have, rather than 'actual racism', that is the major barrier to their attendance. Moreover, it suggests that now 'significant improvements' have been made in reducing 'actual racism' at matches, clubs need to turn their attention to addressing and challenging these damaging perceptions.

Religio-cultural barriers

Religio-cultural barriers have also been widely cited as key reasons for why British Asian fans typically avoid the live match experience. According to the literature, the 'traditional live match experience' (*which still exists at most grounds across the country, particularly in the lower leagues*) conflicts with many of the religious and cultural needs of British Asian supporters. As research suggests that most British Asians "*would put religious and cultural needs before any desire to watch football*" (Lewis, 2015, p.80), the failure of football clubs to meet these needs is a significant barrier to their attendance. This is a view which is shared by Riz Rehman:

"I think that some of the cultural clashes that exist are a factor in why many [British Asians] don't attend. For Muslim fans in particular, with the alcohol, the food, not being able to pray, it can make it difficult... in this day and age there's no reason why we shouldn't be catering for everyone and I think once more clubs (some in the Premier League and Championship have multi-faith rooms) start to do that, it will make the idea of going to games much more attractive to the" (interview).

The religio-cultural barriers that Riz referred to – the presence of alcohol; the lack of halal, vegetarian and Asian cuisine refreshments; the absence of prayer facilities; and prayer times clashing with match times – have featured frequently throughout past research and were all noted multiple times throughout the interviews with the British Asian fans. The significance of these barriers in the decision of 'whether to attend or not', however, differed considerably amongst all of them. The presence of alcohol, for example, was seen as a major barrier for some Muslim supporters, and for others not so much. These responses demonstrate the mixed views given on the presence of alcohol at live matches:

"It isn't the sole reason I don't go but it's a big issue for me... we aren't forbidden from being around alcohol but when you've got fans throwing it around and stuff it's a no go really. It's not just that it might get on our skin, it's that we're not used to being around drunk people either... the idea of that is quite unnerving to me" (Participant N1, interview).

"For me personally, the alcohol isn't a barrier... I mean you do see it but not that much, you only see people drinking it inside where it's served, it's not in the stands or anything, so really it's quite easy to avoid... compared to other things I've been to like boxing matches and concerts and stuff, where I've had beer thrown all over

me before, football games really aren't that bad at all" (Participant Y1, interview).

The Muslim participants also had differing thoughts on the absence of prayer rooms inside the stadium. For one Muslim supporter, not having somewhere to pray inside the stadium – when matches so often clash with the time of afternoon and evening prayer – was a serious barrier and attending matches for him would mean *"putting football ahead of my religion and that's a decision which isn't even close... if I can watch it at home where I can pray and be a good Muslim, I'm going to go with that every time"* (Participant N1, interview). Other Muslim participants, however, believed that not being able to pray at live matches was not a significant issue and that it was something that they are unable to do in many other places. Participant N5, who does not attend matches for other reasons, claimed that:

"If a Muslim fan really wanted to go to a game, I don't think not being able to pray for a couple of hours would stop him... there is flexibility in when you pray, you don't have to do it on the minute, you can move things around... and if someone desperately needed to pray during the game then I don't see why they couldn't just pop out of the stadium for a bit to pray and then go back in" (interview).

Participant Y14, who is a Muslim football fan that does attend matches holds a similar view and even suggested that prayer was something which was becoming less important to younger generations:

"I don't think it's much of a barrier to be honest and it's not nice to hear but amongst the younger generations it's [prayer] fizzling out a bit anyway as they're integrating more and more... they aren't praying all the time like they're meant to be already so I definitely don't think it would stop the younger ones from going to a game and they're probably the ones most interested in going anyway" (interview).

Other religio-cultural issues such as the lack of provision of halal and Asian-style food, were not thought of as much as 'barriers' but rather, *"further evidence that the game is not for us, it's for the whites"* (Participant N13, interview). On the whole, however, the religio-cultural issues that were discussed were seen as 'barriers to attendance', however, the significance of these barriers in the decision of whether or not to attend live matches differed considerably. For most fans these issues were not significant barriers, and were not the main reasons why some of them did not attend, but rather, they were seen as 'smaller issues' which combined with other factors often culminated in a motivation not to attend.

Lack of role models (*institutional racism*)

The lack of identifiable role models for British Asians throughout the football industry has also been posited as a barrier to their attendance at live matches. Many authors believe that the lack of British Asian's within the professional game, as players, managers and coaches, makes British Asian fans less inclined to attend live matches (Middleton, 2009; Lewis, 2015; Kilvington, 2013) and this notion is supported by a number of empirical studies. A study undertaken by indianfootball.com (2004), for example, found that *"significantly more"* British Asian fans would make the effort to go to live games if there were more British Asian players on the pitch. Not only has this 'premise' been evidenced in English football, with the increase

in attendance of black supporters (Kessel, 2010), it is also evident in other sports too. Cricket, for example, attracts significantly more British Asian spectators than football does because the number of British Asians in the game as players and coaches is also considerably higher (Lewis, 2015).

Almost all of the fans interviewed in this study, including those that already attend matches, believed that the lack of visibility that British Asian's have within professional football, was a significant barrier to more British Asian fans attending live games. Participant Y9, for example, believes that due to the lack of British Asian players in the game, the Asian community does not have the same level of connection with the players that the white British and black British communities do, which consequently lessens their desire 'to be there':

"The Asian community would definitely be more interested in wanting to see 'one of their own' play live. If the local team had an Asian player I've got no doubt that they'd want to go and support him and make him feel like 'the Asian community is behind you mate' ... because they don't have that, many just watch it on TV... there isn't that 'need to be there' because they don't have that same vested interest and connection with the players that lots of the white and black locals do" (interview).

Clearly, therefore, there is a belief amongst British Asian fans that the introduction of more British Asian players, that they can relate and connect with, would increase their motivations to attend matches. This quote from the interview with Participant N2, who is a Liverpool fan that does not currently go to live games, demonstrates this belief:

"It's hard to say but I'd like to think that if there were more British Asians playing that I'd want to go see them... for me it's not important to be at the game but if there was someone like me out on the pitch that I could relate to then I think I probably would be more interested... I think it would make us feel a bit more included too and a bit more like we should be there at the stadium, just like the white fans" (interview).

Here the participant also alludes to the idea that the lack of British Asian's within professional football, has consequently made some British Asian fans feel like they too cannot be a part of the professional game or the live match experience. This point was reinforced by another fan who does not attend games, who suggests that the absence of British Asian players means more than just a lack of role models:

"I wouldn't call it 'a lack of role models', I would say what is missing more is evidence that the game is for us as well... regardless of who the footballer is, whether he's good or bad, I don't think we'd see it as a role model or someone to look up to, we'd see it as clear evidence that football is something we can do and that there aren't barriers against us... I think when we finally see that there aren't barriers there, we'd feel a lot more included and wanted, and that would probably make us more inclined to start going to games" (Participant N5, interview).

These views are in line with the work of several academics, who argue that this barrier is much deeper than just 'a lack of role models' and suggest that it is instead a form of 'institutional racism' (Kilvington, 2013; Burdsey, 2007; Lewis, 2015). These researchers suggest that the

structures and ethos of the British football industry discriminate against British Asian's and other ethnic minorities, and prevent them from having access to the same rights and opportunities as others. They believe that these 'institutional barriers' not only prevent British Asian's from engaging with the professional game as players, coaches and businesspersons, but also as spectators; as many British Asian fans feel like the same barriers are for them too, when in reality they probably are not.

All in all, it is fairly conclusive to say that British Asian fans do feel that the lack of British Asians in professional football, particularly as players, is a significant barrier to their attendance, and that an increase in British Asian presence within the game would increase their interest and motivations to attend.

Socio-economic disadvantage

The accessibility of match day tickets for British Asian supporters is also a key theme within the literature. According to Middleton (2009, p.42) "*one of the main reasons there is such a small number of Asians at football grounds are the economic constraints that affect this section of the population*". Research suggests that despite the increased spending power of British Asian consumers, large sections of the British Asian population still suffer from 'severe socio-economic disadvantage' (McGuire et al, 2001; Stevenson & Sanchez, 2008; Lewis, 2015), which according to Burdsey and Randhawa "*is highly likely to impact on their ability to purchase increasingly expensive match tickets*" (2012, p.107). The cost of match tickets, given the current socio-economic status of many British Asian supporters, is therefore believed to be another significant barrier to their attendance at live matches (Middleton, 2009).

Whilst all of the fans in this study agreed that the cost of tickets was a big issue, there were mixed opinions on whether it was any more of a barrier for British Asian fans, than it was for fans of other ethnicities. Participant N15, for example, believes that it is a bigger issue for British Asian fans because "*although the younger generations are doing much better, the majority still come from low income households and would never have the kind of disposable income needed to go to a match these days*". He went on further to suggest that the cost of match tickets is "*the biggest reason you get so many Asians who are what you'd call 'arm chair supporters' who just stay at home and watch it on TV*" (interview).

Other fans, however, believe that most British Asian's do have the money now but choose not to spend it on 'luxuries' like going to football because it is not in their culture to do that. These responses illustrate this point:

"Coming from Pakistan and India, money is a big factor in why you don't get many Asians going to games but it's not that they can't afford it, it's just that a lot of them will put other things first... getting football tickets or a season ticket even, is way down on that list for Asians, especially with families...how is the dad and son going to a game going to benefit the rest of the family... many Pakistani families send a lot of money back every month to relatives in Pakistan too, so these factors are key in why most won't spend money on things like football" (Participant Y14, interview).

“There are some that totally can’t afford it but there’s a lot that can afford it but won’t prioritise it because it’s not in their culture to do that... I feel like it’s not a necessity to be there for Asians and never will be in the same way that going to the game every Saturday is for many white British fans” (Participant Y3, interview).

“We have the money, it’s not that, I just think in our culture we are a lot more cautious and tend to prioritise things that we absolutely need... when we can watch it at home for free, then spending loads on going to the game is never going to be a priority... I think because lots of us have come from poorer backgrounds, you know our grandparents we’re very poor when they first came over, so we perhaps just think a bit more about what we spend” (Participant Y12, interview).

These views are very much in line with the findings of Lewis’ (2015, p.74) research which found that British Asians are often more *“careful in their consumption decisions”* and tend to *“prioritise necessities over luxuries”*. He suggests that this is primarily because of the influence that ‘the family’ has during purchasing decision and also explains that *“because their parents worked so hard to give them a good start in the UK, many feel it would be against their values to spend so much money to watch a football game...and fear that parents would frown upon such consumption behaviour”* (2015, p.76). One of the British Asian participants (Respondent B2) in his study exemplifies this point:

“If I spent hundreds on going to football games then it would be against my values as I try to live a simple life. If I was to spend all that money when I could watch it at home and give that money to my family, I would worry what people would think of me” (cited in Lewis, 2015, p.76).

For some of the fans, however, the cost of tickets was not an issue at all, and as postulated by Burdsey and Randhawa (2012), the barrier for them instead was actually the availability of match tickets. In their 2012 study, they found that many British Asian fans would like to go to more matches but were often prevented from doing so because of their inability to get hold of tickets, due to longstanding *“loyalty/priority schemes or the ways in which season-tickets are passed down through families”* (p.110). This was the case for several supporters in this study, who due to loyalty schemes that were in place long before their interest in attending matches, were either unable to attend games at all, or just not able to go as often as they would like to go. These excerpts from the interviews demonstrate the significance of this barrier for British Asian fans:

“I’d love to start going to Liverpool games but the big thing stopping me really is that it’s just too hard to get a ticket. Whenever I look they’re always sold out or being resold for like £200 so I don’t know how I’m ever going to get them... and it’s like a 20 year waiting list for season tickets too so it’s quite disheartening really... I probably would say it’s the main reason I don’t go to games... well Liverpool ones anyway, I’m still not sure about the smaller stadiums” (Participant N9, interview).

“It’s a very frustrating barrier but I don’t really know what the top clubs can do... I’ve been on the waiting list for a United season ticket for about 10 years now and don’t seem to be any closer to getting one... I’ve got a membership which allows me to get a few tickets each season but I’d love to go more... I don’t think it’s only Asians who struggle but because our dad’s and granddad’s never went, the system of how tickets get distributed works against us a bit really” (Participant Y4, interview).

Clearly, therefore, because British Asians attending matches is still very much a new thing (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012), these loyalty schemes which predate their interest in going to games, are a significant barrier to their attendance.

On the whole, it was clear from the responses that the cost of tickets is a barrier to attendance for British Asian supporters. However, it was also apparent that it is not always due to the ‘unaffordability’ of tickets, as the literature suggests. Instead, it appears that many British Asians can afford to purchase tickets but choose not to because spending lots of money on luxuries like going to football is not in their culture and is against their values. For those that can afford it and are happy to spend money on football tickets, the ‘availability of tickets’ can also be a major barrier. Whilst ticket rarity, for the top games in particular, is quite a common barrier for ‘all supporters’, it is perhaps more significant for British Asian fans (*and other ethnic minorities*), who are disadvantaged against by longstanding loyalty/priority schemes for tickets, which predate their interest in attending live games. It was evident, however, that both the cost and availability of tickets was only really seen as a barrier to attending top Premier League games; most participants felt that the price and availability of tickets for their local teams was not a major barrier.

Barriers to attendance for British Asian fans

(Findings new to the literature)

Parental influence

A theme which emerged from the interviews with the fans that had not been considered in previous research was ‘parental influence’. It was clear among a number of the participants, that they felt that ‘parental influence’ was a significant factor in why ‘traditional white British supporters’ typically develop a deeper attachment with their teams and a stronger desire to attend live matches than British Asian fans do. They highlighted that whereas white British fans are typically introduced to football through the ‘live match experience’ (*when the dad takes their kid along to games*), British Asian’s are generally introduced to it through the media (*TV, papers, internet*) and other mediums, and do not receive anywhere near the same level of parental encouragement to take an interest in football or a particular team. They argue that because they have not engaged with the ‘live match experience’ from an early age, it is not something which is important to them in the same way that it is for many white British fans, and many, therefore, happily continue to engage with football through the media rather than live matches. These extracts demonstrate these views and highlight the idea of ‘a lack of parental influence’ being a barrier to attendance for British Asian fans:

“The type of fans that go to football stadiums are the ones that are brought up in that culture of football and going to games every Saturday, where the father hands it down to the son and that’s how they’re introduced to it... as Pakistani’s we don’t have that. That football culture doesn’t exist in our families, so football is not something which is passed down or encouraged by our parents... we are introduced to it through TV and radio and that’s the football we know, so we don’t see going to the ground as the be all and end all, we don’t need it to enjoy football” (Participant N13, interview).

“I think your average white football fan see’s going to the game as almost like a religious ritual, like it’s just something that you do... and that’s because they are born into that environment... they go as kids with their dads or grandads and that’s the way they interact and engage with football, they know no different. For us, we don’t know football like that. Our dads weren’t in to football so we didn’t have anyone to introduce us to the game in that way, we’ve developed our own interest in the game through what we’ve seen in the media and talking about it with friends and that’s how we enjoy football, we don’t see the importance of needing to be there” (Participant N6, interview).

It is clear here that there is a significant difference in how British Asians are introduced to football and that this has had a significant impact on the importance they give to attending live matches and their desire to do so. Lewis (2015, p.102) similarly found differences in how British Asians become interested in football, suggesting that *“their awareness of football has not followed the traditional approach of mainstream football supporters, in that they have not been socialised into the sport through parental influence”*. Although this seems to be the case for the majority of British Asian fans, one participant revealed that they had been introduced to football by their parents:

“My dad used to take me to Bradford City games from a very young age and I used to love it. I didn’t know too much about the football itself but I loved the atmosphere and buzz around the stadium... these early experiences have definitely made me appreciate live football a lot more... that atmosphere and getting to see things in games you can’t see on TV, I’d much rather watch it live any day and try to go as much as I can now” (Participant Y1, interview).

Whilst this participants experience suggests that not all British Asians have no parental influence to spectate at live games, his case also provides proof of the importance of being introduced to the live match experience from a young age, as he now places great importance on the ‘live match experience’ and attends live games regularly.

Although no research has previously considered ‘parental influence’ (*or the lack of*) as a reason why British Asian fans do not to attend live matches, there is support for this belief in other fields of literature. Funk et al (2002), for example, identified ‘parental influence’ as one of the most important ‘awareness factors’ in the development of ‘loyal sports fans’ and numerous researchers have also looked at ‘parental influence’ as a possible factor in why there are so few British Asian professional footballers. These studies suggest that the lack of parental support that young British Asian players receive is a significant barrier to their chances of becoming professional footballers. According to Pilger (2007), most British Asian parents actively discourage their children from playing football as they see little value in it, and instead push their children to pursue more realistic and respectable careers in law, accountancy and medicine (Lewis, 2015). Whilst this parental attitude towards football can be clearly used to explain why there are so few British Asian players, it is clear that it could also be used to explain why there are so few British Asian fans attending matches.

Influence of television

Another major theme which was discussed that had not been looked at in past research was the influence of televised football on the attendance of British Asian fans. Whilst several studies have examined the impact of television coverage on spectator attendance, no research has looked specifically at its influence on British Asian fans. Based on the interviews with the fans in this study, it is clear that the increasing number of live televised football matches is one of, if not ‘the’ biggest factor in why so many British Asian fans choose not to attend live matches. All fifteen of the non-attending supporters that were interviewed admitted that the ease and lower cost of watching games on television was one of the main reasons why they did not attend live games. These accounts highlight some of the other reasons why television coverage is such a significant factor in their decision not to attend live games:

“I don’t get why you would go to games when they’re all on the TV or online for you, basically for free... for me it’s a bit like movies, people don’t pay a tenner to go to the cinema anymore, they wait a week and see it online for free... football is an even easier decision, not only is TV miles cheaper than going but you see it live as it happens and probably have a better experience, you’ve got the comfort of your own home, you’re warm, you’ve got the benefit of replays, it’s a no brainer” (Participant N2, interview).

“I think a major barrier is the sheer amount of football on television now and not even just TV anymore, it’s the online streaming now as well, so a lot of people think I don’t need to go anywhere to watch a match, I can just watch it from the comfort of my arm chair and my own home, where I can drink and eat what I want and not have the wind piping down my neck” (Participant N6, interview).

“I grew up in the generation of Sky Sports and get nearly all my football from Sky and I think it’s a really good experience. It’s convenient, it’s easy, it’s cheaper, I get all the action I want, I can switch off when I want, I don’t have to do any travelling and that’s why I don’t go to stadiums. If it was a once in a lifetime event... the World Cup final and England were in it, I’d like to go for the experience but I wouldn’t think my satisfaction of watching the game would be any better than it would be at home” (Participant N13, interview).

It is clear therefore that the television experience brings many benefits to British Asian fans, and for those that have never experienced a live match, it seems many of them believe the television experience to be a superior one, as well as being cheaper, easier and more accessible. Whilst Metcalfe (2005) was not looking specifically at the influence of television, he did find that 83% of British Asians would prefer to watch football within the confines of their own home, rather than go to games, which is consistent with the findings above.

Although it is clear that the influence of television is a significant factor in why many British Asian fans choose not to attend live matches, it is worth noting that similar findings have been found in relation to supporters of all ethnicities. According to Borland and MacDonald (2003), televised football is a significant threat to the attendance of all supporters, including ‘traditional mainstream supporters’. Buraimo et al (2006, p.3) suggest that televised matches have “*reduced the appeal of the professional football match as a spectacle*” and empirical evidence supports this. Almost all of the studies that have examined the impacts that televising games has on match-day attendances, highlight a drop in spectator attendance when games are televised (Baimbridge et al, 1996; Garcia & Rodriguez, 2002; Buraimo et al, 2006; Allan & Roy, 2008;

Buraimo et al, 2010), with a reduction of up to 8% found in EPL games (Buraimo et al, 2010) and 30% in the EFL and Scottish Premier League (SPL) games (Allan & Roy, 2008).

It would appear, therefore, that televised football is a barrier to attendance for all supporters, not just British Asians. However, where the effect of televised football differs between British Asian fans and mainstream fans, is that many British Asian fans have never experienced football in any other way. This, according to some of the fans in this study, has created a bit of a ‘disconnect’ between football and the real world, making them less likely to consider physically going to a game. Participant N13, for example, suggests that because he has only ever experienced football on television, he sees football more as ‘media entertainment’, rather than something which is ‘real life’ and this is a key reason why attending live matches is not something he seriously considers:

“The other day I was thinking, just down the road we’ve got two of the biggest football clubs in the world, Man City and Man United, and Man City are now playing some of the best football we’ve ever seen and they’re only 30 miles away from me, yet I wouldn’t ever consider going to watch them because they seem a million miles away from me. Even if I lived in Manchester, it wouldn’t register in my head that we’ve got two world class teams here that I can go watch because I only ever see them on the TV, they’re not part of the real world for me, they’re just an entertainment world and I think that is the way that I see football, rather than something that I live and breathe, it’s just a fake entertainment world for me and that’s how I enjoy it” (interview).

Barriers to attendance for ‘local clubs’

(Findings consistent with existing literature)

Attraction to the top teams

According to the literature, the most significant barrier for ‘local clubs’ trying to attract more British Asian supporters, is the lure and attraction of the top EPL teams. Evidence suggests that in spite of where they are geographically based, British Asians are typically only interested in following the biggest and most successful clubs (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Lewis, 2015; Kilvington, 2017). In Lewis’ (2015, p.68) study of 30 British Asian football fans, for example, not one participant expressed an interest in following their ‘local club’, leading him to conclude that *“British Asians seem only to be attracted to the very best teams, those who have the best players, who play in the best leagues and arguably have the most brand appeal.”* Similar findings were discovered in this study, as not one of the British Asian fans interviewed was a supporter of their local club; they all supported top EPL clubs like Liverpool and Manchester United, despite all being born and based in various parts of the country.

Lewis (2015) suggests that the main attraction of these ‘top teams’ is the prestige and social value attached to them. He claims that British Asian fans *“want to be associated with the teams that have the greatest perceived value amongst their social circles”* (2015, p.92) and this was apparent among the fans in this research. It was clear from their responses that their ‘local clubs’ had very little ‘perceived value’ within their social circles and, as a result, only the ‘top teams’ were an option for them in order to ‘fit in’. Participant Y10 exemplifies this point perfectly:

“I remember at school with my mates, all we wanted to talk about was the Premier League and the top teams...we all supported Arsenal, Man United, Liverpool, no one really talked about Peterborough or any local teams, so I guess I would have felt left out if I wasn't supporting one of the big teams and I wouldn't have been able to join in the conversations with my mates about the top games and top players” (interview).

According to several supporters in this study, their attraction to the teams with the most prestige and brand appeal is a product of their South Asian culture. Participant N8, for example, admitted that there is a big attraction to “*big quality brands*” in his culture and suggests that this is reflected in the teams that they choose to follow:

“I think our preference for these teams has a lot to do with our culture in that we like quality and we like brands... I don't want to say we're materialistic but you know us Asian lads we like Audi's, BMW's, Mercedes, expensive clothes, big brands... you see our weddings too, there's so much glamour and grandness, and you can see that in football... Man United and Liverpool, these are huge brands recognised all over the world with huge glamour and prestige attached to them and we like to be linked with that and part of it cos it makes us look better and feel good” (interview).

This suggestion is in line with research which suggests that British Asian consumers have a “*strong status-orientation which makes brands disproportionately important compared with the mainstream*” (Fletcher, 2003, p.3). Moreover, Lewis (2015, p.22) suggests that “*British Asians are loyal to brands that have a perceived status and prestige attached to them*” and this is clearly reflective within the context of football also.

Research has also speculated that one of the key reasons why British Asians are attracted to the ‘top teams’, is their desire to be associated with success (Lewis, 2015). Success was an important factor for all of the participants in this study, with many citing that their local teams were not particularly good or successful, as one of the main reasons why they supported the top teams instead. Several supporters admitted that British Asians could be considered as ‘glory hunters’ and yet again linked this mentality back to their culture. Participant Y4, who is a Manchester United fan from Essex, suggests that wanting to be successful is something which is ingrained in them from an early age and believes that it is natural that they would want the same from their football team:

“In Indian and Pakistani culture we like success and we like ambition and I think that's why you find so many people from our culture supporting these big teams who are fighting for the top, top trophies... we ourselves always strive for success, whether that's in school or at work, and that's instilled in us by our parents from an early age, so I think it's just natural that we want that from our football teams too” (interview).

The attraction of star players was also a pertinent factor in their attraction to the top teams, however, most fans disagreed with Lewis' suggestion that “*the teams South Asians support are secondary to the players the teams possess*” (2015, p.69).

It is clear, therefore, that the attraction of the top teams is a very serious barrier for local clubs trying to attract British Asians from the local community, and one they can do relatively little

about due to their inability to compete with these teams. The ‘obsession’ that British Asian fans have with the top teams, and all the success, prestige and top players that come with it, is typified by the stories of two of the supporters in this study, who both admitted to going to watch their local club (*Bradford City*) but only to see the opposition team:

“The only game I’ve ever been to was a Bradford City game, it was actually the cup game against Arsenal and to be honest I was only really there to see Arsenal... when you’ve got a big team in town, you can’t pass up the chance to see all those world class players...I think there was probably more Asians there than ever before actually” (Participant N9, interview).

“I wasn’t really a fan but I did go watch Bradford fairly often when they were in the Premier League, especially when they were playing United and Liverpool and stuff, and you know I will be honest that was more because I wanted to see the opposition, I wanted to see top players the other teams had and watch good football” (Participant Y1, interview).

Marketing barriers

Although no research has looked specifically at how football clubs market to British Asians, marketing literature suggests that British companies on the whole have generally struggled to market to ethnic minority groups (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998; Krug, 2008). Research suggests that UK companies (*including football clubs*) are significantly behind countries like the United States when it comes to ethnic marketing and are consequently missing out on valuable opportunities to grow their customer base. Krug (2008, p.1) states that:

“Whereas marketers in the US are becoming increasingly aware of the power of the ethnic market and are growing more disposed to meet their needs... UK businesses have been comparatively slow to target ethnic minority markets, as only one fifth of British companies are reaching out to ethnic minority consumers with ethnically-based strategies.”

According to Burton (2002), the only way that companies can take full advantage of the growing ethnic markets in the UK is through deploying “*ethnically-based marketing strategies*”. The need to develop such strategies was earlier proposed as a barrier for ‘local clubs’ – who are unlikely to have the marketing and financial resources available to develop targeted marketing strategies on top of their mainstream marketing strategies – and this was confirmed in the interviews with both the industry experts and the fans themselves. Based on their experiences of working with clubs to attract more BAME fans, the industry experts highlighted that very few ‘local clubs’ were employing ethnically-based marketing strategies and this was consistent with the findings amongst the fans; none of whom could recall any targeted attempts by their local clubs to get them to attend.

Humayun Islam, who is the Chair of the West Riding County Football Association’s Inclusion Advisory Group, suggests that not enough clubs are making targeted efforts to attract British Asians from the local community. In his interview he claimed that too many ‘local clubs’ were adopting a ‘catch-all approach’ to marketing and stated that “*When so many [British Asians] already feel like the game isn’t for them, they aren’t going to respond to generic campaigns...*

they're going to assume it's not meant for them and likely ignore it". The same was felt by Participant Y3, who is a Manchester United fan that regularly attends games. He highlighted the differences between the way that Manchester United market to him and the way that his local club market to him:

"I'm not saying that better marketing would make me more interested in Preston or Blackburn or more likely to go to games but I do think having some tailored campaigns is important... like where are the Asians in their adverts if they want us to feel like we're welcome there? In United's marketing it's very clear that different cultures are welcome but from what I've seen of my local clubs in the paper and on the radio, it just always seems to be targeted at their core fans, there's no kind of extra effort which makes you think 'ah they're actually talking to me, they want new fans'" (interview).

It is clear, therefore, that the failure of local clubs to adopt targeted ethnic marketing strategies, is a significant barrier to their ability to attract more British Asian supporters.

Aside from resource constraints, one of the other chief reasons why so few British companies, and so few local football clubs, are targeting ethnic minority groups with tailored (*ethnically-based*) strategies, is the lack of consumer research that exists on ethnic groups within the UK. Krug (2008) suggests that there is a significant lack of knowledge and understanding among British firms about the purchasing patterns and behaviours of different ethnic subcultures, and states that this has created a climate of 'uncertainty' and 'apprehension' around the idea of pursuing ethnically-based marketing strategies. According to Fletcher (2003, p.3), one of the biggest concerns that marketers have with such strategies is the potential to cause offence through being "*unintentionally racist, stereotypical, tokenistic and patronising*". Anwar Uddin (interview) suggests that this caution is also clear among a number of the football clubs that he has worked with and suggests that many are often nervous about targeting ethnic groups because they are scared of offending or singling out parts of the community. He argues that that the lack of confidence that clubs have to be able target these groups is a significant barrier to their ability to increase the number of ethnic supporters they attract.

There was a clear consensus among the participants that the failure of local clubs to adopt ethnic-based marketing strategies is a barrier to them attracting more British Asian fans. Although the fans themselves admitted that tailored marketing alone would be unlikely to increase their motivations to attend, they did suggest that such marketing would play a 'significant role' in making them feel welcome and wanted by the club. It is clear that many British Asians feel like generic marketing campaigns are not addressed to them which results in them paying little attention to them. It also evident that the significant lack of cultural knowledge and data available on these groups is also a barrier to clubs, because they do not feel confident enough to carry out such strategies.

Barriers to attendance for 'local clubs' (Findings new to the literature)

Lack of visibility

One theme which was prominent throughout the discussions on the barriers that local clubs face, was the lack of visibility and presence that these clubs have within their local Asian communities. It was clear from the responses that there is a significant lack of awareness among British Asians about their local clubs, which is in turn a significant barrier to their support and subsequent attendance at matches. Participant N15, for example, suggests that because he was brought up in ‘predominantly Asian’ social circles, he was never introduced to his local clubs and, as such, never had an opportunity to grow an interest or attachment to them:

“If I was trying to pinpoint why I wasn’t a supporter of Huddersfield or Bradford, who were the closest teams growing up, it’s probably because I wasn’t really aware of them... cos they weren’t in the Premier League they weren’t talked about in the places I went to, I was at a predominantly Asian school and hung out with mainly Asian mates, so in terms of football it was all about the big teams cos they were the ones we saw on TV... even though geographically they were so close, I had no real way of knowing about them, I never saw or heard anything from them” (interview).

Clearly, therefore, the lack of engagement that British Asians have with their local clubs, particularly whilst growing up, is a significant factor in why so few support their local club, and this was confirmed further by the industry experts. Riz Rehman, who works with local clubs to address this barrier, claims that the lack of awareness that British Asian kids have of their local teams is *“probably the biggest barrier these clubs have”* (interview). He suggests that if local clubs do not start to interact and engage with young British Asians and make themselves known to these groups, they will continually struggle to attract British Asian supporters:

“The lack of visibility they [local clubs] have within the local Asian communities is probably the biggest barrier these clubs have. So many kids have no idea about their local clubs because they’re just not introduced to them in the same way that white locals are... their family aren’t going to introduce them, their friends are unlikely to and the media isn’t... these kids mainly know about the big clubs that are talked about around them, the ones they see on TV every weekend... smaller clubs need to make themselves visible in these communities, they have to proactively make that engagement because unlike the big clubs, it won’t just happen” (interview).

Although this barrier has been largely overlooked in the literature, Lewis (2015) has found evidence to suggest that ‘the lack of visibility’ that local clubs have within British Asian communities is a significant factor in why so many British Asians support the ‘top teams’ – whose presence is far more visible due to their unrivalled media coverage. Lewis (2015) argues that the coverage of football in the British media is dominated by the top EPL teams, leaving local clubs reliant on local media to raise their profile. As research suggests that younger British Asians are more likely to consume mainstream media than local media (Krug, 2008), this explains why there is such little awareness of local clubs in these communities. Interestingly, one fan in this study suggested that the lack of media coverage that local teams receive would make it difficult to maintain an interest in them:

“It would be really hard to support your local team I think cos you’d barely see or hear anything about them through the week. Yeah you’d see the game on Saturday but then that’s it. If you support a Premier League team it never stops, every hour it’s there in your face. You don’t even have to be looking for it, their presence is just

always there and that constantly keeps that interest there for me” (Participant Y10, interview).

Section 2

Potential service and marketing solutions

This section of the discussion explores the ways that football clubs can address these barriers and attract more British Asian fans to attend matches. It will analyse a number of service and marketing solutions that were presented in the primary and secondary data and groups these under ‘theoretical umbrellas’ based on their business purpose. Seven ‘umbrellas’ will be explored in total and these are:

1. Providing a tailored and inclusive service
2. Community involvement in decisions
3. Familiarising the stadium environment
4. Creating role model figures within the club
5. Targeted marketing strategies
6. Enhancing visibility in British Asian communities (community engagement)
7. Asian supporters’ groups

Providing a tailored and inclusive service

The solution that featured most prominently throughout the primary and secondary data was the need for football clubs to provide a more ‘tailored and inclusive’ match day service for British Asian supporters. Several authors have previously stressed the need for football clubs to create a service which better caters for the religio-cultural needs of British Asian consumers (Burdsey, 2007; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012; Lewis, 2015) and this was reaffirmed by the participants in this study. All three industry experts indicated that football clubs would continually struggle to attract British Asian fans if they did not start to meet basic cultural needs. Riz Rehman (interview), for example, argues that initiatives such as the provision of multi-faith prayer rooms, Halal and vegetarian menus, and alcohol-free refreshment zones, should be “*second nature in this day and age*” and suggests that football is “*rapidly falling behind*” other industries in terms of catering for ethnic needs. However, he notes that a number of the ‘top clubs’ are growing increasingly accustomed to meeting the needs of British Asian fans and suggests that it is reflected in the diversity of their crowds:

“More and more top clubs are starting to cater for these needs and I think that is reflected in the number of ethnic minority fans going to top flight games now. Most Premier League clubs provide prayer rooms now and most have halal and vegetarian options, and these are just things we expect in today’s society, look at airports etc... lower league teams need to follow suit or they’re going to get left behind even further” (interview).

A number of the supporters that were interviewed held a similar view and argued that clubs needed to start providing something for British Asian fans inside the stadium, in addition to just the game itself. Participant N6 (interview), for example, suggested that currently most British Asian fans do not get a service, “*they get a seat and that’s it*” and argued that “*when you are paying good money to go to a game, you want to enjoy the full experience like other supporters are able to, not just the football*”. Participant Y12 (interview) similarly suggested that British Asian fans do not receive the same service as ‘traditional fans’, and indicated that clubs need to start providing an alternative service for Asian fans if they want them to return regularly:

“Once they’re inside the stadium, clubs have to deliver a better experience for them, they need to make them feel like there’s something for them besides the football or they’re just gonna stay at home. The food is an obvious one, they’ve got all the favourites for traditional fans, what’s wrong with an option on for Asian fans, some chicken and rice or something... having a drink and a pie is all part of the experience for traditional fans and we don’t have something like that at the moment... even something silly like having some bhangra music played before matches, maybe having some Asian entertainment at half time, just creating a bit of an ambience we can feel a part of.”

Humayun Islam (interview) argues, however, that it is important that clubs take a “*collective approach*” to addressing the needs of British Asian fans and create a “*full service*” for them, rather than “*the odd initiative here and there*”. He claims that there would be little value in providing a prayer room if there was then nothing on the menu that they could eat and this notion was supported by a number of the fans in this study. Participant Y12, for example, highlighted some of the contradictions that would exist if clubs did not take a holistic approach to meeting the needs of British Asian fans:

“If you did have a prayer room but it was somewhere else in the stadium where there was still alcohol about it’s a bit contradictory really, because you can’t really pray without being clean. There is a process you have to go through and if you’ve got alcohol on you then it would be an even more rigorous process and not really possible, so I think packaging it all together is important in my opinion” (interview).

Linked with this idea, a number of the non-attending supporters suggested that if clubs were to create certain sections within the stadium where all of these needs could be met, then they would be much more likely to attend. They proposed that this was one way of providing a service which could cater for their needs without impacting on the needs of traditional mainstream supporters. These extracts demonstrate the positive impact that these spaces could have on the motivations of British Asians to attend:

“If I knew there were certain areas set up for more ‘non-traditional fans’ where I didn’t have to worry about alcohol or violence, where I could get hot food and a drink, that would really reduce a lot of doubts for me... if I knew I was going to have a nice comfortable experience and not have to worry about things I’d definitely consider going” (Participant N11, interview).

“Whilst I don’t think it would be a good idea to segregate fans, I think it would make a big difference for me if there were certain areas where it was like ‘if you want to drink beer go to this side and if you don’t want to go to this side’... anything clubs can

do to create like mini sub-environments in the stadium which make Muslims like myself feel a bit more comfortable and a bit safer would really help” (Participant N1, interview).

All of the fans indicated, however, that labelling these areas as ‘the Asian section’ would do more harm than good and would segregate and exclude British Asian fans further. They suggested that these sections would need to be developed and marketed in a subtle fashion. One fan proposed that clubs could do this through developing their family stands into spaces which cater for both family needs and ethnic minority needs:

“I think the family stand is the perfect thing to advertise to Asian communities. If clubs make them bigger and turn them into areas that meet the needs of families and Asians that would be the best way to do it. I think Asians would subliminally start to see it as something for them... I think labelling it child friendly would certainly calm a lot fears about racism, violence, aggression etc... making sure no alcohol is allowed, making sure it has a prayer room, that it serves halal options, vegetarian food, perhaps giving it a different menu to the rest of the stadium. I have experienced something similar at Chelsea’s ground before and I really think this is the answer” (Participant Y14, interview).

Evidently then, creating a tailored service or space within the stadium that satisfies most, if not all, of these religio-cultural needs, is something which British Asian fans would be supportive of and something that clubs should seriously consider. What was interesting, however, was that most of the fans indicated that it would make them more likely to attend more because of the message it connotes rather than it making their experience any easier or more enjoyable. Several non-attending supporters suggested that if clubs were to create this kind of service for them, it would be a ‘real signal’ that they are welcome and wanted at the matches. This quote from Participant N5 (interview) summarises this viewpoint:

“I don’t think it would make getting to the game easier or make your time when you are there easier, I think it would be more of a signal to Muslims to say ‘look were actually doing this because we’re happy for you to come to our grounds, we’re happy to have you here and you’re welcome here, you’re part of the local area and we can make these allowances to make the environment more friendlier for you’, so it would be more of signal that we should be going to these games rather than we’re going to make it easier for you to come, it’s not really going to practically make it any easier”.

Evidently then, as well as reducing many of the religio-cultural barriers that exist, providing a tailored service for British Asian supporters would also significantly reduce their perceptions that they are not welcome and are excluded from the stadium environment. Indeed, Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.108) suggest that the most effective way to combat such perceptions is by creating a “welcoming and inclusive environment”, which these initiatives would do. They propose that it is vital that clubs “emphasise that diverse cultures are welcome and valued, both within the stadium and the fan collectivity in general, as it is only when British Asian fans feel valued that they will begin the process of developing attachment and belonging to a club”. Indeed, the figures revealed in the 2011 FA Premier League Fan Survey demonstrate the impact that creating a welcoming and inclusive environment could have, with 69% of Muslim British Asians and 53%

of non-Muslim British Asians suggesting that they would be either “*much more likely*” or “*more likely*” to attend matches if there was a “*welcoming attitude to diverse cultures*”.

Community involvement in decisions (co-developed initiatives)

In order to ensure that they are successfully delivering an inclusive and attractive offering for British Asian supporters, clubs need to reach out to British Asian communities and involve them in decision-making processes. Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) claim that the most effective way of developing successful initiatives to attract more British Asian fans to attend is through engaging with local British Asian communities and working with them to co-develop solutions. They suggest that too many initiatives that clubs introduce to try and attract more ethnic minority supporters are built on “*cultural stereotypes and assumptions*” (p.109) and are consequently often ineffective and potentially counter-productive. They stress, therefore, a need for clubs to develop “*more informed measures*” and to allow input from the communities that they are trying target.

This was echoed by Humayun Islam (interview), who likewise suggests that clubs need to operate in a much more collaborative way if they want to develop and deliver a “*truly inclusive offering that meets the needs of all its fans.*” He proposes that one way that clubs can do this practically and effectively, and on a continuous basis, is through setting up a working group which has key representatives from all of the different minority communities in the local area. He highlights Bradford City’s new ‘Inclusion Advisory Group’, on which he sits, as a prime example of this. The group was set up “*to support and advise Bradford City FC to ensure that they deliver an inclusive offer, and operate in a way that meets the needs of all their supporters and the community within which they serve*” and is made up of several “*Community Champions*” from different minority groups (community groups, religious groups and supporters groups), as well as representatives from the club and organisations such as the Football Supporters’ Federation and the FA (Bradford City FC, 2018). The group meets regularly throughout the year and discusses everything from club policies to new service initiatives, and even potential marketing campaigns, all focused on helping the club to attract supporters from all communities to games and “*creating an environment where everyone is welcome and comfortable*” (Humayun Islam, interview). Humayun suggests that by tapping into the knowledge and networks of key groups in the community, clubs are able to target minority communities much more effectively and develop more successful initiatives based on what these communities actually want, not just assumptions.

Riz Rehman and Anwar Uddin are also advocates of these collaborative groups and stress that more clubs should be working with ‘community groups’ to create a stadium environment that is inclusive to everyone. Anwar (interview) suggests that community groups are always looking for ways to integrate and increase participation and that football clubs need to take advantage of this. He proposes that the knowledge and insights that these groups could offer to clubs would be “*invaluable*”:

“From my experience, they [community groups] are really keen to work with football clubs, if the clubs approach them... these groups work every day to engage their communities and get them involved in things so they’d have some great ideas. Not only

that, they have access to huge networks within their communities... getting them involved, with the influence and connections they have, would be really beneficial.”

The British Asian fans themselves also feel that there is not enough engagement or involvement of Asian communities in the decisions made by football clubs. Participant N2 (interview), for example, noted that he found it hard to believe that clubs were trying to attract more British Asian fans purely because of the lack of engagement they have had with himself and others in his community:

“If clubs do want us there they’ve got a funny way of showing it. How can they be trying to attract us without asking what it is that puts us off and what sort of things we might like changing? I find it an odd approach and a missed opportunity to tell us that they want us to take part and that they’re trying to make the experience better for us, that engagement alone might even be enough for some people to decide to start going.”

Whilst the fans would be supportive of having representatives at key decision-making groups, as discussed above, it was clear that they would prefer initiatives that gave them an opportunity to be directly involved and contribute ideas. Some fans proposed that clubs should host regular fan forums with their local British Asian communities, to give the community a chance to voice their concerns and ideas, and impact on future initiatives implemented by the club. Participant N15 (interview) suggested that direct engagement like this would not only result in the development of more appropriate and effective solutions, but it would also send out a clear message to British Asian communities that the club wants them to attend games and wants to improve the experience for them, *“making them feel more involved and part of the club.”* In addition, Participant N1 (interview) suggests that if British Asian communities are not involved in these collaborative processes, then *“the majority of us won’t even know about the things that clubs are supposedly doing for us, and even if we did see something new they were doing, we wouldn’t necessarily realise they were doing it for us.”*

Clearly, then, involving the community in decisions and working with them in different ways to co-develop solutions, is an effective way of developing more effective and successful solutions, as demonstrated in the increased diversity of Bradford City’s terraces since the establishment of their ‘Inclusion Advisory Group’. It appears that this kind of engagement is also an effective way of sending a clear statement to these communities that the club wants them to attend and to be a part of the club, which is key in overturning their perceptions that they are not welcome or valued in professional football.

Familiarising the stadium environment

Another very popular proposal that emerged throughout the primary and secondary data was the idea of familiarising British Asian communities with the stadium environment. There is a strong perception among many British Asian fans that they are not welcome at matches and, as a result, stadiums have *“historically been spaces to avoid”* for them (Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012, p.109). By introducing British Asian communities to the stadium environment through means other than ‘live football’, it is believed that clubs can familiarise these *“alien*

environments” and significantly reduce these negative perceptions which are restricting their attendance.

Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.109) suggest that when trying to attract new supporters from British Asian communities, clubs should look to “*engage with them in a variety of ways in the first instance*” to try and break down these perceptions, before any attempts are made to encourage them to come to games. Similar views were held by Humayun Islam (interview) who proposed that “*it’s all about getting them there for the first time and then making sure they have a good experience when they are there... that’s how to truly break down those perceptions*”. He suggests that whilst incentives such as free tickets can be a successful way of bringing British Asians to the stadium for the first time, many fans still decline the opportunity because of the negative perceptions they have associated with the live match experience. He posits, therefore, that clubs need to be more creative and explore the different ways that they can get British Asian communities to the stadium.

One way that Humayun proposes that clubs can do this is through hosting community events at the stadium, where British Asian communities and other ethnic groups are invited to the ground to get a feel for the environment and to learn more about the club and the different communities and cultures that are present. He highlights the annual ‘Community Days’ that he runs at Bradford City’s football stadium in partnership with the club and the Football Supporters’ Federation as the ‘perfect introduction’ to the stadium environment for supporters who have never been before (interview):

“It’s the perfect introduction to the professional football environment for these communities. A lot of them have heard bad things about football stadiums and have negative perceptions of what they’d be like but these events are great for quashing those doubts and showing them that they’re just as welcome there as anyone else... it’s just a really fun event, we encourage all communities in the local area to come along and learn a bit more about the club, get a chance to play on the pitch and really just explore the stadium away from the hustle and bustle of a match day”

Riz Rehman (interview) similarly suggests that inviting local Asian communities to the stadium for such events and experiences like stadium tours and talks, are a very effective way of helping fans to “*overcome any fears and perceptions that they have attached with idea of being inside the stadium on a rowdy match day.*”

A number of fans also believe that such events would be an effective way of reducing some of the fears and concerns that British Asians have about going to the stadium. Initiatives such as hosting cultural events and festivals, and Asian-themed charity matches were just some of the ideas put forward. Holding these events during pre-season was identified as an ideal time to trial these initiatives:

“I think pre-season is great time to trial something because you want to boost numbers anyway, so why not try something, where you might say we’re having an Indian-style event, fanfare, we want to experience Indian culture, you know you might have a themed pre-season charity game where you might have fans coming dressed as certain things to do with culture, it’s trying to be creative I guess but once you get people

coming to the stadium more than once, they are more likely to see it as something that they could do more regularly, as a social past time” Participant Y4 (interview).

“Perhaps hosting Asian-style, non-footballing events could work. So maybe a festival at the stadium specifically targeting Asians, where you might have a couple of high-profile speakers from the Asian community or maybe some Asian celebrities or footballers, just something to try and get them there and at least experience the stadium because I think there is a barrier surrounding the stadium. It was big thing for me when I went for the first time and I think if they can get a feel for the environment before they even consider going to a game that would calm a lot of fears” (Participant N15, interview)

Here, the participant also touches on the idea of using ‘non-footballing’ events to try and draw British Asians to the stadium and this too received support in both the primary and secondary data. Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.109), for example, suggest that *“the internal spaces within many modern stadia can be used for a range of activities – conferences, meetings, business forums and weddings (and other cultural ceremonies) – and these should be targeted towards British Asian communities.”* They suggest that opening up the stadium to these communities can help to make it a more familiar and less daunting space, and help to foster new relationships and new channels of dialogue with British Asian communities. They claim that these alternative channels of dialogue will help to break down and overcome many of the perceptions that British Asians have about football clubs and their stadia, reducing a significant barrier to their attendance at matches. Riz Rehman (interview) similarly suggests that:

“Clubs have a lot of stadium space and this could also be offered to local BAME organisations to host meetings and functions etc...it’s all about familiarising the space and breaking down those fears that they associate with that stadium environment.”

Participant N1 (interview), suggests that clubs should look to host events at the stadium that young people would go to. He proposed that events like ‘careers days’ would be a great way of bringing young British Asians to the stadium for the first time and suggested that although it would be an ‘non-football-related’ event, it would be a *“huge step”* in overcoming some of the fears he has about football stadiums:

“Someone my age would definitely go to things like careers events where you have lots of different company’s there giving advice, and colleges and universities too. I think if something like that could be held at the stadium then that would really help break down a lot of barriers for me and others who feel a similar way to me about football stadiums because you’re at least experiencing that environment and seeing for yourself what it’s like and that would be a huge step for me.”

Clearly, therefore, initiatives which aim to familiarise British Asians with the stadium environment, whether football related or not, are an effective way of breaking down residual perceptions that many British Asians have about the stadium being an inaccessible space. Linked with the previous solution of providing a ‘tailored and inclusive service’; if this service is in place when they visit the stadium for the first time, it is going to break down those perceptions even further and make them feel like they are valued and wanted by the club. In

addition to this, such events are also an effective way of raising awareness of the club in these communities, which in itself is an important barrier for local clubs too break down.

Creating role model figures within the club

It is clear from the data collected, that a major factor in why so few British Asian fans make the effort to attend live matches, is the significant lack of British Asian ‘role models’ within the game, particularly as players and coaches. To address this, Lewis (2015) suggests that football clubs must look to recreate these ‘role models’ within other areas of the club, to give the British Asian communities ‘figures’ that they can relate to and connect with. One of the most effective ways that clubs can achieve this, according to the industry experts, is through giving ‘influential figures’ in these community’s ambassadorial roles within the club. Riz Rehman suggests that every club should consider having an Asian ambassador and suggests that clubs should be targeting ‘key influencers’ and ‘community leaders’ for these roles. He suggests that having these “*key, respected figures*” as ambassadors and advocates of the club, would not only help bring British Asian communities closer to their local clubs, but it would also help to break down the negative perceptions that many British Asians have about the ‘live match experience’:

“These figures will have huge networks that they can open up for clubs and their influence in these communities will help grow awareness and interest in the club much quicker than any marketing campaigns... where ambassadors can be really effective, is in using their influence to change the perceptions these communities have about football. Making them believe that football is something for them and that the stadium is a safe and welcoming place.”

Humayun similarly suggests:

“I think these figures can go a long way to building connections between Asian communities and their local clubs... having someone they respect and look up to involved in the club, gives them a reason to take an interest and gives them something they can finally relate to at the club” (interview).

The fans in this study were also very supportive of the idea of clubs having Asian ambassadors to lead their community engagement, with a number of them suggesting that it would make them more inclined to support their local team if it was someone within the community that they respected and particularly admired. Participant N13 (interview), for example, suggested that it would simply just give him something that he can finally affiliate with at the club, which despite being born and raised in Bradford, is something he’s never felt:

“I think at the moment local clubs just don’t really represent us at all and that’s why we feel very little affiliation to them. Of course if Bradford were to get an Asian player that would change completely, I think you’d see loads of interest then but for now I do think at least having some popular, respected Asians involved in the club and being a bit of a public face for the club, that would give us something to relate to. It would show us that the club is starting to try and represent our communities as well as.”

As well as bringing them to closer to their local clubs, some of the non-attending fans also suggested that it could change their thoughts on attending matches. Participant N1 and Participant N2, who both avoid live games, suggested that having someone that they could look up to and trust involved with the club, telling them to attend and that it is a safe and fun experience, would make a significant difference to their thoughts on going to games:

“Without sounding too fickle, I think it would change a lot for me, especially if this ambassador was somebody that I admire and trust, who I believe would have my best interests at heart. You hear from a lot of people that the game has changed, that we’re safe to go now etc. etc. but you only ever hear that from white people who aren’t in your shoes, if I was to hear this from an Asian, someone I could trust, someone who I knew went to games themselves and had no problems, I definitely would listen and yeah I think it might change my mind” (Participant N2, interview).

“I think having an Asian ambassador at the club that you could look to would really help actually, knowing that there’s someone there who is already going, who enjoys the experience and has no problems or issues, and it gives you someone then to follow in their path. Someone that you can ask questions about what it’s like, cos you only ever hear it from a white perspective” (Participant N1, interview)

Evidently, if the right figures are placed in these ambassadorial roles they can transfer a great deal of trust to the people in their communities (Doney & Cannon, 1997), which is vital in changing some of the longstanding perceptions that the British Asian community have about live football. In terms of what kinds of figures clubs should be targeting, the participants had various opinions but it was clear that these persons need to be well-known, respected figures within these communities, such as professional sportspersons, religious leaders, successful businesspersons, or even just leaders of large community groups.

Targeted marketing strategies

The literature suggests that British companies typically struggle in marketing to British Asian consumers, and ethnic minorities in general, and based on the results of the interviews, this appears to be the case for football clubs too. Past studies suggest that the most effective way of reaching and attracting British Asian consumers, is through using ‘tailored, ethnic-based marketing strategies’ (Burton, 2002; Considine, 2003; Krug, 2008), however, it was clear from the fans responses that very few local clubs, in particular, are doing this. As highlighted in the first section of this chapter, the fans felt that the marketing campaigns delivered by local clubs were typically too generic and targeted more at the ‘core fan base’. Not one fan had encountered what they would identify as ‘tailored marketing’ from their local club, which was targeted specifically at British Asian communities or ethnic minorities as a whole.

All three experts argued that this ‘catch-all approach’ to marketing that many local clubs are adopting has to stop if they want to truly diversify their match day crowds. They proposed that clubs should tailor their marketing in a number of ways when trying to target British Asian

communities and there is significant support for these suggestions in the literature and in the interviews with the British Asian fans themselves:

- Using more Asian characters in adverts
- Advertising the approval of others
- Using bilingual adverts
- and targeting ethnic media publications

Increased Asian representation in adverts

All three proposed that using British Asian characters, such as Asian ambassadors and Asian fans, in visual and audio advertisements is a more effective way of targeting Asian communities, as it is more likely to grab their attention and make them more likely to listen and consider the message. In addition to this, past research indicates that the use of British Asian models in advertisements positively influences the attitudes of British Asian consumers towards the company and their intention to buy the product or service (Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998; Fletcher, 2003; Krug, 2008). The responses of the fans support this and suggest that the use of Asians in adverts could play a significant role in reducing perceptions that they are not welcome and do not belong at football matches:

“Just seeing that there are Asians at the club, it would make me feel differently about my local club... I feel like it doesn’t represent us at all at the minute so to see some Asians on posters or videos or something, that would show me that they’re trying to change that and making effort to try and make us feel more involved” (Participant N5, interview).

“I think using some Asian faces in adverts would have quite a profound impact, you never see them in things to do with football, so to do that would be clear evidence that the club is trying to talk to us and make us feel like we are welcome there now, which is going to work on some people” (Participant N11, interview).

Advertising approval from others

Research suggests that ‘word of mouth’ is the most effective form of marketing in British Asian culture (Synovate, 2010). Further to this, Krug (2008) suggests that British Asians have a very strong level of trust with spokespeople from their own community, and will consequently engage and respond better to the messages delivered by Asian characters. The experts suggest that it is vital, therefore, that clubs advertise the approval of others in the British Asian community as much as they can during targeted campaigns and this was supported by the fans as well. One initiative that was particularly popular amongst the non-attending fans was the idea of creating videos of British Asian fans talking about their experience of attending a live match. A number of fans suggested that documenting the experiences of other British Asian fans in this way would give them a great insight into what the experience would be like, which could significantly reduce their fears about going. Participant N1 (interview), for example, who previously stated that he was “*very far away*” from ever attending a live match because of his fears, suggested that this initiative would make a significant contribution to him starting to get over his fear of attending:

“I think one way that clubs could reduce my fears a bit and for other Asians too is by being more transparent about the experience really... giving us chances to see what you’re going to be doing and how the day is going to pan out and everything... I think may be getting the Asian fans to video their experience and talk about it, cos I don’t really have anyone around me that can kind of tell me what it’s like really...I think then you kind of have peace of mind knowing exactly what you’re in for and if it doesn’t look too bad and I see a few examples, that will help enormously”.

Bilingual advertisements

The experts also propose that clubs should be producing multilingual marketing collateral, particularly when the club is based in heavily populated Asian areas. Riz Rehman notes that a number of clubs have started to use multilingual advertisements and that these had been particularly well received by British Asians and other ethnic minorities:

“Some clubs are now producing marketing materials that have different languages on, including the likes of Urdu and Arabic (which I introduced to the community trusts at Portsmouth and Reading), and these are being really well-received. As much as anything, it sends out a signal that you are trying to reach them and include them” (interview).

The majority of the fans agree with Riz and suggest that whilst the use of multilingual language does not practically make the message any easier to read or make it anymore impactful, it would be further evidence that clubs are making an effort to reach them and cater for their needs. Participant N5 (interview) suggests that small gestures like this will gradually become recognised in the community, and will in turn start to spread the word about the club and their efforts to attract these communities.

Targeting ethnic media

Their final suggestion is that clubs should be targeting ‘ethnic media’ with their advertisements. They suggest that publications such as the BBC Asian Network, Sunrise Radio and the Asian Express are consumed by a large number of British Asians in the West Yorkshire region and would be effective channels for local clubs to target with their targeted campaigns. It was apparent that the most significant benefit of utilising ethnic media, was that clubs can be more direct in its advertising and be less subtle in addressing the British Asian communities, as they are the main audience of these publications and there is no chance of alienating your core fan base.

A few fans suggested, however, that they consumed local media more than ethnic media but usually do not pay attention to the coverage of their local club. Participant N15 (interview) indicates here that here that he has not seen anything in the local paper from his local team that has appeared to be targeted at the British Asian community, in terms of stories or advertisements:

“A lot of the local Asian community and especially my friends and family read the Examiner every day and is like our main source of news to see what is going on in

the area really, so the local paper would definitely be a good place to target the Asian community with PR and advertisements and stuff... I check how Huddersfield are getting on with results and stuff, but I never really see anything in there that would change my mind about going.”

This suggests that clubs should also consider occasionally targeting local media with some targeted campaigns for the Asian community, subtly tailoring stories and advertisements in the paper or radio with the above features noted above.

Enhancing visibility in British Asian communities (Community Engagement)

Aside from the superior attraction of the ‘top teams’, the most significant barrier to local clubs attracting British Asian fans is the lack of visibility that these clubs have within their local British Asian communities (Lewis, 2015). In order to overcome this barrier and start attracting more supporters from these communities, the overwhelming solution proposed in the literature and in the interviews, is the need for clubs to enhance their engagement with these groups and make themselves more visible. Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) suggest that the only way that local clubs can challenge the ‘attraction of the top teams’ is by generating greater awareness of the club amongst local British Asian communities, and this was echoed by the three industry experts. Anwar Uddin, for example, claims that generating awareness is fundamental to any efforts that clubs make to attract British Asian fans:

“There’s no point introducing prayer rooms and halal food if you’re not going to address the core issue, which is that large parts of these communities don’t know about their local club... engaging with these communities and generating awareness has to be the priority” (interview).

Most British football clubs have ‘football in the community’ departments, which aim to increase the club’s engagement with the local community and to generate interest and awareness in the local area (Burdsey, 2007). Whilst these departments have worked in the most part, the majority have had very little success in achieving this among their local British Asian communities (Burdsey, 2007; Burdsey & Randhawa, 2012). Burdsey and Randhawa (2012, p.108) suggest, therefore, that clubs and their community departments have to discard their “blanket approach” to community engagement and start to “make a more significant, apposite and targeted impact in their local British Asian communities”, and the same was expressed by the industry experts and the fans themselves.

Anwar Uddin (interview) suggests that if clubs are serious about attracting more supporters from their local Asian communities, then they have to start making a more “concentrated and directed effort” to target British Asian groups in the area. To do that, he suggests that clubs, led by their community departments, have to abandon their ‘catch-all approach’ to reaching and engaging these communities through ‘mainstream channels’ and look to explore new channels of engagement, developing relationships with ‘exclusively Asian’ groups and agencies:

“Clubs have to physically get out into these communities and create a dialogue with them. They can’t rely on the mainstream outreach they do in the community... they need to look at targeting schools in the ‘Asian hubs’ of the community, faith-based

schools, community centres, religious centres, Mosques... places where they can directly engage with significant sections of these communities.”

In addition to making a more targeted effort to reach and engage these communities, Riz Rehman (interview) suggests that clubs also need to make an effort to “*personalise their introduction*” to the club. He notes that many clubs give out free tickets to schools and other community groups to try and entice them to attend matches, but suggests that it is only ‘direct engagement’ with these communities that will result in the development of genuine relationships and connections with them:

“Lots of clubs give out free tickets to schools, Asian schools included, and yeah some kids may go once or twice because it’s free but then that’s it. To stand a chance of them becoming true supporters and regular match-goers, they need to personalise their introduction to the club; they need to go into Asian schools, Mosques, religious centres and teach them about the club, tell them you want them to be part of the club... and then it’s trying to use role models, people with influence, to help deliver that message – using ambassadors, player visits, getting the players to go in and talk to the kids, doing signing sessions, that’s how you’ll really generate an interest and connection with them... then you can use the free tickets.”

Clearly, therefore, it is believed by both academics and practitioners, that the most influential way of generating interest and awareness of ‘local clubs’ in these communities, is to take a direct and hands-on approach to engaging with them, and this belief was also shared by the supporters themselves. The majority of the fans interviewed felt that ‘direct and targeted engagement’ through schools, community centres and religious settings, was the only real way that ‘local clubs’ could generate interest and awareness amongst British Asian communities. They also strongly believed that targeting ‘predominantly Asian’ schools and generating interest among young British Asians was ‘the key’ to seeing more British Asians supporting their local clubs and potentially spectating at matches:

“For me, if they want to get more Asian fans and potentially compete with our interest in the big Premier League teams, then they have to get out into the Asian schools and generate that interest from a young age, more so than white schools actually. Most ‘local kids’, they’ll get introduced to their local team from dads, uncles, friends... Asians, we don’t have that and cos they’re not on TV, Asian kids don’t know about them, so going into Asian schools is a must... letting them know they have a club on their doorstep, an amazing stadium that they can come see. It’s just trying to make them feel like a part of the club and a part of that local culture and when they do, hopefully you’ll start to see more of us supporting them” (Participant N13, interview).

“In the likes of Bradford and Huddersfield, there are a lot of schools which are predominantly Asian, I didn’t go to one but at my school Bradford City used to come in all the time and give talks, and we’d get cheap tickets, like kids for a fiver and adults for a tenner, and I think this needs to start happening in the Asian schools too. Going in and promoting the club and cheaper tickets, it gets the kids talking about the club with their mates, which is something that doesn’t really happen amongst Asians cos normally it’s all United or Liverpool... that kind of engagement whilst you’re in school puts them on your radar because in school you’re going to listen to people talking

about football and take an automatic interest in what's said" (Participant Y1, interview).

They were also very supportive of clubs reaching out to religious and community centres and suggested that there was no need for clubs to be cautious or apprehensive about approaching these agencies. Participant N6 (interview) explained that:

"I think what you'll find is that 99% of mosques are very open to dialogue and engagement, and that goes for other religious and Asian community centres too, and in fact, I know that faith-based schools are actually actively looking for more sporting opportunities for their pupils, so I don't think there are any barriers for the clubs... Religious leaders have absolutely nothing against football or going to support a club, so I don't think there will be any challenges there, they'd be happy to help."

Further to this, Participant N6 offers advice about how clubs could approach this engagement if they are cautious about approaching these groups, and refers back to the importance of having influential leaders within these communities as partners or ambassadors, to be able to facilitate these introductions:

"If the clubs are tentative about approaching these groups then, I'm sure they'll have a community engagement officer, so they should be looking at how they can lead that engagement at a ground level, and then using the youth centres and community centres as the 'go to', which will then lead on to the relationships with the mosque's and faith-based schools. So they need to find a mediator, whether that's their own community engagement office or the community groups themselves... looking for local community leaders is going to be the key thing because they will be able to open up a lot of doors and be able to facilitate introductions and relationships with these groups."

In addition to targeting British Asian communities through 'formal engagement' with educational and religio-cultural institutions, it has also been proposed that clubs should consider more 'informal engagement' with these communities through grassroots football. Despite their absence in the professional game, it is apparent that there is a large number of British Asians that participate in amateur and grassroots football. According to the participants there are a large number of 'all Asian teams' playing Sunday league football all over the country, and an even bigger population that regularly engage in 'five-a-side football'. Riz Rehman (interview) suggests that targeting these groups could be particularly beneficial as it gives clubs direct access to a huge network of Asians who love football and are more likely to be interested in going to games than most other parts of the Asian community. This was also echoed by one of the supporters:

"I know in Bradford in particular there are a lot of amateur, Sunday league type teams that are all Asian... then there's more like friendly type leagues away from the official leagues where all the teams are like 99% Asian and there's a massive five-a-side Asian community... I definitely think the clubs have to reach out to these teams and these leagues, you've got a huge network of Asians who love football who probably would be interested in going to games but there's such little interaction between us and our local clubs.... they need to go down to their training, maybe even help out in a session, teach them about the club, tell them you need their support and then give them some free tickets for a couple of games maybe, get them into the club as teams so they're with their mates and they might love it" (Participant N9, interview).

British Asian supporters' groups

Finally, the initiative which received the most comprehensive support was Asian supporters' groups. In his 2017 study, Kilvington highlighted that there are now a number of Asian supporters' groups which exist at English football clubs and suggested that these have all had significant success in increasing the number of British Asian supporters spectating at these clubs. He suggests that the reason for their success is that they counter many of the significant barriers that British Asian fans face, most notably the fear of being racially abused or attacked, and the feelings of exclusion and not belonging. These views were mirrored by all three industry experts, not least Humayun Islam, who is the Founder and Chair of the Bangla Bantams – Bradford City's official Asian supporters' group.

The group has been the catalyst for the increase in Asian fans attending Bradford City matches in recent years and Humayun believes it has been influential in removing some of the fears that these communities had about attending live matches (interview):

“It has been a huge success, far bigger than I ever imagined when I set it up in 2015. We've got over 600 members now from the Bangladeshi community in Bradford and have probably 60-70 attending home games every week and not just young lads either, but a mix of ages and girls and women too... coming to your first game with the group doesn't automatically take that fear away, when we take 20 Asian women with head scarfs to a home game at first they are nervous and don't know what to expect, but by the 60th minute they are singing and cheering... going with the group just gives them that extra confidence to try it, that safety in numbers, then when they experience it and realise there's nothing to worry about, they keep coming back.”

Anwar Uddin (interview) also played a significant part in the development of the Bangla Bantams, in his role within the 'Fans for Diversity' campaign, and he stressed the importance that these fan groups can play in introducing the Asian community to their local clubs:

“There is a huge Asian community just minutes away from the stadium in Bradford yet so many of them, particularly the young ones, don't even know the club exists. These fan groups are a fantastic way of addressing that and introducing them to their local club... you are bringing the community together and using the club to do that... many of them [British Asians] don't feel that much connection with their local teams but these groups are a way that these communities can start to identify with the club.”

Although the fans in this study did not support teams that had Asian fan groups, all of them suggested that the introduction of these groups at their clubs would positively influence their intentions to attend matches. Their responses also provided significant support for the notion of these groups being an effective mechanism of reducing fears of racism and exclusion, and making them feel safer and more belonged:

“If there was an Asian fan group at Man United then I would definitely consider going. If there was a group that could bring us together and form a bit more of a collective and introduce us to live football games in that way, that would help me massively...”

having people there during that introduction helping you get through it, telling you what is what, I'd feel much more confident and safer” (Participant N1, interview).

“As a community we are very collectivist and quite secular, sometimes too much actually, but for that reason I think these fan groups that bring us all together would be a great idea and one that would be well received by the Asian community... if you have a group there representing your culture and your identity and there's like 20, 30, 40 people there just like you all there supporting your club, going to games in a big group, then that's going to make you feel safe, it's going to make you feel more welcome and more belonged at the club and at the game” (Participant N2, interview).

“I think these groups would definitely make us feel more welcome because I think one of the biggest barriers we face is that we feel like outsiders and you don't want to feel like an outsider, it's not a nice feeling. I've had it growing up all the time whenever I've tried to mix in typically 'white' places, I have white friends as well and when I go drinking, sometimes I get funny looks like what a brown guys having a drink, so yeah you don't want to be signalled out and feel like an outsider at football too, so I think it's safety in numbers, it's belonging to a group and I think it's important to actually feel welcome at the game, joining in, singing songs” (Participant N9, interview).

It is clear, therefore, that Asian fans groups do significantly reduce a lot of the fear and apprehension that British Asians have about attending live matches, and they give them the ‘confidence in numbers’ to experience live football for the first time. Whilst the success of these groups at other clubs suggest that all football clubs should look to develop Asian fans groups, it is also clear that this initiative would have to be subsequent to the other measures highlighted above, as a nucleus of Asian fans would have to already exist at the club in order to form a group.

Conclusions and recommendations

5.

This section sets out to discover the reasons why so few British Asian football fans attend live football matches and to identify ways in which football clubs could address these barriers and attract more British Asians to attend. Based on the evidence presented in the literature review and on the data collected from the interviews, this chapter seeks to answer the three key research questions that were outlined at the start of the paper:

1. What are the key barriers to attendance for British Asian football fans?
2. What are the key barriers that football clubs face in trying to attract British Asian supporters?
3. What service and marketing solutions can football clubs adopt to reduce these barriers and attract more British Asian fans to attend?

1. What are the key barriers to attendance for British Asian football fans?

The results of both sets of data suggest that whilst there are a number of factors that deter British Asian fans from attending live matches, there are three key barriers which are consistent amongst most non-attending British Asian fans. These barriers have also been highlighted, as they are barriers over which the club has an element of control and can be addressed and resolved through several solutions that will be listed in the recommendations.

Threat of racism

Though overt racism has considerably reduced at British football stadia, it has clearly left a lasting perception among many in the British Asian community that the stadium is not a safe or welcoming environment for them. It is clear that dispelling these perceptions among these communities is going to be vital to attracting more British Asians to attend live matches. The British Asian fans that do attend matches suggest that it is only when they experienced a live game for the first time that these perceptions truly changed. Clearly therefore, there also has to be some emphasis on strategies that aim to get people from these communities to the stadium for the first time and dispelling these perceptions, before efforts are made to turn them into regular match-goers.

Religio-cultural barriers

It is clear that for a number of British Asian fans, particularly Muslims, there are issues in the typical match day service provided that clash with their religious and cultural needs. Common issues highlighted were being unable to pray (3 o'clock kick offs which often clash with prayer times), the presence of alcohol and the potential of it touching their skin, being around drunk supporters, and the lack of Halal and vegetarian food options. Whilst these issues were not seen as significant factors for not attending, in conjunction with other barriers such as the perceptions of racism, they were contributing factors. What was also clear was that the failure of clubs to meet these needs, contributed to the perceptions of some non-attending fans that the game is not for them and they are not valued or welcome at the stadium. Whilst these factors are not the main reasons fans do not attend, clubs should be looking to address these issues and beginning to fulfil these needs, to help create a more welcoming environment for British Asian fans that dispels their perceptions that they do not belong at matches and that they are not wanted.

Lack of role models and British Asian presence within the club

It appears that the lack of identifiable role models for British Asians throughout English football, particularly as players, has had a significant impact on their interest in attending games and is yet another factor that contributes to their perceptions that the game is not for them. Although being able to acquire British Asian players for the first team is something out of most clubs control, due to the talent pool that is currently available, they need to explore ways in which they can increase British Asian presence within other areas of their clubs, to help create the perception that it is a place where British Asians are welcome and valued.

Other factors

As mentioned above, there are a number of other factors that deter British Asian fans from attending live matches; these barriers, however, are not as prominent and are not as relevant or controllable for most football clubs. The cost of tickets, for example, is an issue for some British Asian fans but none more so than it is for supporters of other ethnicities. Other barriers discovered in the study, such as the increasing amount of televised football and the lack of the lack of parental influence, are also very much out of most 'local clubs' control.

Summary

All in all, the findings suggest that clubs need to take a holistic approach to addressing these barriers, rather than approaching them in isolation, and that the underlying issue at the heart of these barriers is actually the negative perceptions that many British Asians have built about the live match experience. Based on what they have seen and heard from the past, there is an enduring perception amongst large sections of the British Asian population that, firstly, attending live football matches is not a safe activity and that they will be racially abused, and secondly, that they are not welcome and do not belong in the stadium environment.

2. What are the key barriers that football clubs face in trying to attract British Asian supporters?

As anticipated during the scoping of this study, this research confirms that it is predominantly 'local clubs' who still struggle to attract British Asian fans to attend. The results suggest that there are three significant barriers to local football clubs attracting more British Asian fans.

Attraction to the top teams

The main barrier that local clubs face in trying to attract British Asian fans is the lure and attraction of the 'top teams' in the EPL. Consistent with previous research, all of the supporters in this study confirmed that they supported one of the big EPL teams like Manchester United or Liverpool, and that they had little interest in supporting their local clubs. Whilst it would be incredibly difficult for local clubs to ever compete with the top teams in terms of their success, prestige and brand appeal (*the main factors of attraction for British Asian fans*), they can try to challenge their superior presence and visibility within these communities. It was clear from the data that the only way that local clubs can challenge the attraction of the top teams is to generate greater awareness of and interest in the club in their local British Asian communities.

Lack of visibility in British Asian communities

The lack of awareness that British Asian communities have of their local team is a significant barrier to local clubs being able to attract supporters from these communities. It was clear from the results that local clubs have a significant lack of visibility and presence within their local Asian communities, which is not only a significant barrier to these communities attending matches but is also a major contributor to the fact that British Asians seem to be only interested in supporting the top teams, who have an unrivalled media presence and visibility within these

communities. Local clubs, therefore, need to significantly enhance their engagement and interaction with these communities and generate awareness of the club.

Failure to reach and engage British Asian communities through marketing

Another contributor to the lack of awareness that British Asian communities have of their local teams, appears to be their failure to reach and engage with these communities through their marketing and communications. It was clear that the failure of most local clubs to adopt targeted 'ethnic-based' marketing strategies was a significant barrier to their ability to attract British Asian supporters. A lack of financial and marketing resource, as well as lack of cultural knowledge and understanding, were found to be the major restrictions to local clubs adopting these strategies.

Summary

On the whole, it seems clear that the fundamental barrier that local clubs face is the lack of awareness that British Asian communities have of them, particularly in comparison to the top EPL clubs. It is clear, therefore, that local clubs need to increase their presence and visibility in their local Asian communities, through marketing and other engagement, in order to address these barriers they face.

Summary of all the barriers

Looking at the key barriers from the fans perspective and the clubs perspective, it is clear that there are *two overarching barriers* that football clubs need to focus on addressing:

1. The perceptions held by many British Asians that, firstly, attending live football matches is not a safe activity and that they will be racially abused or attacked if they go, and secondly, that they are not welcome and do not belong at the stadium.
2. The significant lack of awareness that British Asian communities have of their local clubs.

The business recommendations listed below will focus on how clubs can address these underlying factors.

3. What service and marketing solutions can football clubs adopt to reduce these barriers and attract more British Asian fans?

Although there is a distinct lack of 'off-the-shelf' solutions presented in previous research into this issue, the literature does provide a number of theoretical considerations. These have been combined with the ideas proposed in the interviews to form a number of business solutions, which football clubs can adopt to reduce the barriers to attendance for British Asian fans and help attract more to attend their matches. These recommendations will aim to address the two main overarching barriers summarised above and will cover the following areas:

1. Develop a nucleus of support
2. Create a tailored and exclusive service
3. Appoint an Asian community ambassador
4. Community engagement
5. Targeted marketing
6. Asian supporters' group

These will be discussed in further detail, along with recommendations for action, below. While individual recommendations used in isolation or out of sequence could have limited short-term success, it is recommended that the solutions are viewed as a comprehensive whole in order to attain maximum benefit. Therefore, these recommendations are presented in a logical sequence of steps, with each intervention enabling the following step and complementing the previous actions:

1. Develop a nucleus of support

The first step that clubs should take is to develop a support network of key stakeholders in this industry and in the community, which will work with the club to collectively develop and deliver these initiatives and the wider campaign to attract more British Asian supporters from the local community. Below are recommendations as to how clubs should go about setting up this network and how it should function and operate in practice, with examples provided in italics:

- Develop partnerships with footballing authorities and diversity groups

If clubs have not done so already, they need to reach out to footballing authorities and diversity groups such as Kick it Out and the Football Supporters' Federation, and develop stronger links with their initiatives, such as the 'Fans for Diversity' campaign. These groups actively work with football clubs to help them attract more BAME supporters from the local community; providing advice on how to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment and how to target and engage these communities, as well as providing resources and funding to facilitate initiatives like community events at the stadium. It is essential, therefore, that clubs develop partnerships with these groups and that these groups play a fundamental role in this 'support network', due to the extensive knowledge, expertise and supporting resources that they can offer.

The Fans for Diversity campaign, for example, has been influential in diversifying the terraces of many football league clubs, including Bradford City. They have played a key role in the club's recent success in attracting more supporters from the city's large Asian community, in particular in the development of initiatives such as their annual 'Community Day' event and the 'Bangla Bantams', which is now one of the largest Asian fan groups in the country, with over 600 members.

- Develop partnerships with British Asian community groups

Clubs also needs to establish and develop mutually beneficial relationships with Asian community groups and centres in the local area. These groups are constantly looking to promote and increase the involvement and participation of their communities, and represent a fantastic opportunity for football clubs. The relationships and networks that these groups could open up for clubs, along with the knowledge and insights that they can offer about the communities clubs are trying to attract, will be pivotal to the success of any campaign to attract

more British Asian supporters. Clubs should, therefore, look to establish a number of partnerships with a diverse range of these groups and these groups should also play a key role in this support network.

Bradford City's partnership with the BEAP Community Partnership (a Bangladeshi community group in Bradford) has been particularly successful in increasing the number of Bangladeshi supporters that attend their matches. The community group has acted as an intermediary between the club and the Fans for Diversity campaign in making many of the initiatives discussed above happen.

- Establish and set up an Inclusion Working Group

This support network should then operate as a working group between the club, the club's community foundation and representatives from the industry and community partnerships noted above. The role of this group would be to discuss and develop service and marketing initiatives that could attract more British Asian supporters, to discuss the best ways and channels to target and engage these communities, and also to proofread and approve targeted marketing and communication materials before they are published, to avoid causing offence.

This group would be specifically aimed at attracting supporters from local Asian communities but if the club were to follow these steps and develop partnerships with groups and organisations from other minority communities – including not just different ethnicities and religions but also sexual orientation and disability groups – then the club should look at setting up a wider 'inclusion group'. Again, this is similar to Bradford City's 'Inclusion Advisory Group', which discusses initiatives which can help to bring all communities together and create an inclusive environment which meets the needs of everyone in the 'wider community'.

2. Create a tailored and inclusive service

The next step that clubs should take, with the support and advice of its 'support network', is to develop a 'tailored service' for British Asian fans, which better caters for their different religio-cultural needs. Providing a service that meets these needs not only reduces the religio-cultural barriers which exist but it would also break down the perceptions among British Asians that they are not valued or welcome in the stadium environment. They would see this initiative as clear evidence that you want them to be part of the club and that you are actively making improvements to give them a better, more comfortable experience, and offering them something in addition to the football itself.

- Develop the Family Stand into a space which caters for British Asian fans

One way of providing a service that could cater for the needs of British Asian fans without affecting the needs of traditional mainstream supporters, is to create a specific section within the stadium that provides this tailored service. Clubs should consider looking at their 'family stands' and transforming these into spaces which cater for both family needs and the religio-cultural needs of British Asian communities (and other minority communities in the future). What this space and the service provided inside it would look like should be discussed and developed with your 'support network', with your community partners potentially running some engagement sessions / surveys within their communities to establish what initiatives would be most attractive and important to British Asian consumers. However, based on this research, these are my recommendations for how this space should be developed:

- Firstly, the space would remain under the same name ‘the Family Stand’; referring to this as the ‘Asian section’ or the ‘Community section’ would be viewed negatively by both the British Asian communities and potentially core supporters, as it could be seen as segregating them and giving them special treatment.
- Providing a multi-faith prayer room facility within this stand. If feasible, this should be an existing lounge space within the stand and not a room that is accessed through the concourse. This is to avoid Asian fans being fearful of using it in case other supporters make comments in the concourse. Therefore, this facility needs to be easily accessible from this stand but should be made private in terms of its location and visibility.
- Halal and vegetarian food options should be provided stadium-wide; however, this stand should have a more comprehensive menu to the rest of the stadium, with a range of food and drink options catering for kids and different cultures. Clubs should consider providing dishes of Asian cuisine in this stand, such as chicken and rice, which is more suited to their needs and avoids being too stereotypical. When serving Halal food, it is also important to note that many Muslims will not eat it if it has been cooked in the same area as non-Halal meat. If clubs are to implement this initiative, they will need to clearly display that the Halal food is cooked in a separate area of the servery.
- Provide a mix of distinct alcoholic and non-alcoholic refreshment serveries within the concourse. Providing an even split of alcoholic and non-alcoholic serveries would mean that Muslim supporters can comfortably purchase food and drink inside the stand, as many of them are uncomfortable being around alcohol and have a strict view on mixing with people consuming it. Marketing the fact that there are non-alcoholic zones inside this stand would also calm a lot of their apprehension about drunk fans and perceptions of it being a violent and aggressive environment. It is important that there is a mix so your core supporters are not impacted, as alcohol is an important part of the match day experience for many traditional supporters.
- If feasible, look at providing a new entrance into this stand rather than the traditional turnstiles, which can be off-putting for some Asian fans. If feasible the entrance would be a standard door leading into a room where you then go out into the stadium, similar to what you would expect from the executive areas at bigger stadiums
- Finally, the space should be marketed subtly but with enough subliminal messages to catch the attention of British Asian fans and make them realise that this is a space that has been developed with their needs at the forefront: *“Check out our new improved Family Stand, perfect for a family day out. Suitable for all families, its child-friendly, has a new all-encompassing menu with great options for kids and new Halal and vegetarian choices too, it has a new multi-faith prayer room, and alcohol-free refreshment areas.”*

3. Appoint an official Asian community Ambassador

Clubs should also consider appointing an Asian ambassador to be the face of their campaign to attract more Asian fans and to lead the club’s engagement with these communities. Clubs need to engage with key influencers and leaders within these communities to acquire the right figures for this role. The person needs to be a well-known, respected figure within these communities,

such as a professional sports person, a religious leader, a successful business person, or even just a leader of a large community group. Having a ‘role model figure’ publically advocate the club and promote the live match experience, with the influence they possess, will be vital in generating interest and awareness of clubs in these communities, and be critical in reducing the fears and perceptions that many British Asians have about attending live matches.

4. Community engagement

Once relationships with key groups in the local Asian communities have been established, and a service that meets the needs of these communities has been developed, clubs need to start generating greater awareness within these communities.

In order to do this, clubs need to enhance their engagement with these communities, in two key areas in particular. The first is their ‘outreach’ in these communities (*they need to considerably increase their presence and visibility in these communities*), and the second is their ‘impact’ in these communities (*they need to actively make a positive impact in these communities to build connections with them and change their perceptions of the club and their welcome*).

Community Outreach

Working with their community foundations and community partners, clubs need to enhance their outreach in the local Asian community and start targeting agencies where they can directly engage with large groups of this community. Community partners will not only be able to identify the agencies that clubs should be targeting but they will also be able to facilitate introductions for clubs. Based on this research, below are recommendations of the types of agencies that clubs need to be targeting, followed by more detail about how clubs should approach this engagement with each:

- **Asian and faith-based schools** – At some schools within the ‘Asian hubs’ of communities, over 75% of the students are Asian, presenting a great opportunity to introduce large sections of the local Asian community to their local club whilst they are young, which is when most people pick the team that they will follow. A key reason why so many British Asians do not support their local clubs is the lack of awareness they had of them as kids because no one introduced them to it, and this still applies for the majority of British Asian kids today, particularly those in predominantly Asian schools who have little integration with the white community.
- **Religious and community centres/groups** – Clubs also need to engage older generations of the Asian community, as it is they who will ultimately make the decisions of whether to attend matches or not and whether to take their kids. To do this, clubs should target local religious centres and places of worship like mosques and Gurdwaras, and also Asian community centres and community groups, as these are places where the audience and membership is going to be almost 100% Asian. This not only gives clubs access to engage with large segments of the local Asian community but it also sends out a clear message to these communities that clubs want to engage with them and get them involved.
- **Grassroots football** – Despite their absence in the professional game, there is a large number of British Asians that participate in amateur and grassroots football. There are a number of ‘all Asian’ teams playing Sunday league football across the nation, and an even bigger population that regularly engage in ‘five-a-side football’. Clubs should look at developing links with these

groups and establishing a regular dialogue with them. Engaging with these groups will give clubs access to a huge network of Asians who love football and are more likely to be interested in going to games than other sections of the Asian community.

How to approach this engagement

Asian and faith based schools

The findings of this research suggest that these schools are very open to engagement and new sporting opportunities in particular, so clubs need to take advantage of this and reach out to these schools, with support from community partners. Clubs should primarily focus on primary schools, as these children are unlikely to have developed any formal attachments to other teams; however, secondary schools should not be ignored as these pupils are of an age where parents would be more inclined to let them attend matches. This engagement needs to be face-to-face and needs to be continual, to ensure that clubs are not just raising awareness but generating interest as well. To do this more effectively, clubs should consider doing regular player visits in these schools, to create role models that the kids can look up to and be inspired by. Letting the players talk about how they need their support and how they could one day be playing for their local club, doing signing and photo sessions, and growing a connection between the kids, the players and the club. This engagement then needs to be supplemented by giving out free and/or discounted tickets to go to a game with their parents, to give them a taste of the live match experience and to establish if it were something they would want to do regularly.

Religious and community centres/groups

These agencies are also very open to engagement and opportunities to increase the participation and integration of their congregations, however, clubs should again use community partners to help establish these relationships. Again, this engagement needs to be sustained and not just a one off occurrence. Importantly, engagement with these groups should, where possible, be led by a British Asian figure, whether that a clubs Asian ambassador, a community partner or someone who works within the club's community foundation. This is because British Asians, particularly older generations, typically respond better to spokespeople of their own ethnicity and are much more likely to trust and engage with the messages being delivered. With these groups, the engagement needs to be focused on not just raising awareness of the club but also on changing their perceptions that watching live football is not safe and is not something for them. Clubs need to deliver a clear message that they want them to be part of the club, that they need their support, and that they are already making changes within the stadium to improve the service for them. Clubs then need to supplement this engagement by giving out free tickets to let these groups experience for themselves what you are telling them. What would be particularly effective, is if these groups were able to go together as a group trip led by their 'leader', as this would calm a lot of fears and apprehension they may have about going and it would also be seen as symbol that they can and should be going to live games as their leader approves of it.

Grassroots football

Engagement with these groups needs to be more creative given the environment within which they are based. One idea could be to approach these teams and leagues and offer to help run a training session for them, and at the same time teach them about their local club and the fact you are wanting to attract more supporters from the Asian community. Again, Asian role models could be used to deliver these messages or even player visits to really generate excitement and get people talking about the club. Giving out free tickets for them to go to a game as a team would also be very effective and could result in matches becoming a regular social event for the team.

Community Impact

Clubs also need to consider their impact within the local Asian community. This research suggests that in order for clubs to generate wider awareness amongst these communities and to start building a connection with them (*which is typically missing at most local clubs*), they need to do more than just ‘engage’ with the communities and need to actively try and make a positive impact in them. Doing this will also help to significantly reduce any negative perceptions that they have about their welcome at the club. Below are some initiatives that clubs should seriously consider in order to increase their positive impact in these communities:

- Promote British Asian participation in grassroots football

Given the significant lack of British Asian players within the professional game, clubs should be seen within their local Asian communities to be actively trying to address this issue. Clubs should be actively encouraging young British Asians from the local community to get involved in football and should tie these efforts into their engagement with local Asian schools. Clubs should consider ideas such as hiring coaches to go into these schools to run regular extra-curricular coaching sessions, or setting up and hosting a tournament at the stadium for a handful of the Asian schools that they actively engage with. Clubs should also consider initiatives like Chelsea FC’s annual ‘*Search for an Asian Star*’ talent competition. This community scheme aims to encourage Asian kids in the community to take part in grassroots football but also provides them with a rare opportunity to be identified by top scouts from across the country. These initiatives can all make a positive impact in local Asian communities and are trying to make a difference to their participation and future success in football. This kind of engagement would be greatly appreciated in these communities and would significantly their perceptions of and connections with their local club.

- Community Day

Another way that clubs can make a positive impact within the local Asian community is to host a ‘Community Day’ event at the stadium for minority communities to come and visit the stadium and have a tour, get to play on the pitch, try food from different cultures and take part in lots of other fun activities. Bradford City’s annual ‘Community Day’ event, which is run in collaboration with their BEAP community partnership and the ‘Fans for Diversity’ campaign, for example, has been a huge success and well received by the Asian community in Bradford. Giving the Asian community a rare opportunity to fulfil their dreams of playing at a professional football stadium is something that has really connected Bradford’s Bangladeshi community with the club.

5. Targeted marketing

Once clubs have a service in place which caters for British Asian communities, and it has begun generating awareness ‘on the ground’ in these communities, clubs need supplement this through some ‘targeted marketing’. This research suggests that generic mainstream campaigns typically do not engage British Asians because they feel like they are not addressed to them. Clubs, therefore, need to develop targeted campaigns that are tailored especially for British Asian communities, in order to reach and engage with more people within these communities and let them know that the club wants and needs their support. Below are a list of recommendations for how clubs should tailor these targeted campaigns, followed by more detail about how these features should be utilised:

- Increase Asian representation in advertisements
- Advertise the approval of others
- Using bilingual advertisements
- Targeting ethnic media publications

Increasing Asian representation in advertisements

Using Asian characters is fundamental to the success any targeted advertisements because they capture the attention more of Asian consumers and positively influence their perceptions of the company and their intentions to buy the product or service. Asian characters, therefore, need to be the focus of any targeted campaigns that clubs develop. These characters should include people such as Asian ambassadors, community partners and any Asian fans that already attend games. These figures should feature across all marketing channels including print, digital, audio and video. Clubs should also consider increasing the number of Asian characters used in mainstream campaigns, so that the characters used are more reflective of the ‘wider community’ that you are trying to engage. The use of more Asian faces in both types of campaign will significantly change perceptions of clubs. Most Asian communities feel that their local club does not represent them and this addresses that, and it will also make them feel like they can be involved with the club and that they are welcome.

Advertising approval from others

My research suggests that ‘word of mouth’ is the most effective form of marketing in British Asian culture. It is vital, therefore, that clubs advertise the approval of others in the Asian community as much as they can during these targeted campaigns. British Asians typically have a very strong level of trust with spokespeople from their own community, and will consequently engage and respond better to the messages delivered by their community peers. One marketing initiative that clubs should definitely consider is creating video content of Asian fans, as well as other Asian figures (*Asian ambassador and community leaders*), talking about their experience of attending matches, reassuring the Asian community that it is a safe and fun activity, that Asians are welcome and that it is something that they can be involved in too. This could be done through simple face-to-face interviews or, even more effectively through getting the fans to film their match day experience and giving the Asian community a real insight into what the experience is like for a British Asian fan.

Bilingual advertisements

The club should also consider developing multilingual marketing collateral; providing Punjabi, Urdu and Bengali translation on advertisements for their local Asian communities. Whilst the findings suggest that this initiative would not practically make messages any easier for these communities to read or make it anymore impactful, it would be clear evidence for them that clubs are actively making an effort to address them and cater for their needs, which will positively influence their perception of their welcome at the club.

Targeting ethnic media publications

The findings suggest that clubs should be targeting ethnic media with advertisements and PR to attract Asian communities to attend matches. Publications such as the BBC Asian Network, Sunrise Radio and the Asian Express are consumed by a large number of British Asians and would be effective channels for clubs to target with their targeted campaigns. The most significant benefit of targeting ethnic media is that clubs can be more direct in their advertising and be less subtle in addressing the Asian community, as they are the main audience of these publications. For example, when advertising the ‘new family stand’, clubs could place greater emphasis on the features that have been included to attract British Asian fans such as the ‘non-alcoholic refreshment zones’, the Halal food and the prayer room; whereas in mainstream campaigns, these features maybe mentioned briefly but would not be the focus of the advertisement, to avoid alienating other fans and communities. Clubs should also consider targeting local media with targeted campaigns for the Asian community. This research revealed that a number of British Asians consume local media more than they consume ethnic media.

6. Asian supporters’ group

Having implemented the previous steps over a sustained period of time (12 to 18 months), clubs should have developed at least a small nucleus of regularly attending Asian supporters. Once clubs have achieved this, the final step would be to then successfully develop that hub of fans into an Asian supporters’ group. Looking at the success of other examples, such as ‘the Punjabi Wolves’ at Wolverhampton Wanderers, ‘the Punjabi Rams’ at Derby County and ‘the Bangla Bantams’ at Bradford City, who are all bringing 100+ Asian fans to the stadium each week, it is clear that the development of one of these group would represent significant success for most local clubs. Clubs would have to consistently support this fan group with free tickets and travel during its inception but once it gradually builds momentum with support from the club’s marketing and engagement activities, it will eventually run and grow by itself like the aforementioned examples. Clubs should again look for support from community and industry partners to help facilitate this.

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