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West Midlands riots: Sangat TV gets to the heart of the action

Birmingham-based satellite and web station becomes Twitter hit after it gets footage of unrest the BBC and Sky cannot cover

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Wed 10 Aug 2011 14.56 BST



Sangat TV covers the Birmingham riots. Photograph: Sangat TV

Its sound is often sporadic and the camerawork shaky, but Sangat TV, a little-known satellite and web TV station based in Birmingham, has become an overnight hit thanks to its raw, unedited coverage of the West Midlands riots.

In hours of live coverage last night, Sangat TV presenter Upinder Randhawa and his cameraman drove around the streets of Birmingham, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton into the early hours of Wednesday morning, providing a constant narrative of updates and moral messages.

Randhawa's heartfelt presenting style implored audiences to "protect your houses and the community and humanity" - a comment that may land Sangat TV in trouble with media regulator Ofcom - and offering messages of solidarity: "We are in the United Kingdom. We must stay united."



Sangat TV's Upinder Randhawa talks to Sikhs guarding their temple. Photograph: Sangat TV

Overnight, Randhawa's verbose and occasionally humorous presenting style (he described a group of 70-year-old Sikhs guarding their temple as

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"youngsters") made him a Twitter star. His Twitter followers had jumped from 600 at 10pm on Tuesday to about 4,000 by Wednesday morning.

After providing video footage of a burning skip in Birmingham to BBC News, Sky and CNN, Sangat TV - previously largely unknown outside its target Sikh community - began trending on Twitter as mainstream news viewers tuned in.

The channel's website went down under the weight of traffic and footage and is now being streamed [via a temporary site](#). Sangat TV can also be seen on Sky channel 847.

Sangat TV launched in September 2010 and is owned by the [Sangat Trust](#), a charity which according to its website was set up by a group of Sikh business owners and temples to promote their values of peace and justice.

Whereas the big news organisations struggled with relatively limited coverage as the riots spread outside London on Tuesday night - not least because of safety concerns [after a number of attacks on journalists covering the earlier disturbances in the capital](#) - Sangat TV got into the heart of the action.

In West Bromwich, Randhawa stood for at least half an hour in front of a burning car. In Birmingham, [he gave a police officer a lift](#) to give chase to looters.

While cruising around the deserted streets of Wolverhampton, Randhawa rolled down the car window, leaned out and asked a police officer: "The whole country is watching you. Why wasn't the police prepared? Was it intelligence or were you just not bothered?" The police officer declined to comment.

Randhawa's inimitable presenting and interviewing technique contrasted with the reporting on Sky News and BBC News.

Unlike his suited counterparts in professional studios, Randhawa bluntly asked questions many want answers to. He also unashamedly voiced out loud what many might have been thinking anyway: "This is a shame for us as a nation and as a country. We are trying to protect Afghanistan and Iraq and all the other countries from the warzones, but we cannot protect ourselves."

However, mainstream broadcasters including the BBC and Sky News have to consider the safety of their journalists and allocate resources on a fast-moving story that is spreading across large parts of England, as well as working within Ofcom's [broadcasting code](#), with its strict guidelines on impartiality, accuracy and the reporting of criminal activity.

Freelance journalist and BBC 6 Music presenter Adil Ray [criticised Sangat TV's reporting on Twitter](#) as "inflammatory and irresponsible" and the channel may find Ofcom taking a closer look at its coverage.

The regulator said on Wednesday it had not previously ruled against Sangat TV's programming and had received one complaint about Tuesday night's coverage of the riots, in relation to alleged incitement to violence over comments urging people to get out on the streets and protect their property.

Reporting from Southall on Wednesday morning, Sangat TV's daytime presenter, who also holds a day job as a solicitor, thanked viewers for the messages of support. He said: "We're not on a big budget. Just two people with two cameras. We dare to get down into the scenes where no one else bothered to get down to. England is my country and I love this country. This is about the whole community."

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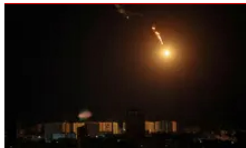


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