

A Study of National Identity in the Irish Men's Football & Rugby Teams

By

Emmet Bradshaw

**A dissertation prepared in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for MA in TV & Radio Journalism**

Faculty of Journalism & Media Communications (QQI)

Griffith College Dublin

August 2019

Declaration:

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in TV & Radio Journalism, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

Signed: __Emmet Bradshaw_____

Dated: __01/08/2019_____

Abstract

This paper is a study of national identity in the Irish men's football & rugby teams, as perceived by the media and the public.

Among many Irish sports fans, there are different attitudes towards the Irish national rugby and football teams respectively. Many of these opinions are influenced by factors other than results on the pitch. This research study aims to address the idea of Irish national identity as embodied by Ireland's two most popular national sports teams, and to understand how these perceived collective identities are (a) projected onto these teams by the media and (b) shaping public opinion towards both teams.

I conducted a mixed methods research study that involved a content analysis of 757 articles produced by the Irish Times and the Irish Daily Star in relation to both teams on selected dates during the calendar year 2017. I also conducted an online multiple-choice survey whereby 229 respondents from the Irish public shared their perspectives on the Irish rugby and football teams, Irish national identity and their level of sports media consumption.

This study sought to address six research questions as listed below, alongside some of the key findings.

1. *What percentage of recent media coverage related to the Ireland rugby team and the Republic of Ireland football team features the theme of Irish national identity?* 37% of the selected media coverage related to the Ireland rugby team and the Republic of Ireland football team features the theme of Irish national identity. However, there are some limitations in scope of certain elements of this study, so further extensive research would be welcomed in this regard.
2. *Does that percentage of media coverage showcase each team in a negative or positive light?* The study found that 93% of the coverage was positive and 7% was negative.
3. *According to the Irish sports media, what are the main differences between how the Irish rugby and football teams respectively embody national identity?* This research suggests both teams have similar work-ethics and embody similar levels of humility, but the main difference between both teams according to the Irish sports media with regard to national identity is that the Irish football team embody passion to a larger extent.
4. *How does negative media coverage of each team impact public interest in Irish international rugby and football matches?* Due to the limited scope of this research study, the findings do

not offer a conclusive insight in relation to this research question. Further, more in-depth research in this regard would be welcomed.

5. *According to Irish rugby and football supporters, what are the main differences between how the Irish rugby and football teams respectively embody national identity?* These findings could be seen as an indication that in relation to national identity, with a majority sample of male Leinster-based supporters, rugby fans have a lower opinion of the Irish football team than that of the football fans towards the rugby team. However, further research would be required to accurately explore this in more detail involving a more diverse demographic of Irish supporters.
6. *Do Irish rugby and soccer supporters factor their own perceptions of national identity into their opinions towards the national teams?* The scope of this research study cannot sufficiently address this final research question and further investigation would be needed in order to posit an accurate response.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	6
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	9
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	12
Chapter 4: Analysis (part-one).....	30
Chapter 5: Analysis (part-two).....	54
Conclusion.....	72
Bibliography.....	75

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the media faculty at Griffith College for all their help and support over the past two years. I'd especially like to mention Barry Finnegan, Robbie Smyth and Conor Kostick for all of their help and guidance during the process of completing this dissertation.

Thank you to my classmates who made my time at Griffith so enjoyable, and to my loved ones at home who have been patient with me all the way through.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Does the media's portrayal of Irish 'national identity' through sport influence public interest in the men's national rugby and soccer teams?

'People anchor their judgment of the quality of a player around the results of the team they play in. Ireland's rugby results have been good, so the players get recognition and praise. The soccer results have not been so good, so the players are dismissed as mediocre. The gigantic pyramid of competition every professional footballer has to scale in order to reach international level is seldom taken into account. A lot of people don't realise how brilliant you have to be to become a merely mediocre footballer.' (Early, 2015)

The year 2018 offered contrasting narratives for rugby and soccer in this country, as exemplified by the performances of both of our national men's teams. As the Ireland rugby team ended the year on a high having beaten New Zealand for the first time on home soil, thus cementing their position in the top two ranked teams in the world, the Republic of Ireland football team experienced a dreadful year of results and poor performances that resulted in the sacking of their senior management team and widespread calls for reform in the strategy of the sport's national governing body, the FAI.

As both sports are common sources of public interest and debate in this country, the stark contrast in media coverage has highlighted the differences in public opinion towards each team. Figures in a report released by Television Audience Measurement Ireland (TAMI, 2018) show that in 2018 the Ireland rugby team featured six times in the top 25 most viewed programmes on Irish TV that year, with the Irish soccer team failing to feature in the top 50. While there may be a number of factors at play here, it speaks to the growing popularity of rugby in Ireland, which is to some extent at the expense of the popularity of soccer. The tone of coverage from sports journalists as well as fans on social media can often point to the disparity between how the achievements of the rugby team are judged in comparison to the soccer team and vice versa, as discussed in the article referenced above by Ken Early in the Irish Times. In recent months this can be partially attributed to results on the field, but some Irish fans of one sport have often expressed derogatory views towards the other for many years, irrespective of the varying success of both teams, so it seems as though the results on the field are not always the root cause of this antipathy.

The degree to which our national teams are celebrated or criticised may be influenced by something more ingrained in our national psyche, and this idea piqued my curiosity towards how our media coverage has portrayed both sports in Ireland in the past. The concept of national identity, as epitomised by our sports teams, was a common theme found in my initial research. The historical

context behind how soccer and rugby have grown to become the two most popular ‘foreign’ team sports in Ireland goes some way to explaining why sports fans often apply different standards of quality and achievement to each sport. In my initial research, the concept of national identity was prominent in how the media often described the achievements of our national teams, but there was no clear indicator in just how influential the media was in shaping public opinion towards each sport. This idea has room for further investigation into how influential the Irish sports media currently is in shaping public attitudes towards our soccer and rugby teams, with regard to Irish national identity.

Research Questions & Objectives

The main objective of this research study is to explore the extent to which the theme of national identity features in the recent sports media’s coverage of the Irish soccer and rugby teams, and the degree to which this type of coverage shapes general attitudes towards both teams among Irish sports fans and the wider public. Through this research I will compare and contrast my findings between both sports, to better understand the differences in public attitudes towards them.

This research will be conducted as a mixed methods content analysis, featuring both qualitative and quantitative methods and I will seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What percentage of recent media coverage related to the Ireland rugby team and the Republic of Ireland soccer team features the theme of Irish national identity?
2. Does that percentage of media coverage showcase each team in a negative or positive light?
3. According to the Irish sports media, what are the main differences between how the Irish rugby and soccer teams respectively embody national identity?
4. How does negative media coverage of each team impact public interest in Irish international rugby and soccer matches?
5. According to Irish rugby and soccer supporters, what are the main differences between how the Irish rugby and soccer teams respectively embody national identity?
6. Do Irish rugby and soccer supporters factor their own perceptions of national identity into their opinions towards the national teams?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Rugby and football are the most watched and most popular 'foreign' team sports in Ireland, and as a follower of both sports I have always been curious about the reasons for some notable differences in how the teams are often portrayed in the Irish media and how they are perceived by the Irish people. The historical contexts of both teams along with the cultural, social and political differences between both sports makes for an interesting study, particularly when one considers the tribalistic nature of opposing sets of fans who often express derogatory opinions towards the other sport. This is despite the fact that there is a cross-section of sports fans in Ireland who support both teams and celebrate their successes equally. In my research I discovered that the idea of national identity is a common theme found in the literature regarding this topic. This concept of national identity, and how it both feeds into and is partially constructed by our national sports teams, will be the basis of my analysis of the articles I have selected.

Free (2013) discusses the Irish media's framing of both teams in the context of rootedness versus diaspora, and amateurism versus professionalism during the 1990s and 2000s when both sports experienced huge growth in popularity across the country. The Republic of Ireland's glory years under Jack Charlton and later Mick McCarthy facilitated what was described as a "reimagining of Irish emigrant history as a narrative of success rather than economic and cultural failure" (Free, 2013, p.212), as the country celebrated a team largely made up of descendants of the diaspora. This public praise of a predominantly British-based, and in some cases British-born, group of players was a popular narrative when the team enjoyed success in qualifying for four major tournaments between 1988 & 2002. Yet in some people's eyes, having a national football team made up of professional players plying their trade in Britain seemed to compare unfavourably with a rugby team developed domestically, grounded in an amateur ethos from the pre-professional era, moulded by cerebral coaching into what some observers referred to as an exemplar of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy.

In the early 2000s Irish rugby enjoyed national and provincial success that was heralded in parts of the media as a "symbol of economic and cultural regeneration" (Free, 2013, p.219). This perspective ties in with a common criticism that some Irish rugby fans often level at their football counterparts; the notion that football is a game full of emigrant mercenaries who lack the integrity and honour embodied by the Irish rugby team. During this period Irish rugby was at times presented by the media as having crossed amateur & professional, middle class & working class, urban & rural, and North & South divides to a greater extent than a Republic of Ireland football team of mostly working-class emigrants, schooled in a sport that incentivised career-advancement at the expense of loyalty

or 'rootedness.' This is interesting in the context of national identity, the idea that Irish fans might value one sport over another based on how a team depicts abstract representations of their national character, rather than simply the on-field merits of the sport itself.

This link between national identity and sport in Ireland can also be found in an article by Maguire & Tuck (2005) who track the development of rugby in Ireland in the post-war period as a symbol of our escape from the shackles of British colonisation. In this study it is notable how much Irish rugby, to a greater extent than Irish football, attempts to define itself in opposition to Britain by regularly competing against them as an all-island team representing the 32 counties, while developing a strong domestic game which allows the national team to stand apart from their neighbours, rather than being propped up by them. This article outlines how national identity, much like sport, is in a constant state of flux, an "ever-changing vehicle for the transmission of ideology and identity" (Cronin 1999, as cited in Maguire & Tuck, 2005, p.95). In the case of Irish rugby, this can be demonstrated by the gradual evolution of the national team's playing style from one full of swashbuckling, fiery spirit to the more modern, cosmopolitan style that combines spirit and intensity with a scientific, tactical approach. While emerging from the post-colonial shadow of Britain, Irish rugby was seen as an outlet that could provide "the soil from which an imaginary Ireland can grow and become more real", (Maguire & Tuck, 2005, p.105), and the unprecedented success of Irish rugby in 2018 could be seen as an example of that idea coming to fruition. The stark contrast between that and the state of ill-health that Irish football found itself in last year, drives a bigger wedge between how each of the two sports currently represent our national identity and this is an idea that may resonate with some fans when deciding which team they are going to invest their time in and support.

While the trajectory of Irish rugby in recent decades as depicted by Maguire & Tuck (2005) has largely been on an upward curve, Arrowsmith (2004) explores the development of Irish identity through the prism of the national football team, which has experienced more peaks and troughs. This article outlines the fact that even in the 21st century, Irish football lacks the infrastructure to be self-sufficient and is still heavily reliant on England. This is despite the lucrative global industry of football and the huge popularity of the sport in Ireland. In the context of national identity, supporting the Irish football team involves either accepting or ignoring what is for some an uncomfortable echo of colonial dependence. This is a change from the perspective described by Arrowsmith (2004) in the early decades of Irish independence, when supporting football was seen as a break from the traditional, rural, nationalist culture of the GAA towards a postmodern identity that could compete and represent Ireland on the international stage. While Irish football has enjoyed its greatest on-field successes over the past 30 years, it could be argued that we have made very little

progress in terms of cultural independence from Britain during this period. This is a damning feature of the sport in this country, that leaves the game open to criticism from other fields, particularly when the team is not performing well.

While that dependence on Britain may exist within Irish football structures, supporters themselves are keen to disassociate from their neighbours and establish a unique national identity, as studied by O'Boyle & Kearns (2017). Their analysis of the self-presentational practices of Irish fans at Euro 2016 depicts a country split between those who knowingly play up to 'representational tropes' in order to appeal to an international audience, and the dissenting voices on social media who criticise this behaviour and feel ashamed of that perception of 'Irishness'. In my opinion, this dissent itself is derived from a common feature of the Irish psyche, something that wavers between begrudgery, self-loathing, and a healthy level of cynicism.

In this literature review there is a common thread of how each team's representation of national identity can be found in the praise or criticism they receive from the fans and media alike. From a theoretical perspective, the concept of the 'imagined audience' is significant in terms of how Irish football and rugby supporters perceive their national teams. Our previous colonial ties to Britain continue to influence how we view our own sports teams in 2018. A large aspect of how we analyse the success or failures of our own football and rugby teams seems to relate to how our national identity compares with that of our English counterparts, how our national identity might be perceived by our English counterparts, and whether or not the key factors influencing our national teams, and thus shaping our national identity, are home-grown. Yet there is a gap in this research in terms of the degree to which the Irish media's analysis of national identity through sport impacts public interest in both the national rugby and football teams. In these articles there is no deep analysis of how media coverage regarding our national identity within each team, determines the level of interest or support that the public shows towards them. As such, I endeavour to conduct further research throughout this paper with regard to the question of how the media's portrayal of Irish 'national identity' through sport may affect public interest in the men's national rugby and football teams.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

In order to explore the extent to which the theme of national identity features in the recent sports media's coverage of the Irish soccer and rugby teams, and the degree to which this type of coverage shapes general attitudes towards both teams among the public, I undertook a mixed methods research study.

This involved a mixed methods content analysis of selected sports media outlets in Ireland over a specific time period, in relation to their coverage of both the Ireland men's rugby team and the Republic of Ireland men's football team. The second element of my research study involved a quantitative analysis of the responses to a 20-question multiple choice survey that asked respondents for information regarding their interest levels in both teams and selected sports media outlets.

Firstly, I will detail the methodological features of mixed methods content analysis. Following that I will define my research topic and discuss my motivations for investigating this area, during which time I will name the chosen sports media outlets and outline the specific time periods chosen to conduct my research. I will produce a pilot study and relay the findings of the pilot study, explaining how that helped shape the form of the second element of my research study, namely the multiple-choice survey. Then I will outline the details of the quantitative research in relation to the survey, my objectives in designing the survey and the findings that were derived from it. These findings will later be discussed in conjunction with the outcomes of my complete content analysis in order to address the proposed research questions.

Mixed methods research study

I conducted a mixed methods research study, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. In a journal about mixed methods research titled '*Barriers to Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*' by Bryman (2007), the author outlines the criteria for an effective mixed methods research study that maximizes the value of utilising both methods concurrently:

1. Rationale for using mixed methods: the scope of this research study requires both qualitative and quantitative analysis. It involves a qualitative content analysis with regard to the themes, meanings and patterns that emerge from the aforementioned selected media

coverage. It also involves a quantitative analysis of the outputs of surveys which will be conducted among the Irish public who were asked a range of questions regarding their interpretations of the perceived collective identities of each of our national teams and how this impacts their own level of interest in the teams.

2. Description of how each method is conducted: In the qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles a detailed, systematic examination of themes was carried out by focusing on certain key words, phrases or characteristics that can be linked to Irish national identity. These characteristics were categorised as being either positive or negative in each case. A quantitative analysis of the rates of negative to positive coverage, broken down by each characteristic that is referenced, will be conducted in order to examine the media's projection of the specific identities onto each team. Concurrently I will use the findings of the multiple-choice surveys to build an understanding of public opinion towards the media's coverage of each team and how relevant or irrelevant it may be to the construction of their own personal views.
3. How methods relate to research questions: certain research questions will be directly linked to the qualitative content analysis, some others will be linked to the quantitative analysis, and others will be linked to a combination of both methods. In reference to the previous section listing the proposed research questions, questions 1, 2 & 3 will adopt a mixed methods approach, while questions 4, 5 & 6 will adopt a quantitative research approach driven by the outputs from the survey.
4. What is gained by using mixed methods: the combination of using both of these methods helps provide the study with a more comprehensive overview of the correlation between media commentary and public opinion. The integration component of using mixed methods research offers a broader scope and greater depth to the findings given that my analysis is being conducted on data from multiple sources. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) outline that 'mixed methods designs can provide pragmatic advantages when exploring complex research questions', and the research questions in this paper are somewhat complex given the subjective nature of certain angles that rely on interpretations of opinion.

Defining the research problem

Before the turn of the millennium, the Republic of Ireland football team had been established as traditionally having a larger supporter base than the Ireland rugby team, due to the clear gap in popularity between the two sports in this country. However, in recent years, the success of the

rugby team along with some relatively disappointing periods for the football team have led some people to question whether or not that power balance has shifted in rugby's favour.

According to the Teneo Sport and Sponsorship Index (TSSI, 2018), only Gaelic Games ranks above football and rugby in a list of the most popular sports in Ireland. Football came in second place with 19% of the vote (2% less than Gaelic Games), with rugby listed in third place with 14%. This survey was conducted across 1,000 people with no specific criteria for a bias towards sport, so the findings are seen as an accurate representation of the general population. In order to make the survey as representative as possible, quotas were imposed across the areas of gender, age, region and social class. This survey measures the public's attitudes towards each sport and their sporting heroes as opposed to the levels of participation in each sport in Ireland. These figures are in line with the general perception that the Republic of Ireland men's football team and the Ireland men's rugby team are the two most high-profile national sports teams in the country.

The success of the men's rugby team in recent years has led to some public discourse regarding the growth of rugby in Ireland, and a regular debate has arisen as to which sport is truly the most popular among the Irish public. On 5th March 2018, in an episode of RTE's 'Against The Head' rugby analysis TV show, presenter Daire O'Brien discussed the increasing popularity of Irish rugby during the Six Nations campaign;

"Everybody goes somewhere to watch the game, everybody has an opinion. Arguably, it's the people's game...This is not a minority sport, maybe in terms of participation. But in terms of public interest, this is now up there, close enough to the Jack's army kind of thing in the 80s or maybe the great hurling of the 90s. It's just caught the wave...Let me put it this way. There are people who wouldn't have an opinion on an All-Ireland hurling final or a soccer international. They will have an opinion and be engaged with this. It's absolutely throughout society." (RTE Sport, 2018)

These comments drew a strong reaction on social media and throughout the Irish sports media in the days that followed, as sports fans, commentators and journalists debated the merits of O'Brien's argument that rugby should now be considered as "the people's game". There is no doubt that the popularity of rugby in Ireland has grown significantly over the past two decades, but the claim that it has now surpassed the likes of football and Gaelic Games as the most popular sport in the country does not tally up with the most recent statistics on sports participation and attendance figures.

The 2017 Irish Sports Monitor is a biennial report produced by Sport Ireland (2017) that undertakes a large population study of the trends in sport participation across the country. The study involved interviews with 8,482 respondents aged 16 or older. It found that rugby was not ranked in the top 12

most highly participated sports in the country. Football / Soccer ranked in 5th place for participation (behind exercise, swimming, running and cycling), with Gaelic Football in 8th and Hurling in 12th. The same report studied attendance levels for each sport across the country, and rugby ranked in fourth place below Hurling, Football / Soccer and Gaelic Football who were third, second and first respectively.

The Television Audience Measurement Ireland (TAMI, 2015-2018) reports from 2015 to 2018 show a number of occasions where Ireland football and rugby matches have been ranked among the most watched TV programmes of each year. In 2015 some of Ireland's Rugby World Cup matches were the most watched sporting events in Ireland, the highest of which was the final pool game against France that attracted a TV audience of just over 1.1 million. Ireland's most significant football matches that year attracted smaller TV audiences, however a fairer comparison can be made to their Euro 2016 matches the following year, given that any Ireland team competing in a major tournament will have a wider reach in comparison with more traditional qualifiers or annual Six Nations matches. During Euro 2016, according to the TAMI (2016) figures that year, the Ireland football matches against Italy and France pulled in more than 1.2 million viewers, which is a larger audience than any Rugby World Cup match the previous year.

According to TAMI (2017) figures in 2017, Ireland's football World Cup qualifiers against Denmark and Wales were the most watched sports programmes that year aside from the two GAA All Ireland finals, with the Denmark match breaking the 1 million viewers mark. Despite the fact that the football team was ultimately unsuccessful in qualifying for the World Cup, both of these matches were ranked above the entire Six Nations rugby campaign. In 2018, rugby dominated the most-watched list with big wins against England and New Zealand rounding off the most successful year in the team's history in terms of results. This coincided with a particularly poor year for the Ireland football team with no major matches taking place, and thus, no appearances in the top 50 most watched TV programmes.

However, despite the rugby team's Grand Slam success and the historic win against the All Blacks in 2018, the largest audience they attracted was 975,000, which still falls short of the largest football audience from the previous year when there were major Ireland football matches taking place. This suggests that while both the rugby and football teams can attract large TV audiences and compete with each other in terms of viewership, the swings in favour of each sport can vary depending on the level of significance of the matches each team plays in a given year. When measured both at their peak, the figures lend to the argument that the Ireland football team still commands a larger TV audience than the rugby team when both are competing in major matches.

Considering the evidence from the aforementioned statistics around participation, attendance and TV viewership in both sports, the argument that rugby is a more popular sport than football in Ireland appears to be misguided. Yet still this idea resonates with some rugby supporters, and in some cases even more casual observers of sport around the country. This led me to consider the reasons why the argument in favour of rugby may still persist.

There are some obvious differences between how both sports are perceived by the public. The media analysis of rugby can often make the sport seem more physically tough, technically proficient, and in some ways more honourable and noble, when compared to the level of analysis and commentary afforded to football. Some of this notion can be derived from the fact that our rugby team holds a higher ranking in the world game compared with our seemingly more mediocre football standings, although the differences in scope of global competition between both sports is significant in that regard. For a number of different reasons, it would seem as though the culture of rugby as a sport is more celebrated in parts of this country, in comparison with the sporting culture of football.

Prior to this research study it was my assumption that these attitudes were influenced by such factors as social class, regional locations and general sporting biases. While I considered the fact that differing opinions of the rugby and football teams could be heavily dictated by the fluctuating success of both teams, I also wondered whether some people's opinions towards the teams were more deeply rooted in their own perceptions of Irish national identity, and how each team was represented by the media in this regard. This appeared to be an area that had not been fully explored in specific detail in recent years, so I undertook the investigation to establish firstly what some members of the public perceived to be the main features of Irish national identity, then how those features were mirrored in our national football and rugby teams, while analysing the role that the media plays in projecting those identities.

Selection of the media and sample

I began by identifying a suitable media sample upon which to base my research. Given that the Ireland rugby team and Republic of Ireland football team both attract a national TV audience, as opposed to a regional audience, the most pertinent media sample could be taken from newspapers with national circulation. The frequency of publication was also considered, and daily newspapers were preferred to Sunday newspapers so that the content analysis would not be limited to a single day of the week.

Of all the most popular national daily newspapers, those with the widest circulation and most relevant demographics were considered. NewsBrands Ireland(2018), formerly known as the National Newspapers of Ireland, or NNI, act as a representative body for all national newspapers, covering print and online publication. According to figures on their website which have been verified by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), the four daily newspapers with the largest circulation in Ireland for the period July to December 2018 were The Irish Independent (83,900), The Irish Times (58,131), The Irish Sun (52,126) and The Irish Daily Star (44,234). Combined with the three previous half-year periods where circulation is measured, the data shows that these four newspapers rank in the same order for highest national circulation during the entire two-year period covering 2017 and 2018. By having two broadsheets and two tabloids involved in the media sample, my intention was to undertake a balanced and fair analysis that would represent a broad reader demographic from across the country.

In terms of time period, I considered the differences in fixture schedules that the Ireland rugby team and Republic of Ireland football team would be involved in. Aside from the major international competitions in both sports, namely the World Cup and European Championships, the international football calendar operates on more of a biennial schedule, in comparison to the more consistent annual schedule of the national rugby team. For example, to limit my analysis to the calendar year of 2018 would likely offer an imbalanced sample of media content, given the fact that the football team had so few competitive matches that year in comparison to the rugby team. Therefore, I initially identified a two-year period of 2017 and 2018 as offering a balanced media sample for my analysis, given the fact that both teams were involved in a number of high-profile matches during this timeframe.

In order to analyse a realistic volume of media content, I limited my analysis to newspaper articles published in the lead-up to and aftermath of each match that the respective teams were involved in. The Republic of Ireland football team played 11 matches in 2017 and 9 matches in 2018, while the Ireland rugby team played 11 matches in 2017 and 12 matches in 2018. Both teams played a mixture of friendly and competitive matches during the selected timeframe, so there was a more even balance in terms of the importance and level of media interest that would be placed on both teams. Based on these factors, I originally identified the four aforementioned newspapers' coverage of the Ireland rugby team and the Republic of Ireland football team during selected dates in the years 2017 and 2018 as the basis of my media content analysis. To begin, I conducted a pilot study of the media sample to help define the structure of my analysis.

Defining the analysis

For my pilot study I conducted a content analysis of selected articles from one broadsheet newspaper, namely the Irish Times, and one tabloid newspaper, namely the Irish Daily Star, in relation to both the Ireland rugby team and the Republic of Ireland football team. As discussed in the previous section, I chose articles during the build-up to and immediate aftermath of matches that the teams were involved in, so for the pilot study I analysed articles related to both teams from the dates three days prior until two days after their first match in 2017. Both teams' first match of the year were important competitive fixtures; the Ireland rugby team played against Scotland in Edinburgh in the Six Nations on 4th February, while the Republic of Ireland football team played against Wales in Dublin in a World Cup qualifier on 24th March. Articles from the Irish Times were sourced from their online archive at irishtimes.com and articles from The Irish Daily Star were sourced from the newspaper archive at the National Library of Ireland (NLI).

Maguire & Tuck (2005) describe National identity as 'sets of behaviour, or habitus codes, which work to bind individuals together.' Using this context, the question at the beginning of this articles refers to 'the media's portrayal of Irish national identity through sport'. In order to assess how the sports media portrays Irish national identity, first it is important to understand what types of personalities or characteristics that the media most commonly project onto our national sports teams, and also what types of personalities or characteristics the public associate with Irish people in general, not just within sport. The public's perspective on this would be gathered via the multiple-choice survey which I will discuss further in a later section. However, I endeavoured to use the findings of my pilot media content analysis as a means of formulating pertinent questions to use in the survey that would follow. These findings from the newspaper articles would inform certain questions to be used in the survey, regarding the most common traits of identity that the public associate with our sports teams and with Irish people in general. The newspaper articles would first reveal the characteristics that the media projects onto each team, and later the results of the survey would clarify whether the public associates these characteristics with their own personal sense of 'Irishness'.

Starting with the Republic of Ireland football team during the week of their match against Wales, I analysed the content of all articles related to the team between the dates of 21st – 26th March inclusive. This analysis involved 33 articles from the Irish Times and 30 articles from the Daily Star during this period. Similarly, for the Ireland rugby team, I focused on all articles surrounding their

match against Scotland between the dates of 1st – 6th February inclusive, which consisted of 25 articles from the Irish Times and 11 articles from the Daily Star. In both cases, I limited the study to articles specifically related to either national team or the players within those teams, as opposed to any article related to either sport. For example, articles related to Peter O'Mahony in the context of his place in the Ireland squad were included as they are relevant to the study, however, articles related to Peter O'Mahony in the context of his place in the Munster squad or as part of the British & Irish Lions tour were deemed not relevant and were excluded from the study.

I used this pilot to identify the most common themes that could be drawn from the coverage and to objectively deduce how the relevant team and / or players were depicted in each article. At the end of this pilot analysis I had identified ten characteristics that were present in the media sample relating to one or both teams, across both newspapers. In *Table 3.1** below, I have outlined examples of how each characteristic is referenced during the media content analysis, both in a positive and negative context in relation to both teams and / or the players and coaches involved.

Characteristic	Positive Context	Negative Context
Combative	Physically competitive or aggressive, to the benefit of the team	Overly aggressive or lacking discipline, to the detriment of the team
Confident	Showing belief or confidence in their own / the team's ability	Lacking belief or confidence, or showing over-confidence or cockiness
Hard-working	Strong work-ethic. Maximum effort and commitment	Poor work-ethic. Insufficient effort and commitment
Humble	Displaying humility in one's role in the squad. Maintaining strong links to one's background, rootedness in their community	Lacking humility in relation to one's role in the squad. Showing a sense of disconnection with one's background or community
Intelligent	Cerebral preparation & tactics. Methodical approach to sport. Positive decision-making	Poor decision-making. Misjudged or inept tactical approach
Loyal	Displaying a strong sense of team spirit and commitment to the cause	Lacking in team spirit and not fully committed to the cause
Passionate	Passionate approach to representing Ireland, showing national pride and spirit	Dispassionate approach to representing Ireland, lacking in national pride and spirit
Pragmatic	Practical decision-making or tactical approach, to the benefit of the team	Overly-practical or limiting tactical approach, to the detriment of the team
Skilful	High quality in terms of skill and ability	Poor quality in terms of skill and ability
Tough	Showing physical or mental toughness and durability	Lacking physical or mental toughness and durability

*Table 3.1**

From my analysis of the chosen articles across both sports, I derived that the following characteristics appeared at least once, either in a positive or negative connotation (see *Table 3.2** below).

Characteristic	Number of articles	Positive Tone	Negative Tone
Combative	14	7	7
Confident	5	4	1
Hard-working	15	15	0
Humble	11	11	0
Intelligent	5	3	2
Loyal	12	11	1
Passionate	9	8	1
Pragmatic	1	1	0
Skilful	18	5	13
Tough	16	15	1

*Table 3.2**

For the purposes of the media analysis section of this study, these ten characteristics are listed as examples of Irish national identity as projected by the media, in relation to the rugby and football teams. These ten characteristics were then used to form the basis of my analysis for the entire media content review. Each newspaper article would be reviewed and logged according to a number of categories. These categories are a mix of standardised factors that track basic information about the article, such as the newspaper and date for example, and more in-depth factors such as ‘themes’ and ‘overall’ that can be used to generate far greater insights on the significance of the article. The categories are listed as follows:

1. Date: date article was published
2. Match: the fixture being covered while this article was published
3. Competition: the competition this fixture was part of – this data would offer an insight on the level of significance of each match

4. Newspaper: the media outlet publishing the article – recording this data would allow for comparisons between the different publications
5. Writer: the author / journalist who produced the article – this data would allow for comparisons in tone between specific journalists
6. Headline: a description of the subject matter as referenced in the headline of the article – for example ‘Martin O’Neill’ or ‘Joe Schmidt’. This data would be useful in determining which players / coaches are covered most frequently
7. Topic: type of article – examples include ‘press conference’, ‘player ratings’, ‘interview’, ‘team selection’, ‘report’ etc
8. National Identity: categorising the article as either relevant or not relevant to the aforementioned ten characteristics of national identity. Any article where one or more of the ten characteristics is referenced would be marked as ‘Yes’, while articles where all characteristics are absent would be marked as ‘No’
9. Themes: Outline of which characteristics of national identity appear in the article
10. Negative: Which characteristics are presented in a negative tone
11. Positive: Which characteristics are presented in a positive tone
12. Overall: Categorise the article into one of three options – ‘Positive’ if overall tone of the article is complimentary; ‘Negative’ if overall tone of the article is critical; ‘Middle’ if overall tone is neither complimentary nor critical. Examples of a ‘Positive’ tone include pieces where a team is being praised for a performance, or a player is being presented in a complimentary fashion during an interview. Examples of a ‘Negative’ tone include pieces where a team is being criticised for a poor performance, or a manager is being presented in an unfavourable manner during a press conference. Examples of articles that are recorded as ‘Middle’ include basic news reports of a team selection that have neither a positive or negative sentiment, or any piece where none of the characteristics of national identity are referenced.

Scope of analysis

The above categories were recorded using Microsoft excel, which allowed for an efficient use of all the data collated when drawing insights from the selected articles in relation to this research topic. During this process, it came to light that there was an abundance of valuable material to be drawn from the analysis of the Irish Times and the Daily Star over the course of the year 2017. Both the volume and quality of material justified reducing the scope of my analysis to only include these two newspapers during the single year period, instead of the original proposal of analysing four newspapers over a two-year period. By limiting the analysis to these two newspapers, I still maintained the balance between reader demographics and style of reporting given that it involved one broadsheet newspaper and one tabloid newspaper.

By choosing to focus solely on the year 2017, this facilitated a more evenly balanced sample of media coverage between the two sports, given that both teams were involved in a similar number of important, high-profile matches during this year, with both teams enduring mixed fortunes in terms of results. This is in stark contrast to 2018, where the Ireland rugby team was hugely successful throughout the calendar year, while the football team floundered during a run of matches with little significance. Therefore, the consideration of these factors justified my decision to amend the scope of my research and to conduct a content analysis of selected articles from The Irish Times and The Irish Daily Star during the calendar year 2017.

Having completed the media content analysis using these parameters, I used the aforementioned logging system to extract data from the full sample and draw conclusions in relation to the sports media's role in portraying Irish national identity as referred to in my research proposal. I will discuss these findings in further detail during the analysis section in chapter four.

Quantitative research

Macnamara (2005) posits that:

"...quantitative content analysis can conform to the scientific method and produce reliable findings. Qualitative content analysis is difficult and maybe impossible to do with scientific reliability. But qualitative analysis of texts is necessary to understand their deeper meanings and likely interpretations by audiences – surely the ultimate goal of analysing media content. So, a combination of the two seems to be the ideal approach." (Macnamara, 2005, p.5)

In order to strengthen the findings from my media content analysis, I chose to apply a quantitative research study for the second element of my analysis. In doing so, I sought to gain insights from the public in terms of how they view Irish national identity, whether or not that view shapes their opinion of the national rugby and football teams, and the sports media's role in how those opinions are formed. My method of seeking these insights was to conduct a quantitative analysis based on a 20-question multiple choice survey. As described in an article by Gaski (2013), survey research is a form of "social scientific investigation that studies large and small populations" by focusing on selected samples. In this instance, the sample is primarily an audience with varying levels of interest in sport.

The survey is used in this research study to establish information related to the respondents' level of interest in the Ireland rugby team, their level of interest in the Republic of Ireland football team, their opinions of both teams, their use of newspapers and online media regarding those teams, and their interpretations of Irish national identity. The survey also gathered demographical data from the respondents to understand their breakdown of age, gender and region. All respondents were anonymous. All questions were answered in a multiple-choice format to keep the responses focused on the key aspects of the research topic, and also to ensure convenience for the respondents to maximise the number of completed surveys.

This was an online survey created using SurveyHero.com which has a free survey creation tool. This tool not only collates responses but also provides reports to be used for data analysis. The survey was targeted primarily towards a sports-focused audience, along with a smaller number of respondents with little to no interest in sport. The sports-focused responses were achieved by circulating the survey via several social media and WhatsApp groups related to amateur sports teams around Ireland, and football and rugby related message boards on websites including Boards.ie and Reddit. My intention in circulating the survey was to obtain a wide demographic of respondents that would fairly represent adult males & females of all ages, with varying levels of interest in rugby and football, with a variety of media consumption, from around the country. The questions and answer options were listed as follows:

Q1: How would you rate your level of interest in the Ireland rugby team?

A1 – choose one from: Strong interest / Fairly regular interest / Occasional interest / Little or no interest

Q2: How many Ireland rugby matches have you attended live since the beginning of 2017?

A2 – choose one from: 10 or more / Between 6 and 10 / Between 2 and 5 / 1 / 0

Q3: How often do you watch the Ireland rugby team play on TV?

A3 – choose one from: All matches (if I'm not attending) / Most matches / Only some important matches / Rarely or never

Q4: With regard to the Ireland rugby team, which of the following is the most important to you?

A4 – choose one from: Results / Style of play / Team's character / None of the above

Q5: Which of the following characteristics do you associate with the Ireland rugby team?

A5 – choose multiple from: Combative / Confident / Hard-working / Humble / Intelligent / Loyal / Passionate / Pragmatic / Skilful / Tough / None of the above

Q6: How would you rate your level of interest in the Republic of Ireland football team?

A6 – choose one from: Strong interest / Fairly regular interest / Occasional interest / Little or no interest

Q7: How many Republic of Ireland football matches have you attended live since the beginning of 2017?

A7 – choose one from: 10 or more / Between 6 and 10 / Between 2 and 5 / 1 / 0

Q8: How often do you watch the Republic of Ireland football team play on TV?

A8 – choose one from: All matches (if I'm not attending) / Most matches / Only some important matches / Rarely or never

Q9: With regard to the Republic of Ireland football team, which of the following is the most important to you?

A9 – choose one from: Results / Style of play / Team’s character / None of the above

Q10: Which of the following characteristics do you associate with the Republic of Ireland football team?

A10 – choose multiple from: Combative / Confident / Hard-working / Humble / Intelligent / Loyal / Passionate / Pragmatic / Skilful / Tough / None of the above

Q11: How often do you read online or newspaper coverage of the Ireland rugby and / or football teams?

A11 – choose one from: Regularly / Occasionally / Rarely or never

Q12: Which of the following newspapers / online media outlets do you read for sports coverage?

A12 – choose multiple from: The Irish Times / The Irish Independent / Irish Daily Star / Other / I don’t read any sports coverage

Q13: In your opinion, to what extent do your chosen sports media outlets influence your view of the Ireland rugby team?

A13 – choose one from: Significant influence / Some influence / Little to no influence / I don’t read any sports coverage

Q14: In your opinion, to what extent do your chosen sports media outlets influence your view of the Republic of Ireland football team?

A14 – choose one from: Significant influence / Some influence / Little to no influence / I don’t read any sports coverage

Q15: Do you think newspaper and online media coverage of the Ireland rugby team is generally fair?

A15 – choose one from: Yes / No / Not sure / I don’t read any sports coverage

Q16: Do you think newspaper and online media coverage of the Republic of Ireland football team is generally fair?

A16 – choose one from: Yes / No / Not sure / I don't read any sports coverage

Q17: Which of the following characteristics do you associate with Irish people outside of sport?

A17 – choose multiple from: Combative / Confident / Hard-working / Humble / Intelligent / Loyal / Passionate / Pragmatic / Skilful / Tough / None of the above

Q18: What is your gender?

A18 – choose one from: Male / Female / I'd rather not say

Q19: What is your age?

A19 – choose one from: 18-25 / 26-35 / 36-45 / 46 or older

Q20: Where are you from?

A20 – choose one from: Connacht / Leinster / Munster / Ulster / Outside Ireland

The findings from this survey will be analysed in conjunction with the data from the media content analysis and both will be used to draw conclusions and address the aforementioned research questions (as discussed in the Introduction). This will be discussed in further detail during the analysis section in chapters four and five.

Ethical challenges

One of the primary ethical challenges of this research study is the need to pursue an objective method of analysis when extracting meaning and interpretations from the selected media content. Content analysis is a more complex method of research in comparison to quantitative findings from a multiple-choice survey, in that conducting an accurate and valuable research study will require limiting my own personal biases and perspectives to extract meaning from the text as it was intended by the author.

McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) outline that “the aims and methods of qualitative research can seem imprecise” and this point was considered from the outset, given that through text I am attempting

to derive perceptions of abstract qualities a football or rugby team embodies on the pitch, as opposed to simply measuring the results or outputs of their performances. In order for this qualitative method to be accurate and meaningful, the personality of the researcher must not interfere with the composition of the data.

The concept of 'objective' content analysis is one that causes some unrest in academic circles, as discussed by Mcnamara (2005). An early definition of content analysis by Berelson uses the phrases 'quantitative', 'systematic' and 'objective' but it is the latter that has been disputed by the likes of Berger & Luckman who argue that even the most scientific approaches to this type of research cannot guarantee objectivity, due to the fact that media texts can be open to variable interpretations depending on the perspective of the reader. While achieving absolute objectivity may be impossible, it is a strong consideration throughout my media content analysis and one that will be noted as a limitation of the study.

Beyond the media content analysis, the quantitative analysis driven by the responses to the multiple-choice survey hold less ethical challenges. This is due to the fact that the analysis is based upon raw data, from a group of anonymous respondents, who are only demographically represented by their gender, age and region. The survey asks respondents to offer their perceptions of the two teams' collective identities, with the answer options based on the findings of my media content analysis. However, the answer options for these questions will also include 'none of the above' so that respondents have the choice to dismiss any findings I put forward if they do not reflect their own personal views.

Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study has been referenced in the previous section of this chapter, regarding the difficulty in conducting purely objective analysis of the media content. Mcnamara (2005) lists several definitions of content analysis which refer to the process of making "valid inferences from text" where the content refers to "words, meanings, symbols, ideas or themes". It is possible that in certain texts there may be multiple themes being touched upon, so there is the possibility that the more prominent themes may dominate the narrative and obstruct the analysis of the secondary and tertiary themes. It is my aim in this research study to extract all themes and meanings depicted in each article so that the data I collate is as accurate as possible, however 100% accuracy cannot be guaranteed in this method.

Additionally, by limiting the survey to multiple-choice questions I have opted to restrict the detail of respondents' opinions so that it captures specific data within certain parameters. This is a choice I have made to specifically target public opinion in a number of particular areas. In the survey respondents are asked to share their perspectives on how much of an influence the media's coverage has on their interest in the two national teams. This can be a difficult question to answer for some people, as the level of critical thinking applied by each respondent will vary, and the influence of the media can often occur subconsciously, so the answers to these particular questions should be viewed simply as a person's perspective on the matter, rather than a factual statement.

Another limitation to consider is that the time period of the media content analysis is not in line with the time period that the survey was conducted, so the coverage that the Irish Times and the Daily Star produced in 2017 may not directly influence public opinion in 2019. It should also be noted that the demographic of the survey respondents is heavily weighted to a particular regional gender group, so it should not be looked at as a fully representative sample of the wider public. This will be elaborated on further in chapter five during the analysis of the survey.

Chapter 4: Analysis & findings (part one)

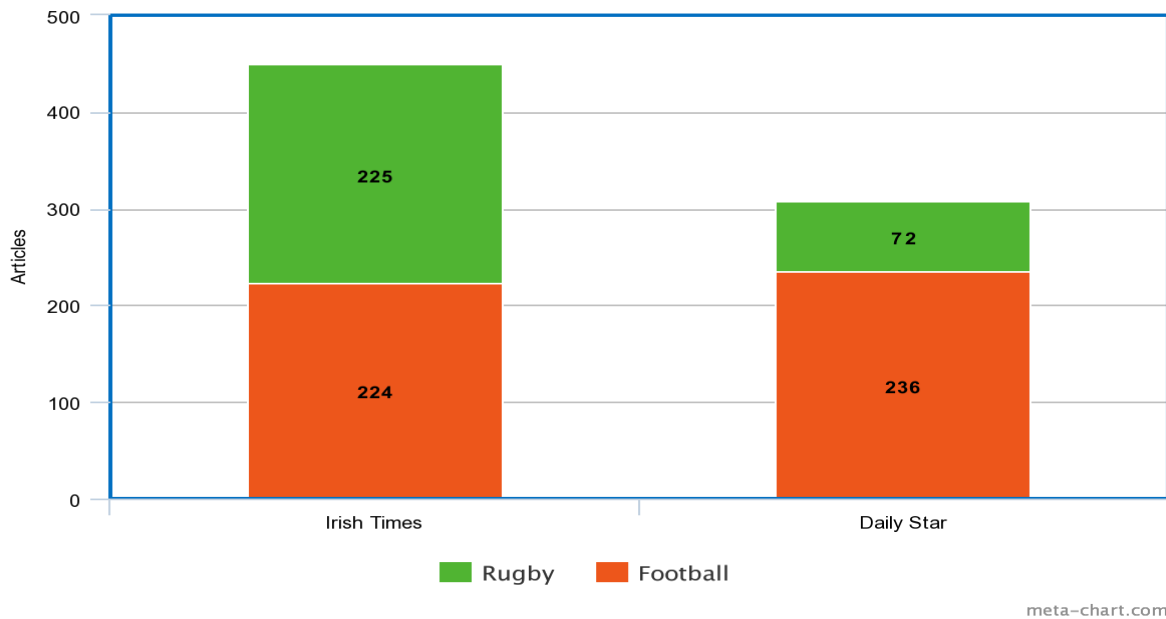
Overview

As previously outlined in the methodology section, this research study involved two elements. The first is a media content analysis which reviewed selected articles related to the Ireland rugby team and Republic of Ireland football team in The Irish Times and The Irish Daily Star from the year 2017. The second is a 20-question multiple-choice survey taken from a sample of the general public with regard to their level of interest in both teams, their sports media consumption and their perceptions of Irish national identity. I will begin this section by outlining the findings of the media content analysis during this chapter, which will be followed by an in-depth look at the findings from the survey in chapter 5. Following that, I will combine both elements to draw insights related to the aforementioned research questions and develop my conclusions.

Content Analysis

During this research study, a total of 757 articles were analysed; this comprised of 449 articles from The Irish Times and 308 articles from the Irish Daily Star. During the selected time period, The Irish Times produced 225 articles in relation to the Ireland rugby team and 224 articles in relation to the Republic of Ireland football team, compared to the Irish Daily Star's 72 articles in relation to the Ireland rugby team and 236 articles in relation to the Republic of Ireland football team. The total number of articles related to the Ireland rugby team across both newspapers was 297, compared with 460 articles across both newspapers in relation to the Republic of Ireland football team. Figure 4.1 below depicts a breakdown of the overall media sample.

Figure 4.1



Rugby Analysis

Beginning with rugby analysis, out of a total of 297 rugby articles a majority of 76% were published by The Irish Times (225 articles). That amounts to a ratio of just over 3:1 in terms of rugby coverage found in the Irish Times in comparison to the amount of rugby coverage in the Daily Star. This speaks to the differences in reader demographics between both newspapers, which I will elaborate on later in this section. The selected articles were based around a timeframe where Ireland played 11 international rugby matches, including 5 Six Nations fixtures, three summer friendlies, and three test matches as part of their Autumn International series.

Rugby in The Irish Times

The 225 rugby articles in The Irish Times featured 13 different writers, made up of journalists, ex-players and coaches. The two lead rugby writers are Gerry Thornley (68 articles) and Gavin Cumiskey (66 articles), with sizeable contributions from John O’Sullivan (30 articles), Johnny Watterson (16 articles) and Liam Toland (10 articles). Their rugby coverage also featured articles from Gordon D’Arcy (5), Matt Williams (3), Patrick Madden (2), Eamon Donoghue (2), Frank McNally (2), Gerard Meagher (1), Malachy Clerkin (1), Mary Hannigan (1) and a further 18 articles with no name attached.

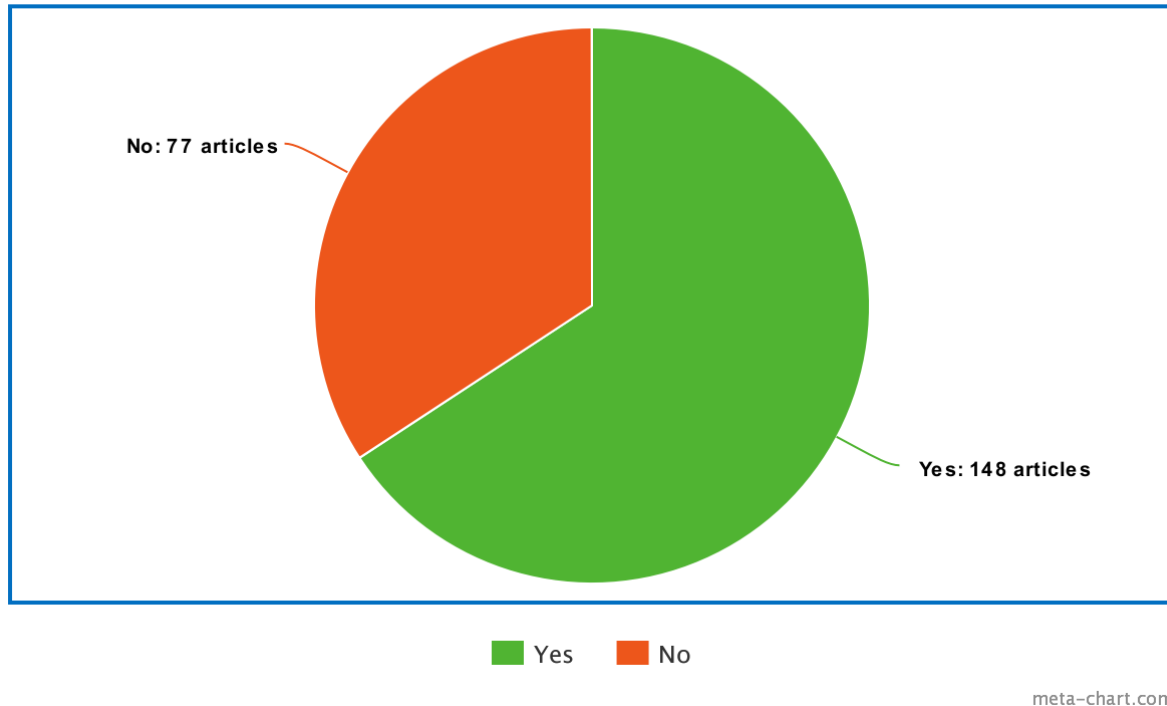
In reference to the list of categories against which each article was logged (described in chapter 3 during the methodology section), category number 7 noted the ‘Topic’ which is, in other words, the type of article. There were 12 different topics found in the Irish Times rugby sample. They were as follows, starting with the most frequent:

- Post-match (75): includes match reports and post-game comments / interviews from players or coaching staff
- Press Conference (49): comments from press conferences in the days prior to a match
- Pre-match (34): includes match previews or pre-game comments / interviews from players or coaching staff in the hours prior to a match
- Team selection (22): speculation regarding team selection or confirmation of team-sheets
- Fitness (11): related to injury news or concerning player fitness
- Column (10): in-depth opinion piece, normally from a lead writer or ex-player / coach
- Player Ratings (8): standard post-match ratings for each player in every competitive test match
- Interview (8): in-depth interview or focus piece, typically related to a single player or coach
- Report (3): basic news report or update
- Statistics (2): piece focused purely on statistical data related to results or performances
- Look back (2): remembering an historic event or match from years gone by
- Competition (1): piece focused purely on permutations of table or competition standings

Under 'Headline' (category number 6), the data log provided a breakdown of each article by subject matter. The headline in all cases focused primarily on either a team (Ireland or their opposition) or a player / coach from the Ireland squad. 37 different Ireland players / coaches in total were referenced in the headlines, the most regular of which were Ireland manager Joe Schmidt (26 articles), and players Johnny Sexton (14 articles), Joey Carbery (12 articles), Conor Murray (9 articles), Rory Best (6 articles) and Bundee Aki (6 articles).

The central objective of this content analysis was to identify whether or not Irish national identity was referenced in the selected articles. Using the ten characteristics of Irish national identity as outlined in chapter 3, I studied each article to assess if one or more of those characteristics could be derived from the text in either a positive or negative context. Articles found to have a reference to at least one of the characteristics of Irish national identity were recorded as 'Yes' on the data log, while articles where these references were absent were recorded as 'No'. *Figure 4.2* below illustrates the split between articles which were categorised as relevant and non-relevant to national identity. Articles in the 'Yes' bracket made up a 66% majority.

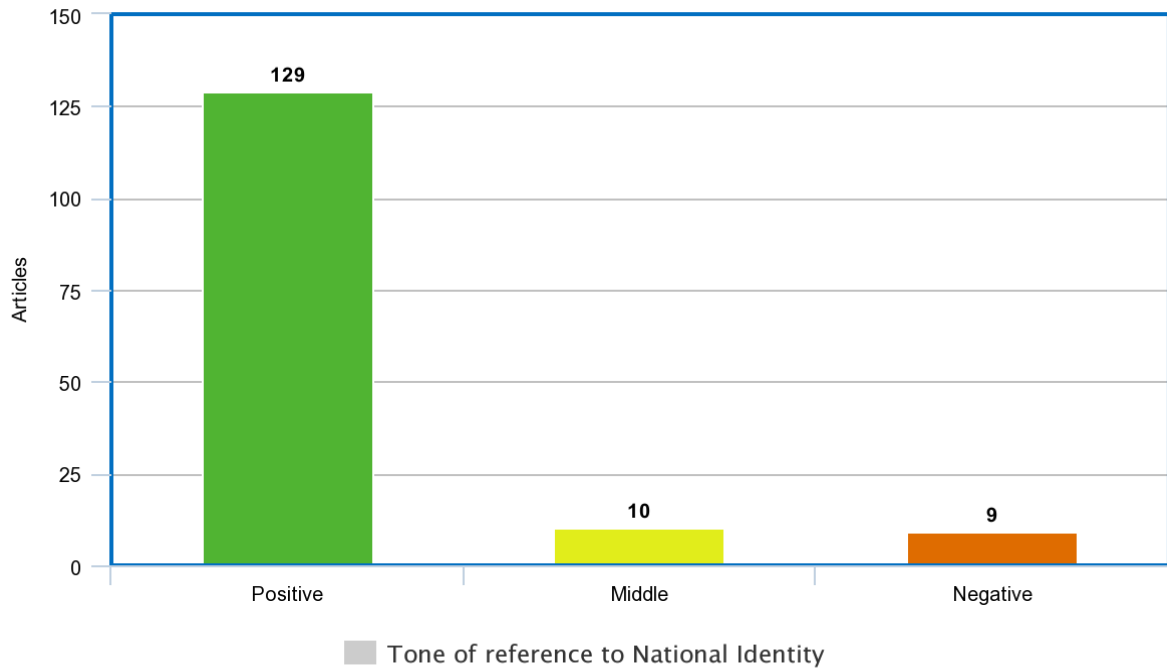
Figure 4.2
National Identity in Irish Times Rugby



Out of the 148 articles where references to Irish national identity were found, in the 'Overall' category, each article was logged as having a 'positive' tone or 'negative' tone, while articles which were neither positive nor negative were logged as 'middle.' *Figure 4.3* below illustrates the breakdown of articles in this category. There was a high level of positivity in this sample, with 87% of the Irish Times rugby articles which referred to national identity having done so in a positive tone. 6% were presented in a negative tone and 7% were in the middle.

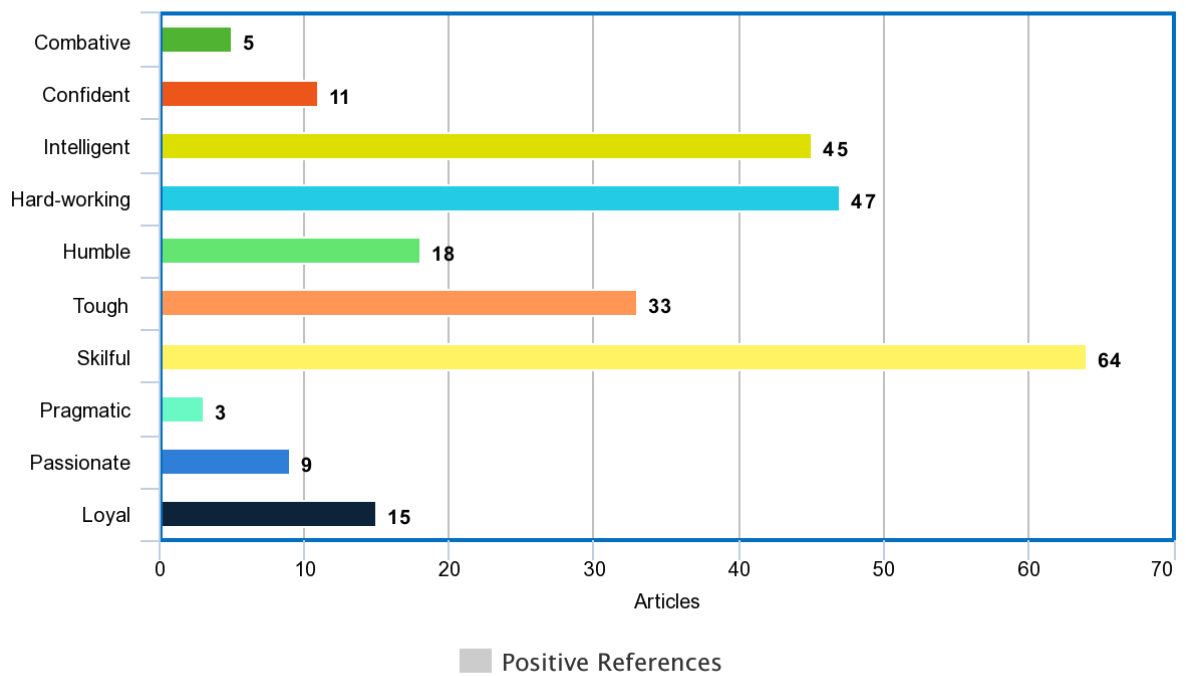
Going into further depth in this regard, I analysed each article to record the characteristics of national identity that were referenced in either a positive or negative tone. Starting with the articles that projected a negative tone, the characteristics of national identity that appeared in the form of criticisms were 'skilful' (8 articles), 'intelligent' (3 articles) and 'confident' (1 article). The positive traits were of a greater number, and *Figure 4.4* below illustrates the breakdown of those characteristics and how frequently they were referenced in a complimentary fashion.

Figure 4.3
Irish Times Rugby



meta-chart.com

Figure 4.4
Irish Times Rugby



meta-chart.com

Out of the total 225 Irish Times rugby articles that were analysed, 57% contained positive references to traits of Irish national identity, with only 4% containing negative references and 39% being in the middle. This majority level of positive coverage should be considered in the context of how the Ireland rugby team performed in 2017. It was considered a successful year for Ireland, having won 9 and lost 2 out of 11 games, finishing the year as 3rd in the world rankings. The highlights were a November test victory over South Africa and a win against England that secured second place in the Six Nations. With some exciting young players coming through the ranks and confidence in the management team, the general mood in the camp according to the Irish Times in this research study was certainly positive.

As depicted in *Figure 4.4* above, the most common characteristics that were referenced in a positive tone were 'Skilful' (64 articles), 'Hard-working' (47 articles), 'Intelligent' (45 articles) and 'Tough' (33 articles). These traits are perhaps unsurprising in the context of this timeframe given that the team's results and performances overall were good. The Ireland squad contained a wealth of high-quality players who were performing well, so it is logical that they would be depicted by the media as 'skilful'. Any team challenging at the top-level of world rugby will typically require a strong work-ethic and physical toughness, so there is no surprise to see 'hard-working' and 'tough' appear regularly.

It is interesting to find the team regularly referred to as 'intelligent', which it could be argued is fuelled by the reputation of the manager Joe Schmidt, who is widely considered as a master tactician and one of the most renowned deep-thinkers in the game. This idea may also contribute to two of the more surprising outcomes of the analysis in this section, namely the lower scores found in relation to the characteristics 'Combative' (5 articles) and 'Passionate' (9 articles). These are two common traits that one would often associate with a national rugby team given the physicality and commitment required to compete at the top level, so it is slightly surprising to see them referenced so infrequently. However, it may be a symptom of the media's depiction of the more cerebral, tactical qualities of Joe Schmidt's Ireland team, that places less focus on the more primal aspects of the game.

Rugby in the Irish Daily Star

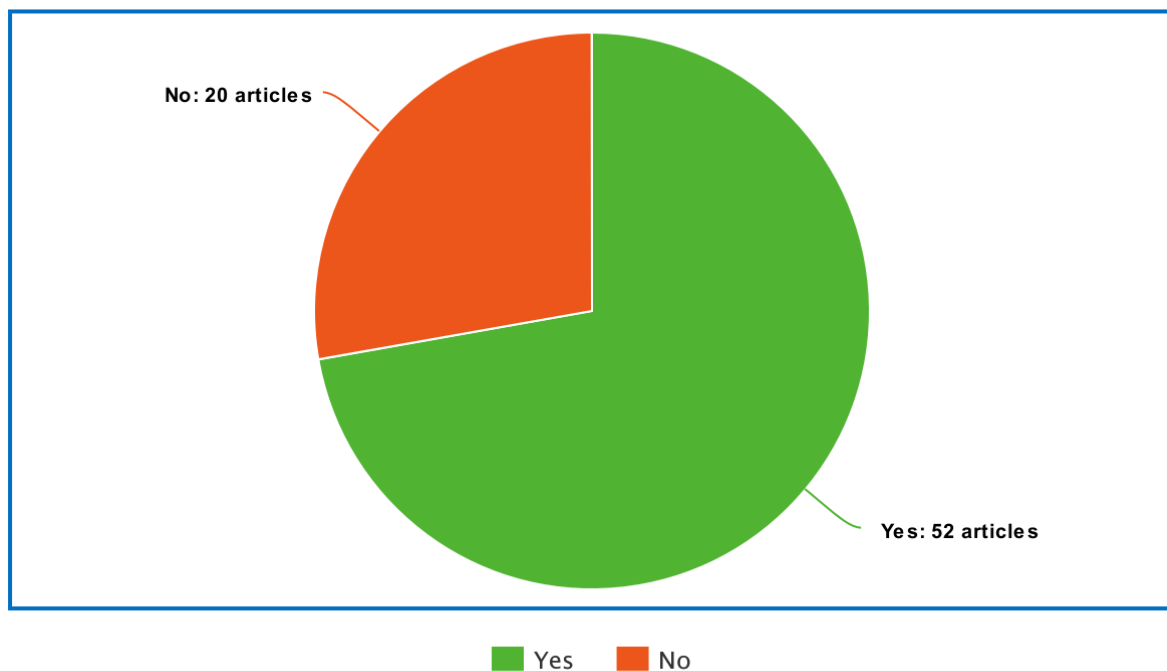
The Daily Star published 72 rugby articles in this timeframe, produced by 5 writers. The vast majority came from their chief rugby writer, Derek Foley (62 articles), with contributions from Kieran

Cunningham (3 articles), Richard Butler (3 articles), Trevor Brennan (3 articles) and Jin Tarberakawa (1 article). In this pool there were 9 different 'topics' as outlined in the following list:

- Post-match (20 articles)
- Press conference (19 articles)
- Team selection (9 articles)
- Pre-match (8 articles)
- Player Ratings (7 articles)
- Report (4 articles)
- Interview (2 articles)
- Column (2 articles)
- Fitness (1 article)

In the category of 'Headline' there were 13 articles that focused primarily on the Ireland team or their opposition, while the rest focused on specific Ireland players or coaches. 24 different squad members were referenced in the Daily Star's rugby headlines, with Joe Schmidt (10 articles), Johnny Sexton (4 articles), Joey Carbery (4 articles) and Jacob Stockdale (4 articles) appearing most frequently.

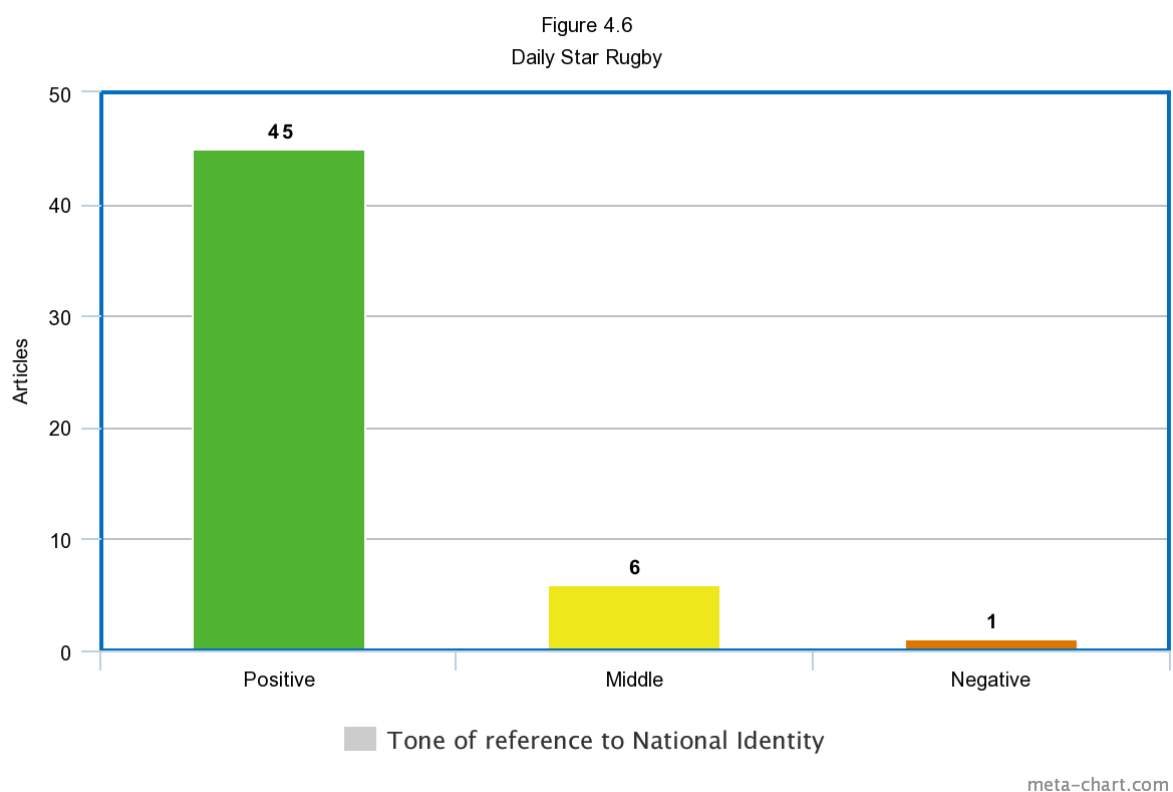
Figure 4.5
National Identity in Daily Star Rugby



meta-chart.com

In the category of national identity, each article was analysed to determine if at least one of the ten characteristics is referenced in the text. In this regard, out of the 72 rugby articles in the Daily Star, 52 were logged as relevant to national identity ('Yes') and 20 were deemed as non-relevant ('No'), as shown in *Figure 4.5* above. This is a majority of 72%, which is slightly higher than the Irish Times figure of 66%, albeit from a smaller sample of articles.

Taking the 52 Daily Star rugby articles where references to national identity were present, the tone of each article was categorised as positive, negative or middle. There was a high rate of positivity in this sample, as evidenced by *Figure 4.6* below. This matches the 87% positive ranking that was found in the corresponding figure in The Irish Times rugby analysis.

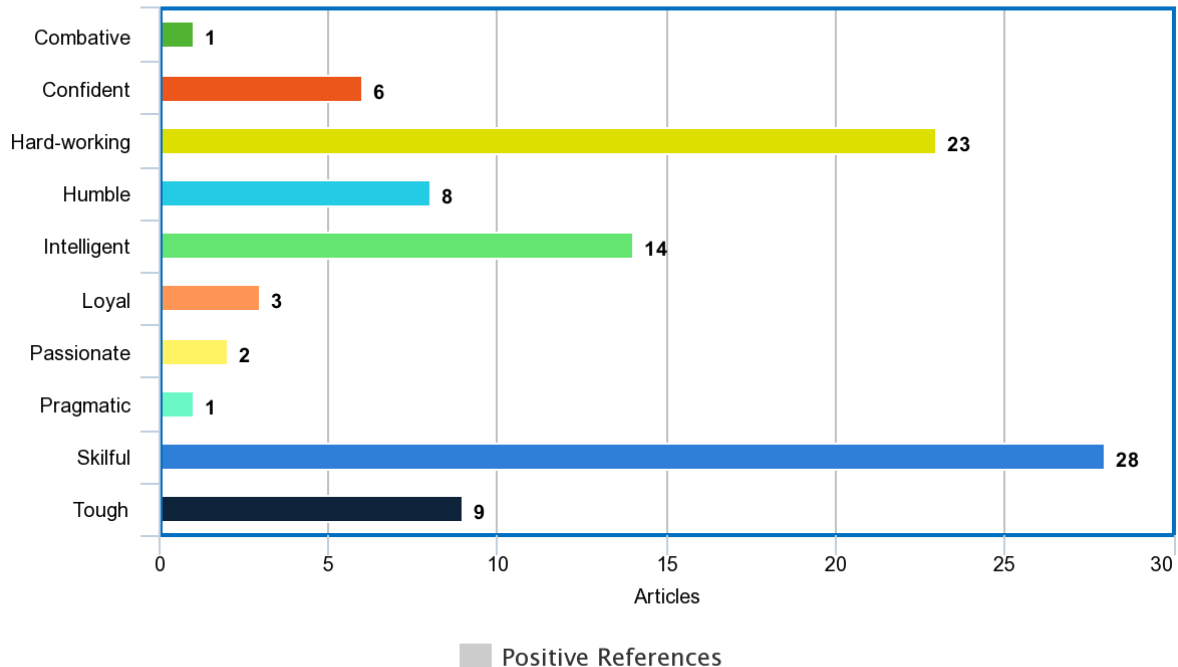


When measuring against the entire sample of rugby articles in the Daily Star (including those where no references to national identity were found), this study found that 63% of the Daily Star's rugby articles had a positive tone of reference to national identity, which is slightly higher than the corresponding Irish Times figure of 57%. Again, here it should be noted that the Irish Times had published a significantly higher number of rugby articles in this sample study.

In terms of the characteristics of national identity that were referenced in the Daily Star's rugby articles, there were 9 examples which were presented in a negative context. The characteristics in these cases were 'skilful' (6 articles), 'intelligent' (2 articles) and 'combative' (1 article). In a similar

way to the Irish Times, there was a much greater number of positive references to characteristics of national identity in the Daily Star’s rugby articles, which is broken down in *Figure 4.7* below.

Figure 4.7
Daily Star Rugby



meta-chart.com

Much like the Irish Times, these examples follow a similar pattern, showing that the top three most frequent references are complimentary in the areas of ‘skilful’, ‘hard-working’ and ‘intelligent’. In both newspapers, the characteristic ‘Tough’ appears as the fourth most common positive reference, though it is present in 22% of the relevant Irish Times articles which is slightly higher than the 17% of relevant articles where it appears in the Daily Star.

Rugby Comparison: Broadsheet & Tabloid

When comparing the findings from rugby coverage in both The Irish Times and the Irish Daily Star, the figures demonstrate a similar pattern between the two newspapers in terms of the rate of positive to negative references to the characteristics of national identity. The same key characteristics are referenced most frequently, which suggests that the Ireland rugby team is depicted in a similar way in both newspapers. The obvious difference, however, is in the volume of coverage between both newspapers. As previously mentioned, The Irish Times published more than three times the number of articles related to the rugby team than the Daily Star during the selected

timeframe, which shows a significant gap in how prominently rugby is positioned in the broadsheet outlet when compared with the tabloid.

Here we should consider the different readership demographics that these newspapers appeal to. The website Medialive.ie shares a readership review for newspapers in the Republic of Ireland, which uses figures from the Joint National Readership Survey (JNRS) in 2014/15. The JNRS produce reports to measure print and digital readership, using research conducted by Millward Brown that adopts a best practice methodological approach which is recognised internationally. These figures show the differences in each newspapers' readership based on age, social class, gender and region. *Table 4.1* below gives a breakdown of the data collated by the most recent JNRS in 2014 / 15.

Age	Irish Times	Irish Daily Star	Difference
All adults	8.8%	8.6%	0.2%
15-34	5.8%	8.7%	2.9%
35 +	10.3%	8.6%	1.7%
Gender	Irish Times	Irish Daily Star	Difference
Male	9.2%	10.0%	0.8%
Female	8.4%	7.3%	1.1%
Social Class	Irish Times	Irish Daily Star	Difference
ABC1	17.2%	5.1%	12.1%
C2DE	3.2%	11.5%	8.3%
Farmers	1.4%	7.3%	5.9%
Region	Irish Times	Irish Daily Star	Difference
Dublin	14.2%	7.8%	6.4%
Rest of Leinster	9.1%	10.7%	1.6%
Munster	4.5%	7.7%	3.2%
Connacht / Ulster	6.3%	8.2%	1.9%

Table 4.1

Readership Demographic (JNRS 2014/15)

In the age bracket, the largest gap between the two newspapers is in the 15-34 grouping, where the Daily Star holds a 2.9% advantage over the Irish Times, who conversely have a 1.7% larger share of the over 35 market. The Daily Star have a slightly larger male demographic, although they have a

smaller female demographic than the Irish Times, which has a more even gender split within their readership.

Perhaps the most striking differences between the two newspapers can be found in the areas of social class and region. UKgeographics.co.uk is a UK-based market research provider who share data and geo-demographical information for marketing and other sectors. They define social grades under the following categories:

- AB: Higher & intermediate managerial, administrative, professional occupations
- C1: Supervisory, clerical & junior managerial, administrative, professional occupations
- C2: Skilled manual occupations
- DE: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, Unemployed and lowest grade occupations

Using these definitions, the figures in *Table 4.1* above show a large gap in the ABC1 market, where the Irish Times hold a 12.1% larger market share than the Daily Star. The Daily Star manages to regain ground in the C2DE and Farmers categories, with 8.3% and 5.9% leads respectively. These are significant gaps that clearly outline the different markets that each newspaper would consider as their primary readership base. In terms of region, it is clear that The Irish Times readership is more heavily concentrated in Dublin, with a 6.4% larger market share in the capital. However, The Daily Star holds an advantage in Munster, Connacht and Ulster.

These factors are highly relevant when considering the primary audience for each newspaper. Taking the traditional view that rugby is more of an elitist, middle class sport than football, it is perhaps no surprise that a newspaper such as The Irish Times, with a primarily ABC1, Dublin-based readership, would focus more attention on the Ireland rugby team in comparison to a tabloid newspaper such as the Daily Star. These findings add more credibility to the view discussed in the previous chapter, that rugby still has some way to go before it could truly be considered as “the people’s game”, when we consider that a national daily newspaper such as the Daily Star could limit their rugby coverage to such an extent, despite maintaining such a large readership across the country within key social and regional demographics.

Football Analysis

Out of a total of 460 articles across both newspapers in relation to the Republic of Ireland football team, there was a fare more even split between the two outlets, in comparison to the rugby coverage. The Irish Times published 224 football articles (49%) in comparison to the Irish Daily Star

who published 236 (51%). During this timeframe Ireland played 11 international football matches, made up of 3 friendlies and 8 competitive matches as part of their ultimately unsuccessful World Cup qualification campaign.

Football in The Irish Times

12 different writers contributed to the 224 football articles in the Irish Times during the selected time period. The primary contributor was Emmet Malone (93 articles), followed by Keith Duggan (20 articles), Ken Early (16 articles) and Patrick Madden (16 articles). The remaining articles were written by Mary Hannigan (13), Ruaidhri Croke (11), Malachy Clerkin (8), Frank McNally (4), Richie Sadlier (2), Gavin Cumiskey (2), Eamon Donoghue (1) and Kevin Burke (1), along with a further 37 articles where no name was attached.

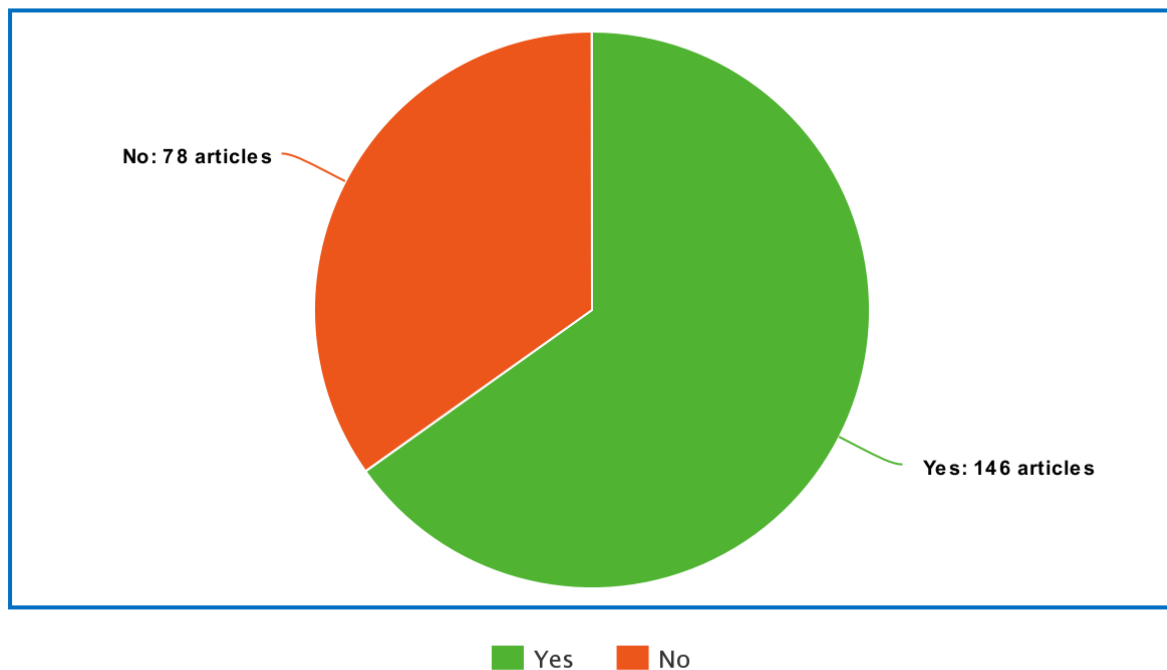
Using the same excel data format as previously described during the rugby analysis, I outlined a 'topic' for each article that was studied. Using the same aforementioned descriptions of each topic, there was only one additional type of article to be added to this list, namely 'Player Profiles', which was a pre-match player-by-player breakdown of the team or squad. The range of different topics found in the 224 articles are listed as follows, starting with the most frequent:

- Post-match (87 articles)
- Press conference (40 articles)
- Pre-match (34 articles)
- Team selection (15 articles)
- Report (15 articles)
- Fitness (11 articles)
- Player ratings (10 articles)
- Column (6 articles)
- Look back (5 articles)
- Player profiles (1 article)

In the category labelled as 'Headline', I recorded the main subject matter or focus of the articles that was referenced in the headline. The vast majority of these headlines referred either to a team (Ireland or the opposition) or a member of the playing squad or coaching staff. There were 30 different players / coaches referenced in the headline category. The most regular of which were the manager Martin O'Neill (43 articles), the assistant manager Roy Keane (10 articles), and the captain Seamus Coleman (10 articles). Beyond that, the most frequently referenced players were Jonathan Walters (8 articles), Harry Arter (8 articles) and James McClean (7 articles).

Each article was analysed to determine whether any of the ten characteristics of national identity were referenced, with relevant articles marked as 'Yes' and non-relevant articles marked as 'No'. In this regard, out of the 224 football articles in the Irish Times, 146 were found to be relevant, with the remaining 78 marked as non-relevant. *Figure 4.8* below illustrates the split between the two, showing that one or more characteristics of national identity were referenced in 65% of the articles analysed in this section.

Figure 4.8
National Identity in Irish Times Football

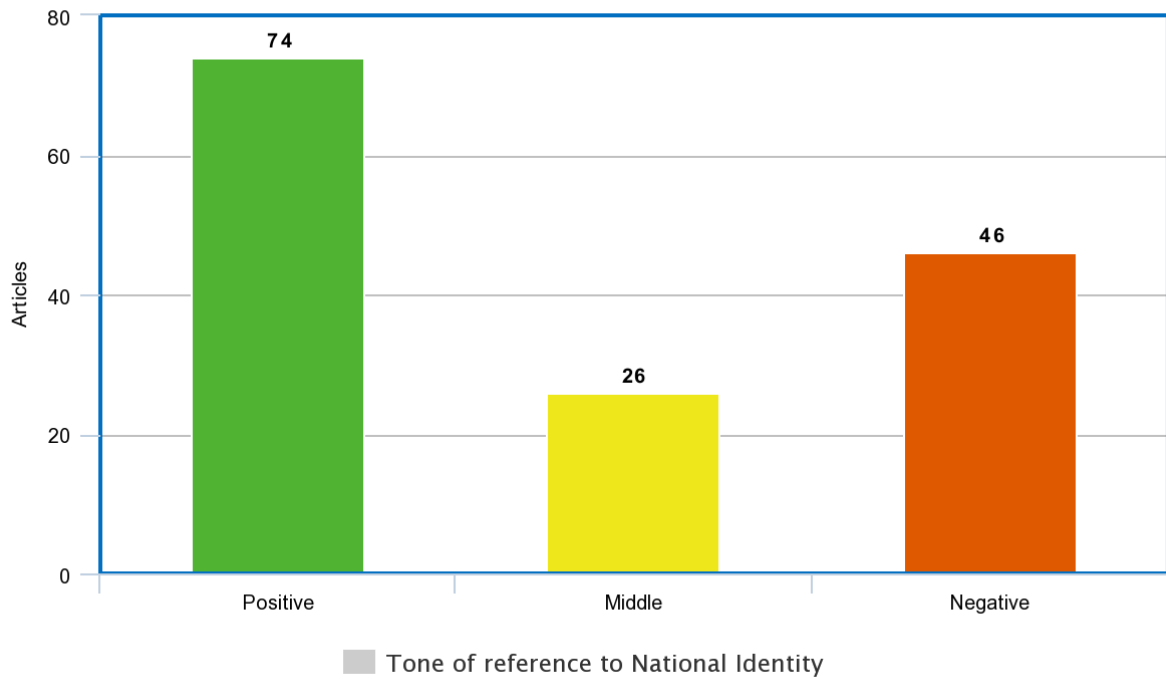


meta-chart.com

Within that grouping of 146 articles where national identity was referenced, an 'overall' ranking was applied to each one depending on whether the prevailing tone of the article was 'positive' or 'negative'. Any articles that were neither positive nor negative would be recorded as 'middle'. In this sample, I determined that a majority of 74 articles contained positive references to national identity, with 46 articles classed as negative, and the remaining 26 recorded as 'middle'.

Figure 4.9 below outlines these findings, which amount to a 51% majority of positive articles in this section with 31% negative. When we expand the sample to include all football articles published by The Irish Times in this study (including those which were marked as non-relevant to the theme of national identity), 33% of articles are found to have at least one of the characteristics of national identity referenced in a predominantly positive tone.

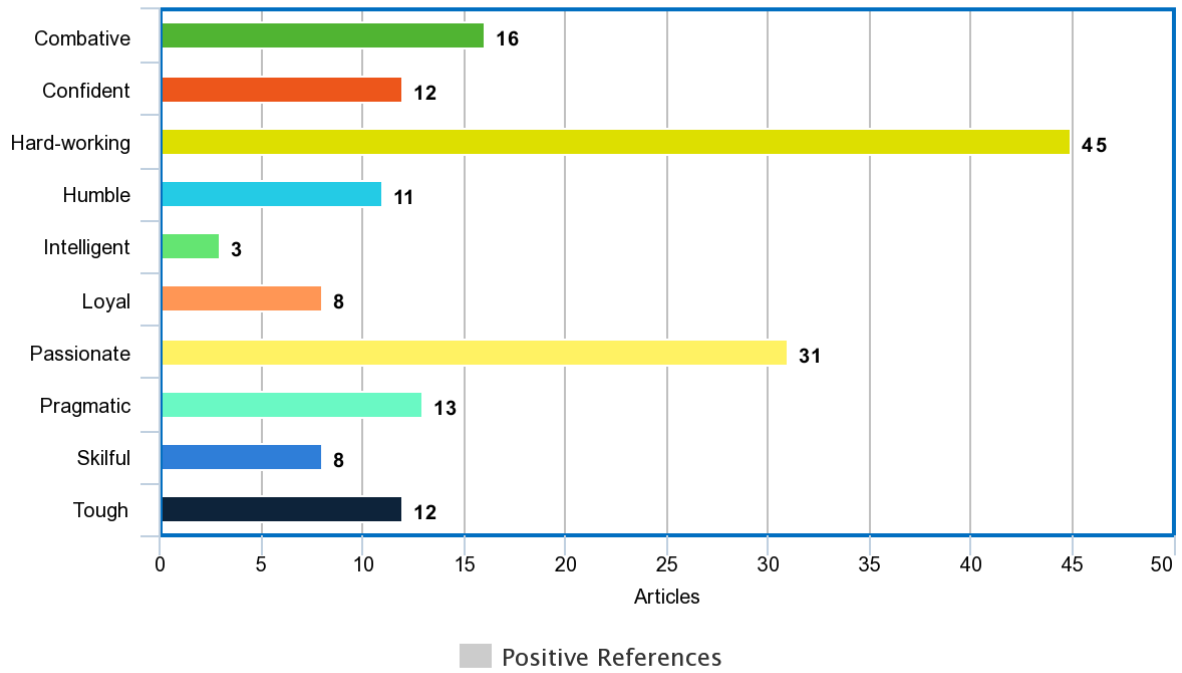
Figure 4.9
Irish Times Football



meta-chart.com

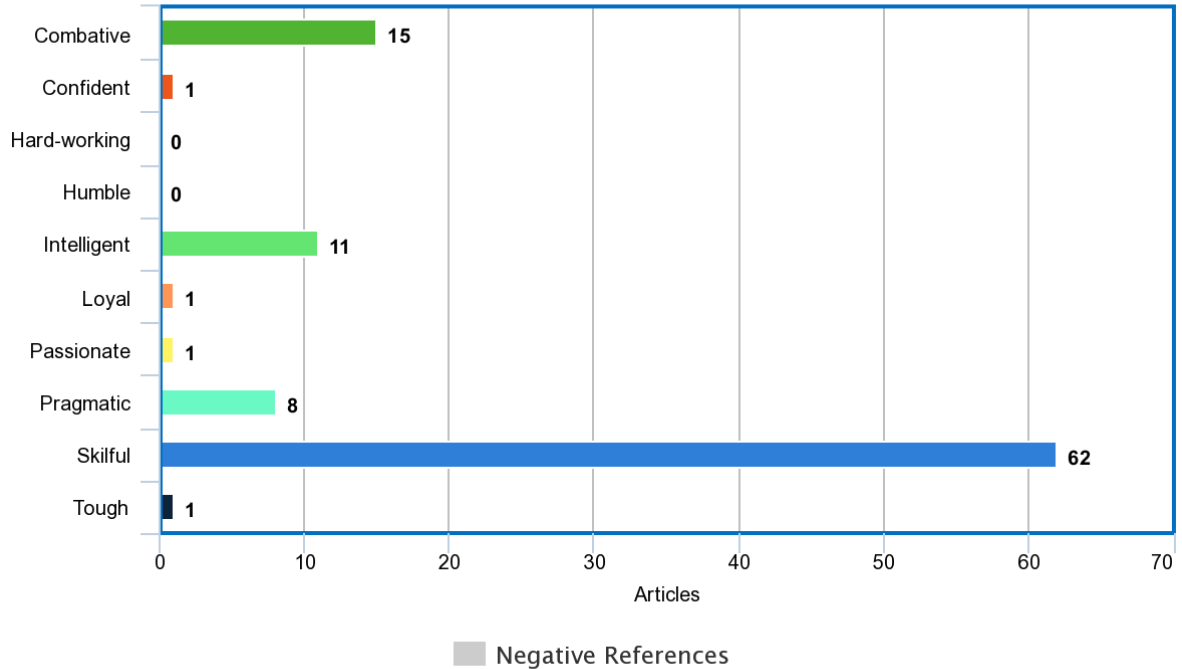
Each of the ten characteristics of national identity were tracked to determine whether they were projected in a positive or negative light. The charts below offer a breakdown of the number of times each characteristic was referenced in a positive tone (as per *Figure 4.10a*) and in a negative tone (as per *Figure 4.10b*). In comparison to the rugby coverage, there was a notably higher amount of negativity found in the football articles.

Figure 4.10a
Irish Times Football



meta-chart.com

Figure 4.10b
Irish Times Football



meta-chart.com

When analysing these figures, it is valuable to consider the context of how the Republic of Ireland football team performed in 2017. The year began with a great sense of optimism following the success of Euro 2016 and a strong start to World Cup qualification, with Ireland finishing 2016 as 23rd

in the FIFA world rankings. But a number of disappointing performances and results during the first 9 months of 2017 left the team's World Cup hopes in severe jeopardy, until a memorable win against Wales in Cardiff put Ireland through to a World Cup play-off and gave them a realistic chance of qualification.

Those chances were ended in an emphatic 5-1 defeat to Denmark, for which the team and manager were heavily criticised. The team's overall record in 2017 was 3 wins, 4 draws and 4 defeats from 11 matches, and they finished the year as 32nd in the FIFA world rankings. The year had its share of ups and downs for the squad in terms of results, but aside from the standout victory over Wales, the year was dogged by a general sense of dissatisfaction within certain sections of the media and some supporters regarding the quality of performances and style of play that the management team was producing.

When reviewing the list of characteristics that were referenced in positive and negative tones, it is notable that there is a relatively low number of compliments towards the team in the areas of skill, technical ability or tactical quality. In Figure 4.10b we see that there were 62 examples in The Irish Times where the characteristic of skill was referenced in a negative tone. That number is notably higher than the two most frequently positive characteristics on Figure 4.10a which were 'hard-working' (referenced in 45 articles) and passionate (referenced in 31 articles). It is also interesting that the characteristic 'combative' is referenced almost the same number of times in a negative tone (15) as it is in a positive tone (16), perhaps implying that the team can at times operate on a thin line between controlled aggression and ill-discipline.

Based on the analysis of The Irish Times football coverage, there appears to be an obvious difference in tone when compared with the aforementioned rugby coverage. But before elaborating on those contrasts, I will first examine how the broadsheet coverage in this case compares with the tabloid perspective on football from the Irish Daily Star.

Football in the Irish Daily Star

The Irish Daily Star published 236 articles related to the Republic of Ireland football team during the selected time period, with contributions from 14 different writers. The most prominent writer was Paul Lennon (130 articles) followed by Mark McCadden (46 articles), Eamon Dunphy (17 articles) and Kieran Cunningham (16 articles). The remainder were written by Pat Dolan (8 articles), Derek Foley (8 articles), Darren O'Dea (5 articles), Chris McKenna (2 articles), Chris McNulty (1 article), Ben Finlay (1 article), Dave Armitage (1 article), Don Murrinan (1 article), Ian Murtagh (1 article) and Simon Collins (1 article).

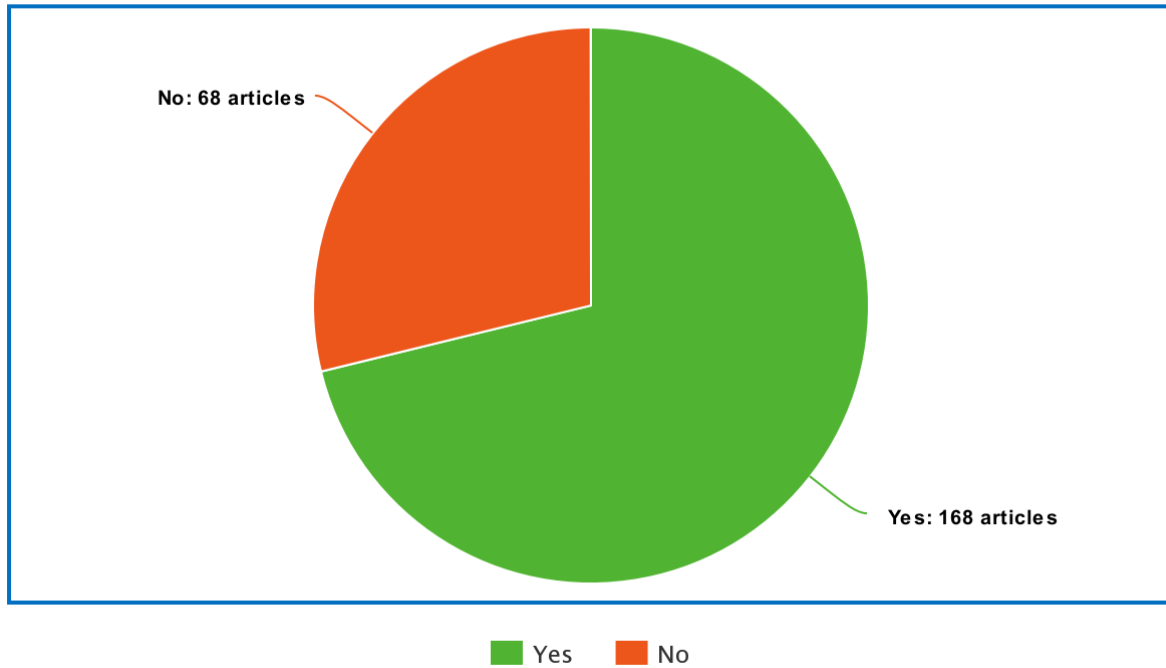
Using the same excel log as discussed previously in this chapter, I recorded the range of 'topics' that the 236 articles were made up of. They are broken down as follows, starting with the most frequent:

- Post-match (84 articles)
- Press conference (49 articles)
- Pre-match (41 articles)
- Team selection (19 articles)
- Player ratings (10 articles)
- Column (10 articles)
- Report (6 articles)
- Fitness (6 articles)
- Look-back (2 articles)
- Profile (1 article)

The main focus of each article's headline was recorded and in the Daily Star there were 35 different players / coaches from the Irish squad referenced in the headlines. Those with the highest numbers in this regard were again Martin O'Neill (55 articles), followed by James McClean (12 articles), Roy Keane (11 articles), Cyrus Christie (10 articles) and Seamus Coleman (7 articles).

As a means of determining how many of the 236 Daily Star articles referred to aspects of national identity, I recorded articles as either 'Yes' being relevant or 'No' being non-relevant. *Figure 4.11* below outlines the split in this category, where 168 articles were tagged as 'Yes' and 68 articles were tagged as 'No'. This is a percentage of 71% whereby articles contained either a positive or negative reference to one or more characteristics of national identity.

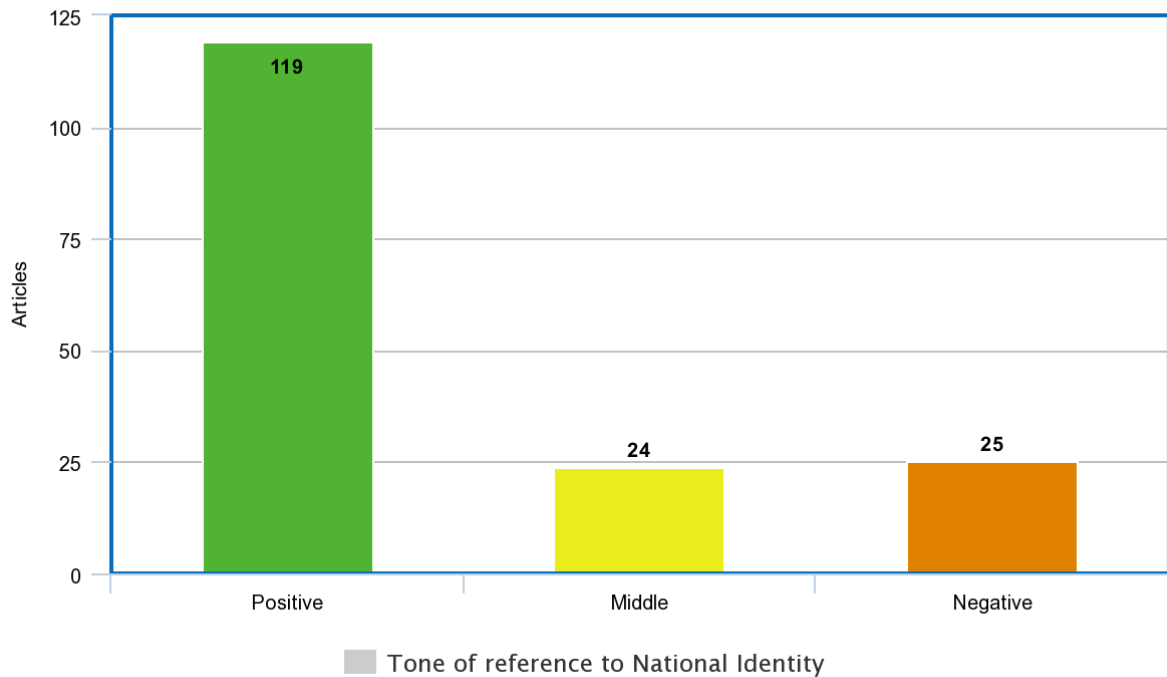
Figure 4.11
National Identity in Daily Star Football



meta-chart.com

From 168 Daily Star articles where references to national identity were recorded, the overall context of each was broken down into those that were positive, negative or in the middle. The majority of articles in this case (119) were positive, with 25 classed as negative and 24 in the middle, as presented in *Figure 4.12* below.

Figure 4.12
Daily Star Football

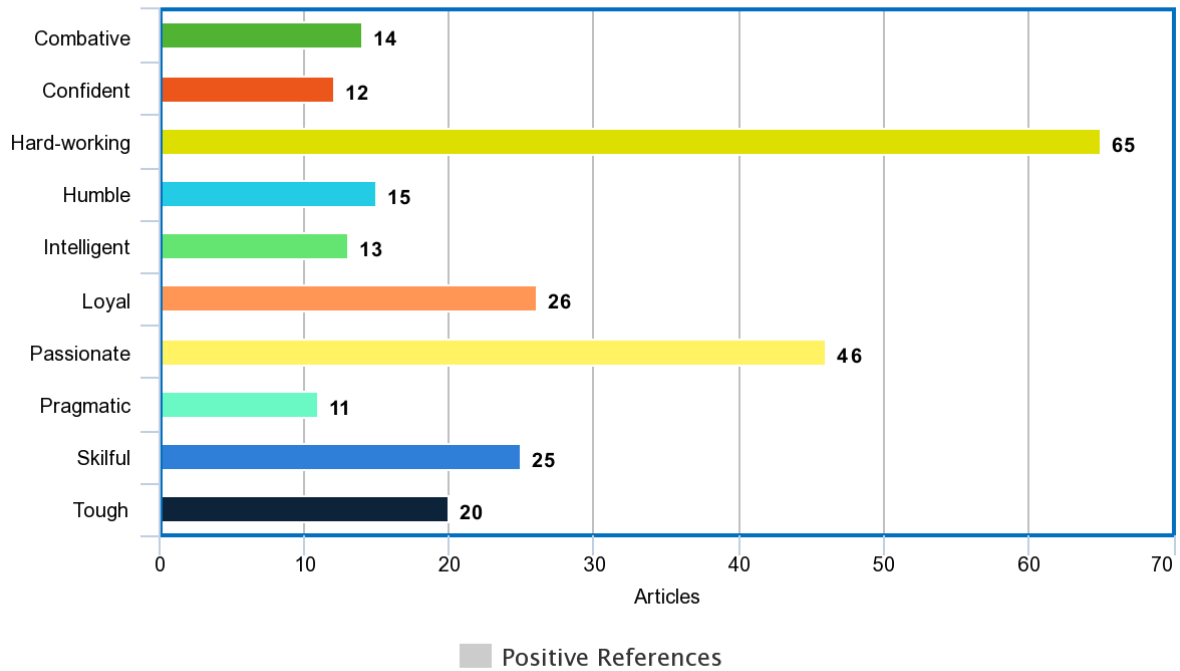


meta-chart.com

This is a notable increase in positivity when compared with the corresponding section of the Irish Times football coverage. The Daily Star's rating of 71% positive and 15% negative is a sizeable increase on the Irish Times' 51% positive and 31% negative.

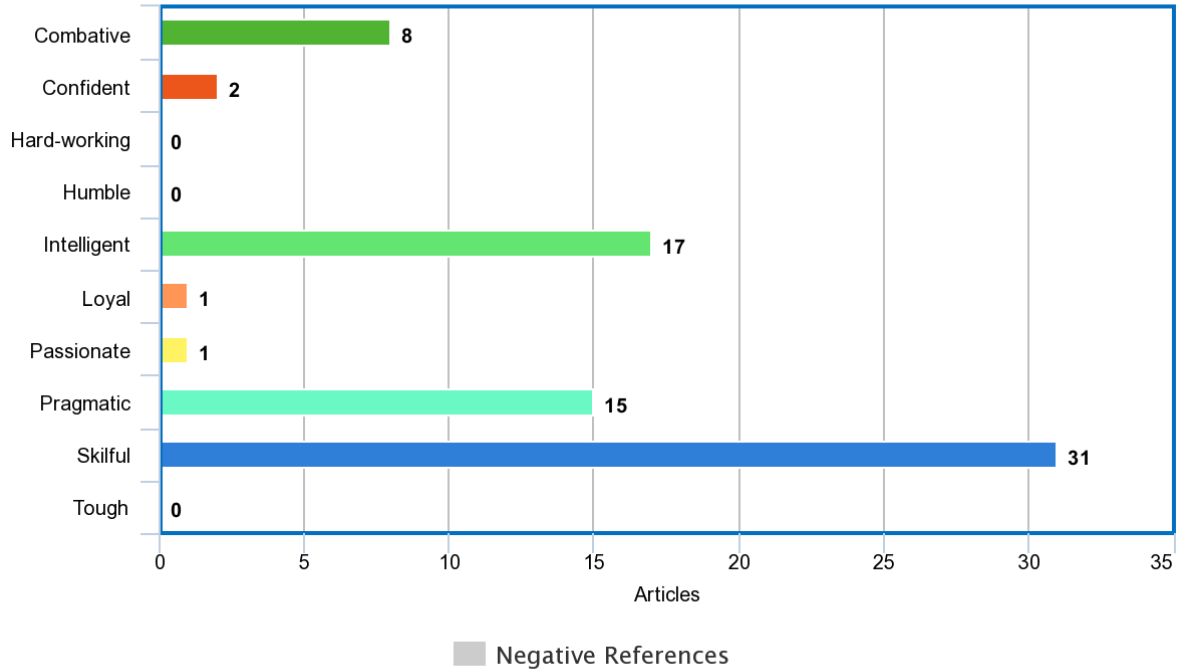
In all articles where one or more characteristics of national identity were referenced, each characteristic was labelled as either positive or negative. These findings are illustrated in *Figure 4.13a* and *Figure 4.13b* below. In terms of positive references, the most highly praised characteristics were 'hard-working' (65 articles) and 'passionate' (46 articles). The team's skill and ability was further down the list as the fourth most positive (25 articles), with 'intelligent' ranking as 8th out of 10 characteristics with only 13 positive references.

Figure 4.13a
Daily Star Football



meta-chart.com

Figure 4.13b
Daily Star Football



meta-chart.com

On the negative side, 'skilful' was by far the most frequently referenced characteristic in the Daily Star's football coverage with 31 articles, followed by 'intelligent' in 17. These findings are perhaps not surprising given that the Republic of Ireland football team in 2017 were not widely renowned as

being a particularly skilful or technically proficient team, but instead relied on factors such as hard-work, spirit, organisation and physicality to achieve the results that they did.

Martin O'Neill's management style was often the source of great debate, as he typically favoured a more defensive, pragmatic style of play that made Ireland 'difficult to beat'. This approach was not always the most pleasing on the eye for some supporters and media commentators, so it left the team open to criticism when results did not go their way. It is notable here to see in the Daily Star's coverage that the characteristic 'pragmatic' features in a negative tone in 15 articles.

Football Comparison: Broadsheet & Tabloid

As previously discussed in this chapter, the differences in readership demographic between the Irish Times and the Daily Star are particularly notable in the areas of region and social class. This, however, does not seem to have much of an influence on the amount of coverage afforded to the Republic of Ireland football team, as the broadsheet and the tabloid newspaper have both published a similar number of football articles in this study (224 for The Irish Times and 236 for the Daily Star). The research shows that football as a sport appears to hold a more even level of focus across both demographics, in contrast to rugby which is more heavily weighted towards the broadsheet readership.

The most obvious differences between both newspapers' coverage of the Irish football team are found in the ratings of positive and negative characteristics of national identity as outlined above. With regard to negative coverage, 'Skilful' is by a distance the most highly criticised aspect of the team in both cases. However, it should be noted that the number of occasions this characteristic was referenced in a negative tone in The Irish Times (62) was double that of the Daily Star (31). In the positive coverage, it is also interesting to see that the number of positive references to both 'skilful' and 'intelligent' in the Daily Star is more than three times those of the corresponding numbers found in The Irish Times.

This feeds into the gap in the overall level of positivity that each newspaper depicts in their football coverage during this study. In the section of articles where references to national identity were found, The Irish Times holds a rating of 51% positive and 31% negative, which is less complimentary to the team than the Daily Star's rating of 71% positive and 15% negative. This implies a more positive tone of coverage overall in the tabloid, which could perhaps be a symptom of the writing style employed by certain columnists in the Daily Star such as Pat Dolan and Darren O'Dea who at times can adopt a more supportive approach to their analysis. There is a noticeable contrast

between these types of articles and some of the more detached, arguably more objective analysis found in The Irish Times from the likes of Ken Early.

Comparing the Analysis of Both Sports: Rugby & Football

Based on the media content analysis across both newspapers, it is clear that there are some notable differences in how the Ireland rugby team and the Republic of Ireland football team are each presented by the media. Before further examination of the reasons why these differences might exist, first I will present an overview of some of the key findings of the content analysis in the form of *Table 4.2* below.

Articles with ...	IT Rugby	DS Rugby	IT Football	DS Football	All Rugby	All Football	Diff: All Rugby v All Football	All IT	All DS	Diff: All IT v All DS
National Identity	66%	72%	65%	71%	67%	68%	1%	65%	71%	6%
Positive tone *	87%	87%	51%	71%	79%	61%	18%	69%	68%	1%
Negative tone *	6%	2%	31%	15%	5%	23%	18%	19%	11%	8%
Skilful – positive*	43%	39%	5%	15%	42%	10%	32%	24%	22%	2%
Skilful – negative*	5%	8%	42%	18%	6%	29%	23%	24%	15%	9%
Intelligent – positive*	30%	19%	2%	8%	27%	5%	22%	16%	11%	5%
Intelligent – negative*	2%	3%	8%	10%	2%	9%	7%	5%	8%	3%
Passionate – positive*	6%	3%	21%	27%	5%	24%	21%	14%	20%	6%
Passionate – negative*	0%	0%	0.7%	0.6%	0%	0.6%	0.6%	0.3%	0.4%	0.1%

Table 4.2

Note: Categories marked with * only refer to articles where a reference to national identity is found

This table gives a visual of how the Irish Times' and the Daily Star's rugby and football coverage compares in a number of aspects. Starting with the second row from the top, which shows the number of articles where at least one of the characteristics of national identity is referenced, there is no obvious gap between the two sports or the two newspapers, as most of the percentages are close in range.

On the next row down, which shows the rate of 'positive tone' articles, both newspapers have the same level of positive coverage for rugby. However, there is a significant gap of 20% between the two newspapers in terms of positive coverage for football, with the Daily Star highest at 71%. As mentioned previously, the difference in writing styles between the tabloid and the broadsheet may have some bearing on this outcome, as some tabloid columnists are afforded the editorial freedom to be direct in their personal support for the team. This difference in tone between the two newspapers is also reflected in the rate of negative football coverage, again showing more favourable articles in the Daily Star.

I have also selected three characteristics of national identity to be included in this table for analysis, namely 'skilful', 'intelligent' and 'passionate'. These three were chosen as the most noteworthy characteristics in terms of the findings of the study. 'Hard-working' was one of the more frequently referenced characteristics during the content analysis, but considering the fact that it is consistently noted as a positive trait for both teams in both newspapers, and seldom referenced in a negative context, I have omitted it from the above table in favour of three examples that I find most interesting in the context of this research study.

In the area of skill, this is a feature of the Irish football team that is frequently referenced in a negative tone by the Irish Times (42%), and to a lesser extent by the Daily Star (18%), while rarely being used as a positive feature with regard to football. This contrasts with the rugby coverage that is consistently complimentary in this regard across both newspapers. The rugby team also receive regular praise in the area of intelligence, while this is seldom given to the football team, even during more successful periods.

It is hardly surprising that a successful rugby team that was ranked 3rd in the world by the end of 2017 would receive more praise for skill and ability than a comparatively mediocre football team who had gone through a disappointing run of results and performances. However, it is striking that

the rugby team's successes are more commonly linked with skill and intelligence, whereas the football team's success is typically matched to factors such as hard-work and passion.

Given the physical nature of rugby as a sport, it is difficult to make a credible argument that elite level international players are lacking in passion for their team or their sport. The findings in this research study merely highlight the fact that the majority of the media's focus when praising this Ireland rugby team is directed at the technical and tactical aspects of their game. This may be in some part influenced by the manager Joe Schmidt's reputation, as previously mentioned in this chapter. But it also speaks to the differences in culture of analysis between the two sports.

In Irish sport, it could be argued that rugby has more of a reliance on structure, organisation and complex tactical plays and analysis than football. Of course, tactics and organisation are hugely important in football also, but based on the findings of this content analysis, it would appear as though this Ireland team's performances under Martin O'Neill in 2017 did not inspire confidence in the media that a detailed, methodically laid plan was being executed by the team on the pitch.

These findings are interesting in the context of the media's role in projecting identities onto both teams, but the full scope of this research study will also include perspectives from the general public. These additional findings will be analysed in further detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Analysis & findings (part two)

In this chapter I will outline and discuss the findings of the second element of my research, namely the multiple-choice survey as described during the methodology section in chapter 3.

The online survey was hosted by SurveyHero.com and included 20 questions for respondents to share information regarding their level of interest in the Ireland rugby team, the Republic of Ireland football team, their sports media consumption and their perspectives on Irish national identity. The closing questions of the survey gathered information regarding the respondents' gender, age and region so that these insights could help shape the analysis.

There were 229 responses to this survey, which were taken during the months of June and July 2019. All respondents were anonymous. I will outline the overall responses to each question in a series of figures below. In doing so, I will go into further detail regarding some of the more interesting findings of the survey.

Demographic

When circulating this online survey, my aim was to gather responses from a diverse group of people so as to make the demographic as broad and as widely representative as possible. I targeted specific online sports groups and message boards in an attempt to increase the number of female and non-Leinster based respondents. In the end, the final group of respondents has a strong majority of Leinster-based males who completed the survey.

The breakdown of demographic is illustrated by *Figure 5.18, 5.19 & 5.20* below, which show the responses to questions regarding age, gender and region.

What is your gender?

Number of responses: 229

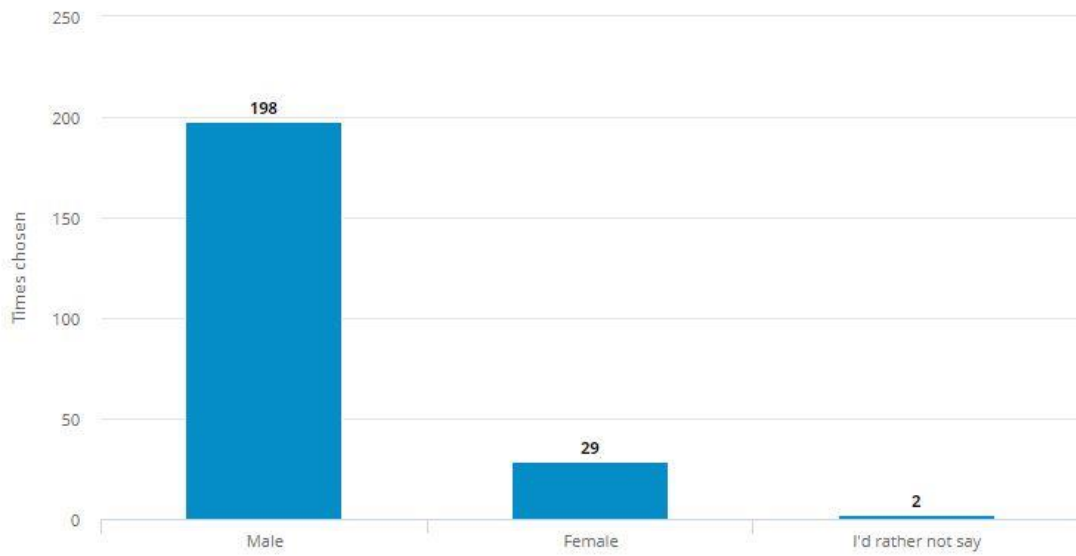


Figure 5.18

What is your age?

Number of responses: 229

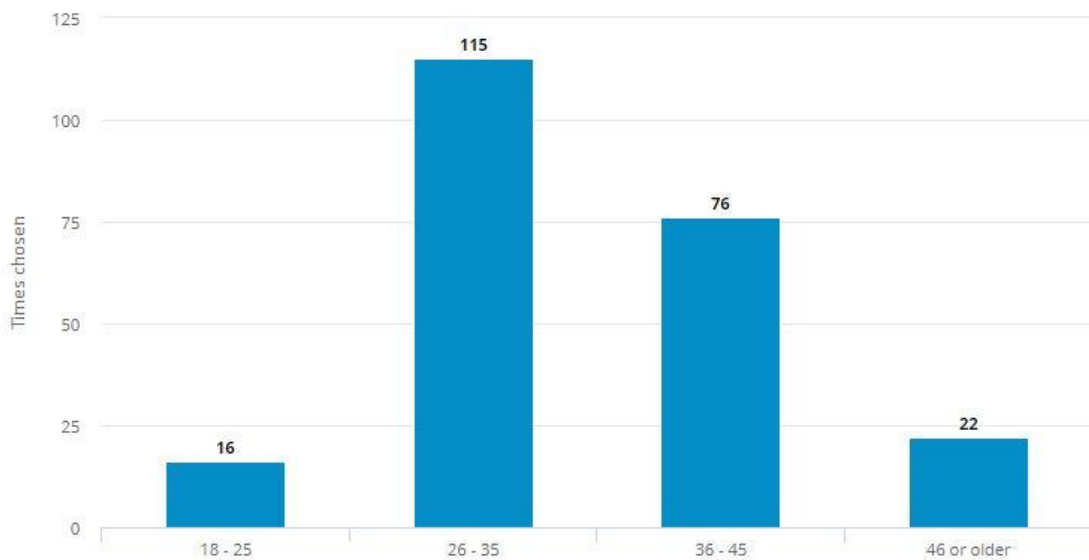


Figure 5.19

Where are you from?

Number of responses: 229

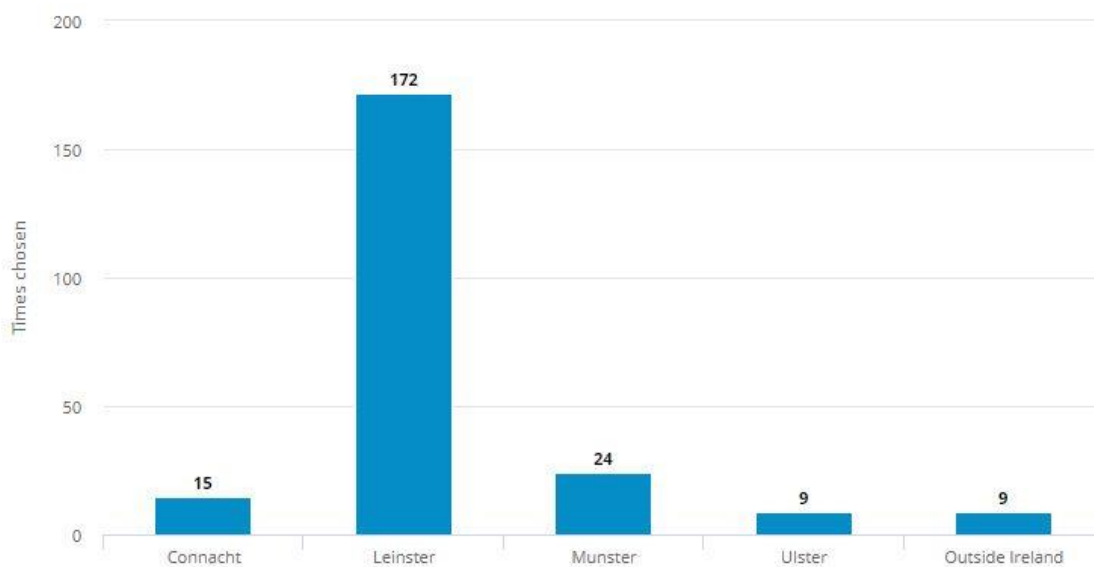


Figure 5.20

There was no information gathered regarding the social class or occupations of the respondents, as it was my intention to avoid making the survey too intrusive and to make it as convenient to complete as possible in order to attract a high number of responses. The three demographical questions as presented above are easy to answer and they provide valuable information that help define the findings of this survey.

Rugby & Football

In the opening questions the survey asks respondents for information regarding their level of interest in the Ireland rugby team. This is to ascertain whether or not each respondent has a particular leaning or bias towards rugby. Sport attracts people with varying degrees of interest so the answers to these questions would help identify which respondents consider themselves as Irish rugby supporters, as opposed to those with a passing interest in rugby or no interest at all. *Figure 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4* below outline the responses to these questions.

How would you rate your level of interest in the Ireland rugby team?

Number of responses: 229

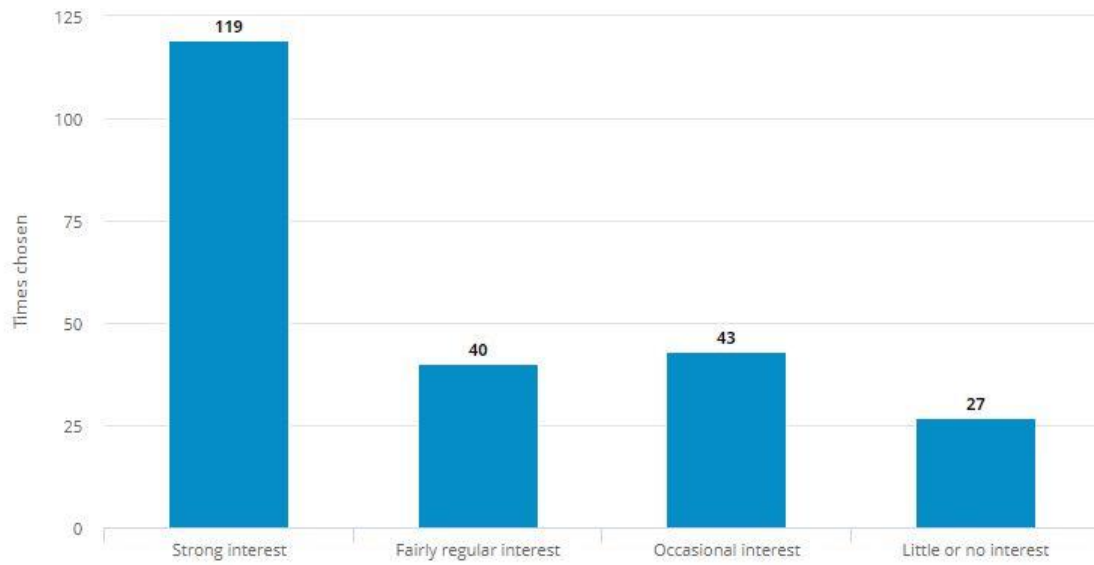


Figure 5.1

How many Ireland rugby matches have you attended live since the beginning of 2017?

Number of responses: 229

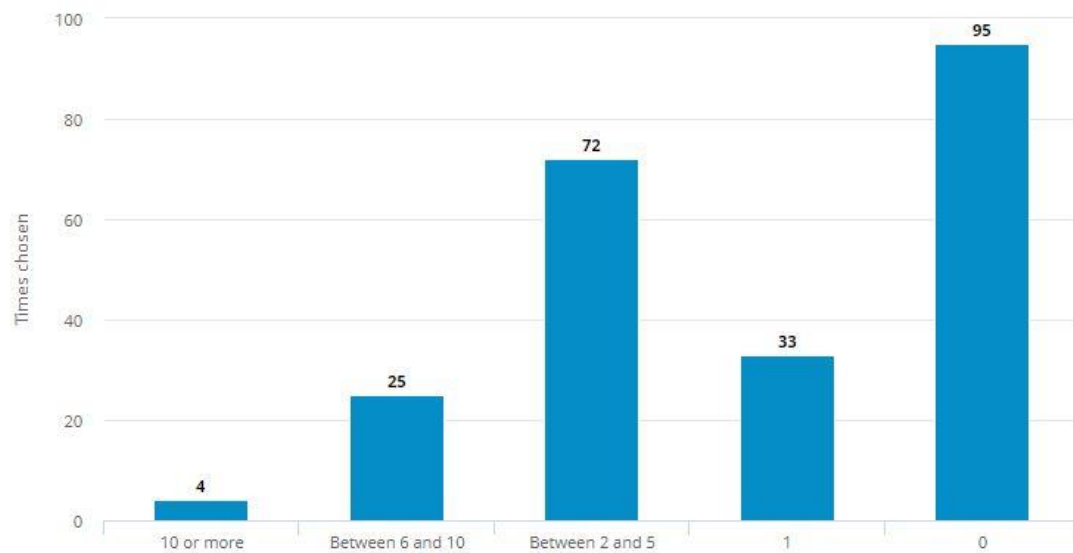


Figure 5.2

How often do you watch the Ireland rugby team play on TV?

Number of responses: 229

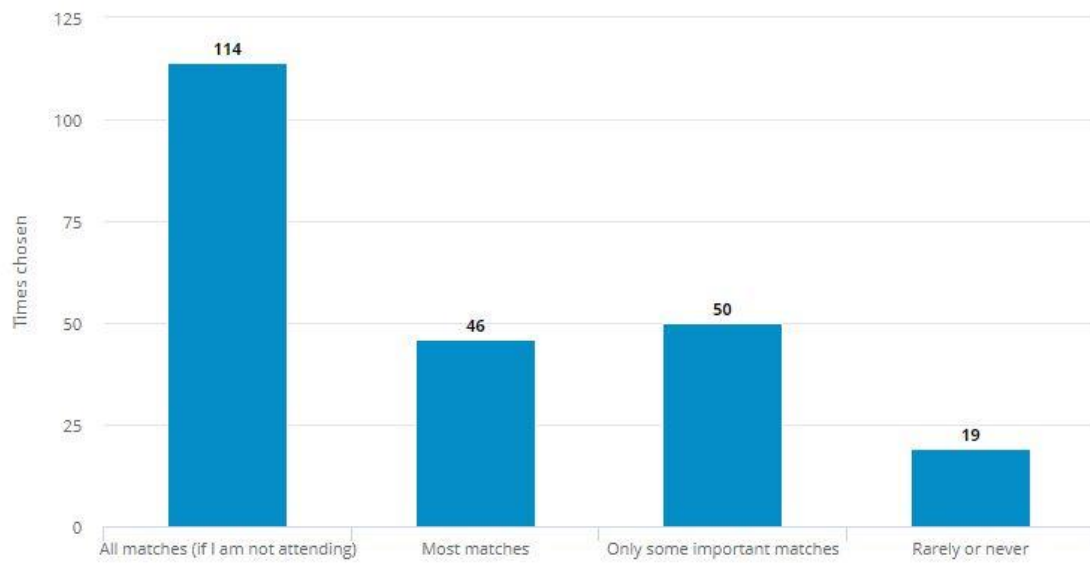


Figure 5.3

With regard to the Ireland rugby team, which of the following is the most important to you?

Number of responses: 229

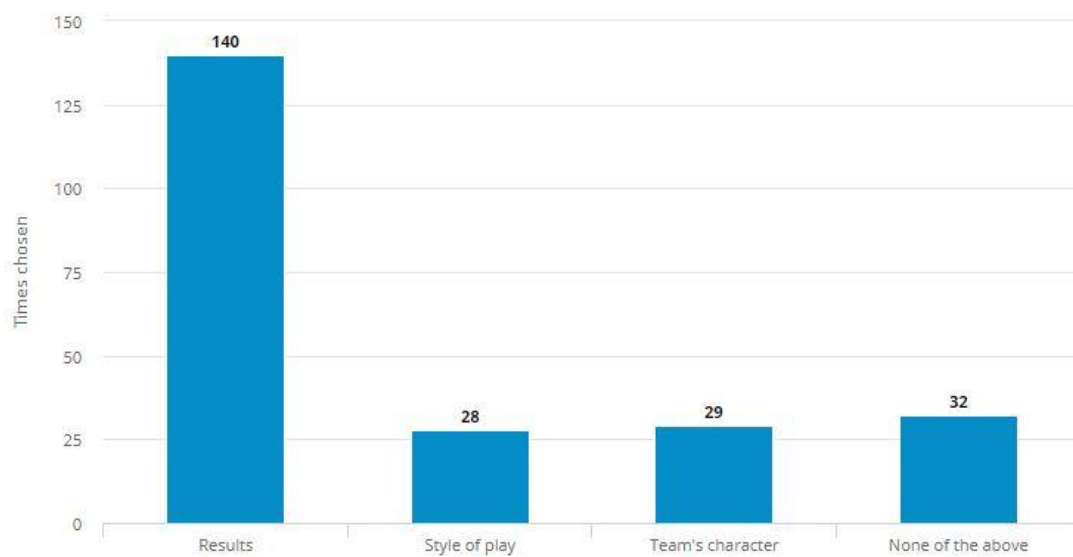


Figure 5.4

The question shown in *Figure 5.4* above was designed to gain an insight on the respondent's personal tastes regarding how the sport is played, as these tastes can vary from one supporter to the next. This information could be valuable in offering some context behind each supporter's outlook when analysing the responses to later questions regarding the team's collective identity.

When examining the findings of the survey in further depth it showed that of those respondents with a strong interest in rugby who regularly attend Ireland matches (between 6 and 10, or 10 or more matches from 2017 onwards), 92% said that they prioritised the team's results as the most important factor. This dropped to 57% when I looked only at people with a fairly regular or occasional interest in the rugby team who have attended 1 or less matches in that time period, who showed a stronger preference for style of play (14%) and the team's character (19%). This perhaps shows a stronger sense of competition in the most dedicated supporter group, compared to those with more of a passing interest in the sport, some of whom may place a greater importance on entertainment than winning.

The same four questions were asked in relation to the Republic of Ireland football team, as outlined in the responses shown in *Figure 5.6*, *5.7*, *5.8* and *5.9* below.

How would you rate your level of interest in the Republic of Ireland football team?

Number of responses: 229

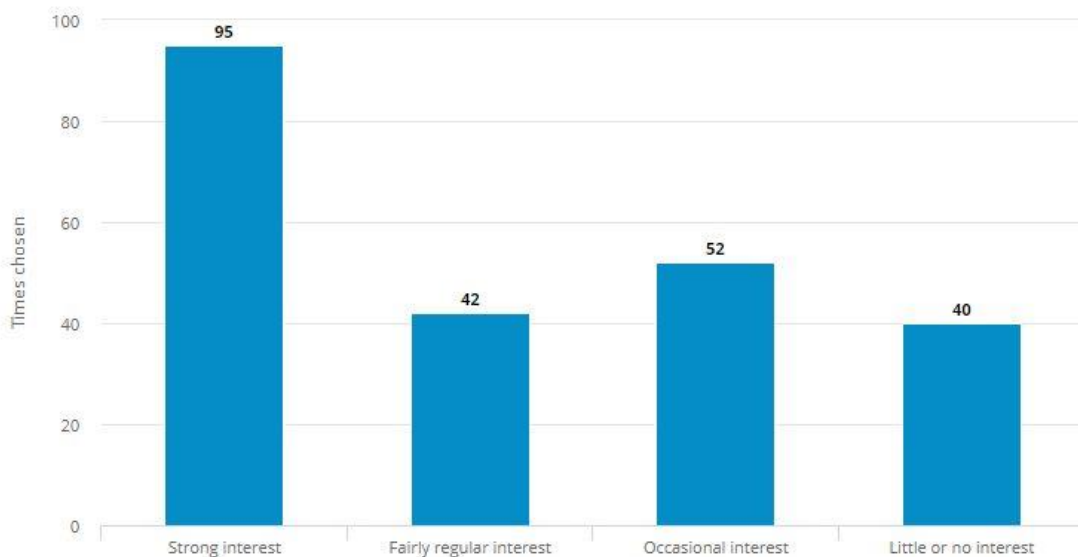


Figure 5.6

The responses shown in *Figure 5.6* when compared with *Figure 5.1* outlines the fact that there is a slight leaning towards rugby ahead of football among participants in this survey group, as 52% have a strong interest in the Ireland rugby team compared with 41% for the Irish football team.

How many Republic of Ireland football matches have you attended live since the beginning of 2017?

Number of responses: 228

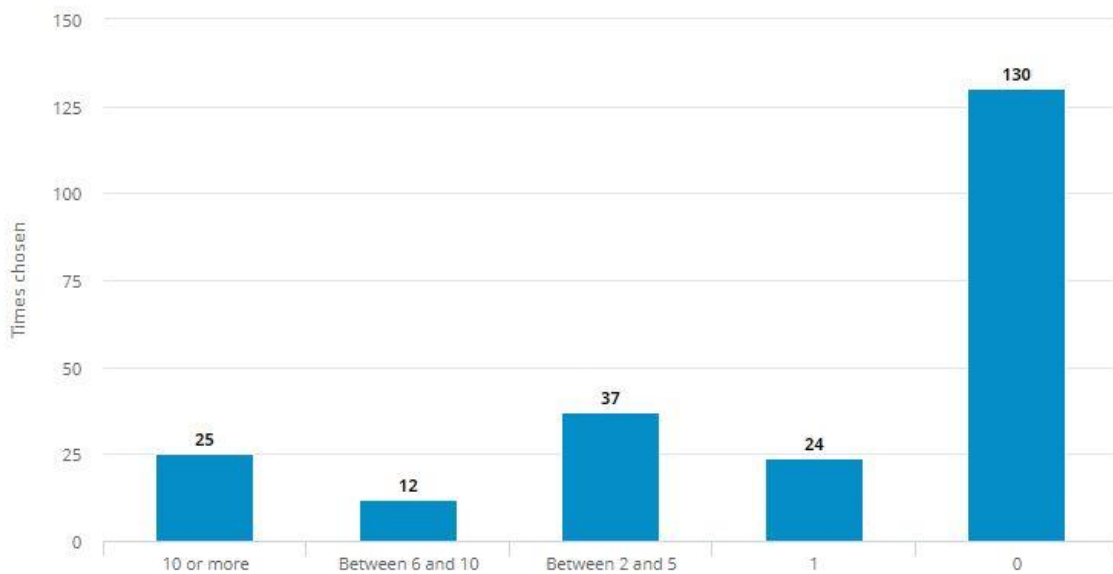


Figure 5.7

With regard to the levels of match attendance, there are more regular attendees of football matches and more infrequent attendees of rugby matches in the survey, although there is not a significant difference between the two sports in this regard. The respondents also watch more rugby than football on TV with 50% committing to all rugby matches in comparison to 33% for the football team.

How often do you watch the Republic of Ireland football team play on TV?

Number of responses: 229

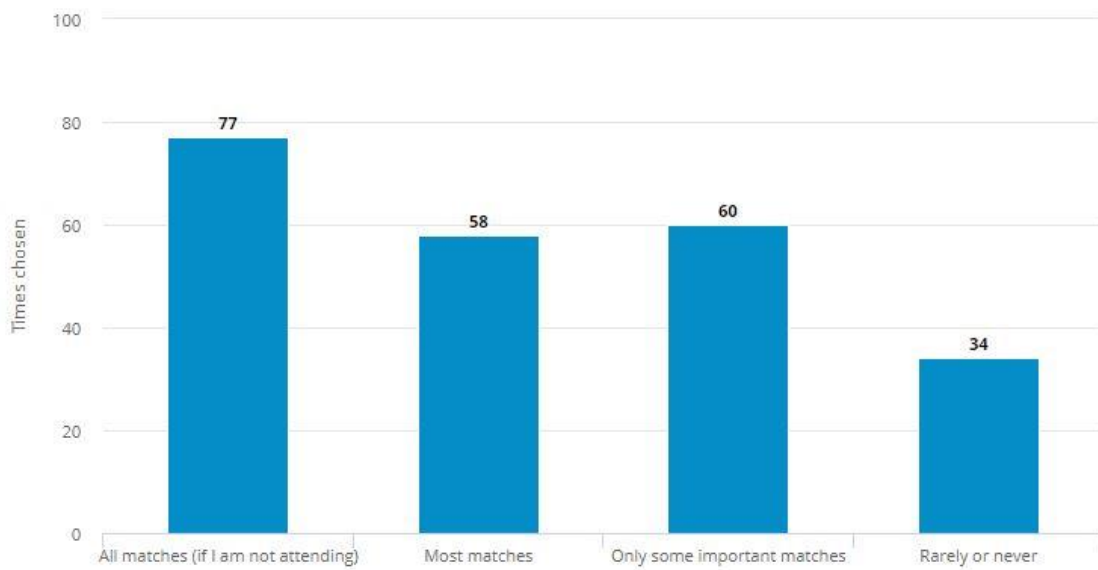


Figure 5.8

With regard to the Republic of Ireland football team, which of the following is most important to you?

Number of responses: 229

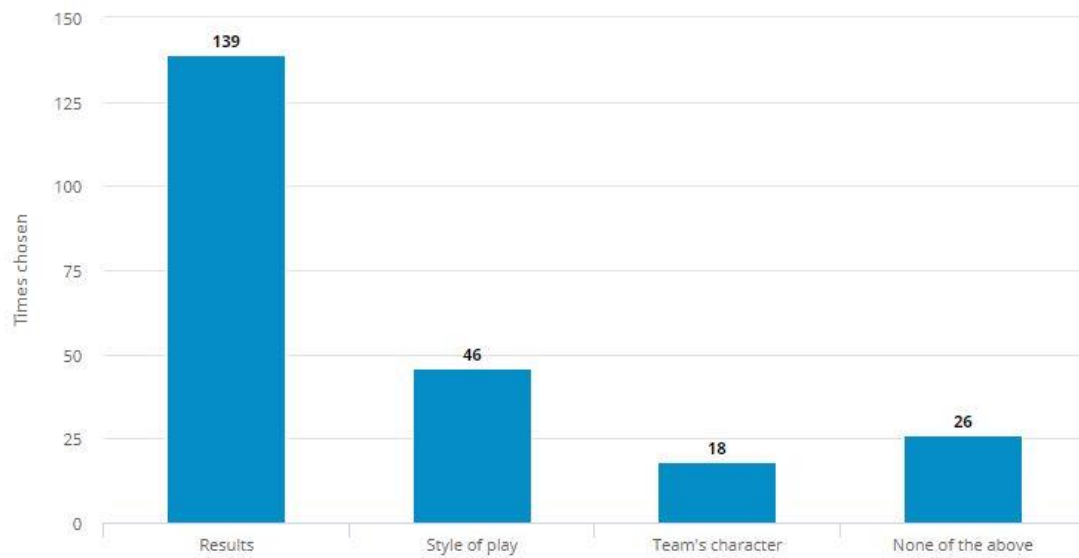


Figure 5.9

It is notable that the responses shown in Figure 5.9 are similar to the corresponding answers regarding the rugby team in Figure 5.4. In both cases 61% of respondents say that results are the most important thing when they watch the Irish team in either sport. This is an interesting response given some of the dissatisfaction within sections of the Irish football media who have been critical of the Irish football team’s playing style in recent years.

Of those with a strong interest in football who regularly attend matches, the percentage of those who prioritise results increases to 75%, with just 18% of that group answering that style of play was most important to them. This is a similar finding to the corresponding group of dedicated rugby supporters.

National Identity

Some of the most insightful responses were extracted from three questions regarding the characteristics shown by the Ireland rugby team, the Republic of Ireland football team and Irish people in general. Respondents were given the option to choose from any or none of the ten characteristics of national identity as discussed in chapters 3 and four, when describing how they viewed each team and the Irish public. See *Figure 5.5*, and *Figure 5.10* below.

Which of the following characteristics do you associate with the Ireland rugby team?

Number of responses: 229

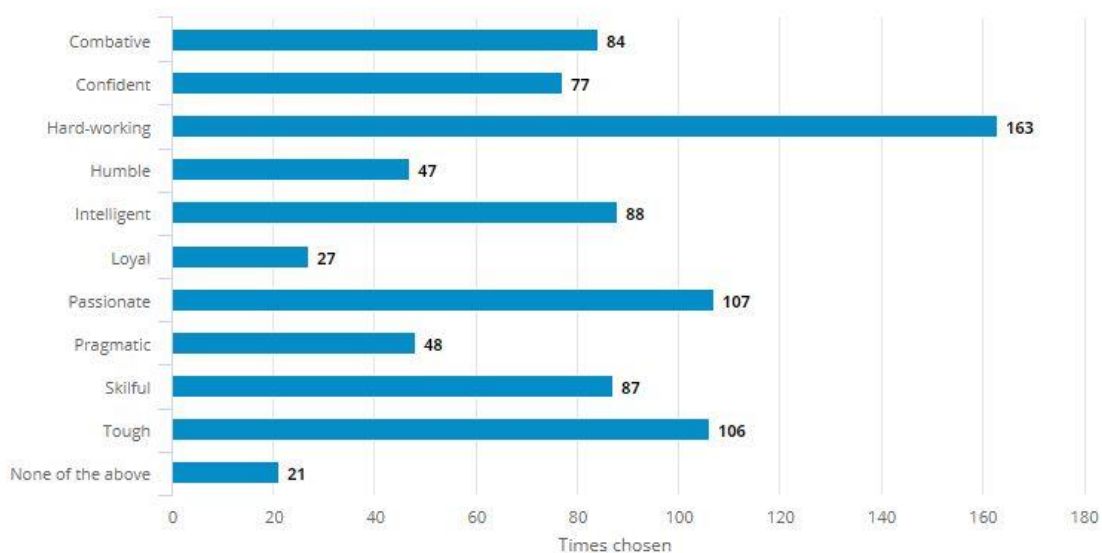


Figure 5.5

Which of the following characteristics do you associate with the Republic of Ireland football team?

Number of responses: 229

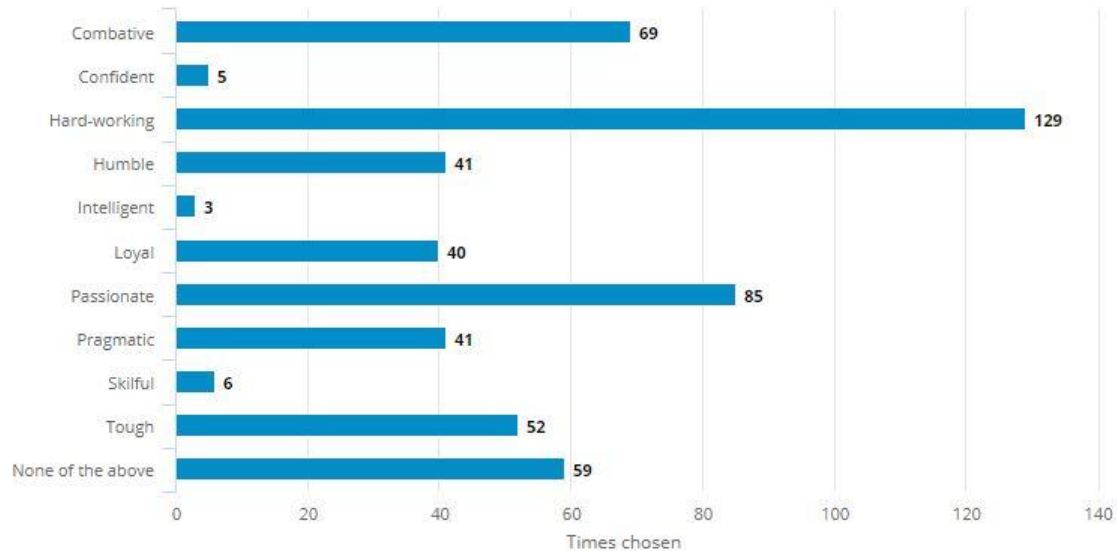


Figure 5.10

These questions were designed to highlight any similarities or differences in how the football and rugby teams are viewed by the public. These characteristics were established in the pilot run of the media content analysis, so I viewed them as pertinent examples of both teams' collective identities, as projected by the media, that would make for intriguing analysis in a public survey.

It is interesting to note the responses by the public as shown in Figure 5.5 and Figure 5.10, particularly the large gap in public perception of both teams' respective levels of skill and intelligence. The Irish football team is ranked low in both of those characteristics, even by those who declared themselves as having a strong interest in the team. Of people who have attended at least 6 or more Ireland football matches since the beginning of 2017, only 6% chose skilful and intelligent as characteristics they would associate with the team.

The following tables outline the comparison for each sport in terms of the top four most positively referenced characteristics by the media, alongside the four most common characteristics as declared by the public. *Table 5.1* outlines the rugby comparison while *Table 5.2* outlines the football comparison.

Rugby characteristics by media analysis	Skilful	Hard-working	Intelligent	Tough
Volume of media references	38%	32%	27%	19%
Rugby characteristics by public survey	Hard-working	Passionate	Tough	Intelligent
Volume of survey responses	71%	47%	46%	38%

Table 5.1: Characteristics of Rugby Team

In the above table the obvious difference is the prominence of ‘skilful’ as the most frequently referenced characteristic in the media, yet it does not appear in the top four selections from the public. It was, however, the fifth most popular selection in the survey, narrowly behind intelligent with 37%. Conversely, the media’s relative lack of focus on the team’s passion (it ranked as the third lowest reference in the media for rugby) is not borne out in the public opinion, who rank ‘passionate’ as the second most common characteristic of the Ireland rugby team with 47% of responses.

Table 5.2 outlines the corresponding football insights below.

Football characteristics by media analysis	Hard-working	Passionate	Loyal	Skilful
Volume of media references	35%	24%	11%	10%
Football characteristics by public survey	Hard-working	Passionate	Combative	Tough
Volume of survey responses	56%	37%	30%	23%

Table 5.2: Characteristics of Football Team

In Table 5.2 we can see some correlation between the media and the public with regard to the top two characteristics in both cases, namely ‘hard-working’ and ‘passionate’. It is telling that ‘skilful’ appears as the fourth most frequently referenced positive characteristic in the media, even though it

is also by far the most frequently referenced negative characteristic in the media that was studied. This typifies how few positive characteristics were regularly referenced by the Irish Times and the Daily Star in relation to the Irish football team.

The question as presented in *Figure 5.17* below is one of the most crucial in the entire survey, as this question is designed to gain an insight into the respondents' own personal ideas of what Irish national identity is.

Which of the following characteristics do you associate with Irish people outside of sport?

Number of responses: 229

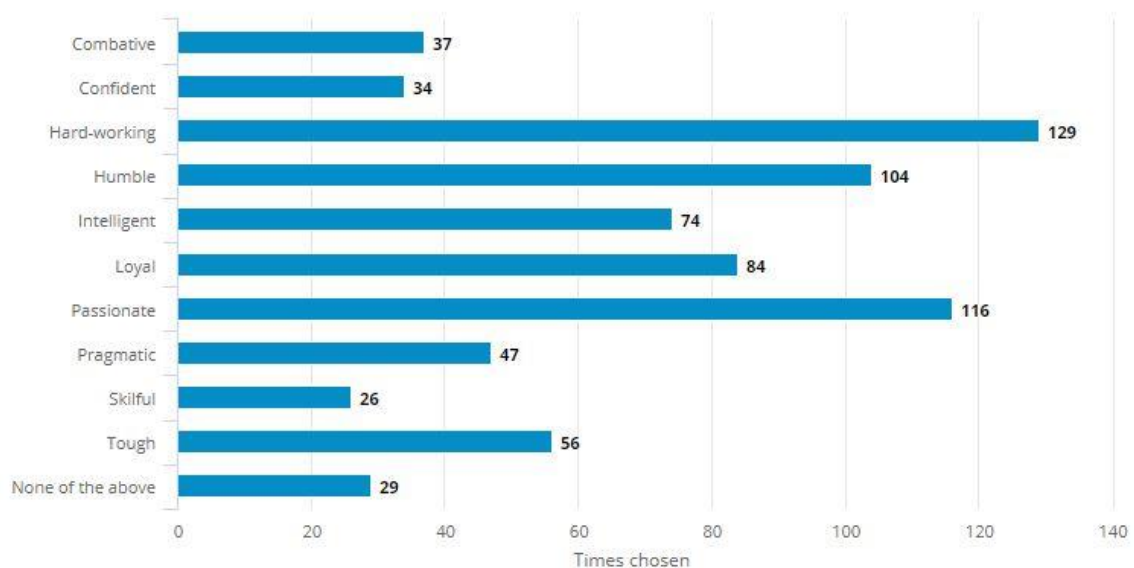


Figure 5.17

The characteristic most associated with Irish people in this survey is 'hard-working' which was chosen by 56% of respondents and is also the top answer in relation to both the Ireland rugby team and the Republic of Ireland football team. This is a characteristic that is frequently praised during the media content analysis where there were also no negative references to this quality.

The characteristic which the survey lists as the second most commonly linked with Irish national identity is 'passionate', which was chosen by 51% of respondents. This once again mirrors the survey's findings in relation to how the rugby and football teams are perceived, with both teams ranking highly with regard to passion. This is interesting in the context of how the media's level of references to the Ireland rugby team's passion is relatively low. The findings of this survey perhaps

imply that the Ireland rugby team transmit a sense of passion in their play with or without the assistance of the Irish Times and the Daily Star in this case.

‘Humble’ is the third most common answer found in *Figure 5.17* with 45% of respondents choosing this characteristic. This is more than double the number of respondents who listed it as a quality that they associate with the football (20%) and rugby teams (21%). This is not a characteristic that was strongly referenced during the media content analysis.

As the top example of Irish national identity chosen in this survey, hard-work is also a consistently referenced characteristic that the selected media outlets project onto the Irish rugby and football teams throughout their 2017 coverage. This perhaps suggests that hard-work is something that both the media and the public will have a keen focus on when assessing the efforts of our national sports teams, and it is a characteristic that our nation values highly, not just in sport.

Role of the media

In this section of the survey I asked respondents to share some information regarding their media consumption to get an insight into how prevalent or not the Irish Times and the Daily Star might be in shaping their views towards both teams. *Figure 5.11* below shows there is a strong use of newspapers and online media with 71% of respondents listing themselves as regular readers.

How often do you read online or newspaper coverage of the Ireland rugby and / or football teams?

Number of responses: 229

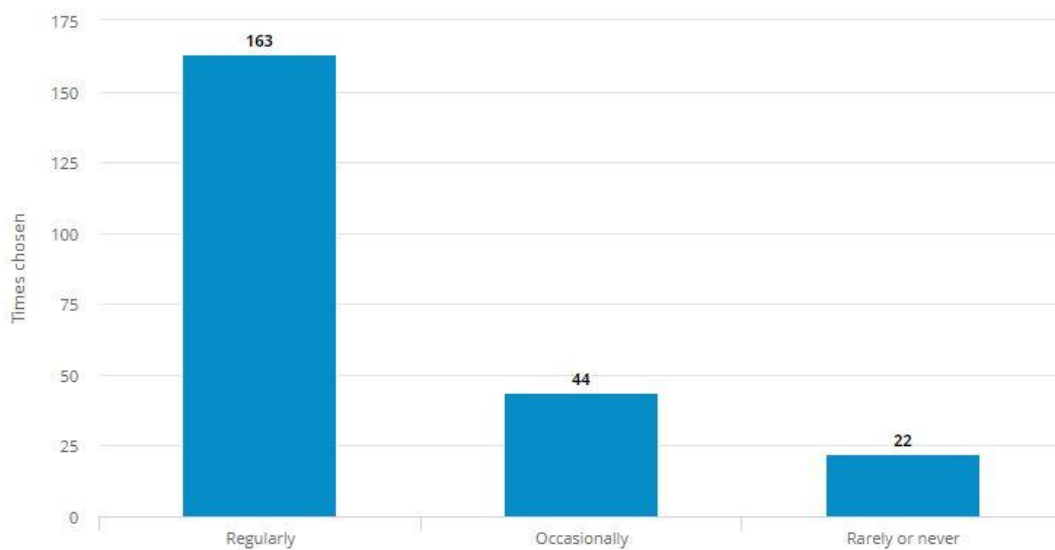


Figure 5.11

The Irish Times is highly prevalent in this regard given that 69% of respondents are readers of their sports coverage (see *Figure 5.12* below). From analysing the findings of this survey, those that read the Irish Times for sports coverage gave a similar response to the overall respondents' in relation to the characteristics displayed by both teams, with notably low rankings regarding the football team's levels of skill and intelligence, both traits that they gave more generous scores to the rugby team.

Which of the following newspaper / online media outlets do you read for sports coverage?

Number of responses: 229

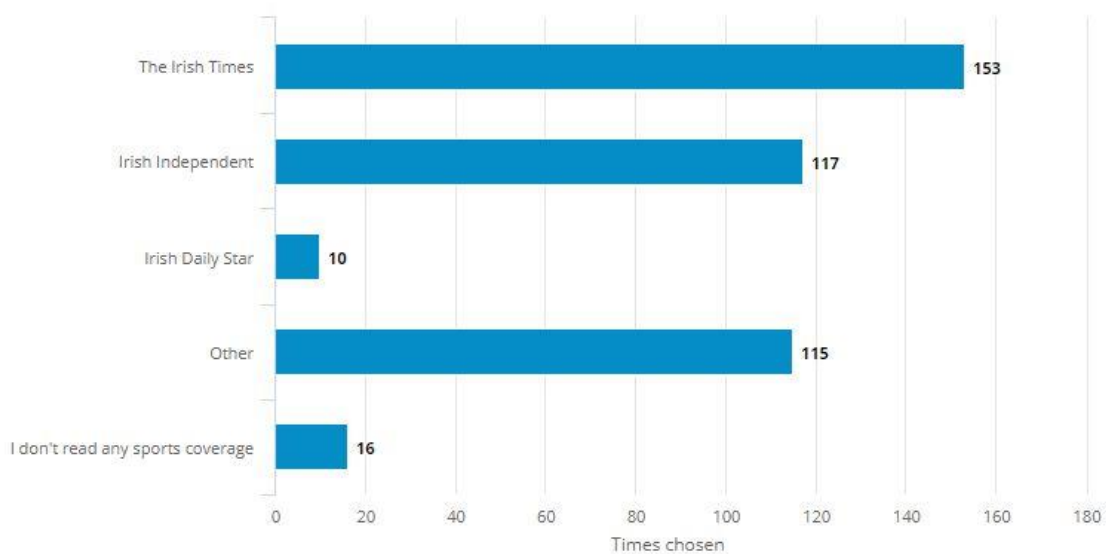


Figure 5.12

One of the more interesting angles related specifically to Irish Times readers comes from the questions shown in *Figure 5.15* and *Figure 5.16* below.

Do you think newspaper and online media coverage of the Ireland rugby team is generally fair?

Number of responses: 229

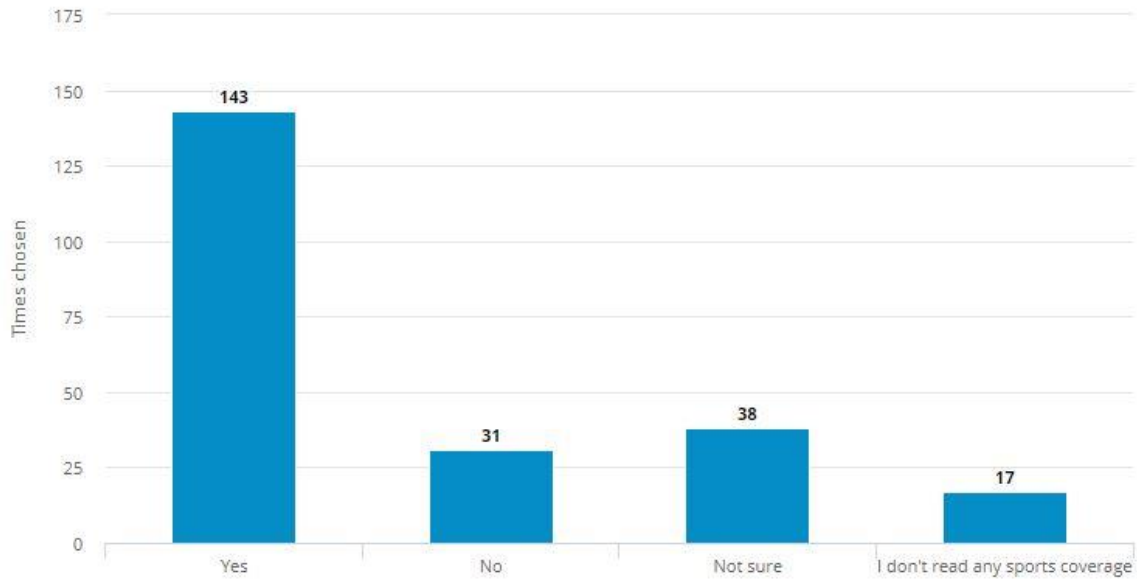


Figure 5.15

Do you think newspaper and online media coverage of the Republic of Ireland football team is generally fair?

Number of responses: 229

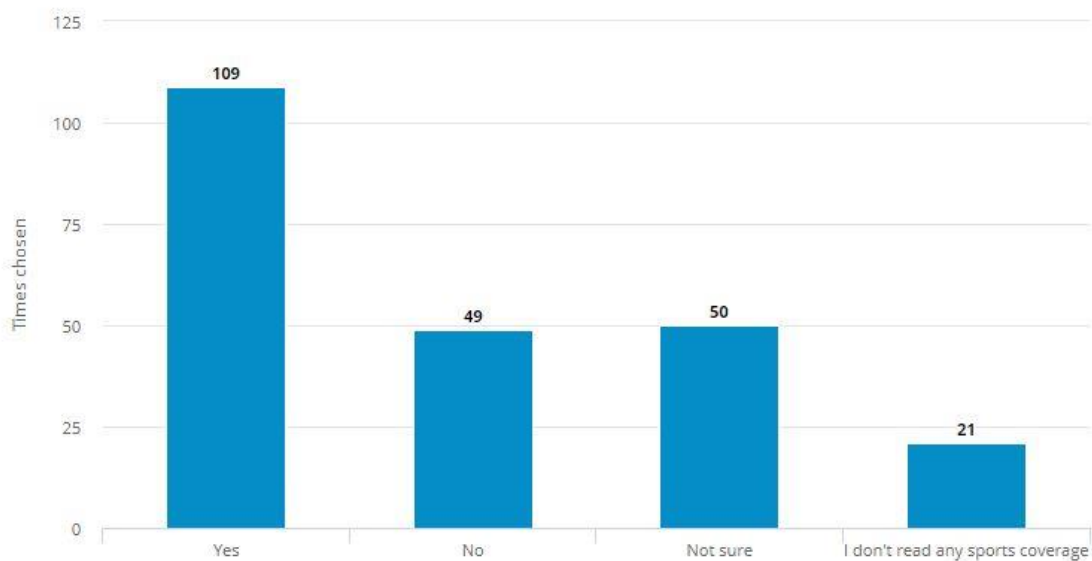


Figure 5.16

Irish Times readers, much like the overall group of respondents, believe that the Ireland rugby team are given fair coverage by the media. However, there is more doubt in relation to the Irish football team, with 43% of respondents saying they thought that the coverage was not fair, or they were unsure.

The view that the Republic of Ireland team do not receive fair analysis may perhaps lie in some of the common misconceptions regarding the sport. As a truly global sport, much of football's appeal lies in its accessibility and in some part to its simplicity as a game. Football is a sport that involves a greater degree of chance and luck in some instances, and the outcomes of matches can often be dictated by intangible factors that do not often hold quite the same influence on a sport like rugby, which relies more on structure and tactical discipline, where there are less upsets and shock results. This, it could be argued, is one of the reasons why the difficulty of football as a sport can often be underestimated, so it is perhaps unfair that an Irish team ranked 32nd in the world can be written off by many as mediocre, when in reality that is a creditable position for Ireland given the size of our talent pool and the global scope of the sport.

Interestingly, 44% of respondents felt that the sports media coverage they read has little or no influence on their view towards both the Irish rugby and football teams, as shown in *Figure 5.13* and *Figure 5.14* below. This is merely an opinion on held by some respondents, though the true answer to that question cannot be taken from the findings of this survey.

In your opinion, to what extent do your chosen sports media outlets influence your view of the Ireland rugby team?

Number of responses: 229

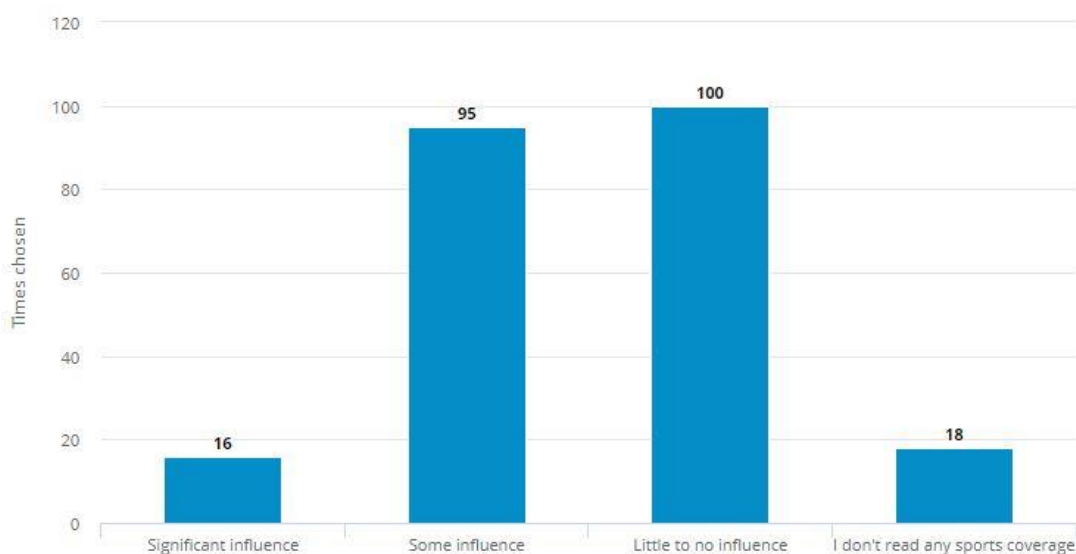


Figure 5.13

In your opinion, to what extent do your chosen sports media outlets influence your view of the Republic of Ireland football team?

Number of responses: 229

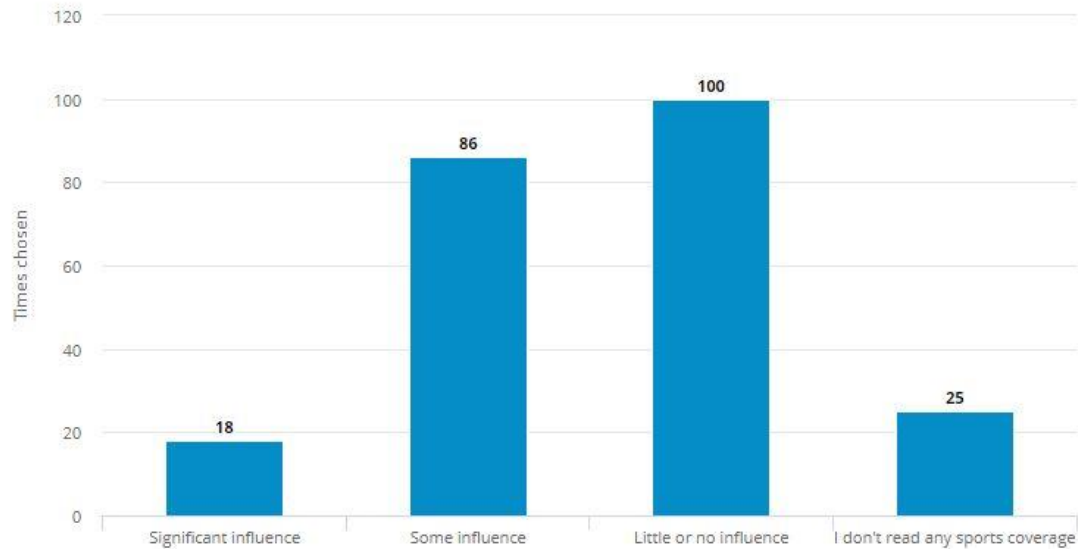


Figure 5.14

One of the limitations of this survey's findings is the fact that so few respondents are readers of the Daily Star. Just 4% of respondents listed the Daily Star as one of their chosen sports media outlets in Figure 5.12 above, so there is no substantial insight here into the perspectives of the Daily Star's readership. However, this information, along with the high number of Irish Times readers based in the Leinster area, suggests that the social demographic represented in this survey is more likely to be weighted towards the ABC1 grouping (based on the newspaper demographic statistics that were discussed in the previous chapter). This, it should be noted, is merely an assumption, given that the survey did not directly gather social demographical information.

Gender split

13% of the respondents to this survey are female, and they showed a notably stronger interest in the Ireland rugby team. 52% of the female respondents said they had little of no interest in the Republic of Ireland football team, and only 1 female has attended more than a single Irish football match since the beginning of 2017.

There were no significant differences in terms of how the female group characterised both teams and the Irish public, though it was notable that none of the female respondents said they would

associate the Irish football team with intelligence. There is some limitation here given how imbalanced the gender split is across the full group of respondents to this survey.

Regional split

Another limitation in the findings of this survey relates to the relative lack of diversity in terms of regional demographic. 75% of respondents are from Leinster, and when responses are viewed purely from those in the non-Leinster group, there are no significant differences in the responses.

One of the most significant cultural differences between Irish football and Irish rugby is that the latter has a national team that represents the 32 counties, while the former is split into two separate national teams. This is dictated by historical circumstances of the respective governing bodies in this country. The national identity that Ulster-based Irish football supporters relate to could be seen as more complex than a typical supporter from one of the 26 counties, so for that reason this survey may have offered an insight in this regard had there been a larger number of responses from Ulster. That is an area of Irish national identity where there has been a notable amount of research conducted previously.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters I have outlined the proposed research question, the research methodology, the analysis findings, and now I will offer my conclusions. Here I will address each of the proposed research questions and determine the outcomes of my analysis.

Answering Research Question 1

What percentage of recent media coverage related to the Ireland rugby team and the Republic of Ireland football team features the theme of Irish national identity?

To address this question, first it is important to clarify what is meant by the term 'national identity' in this instance. This refers to the survey's findings in regard to the most commonly selected characteristics associated with Irish people outside sport, as shown in Figure 5.17 in chapter 5. These are traits of Irish national identity, as selected by the public. There are three characteristics that were each selected by more than 40% of respondents, namely 'humble' (45%), 'passionate' (51%) and 'hard-working' (56%).

Taking these three examples of national identity, we can determine how frequently they are referenced during the media content analysis, either in a positive or negative light. Out of the total 757 articles across both newspapers in this research study, 278 contained a positive or negative reference of at least one of the three aforementioned characteristics of national identity. Based on these findings for the purposes of this research study, 37% of the selected media coverage related to the Ireland rugby team and the Republic of Ireland football team features the theme of Irish national identity.

However, given the limitations in scope of the survey demographic, it should be acknowledged that these definitions of national identity are open to challenge, so further extensive research involving a wider demographic would be welcomed in this regard.

Answering Research Question 2

Does that percentage of media coverage showcase each team in a negative or positive light?

Of the 278 articles which have been found to contain references to national identity, 259 were presented in a positive tone and 18 in a negative tone. This amounts to 93% positive and 7% negative.

Answering Research Question 3

According to the Irish sports media, what are the main differences between how the Irish rugby and football teams respectively embody national identity?

For the purposes of this research study, the Irish Times and the Irish Daily Star can be seen as the combined entity as referred to in this question as 'Irish sports media'. Based on the content analysis of all articles in each sport, comparisons can be made in relation to the previously mentioned characteristics of national identity as outlined in research question 1, namely 'hard-working', 'humble' and 'passion'.

Hard-working is the most commonly selected characteristic by the public in relation to Irish national identity, and it is also the most commonly associated trait for each team in terms of media coverage. The sample of rugby articles and the sample of football articles both show the same result, that 24% of the selected media's coverage of both teams references hard-working as a positive characteristic.

In relation to 'humble', the Ireland rugby has a slightly higher rate of references with 9% in comparison to 6% for the Irish football team.

In relation to 'passionate', there is a notable difference in how the media portrays this characteristic between the two teams. 17% of football articles demonstrate passion in a positive tone, in comparison to only 4% for rugby articles.

In the context of these three outcomes, the research suggests that the main difference according to the Irish sports media with regard to national identity in both teams, is that the Irish football team embody passion to a larger extent.

Answering Research Question 4

How does negative media coverage of each team impact public interest in Irish international rugby and football matches?

The closest indicators that can be extracted from this survey in relation to this question are that according to respondents, media coverage of football has little or no effect on their opinion for 55% of people, and media coverage of rugby has little or no effect on their opinion for 52% of people.

Due to the limited scope of this survey and the abundance of information gathered and focused on in other areas of this research study, the findings do not offer a conclusive insight in relation to this research question. Further, more in-depth research in this regard would be welcomed.

Answering Research Question 5

According to Irish rugby and football supporters, what are the main differences between how the Irish rugby and football teams respectively embody national identity?

Defining supporters as those who said they had a 'strong' or fairly regular' interest in either the Irish rugby or football team, I measured their responses in the three characteristics of national identity, namely 'hard-working', 'humble' and 'passionate'.

Starting with rugby supporters, they credited the rugby team as being stronger in all three characteristics, leading by a rate of 30% for hard-work, 12% for humility and 20% for passion.

Conversely, football supporters credited the football team as being stronger in all three characteristics, although by a smaller margin in each case. They rated the football team higher by 4% in hard-work, 8% in humility and 2% in passion.

These findings could be seen as an indication that in relation to national identity, with a majority sample of male Leinster-based supporters, rugby fans have a lower opinion of the Irish football team than that of the football fans towards the rugby team.

Answering Research Question 6

Do Irish rugby and soccer supporters factor their own perceptions of national identity into their opinions towards the national teams?

The answers to research question 5 could in some way relate to this topic, if we are to make assumptions based on the suggestion that each set of supporters has a higher opinion of their chosen team in relation to national identity. However, the scope of this research study cannot sufficiently address this final research question and further investigation would be needed in order to posit an accurate response.

Bibliography

- **Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC)**, 'About ABC', accessed 21st June 2019. Available at: <https://www.abc.org.uk/>
- **Arrowsmith, A., 2004.** *Plastic paddies vs. master racers: 'Soccer' and Irish identity.* International Journal of Cultural Studies 7, 460–479. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877904047864>
- **Bairner, A., 2015.** *Assessing the sociology of sport: On national identity and nationalism.* International Review for the Sociology of Sport 50, 375–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690214538863>
- **Bernstein, A., Blain, N., 2002.** *Sport and the Media: The Emergence of a Major Research Field.* Culture, Sport, Society 5, 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/911094213>
- **Bryman, A., 2007.** 'Barriers to Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Research'. Journal of Mixed Methods Research 1, 8–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906290531>
- **Duggan, K., 2018.** 'Ireland football is where Ireland rugby was 20 years ago: in the doldrums'. Irish Times. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/sport/rugby/international/ireland-football-is-where-ireland-rugby-was-20-years-ago-in-the-doldrums-1.3708659>
- **Early, K., 2015.** 'Soccer feeling like unloved child in tale of two sports.' Irish Times. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/sport/soccer/international/soccer-feeling-like-unloved-child-in-tale-of-two-sports-1.2156535>
- **Early, K., 2018.** 'Cruel contrast at the Aviva as O'Neill's Ireland stagnate'. Irish Times. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/sport/soccer/ken-early-cruel-contrast-at-the-aviva-as-o-neill-s-ireland-stagnate-1.3702263>
- **Free, M., 2013.** *Diaspora and Rootedness, Amateurism and Professionalism in Media Discourses of Irish Soccer and Rugby in the 1990s and 2000s.* Éire-Ireland 48, 211–229. <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2013.0000>
- **Gaski, J.F., 2013.** 'Survey': Needless Despoilment of a Traditional Research Term. International Journal of Market Research 55, 337–356. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJMR-2013-033>
- **Håkansson, A., 2013.** *Portal of Research Methods and Methodologies for Research Projects and Degree Projects.* Computer Engineering 8.
- **Hsieh, H.-F., Shannon, S.E., 2005.** *Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis.* Qualitative Health Research 15, 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>

- **Irish Times.** 'Archive', accessed numerous times between May 29th and July 19th. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/archive>
- **Kersting, N., 2007.** *Sport and National Identity: A Comparison of the 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cups™*. *Politikon* 34, 277–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589340801962551>
- **Kian, E.M., Hardin, M., 2009.** *Framing of Sport Coverage Based on the Sex of Sports Writers: Female Journalists Counter the Traditional Gendering of Media Coverage*. *International Journal of Sport Communication* 2, 185–204. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2.2.185>
- **Macnamara, J. (2005)** 'Media content analysis: Its uses, benefits and best practice methodology', *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, 6(1), pp. 1-34. <https://amecorg.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Media-Content-Analysis-Paper.pdf>
- **Maguire, J., Tuck, J., 2005.** *National Identity, Rugby Union and Notions of Ireland and the 'Irish.'* *Irish Journal of Sociology* 14, 86–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/079160350501400106>
- **Medialive.ie.** 'ROI Newspapers: Readership Review', accessed July 21st. Available at: http://medialive.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24:readership-review&catid=10&Itemid=360
- **McKim, C.A., 2017.** 'The Value of Mixed Methods Research: A Mixed Methods Study.' *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 11, 202–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815607096>
- **McCusker, K., Gunaydin, S., 2015.** *Research using qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods and choice based on the research.* *Perfusion* 30, 537–542. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267659114559116>
- **National Library of Ireland (NLI)**, accessed 18th June 2019. Available at: <https://www.nli.ie/>
- **NewsBrands Ireland.** 'About Us', accessed on 11th June 2019. Available at: <https://newsbrandsireland.ie/about-us/>
- **NewsBrands Ireland.** 'JNRS Provides Complete Picture of Newspaper Readership in Print and Online', accessed July 14th. Available at: <https://newsbrandsireland.ie/jnrs-provides-complete-picture-of-newspaper-readership-in-print-and-online/>
- **NewsBrands Ireland, 2018.** 'Circulation', accessed on 11th June 2019. Available at: <https://newsbrandsireland.ie/data-centre/circulation/>
- **O'Boyle, N., Kearns, C., 2017.** *The Greening of Euro 2016: Fan Footage, Representational Tropes, and the Media Lionization of the Irish in France.* *Television & New Media* 20, 96–116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476417741201>
- **O'Riordan, I., 2018.** 'Government funding for Irish sport dips slightly for 2018'. *Irish Times*. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/sport/other-sports/government-funding-for-irish-sport-dips-slightly-for-2018-1.3376919>

- **RTE Sport, Against the Head, 2018.** 'Is the Ireland rugby team the new Jack's army?', accessed on 16th June 2019. Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/sport/rugby/2018/0305/945243-is-the-ireland-rugby-team-the-new-jacks-army/>
- **Sport Ireland, 2017.** 'Irish Sports Monitor – Annual Report 2017', accessed on 16th June 2019. Available at: <https://www.sportireland.ie/Research/Irish%20Sports%20Monitor%202017%20-%20Half%20Year%20Report/Irish%20Sports%20Monitor%202017.pdf>
- **Survey Hero, 'User'**, accessed numerous times between June 11th and July 31st. Available at: <https://www.surveyhero.com/user/surveys/151789/results/report>
- **Teneo Sport & Sponsorship Index (TSSI), 2018.** 'Teneo's look back on the highs of 2018', accessed on 3rd July 2019. Available at: <http://sportforbusiness.com/teneos-look-back-on-the-highs-of-2018/>
- **Television Audience Measurement Ireland (TAMI), 2018.** 'We Irish love our TV', accessed on 12th June 2019. <https://www.tamireland.ie/we-irish-love-our-tv-and-thats-official-adults-spend-more-than-24-hours-every-week-viewing-tv/>
- **Television Audience Measurement Ireland (TAMI), 2018.** 'Review 2016', accessed on 12th June 2019. <http://www.tamireland.info/review2016/#p=51>
- **Television Audience Measurement Ireland (TAMI), 2018.** 'Top programmes 2018', accessed on 12th June 2019. Available at: <https://www.tamireland.ie/downloads/top-programmmes-2018/>
- **UKgeographics.** 'Blog – Social Grade', accessed on 20th July 2019. Available at: <https://www.ukgeographics.co.uk/blog/social-grade-a-b-c1-c2-d-e>
- **White, T.J., 2008.** *WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IRISH? THE TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL IDENTITY IN IRELAND.* Southeastern Political Review 24, 137–157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.1996.tb00436.x>