

Three Ireland, Two Teams, One Nation: An Exploration of Sport Sponsorship and Digital Cultural Nationalism

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: _____

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my granddad, Jack Kearns (1927-2018), whose one commandment – ‘Take care of yourself’ – kept me sane throughout this whole process.

“In a hundred years, we’ll all be dead. But here and now, we are alive.”

- Terry Pratchett, *Small Gods*

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Abstract

This PhD project focuses on the intersection of sport, advertising and national identity. Specifically, it examines the period in which telecommunications brand, Three, were the primary sponsors of both major international sports teams in Ireland. Through exploring sponsorship campaigns Three commissioned for the Republic of Ireland international football (soccer) team and the Ireland international rugby union team, this project will expound on both the contextually specific nuances and wider international significance of the contemporary commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus. Thus, it incorporates a variety of perspectives on Irish cultural studies and sports studies in order to shed light on the factors which shaped the production and reception of each campaign. In addition, the cultural and commercial significance of both campaigns are placed within a wider international context with a view to illustrating the distinct potential of sport as a vehicle for commercial expressions of national identity. Perspectives on nationalism are drawn from in order to illustrate a rough spectrum of modern nationalism and identify the significant place of sport on this spectrum, and its subsequent appeal and significance for both advertisers and wider society. This is contextualised through the concept of digital cultural nationalism which is employed to illustrate the curious position of national identity with regard to public expression and commercial use in much of the contemporary western world. In addition to in-depth textual analysis of sponsorship campaign material (televised ads, supplementary videos, press releases, etc.), the data involves interviews with figures from each of the key parties involved in sport sponsorship; advertisers, sponsor officials, sport governing body officials and fans of each team. This is supplemented by analysis of social media reaction to both campaigns and audience survey data gathered after screenings of the campaigns' main televised ads.

Introduction

In 2014 Three Ireland, the Irish branch of telecommunications multi-national Three, completed the takeover of rival phone services provider, O2, having announced their intention to do so in June 2013. This transaction not only cemented Three's place as one of the top telecommunications brands in Ireland, but also placed the brand in the unusual position of being the primary sponsor of both major international sports teams in the country: the Republic of Ireland football (soccer) team and the Ireland rugby team.¹ This is an occurrence that is relatively rare across the range of national sporting markets, and it left Three with what was simultaneously an opportunity and a dilemma. Namely, the brand had double the opportunity to tap into a widespread and passionate fan base, but to accomplish this effectively, they needed to ensure that the campaigns they construct around both sports remain distinct from one another while still availing of the tropes central to the appeal of idealised depictions of sport and nationhood.

This thesis was conceived with this peculiar case of dual sponsorship in mind as an ideal topic for investigation of the wider socio-cultural significances of national sport sponsorship in the modern era. As will be outlined further in subsequent sections, sport is a particularly potent symbol for national identity and this potency is all the more significant as encroaching globalisation and other developments erode the sense of stability around national identity while simultaneously fostering an anxious desire to preserve, or even champion, it. Sport sponsorship campaigns put the symbolic power of sport to use in a coherent narrative, providing a commercial balm to those anxious over national identity. Those involved in the construction of sponsorship campaigns must draw from the cultural connotations attached to both sport and national identity, but their effectiveness is to some extent dependent on obscuring their commercial motivations and resounding with the public through appeal to the emotional attachment to those connotations. Whether or not they are successful in doing this not only

¹ The international football team referred to intermittently throughout this work as 'Ireland' represents, as the above sentence indicates, the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland. The 6 counties of Northern Ireland that remain part of the United Kingdom are represented by their own international team. The Ireland rugby team, on the other hand, represents both the Republic and the North of Ireland. The ramifications of these distinctions with regard to the socio-cultural significance of both teams will be discussed in subsequent chapters. For purposes of brevity, the Republic of Ireland international football team is often referred to as 'Ireland' or 'the Ireland team' throughout this work.

reveals much about the commercial potential and limits of sport sponsorship, but also provides an interesting picture of how national identity is experienced through sport in everyday life. Such a topic is therefore ripe for exploring how notions of national identity are shaped and circulated in contemporary society through a full investigation of the parties involved and the manner in which they negotiate the emotional and commercial fault lines of their relationships. This thesis explores ‘An Ode to Fans’ and ‘All it Takes is Everything,’ sponsorship campaigns Three commissioned for the Ireland football and rugby teams respectively, with the intention of exploring further avenues pertaining to the socio-cultural significance of national sport sponsorship.

i:1. The Intersection of Sport, Sponsorship and National Identity

Mark Falcous (2007) is one of many scholars to notice ‘the tendency for corporations to seek to capitalize on the sport-nation nexus as a way of resonating with national markets in their promotional media’ (377). Appealing to idealised conceptions of national identity offers advertisers the appearance of speaking to the entire nation, but it also has the advantage of connecting the brand to powerful socio-cultural associations with passion, identity and community. Why brands feel the need to rely on such intangible links with national identity is explored in detail over the course of this thesis – in addition to the wider consequences of the commercialised visions of idealised national identity that this partnership of brand, nation and sport produces.

Indeed, the purpose of this study is to use the two sponsorship campaigns Three commissioned around the time of this brief and unusual dual sponsorship stint as a platform for the exploration of the triangular relationship between sport, advertising and national identity. And furthermore, to explore this relationship with full attention paid to all of the relevant stakeholders (both financial and emotional) involved; namely, the sponsor brand, the sport’s governing body, the advertising agency, and the fans. The literature review section expounds on the relative rarity of studies which have examined the confluence of these three topics without focusing on one of the three at the expense of the others, and still fewer which have given full attention to the roles of all the parties involved.

The subject is particularly underexplored from an Irish context, which is all the more curious given, as will be expounded on in later sections, sport in general, but particularly football and rugby, play a significant role in the construction of an Irish imagined national community previously dogged by the spectre of terrorism and stagnant cultural policies. The specific nature of this significance is examined in depth in subsequent chapters, but despite the cultural specificity of the case studies, this study is not limited in its outlook to a purely Irish cultural context. Rather, the case of Three Ireland is intended as a template for the thorough examination of modern sports sponsorship and the commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus.

Such a study is particularly pertinent in the current socio-political context which has seen nationalism at once resurgent and problematised. While this assessment has broadly been applicable to much of the western world since the end of World War II, the second decade of the 21st century has seen a particularly notable rise in populist nationalist movements that have, in turn, prompted significant resistance and critiques on the conceptions of national identity perpetuated by such movements (Scuir 2017; Gusterson 2017). Increasingly, nationalism and the expression or evocation of national identity fosters widespread anxiety, not only over its potential to spill over into xenophobia, but also regarding the question of how it can be credibly maintained in the face of encroaching globalism.

However, this migration of acceptable nationalism to the less controversial fringes of culture is not a development that has only begun in the last decade. Indeed, the two campaigns analysed in detail in this study predate nationalism's more recent escalations. Michael Billig (1995) coined the term 'banal nationalism' to address how nationalism continued to function (and indeed, flourish) in a cultural context which had deemed its more traditional forms problematic. He writes that though '[t]he theme of nationalism's dangerous and irrational return is becoming commonplace in writings by academic social scientists' (47), nationalism is seen as something operating on the global fringes, in politically unstable developing states. Conversely, in 'established nations,' nationalism seems to only exist during exceptional circumstances (such as war), with their very status as 'established nations' implying that they have largely successively purged themselves from impulsive and outdated nationalism. However, Billig argues that '[d]aily, the nation is indicated, or 'flagged,' in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition' (6). Modern national

identity, therefore, exists in a paradoxical state in that it plays a perennial and powerful role within a nation's socio-political context, but this role must be obscured to some degree, as it is associated with nations in flux rather than stable ones. Modern national identity is a fluid concept, in constant search of acceptable and engaging forms. To study these forms is to gain a greater insight into how the national identity of 'established nations' continues to flourish despite intellectual suspicion.

Sport and advertising are foremost among these forms. Both have such a large space in most nations' media spheres as to be almost omnipresent, and therefore present an ideal form for any ideology with intentions of speaking to, or for, the nation. Though both have the potential to attract controversy from the media and wider public, they are only occasionally discussed in terms which afford their effects on wider society any significant degree of importance.² Both are fundamentally narrative mediums, facilitating the shaping of a diffuse concept like national identity into an engaging and coherent form. This may be truer of advertising than sport; the former provides a narrative, while the latter provides the building blocks of a narrative which are then shaped into one through supplementary media coverage (televised punditry, newspaper and online reaction articles and, indeed, advertising). Through sport sponsorship, this narrative marriage of sports and advertising provides a potent vehicle for national narratives.

This thesis will further expand on the perceived 'values vacuum' in modern society (Rowe 1999) which sees advertisers and sponsors tap into powerful cultural values in efforts to win over a fragmented and alienated society. National identity is prominent among these, as a powerfully emotive concept with a rich trove of tropes and imagery to draw from. Sport acts as one of the most effective and engaging forms through which this concept can be evoked and represented. Sport facilitates the temporary transformation of the intangible concept of national identity into a concentrated shared experience. Advertising, usually produced through sponsorship, facilitates the transformation of diffuse sporting events into a readily consumable narrative. Advertising, of course, cannot create such narratives whole-cloth, but must, instead, construct one around public perceptions of the team, athlete or sport being depicted. Furthermore, while advertisers obviously benefit through associating the sponsor brand with a popular team or athlete (the nature of how

² In the public media sphere, at least. In academic circles and publications, the wider cultural influence of sport and advertising has been much discussed.

they benefit will, of course, be examined in detail in this study), the sport-nation nexus benefits through the furthering of the perception of its all-pervading attention and significance. Major sporting events (such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics) may attract huge national audiences united in their support of the national team or athlete, but there will very likely be a small but significant minority who choose not to watch such events out of a lack of interest in sport. It is likely however, that even if such non-fans do not watch the actual sporting event itself, they will be unable to avoid a concurrent advertising campaign - as Toland Frith and Mueller (2003) point out '[a]dvertising pursues us all day long [...] no matter what time of day, or day of the week, wherever we go, consumers are confronted by a constant stream of inescapable commercial communications' (254-255).

The three are thus interlinked, each contributing to the others' sense of socio-cultural significance and practical inescapability. Indeed, these two attributes also exist in symbiotic relationship, prominence furthering the impression of importance, and importance demanding prominence. The purpose of this study then, is to examine this triangular relationship in detail with a view to how it functions despite the problematising of traditional national identity and growing ad-savviness (or scepticism) of audiences. In addition, it aims to trace the fault lines of this relationship, to examine not only how shared priorities are communicated and negotiated, but also where and why they break down.

i:2. Digital Cultural Nationalism

Furthermore, this study will contextualise the unique significance of sports sponsorship as a form of national identity expression by framing it within what might be considered a spectrum of acceptable modern nationalism. On the far end of this spectrum is the hot-blooded nationalism that Billig discusses, political ideologies and policies that risk destabilising a nation's 'established' nature through arousing explicit division or violence. As the recent political developments alluded to above indicates, this degree of nationalism commands considerable allure, but also attracts significant criticism and controversy. Paradoxically, such policies are purportedly founded on a desire to reaffirm 'authentic' national culture and, in doing so, reinforce a sense of national community, but they risk destabilising it through affirming conceptions of national identity that will exclude many from this idealised community. Thus,

despite their political power, such policies cannot, without support, speak for and to the nation with the unanimity they aspire to. They must, as Billig describes, be supported by subtle, everyday flaggings of nationhood. The level of subtlety and emotional resonance of these flaggings varies along this spectrum. The other extreme end of the spectrum consists of the banal examples outlined by Billig (such as the example he cites of flags hanging, unquestioned, in public buildings) and the more recent development of the online cottage industry in semi-ironic affirmations of the minutiae of national culture which has arisen from the desire for an ‘acceptable’ outlet for cultural nationalism in the 21st century western world. The development emerging from the cultural context which sees a desire to affirm national identity without arousing discontent is described in this thesis as ‘digital cultural nationalism’ and will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. This concept will be illustrated with references to ‘playful nationalism’ (Kyriakidou et al 2017) and developing from Billig’s banal nationalism. The ‘digital’ prefix functions to locate the concept in an era when the internet offers a communication medium largely unfettered by nationally-distinct restrictions to content, theoretically facilitating further elision of ideas of distinct national identities and cultures.

The examples on what might be deemed the lower end of the spectrum are unlikely to arouse the backlash of the more overtly political expressions of nationalism at the other end of the spectrum, but nor are they likely to arouse significant public passion or enduring interest (indeed, as Appendix 3:4 shows, they aroused mockery, though this itself attests to the breadth of their appeal). They may serve an important role in underpinning a deep-seated sense of national identity, but the very fact of their unquestioned acceptance by the public speaks not only to their banality, but also their relative docility, as cultural touchstones. To return to sport, it can be argued that it, in contrast to these relative extremes of nationalistic expression, occupies a particularly significant and valuable place on this spectrum. Sport, as Bairner (2001) observes, ‘is clearly linked with the construction and reproduction of the national identities of many people’ (1). Indeed, it is linked in a markedly explicit fashion with athletes or teams competing against each other under the collective identity of the nation, while fans can further emphasise their national bond with ‘their’ team or athlete through use of shared symbols such as flags and team colours. Furthermore, the moments of collective national identification which occur during widely viewed sporting events foster considerable public passion and media attention. Sport provides rare moments in which the normally diffuse, banal, underlying national identity rises to

the surface to create a sense of shared purpose and feeling. Thus, in the uneasy era of digital cultural nationalism, sport provides a rare outlet for expressions and celebrations of national identity which are both inclusive and emotive, and, thus – as will be explained in further chapters – particularly attractive to commercial brands hoping to leverage national identity’s potent appeal.

This spectrum, loose framework of understanding of modern nationalism that it is, should not be read as permanently fixed in place. While it is presented above as a means of differentiating the relationship between sport and national identity with seemingly unremarkable banal nationalism on the one hand and more heated, overtly political forms of nationalism on the other; that is not to preclude the possibility of certain forms of nationalist expression being moved along this spectrum by ongoing events. Billig cites the unwaved flags hanging in public buildings as an example of a form of nationalism that goes largely unquestioned and uncommented upon, but even these have the potential to ferment controversy if their apparent ‘naturalness’ is disturbed. To return to sport, the pre-match playing of the national anthem at US sporting events may have been once regarded as only slightly less unquestioned than the unwaved flag, but the decision of a number of NFL (National Football League) players in 2017 to protest the police’s treatment of African-Americans by taking a knee (rather than standing) during the anthem triggered heated nationwide arguments. Indeed, Michael Skey (2010; 2014; 2018) argues for applying greater flexibility to our notions of what constitutes ‘hot’ nationalism, arguing that seemingly banal rituals and symbols can become temporarily bound up with passionate public debates on national identity and culture. While it is beyond the scope of this study to assess the full scope of how events shift the scale of acceptable nationalisms, the campaigns examined in detail will outline the points in which the evocative but largely uncontroversial forms of idealised Irishness expressed in them occasionally threaten to arouse contentious reactions.

i:3. Structure of Thesis

Therefore the central research question of this project amounts to: what is the significance of sport sponsorship’s place on this spectrum? To answer this question, this project draws together the fields of sport, advertising and Irish identity (detailed in the following chapter) to provide a

context for the exploration of the two afore-mentioned Three campaigns as (while not losing sight of their distinctness as texts and the specific cultural context they emerged from) representative of wider currents within the commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus. Crucially, it explores these campaigns in a manner which affords attention to all of the relevant parties involved: sponsor brand, advertising agent, sport governing body and fans. As will be described in the following two chapters, this decision distinguishes this thesis from many earlier works which limited themselves to prioritising certain parties in their examinations of the field. Furthermore, it explores these campaigns through each of the three stages of their production. Following on from the context established in the Literature Review (Chapter 1) and Methodology (Chapter 2) chapters, Chapters 3 and 4 explore ‘An Ode to Fans’ and ‘All it Takes is Everything’ respectively. These chapters examine the conception of the campaigns, conduct a detailed analysis of the advertising texts distributed for them (chiefly the main televised commercials of each campaign) and discuss their reception and impact, not only in commercial terms, but also with regard to the cultural connotations of the sport and its relationship to national identity. Chapter 5 then synthesises the findings of the previous two chapters and sets them within a wider theoretical framework of how national identity is effectively commercialised through sport and what the wider significance of this process is.

Ultimately, this project aims to explore how sport’s sponsorship’s potency as a vehicle for an acceptable modern form of idealised national identity is constructed and leveraged, and, in doing so, point towards the wider socio-cultural significance of this development. Sport sponsorship is banally accepted as a feature of the cultural landscape and yet is bound up with powerfully emotive events. In the era of digital cultural nationalism, when national identity is simultaneously fetishised and problematised, that such an acceptable yet powerful totem of national identity can sit in plain sight on the cultural and commercial landscape is worthy of investigation.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1:1. Introduction

In order to present a theoretical context for this exploration of the socio-cultural significance of sports sponsorship, it is necessary to expound on the factors which shape this context. This literature review is therefore divided into three parts exploring critical engagement with advertising, studies of the wider significance of sport (with particular attention paid to the examination of its commercial appeal for, and employment by, advertisers), and Irish cultural studies.

Section 1:2 of the literature review examines the field of sport studies with specific focus on the depiction of sports in advertising. It first collates the research which explores the interaction of sport with culture and society, tracing the symbiotic relationship between sport and the media, before outlining the unique cachet sport holds for advertisers and the significance of the manner in which it has been employed by them. The role of sport as a discursive vehicle for constructions of national identity is also examined in this section. Research on this function of sport is drawn from a wide variety of national contexts, and, while acknowledging the cultural specificity of each case, this section makes the case for the wider applicability of certain conclusions drawn from this literature.

Section 1:3 examines the prevailing trends regarding the role of identity in advertising, detailing the research on this topic and sifting through the disparate perspectives with the aim of establishing the context in which Three and their advertising agency, Boys and Girls, operate. This section expounds on the literature which argues in broad terms for the impact of advertising on wider culture, before exploring more specific concepts in the field of advertising studies pertinent to this project, such as the interrogation of the appeal and function of sponsorships. In addition, the depiction of masculinity in advertising is specifically addressed, owing to the reliance on conceptions of idealised masculinity in sports advertising and the construction of national identity. It concludes by outlining the distinct appeal of national identity to advertisers and alluding to how advertising and sponsorship shapes, and is shaped by, prevailing perceptions of national identity, and the importance of sport to this relationship.

Section 1:4 of the literature review explores Irish cultural studies with a view to tracing the construction of Irish identity from 19th century British impositions, the Celtic Revival romanticised response and how this calcified after independence through to the recent alterations it has undergone following the impact of the Celtic Tiger economic boom and subsequent downturn. Furthermore, a separate sub-section assesses sport's interaction with Irish identity and its function in the reshaping and reasserting of particular elements of Irish identity, with a particular view to identifying the specific cultural connotations that certain sports have been discursively imbued with. Advertising within an Irish context is also examined, extrapolating upon the impact of not only national socio-economic conditions, but also on the influence conceptions of national identity, in shaping the industry and its output.

The structure of this literature review is designed to progress from the broad to the particular in constructing a thorough context from which the analysis of the sponsorship campaigns central to this project can proceed. It begins by outlining the socio-cultural impact of advertising at a global level, before examining sport in similar terms and demonstrating its intersection with advertising, and finally expounding on Irish identity and exploring its symbiotic relationship with advertising and sport within the national context. In this manner, the link between Three Ireland's sport sponsorship campaigns and the wider international significance and context of advertising becomes clear, and the significance and wider applicability of this study is asserted.

1:2. Sport

Sport as a concept may have roots extending back thousands of years, but as the organised mass spectator event that forms such a prominent part of contemporary global society, it emerged in the mid to late 19th century. The transformation of sport from unregulated regional folk activities to structured spectator events chiefly began in the British private school system. Beset with worries about the discipline and manliness of the youths assumed to be the future administrators of Britain's burgeoning empire, school authorities sought to instil these qualities in their charges through the promotion of organised sport. As Roberta J. Park (2012) describes, 'Vigorous games-playing developed the manly vigour, strength, courage, and teamwork that were necessary

for a nation deeply involved in military conflicts and also engrossed with maintaining and spreading an Empire' (798).

This anxiety over declining standards of masculinity extended beyond the schoolyard. Park (2012) recounts how an overarching concern of the period was the conduct of soldiers after they had returned from the front. Undeveloped understanding of trauma-induced mental conditions such as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) led to a lack of tolerance for mentally distressed veterans – 'for many Victorians hysteria in males was an anathema' (795). To combat this 'hysteria,' exercise was championed as both prevention and cure. However, increased industrialisation and urbanisation during this period further contributed to worries that many people were living in conditions which consigned them to mental stress and physical indolence. Thus, it was necessary to organize sports that would provide a nationwide platform to address this dearth of exercise and consequent manliness.

This organization involved the compilation of agreed upon rules for games whose codes and conventions previously varied greatly depending on the region in which they were played. Furthermore, as urbanization limited the space to engage in physical activity in the casual and organic manner in which had largely hitherto been practiced, specific spaces purpose built to host and facilitate exercise were constructed, such as gyms, sports clubs and stadiums (Runstedtler 2011). Crucially, these developments not only helped cultivate individual interest and engagement with sport, they also allowed for the national mediatization of sport. Sport became a spectator event with interest extending beyond its practitioners, and the hundreds and even thousands gathered together to watch sporting events attested to their apparent newsworthiness. In addition, increased communication and transportation technologies, and the establishment of nationwide rules and governing bodies facilitated the organization of national and even international competitions – a development which furthered the media's role as the interest in the events of such competitions extended beyond the locale in which they took place. Thus began the ever increasing mediatization of sport. Mediatization is described by Hjarvard (2008) as 'the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic.' In the case of sport, interest in national or international competitions is dependent on the media's coverage of such events. The ideological impact of sporting events therefore stretches beyond the stadium or playing field and into the newspaper

pages, television coverage and internet content concerning those events. With this in mind, the significance of sports advertising becomes evident - it is a prominent element of the mediatisation of sport which is unique in the directness and emphasis with which it highlights ideological values associated with sport.

The significance of the mediatisation of sport and advertising's unique role in the process will be further expounded on later in this chapter. For now, the focus will return briefly to the masculinity anxiety that shaped the organisation of modern sport and examine its relationship with national identity. Cynthia Enloe (1990) argues that 'nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope' (45) - an assertion echoed elsewhere by Maguire (1994), Free (2006) and McSharry (2008) among others. This link was particularly explicit during the formative years of modern sport in the 19th and early 20th centuries. David Goldblatt (2006) writes that sport was viewed as 'physically harden[ing] up the Victorian ruling class for the task of imperial conquest' (27) and cites Victorian schoolmasters prizing the 'games ethic' as a superior tool than 'cleverness' for shaping 'man [and] nation' (28). This attitude persists in the tendency of both figures within sport and media commentators on it to conflate sport with war. Jason Tuck (2003) notes that the media have long had a tendency to employ 'the vocabulary of war' to 'hype up sporting events,' a discursive tactic which he argues links 'the two areas of life where the nation is a primary signifier' (190-191). The persistence of the media's affirmation of nationalism through the conflation of sport and war is noted elsewhere by Ward (2009), Cooley (2010) and Messner (2011). Ultimately what emerges from this overview of the history of modern organized sport is a continual concern with nationhood and manhood. As this chapter progresses to outlining recent academic engagement with the socio-cultural impact of sport, it will become evident that these ideological constructs continue to play a significant role in how sport shapes collective and individual identity.

Despite its international popularity, media attention and the above described loaded ideological connotations; notably scant attention was paid to sport by humanities academics for the greater part of the 20th century (Dunning 1999; Bairner 2001). Eric Dunning ascribes the dearth of sociological research to a misguided interpretation of Marxism which neglected an understanding of the world in favour of directly influencing change to it. Under such an interpretation, the examination of a mere pastime such as sport was deemed a bourgeois luxury.

Furthermore, the predominance of intellectual ‘economism’ encouraged academics to view the political-economy sphere as the driving force of society and culture to the extent of analysing them in purely economic terms. In addition, a tendency towards dualistic thinking – analysing in terms of strict binaries such as society/individual, detached/involved, etc. – inhibited attempting to analyse sport beyond viewing it as a product of mass culture, viewed and consumed passively (1999, 7-11).

The end of the 20th century saw a marked increase in the attention paid to sport by the fields of sociology and cultural studies. Eric Hobsbawm was among the most prominent in articulating sport’s ideological role as an extension of the imagined community, writing that sportsmen representing their nation-state become ‘primary expressions’ of that community (1992, 143). Joseph Maguire (1993; 1994) developed on this by exploring the relationship between sport and globalisation. One of the more notable points to emerge from his work was the assertion that ‘while these processes lead, as noted, to a greater degree of interdependence, and also to an increased awareness of a sense of the world as a whole, we also see a concomitant resurgence of the local/national. These elements are two sides of the same coin’ (1994, 400). While somewhat sceptical of the ability of sport to represent the nation in an increasingly pluralized and globalized society, Maguire nonetheless acknowledges the possibility, writing that: ‘Sport plays an important role in embodying multiple notions of identity. Different sports represent individuals, communities, regions, and nations, and a key feature of the sports process is that it is used by different groups, established as well as emergent or outsider groups, to represent, maintain, and/or challenge identities’ (1994, 410).

The notion of sport as a potent force in the construction and performance of individual and collective identities became a frequent focus for research into the previously neglected socio-cultural significance of sport. While a sports team may come to represent a collective identity for a community, culture or nation; the act of support itself also shapes identity at an individual level. Through the act of purchasing paraphernalia associated with their chosen team, fans take an active role in shaping their individual identity within and through the collective identity of the team (Free and Hughson 2006). Furthermore, through their reactions and (occasionally) resistance to the prevailing trends of their chosen sport, fans demonstrate their individual choice and agency even when apparently subsumed into the collective of stadium spectatorship

(Hutchins 2016). It therefore becomes evident that sport offers ample manoeuvring for individual agency and identity even while the individual's participation in collective support simultaneously contributes to wider identities constructed around the team.

Sport's role in the construction of identity has, of course, also been greatly significant on a macro level, forming a key part of the shaping, affirming and propagation of national identity. Andrei Markovits and Steven Hellerman (2001) argue that the development of sport is inextricably tied to the development of mass societies (products of urbanisation, industrialisation and 'the perpetually expanding participation of a steadily growing number of citizens in the public spheres of politics, production and consumption'), and see sport as a forum for the 'contradictions of modern life' (13-14). Again, it is notable that this assessment of sport's developing with the growing industrialisation of the 19th and early 20th centuries chronologically parallels Benedict Anderson's outline of the construction of the imagined community of the nation (which will be further expounded on in the section 1:4 of this chapter), with the growth of the media and the decline of smaller communities necessitating and facilitating accessible and comprehensible forms of mass collective identification. Mass sport and modern national identity, therefore, have become interwoven. Alan Bairner argues as much, writing 'sport is clearly linked with the construction and reproduction of the national identities of many people' (2001, 1). Dunning goes further in asserting that along with war and religion, sport is the greatest method of collective ideological mobilisation that modern civilisation has devised (1999, 221). A statement echoed elsewhere by Joseph Maguire (1994) and Jason Tuck (2003). Proceeding from this assertion, it can be argued that in large swathes of western society, where large-scale war³ is rare and secularism is broadly increasing, that sport's role in structuring and raising consciousness of a collective national identity becomes increasingly important. International sport clearly delineates between nations and creates a hierarchy of quality through pitting them against one another – in effect affirming a nation's distinct identity by framing it against others. Even war muddies the waters of distinct nationhood somewhat by potentially subsuming individual nations into wider military alliances in the narrative of the conflict. Furthermore, war has the potential to significantly destabilise national identity through its consequences

³ The phrase 'large-scale war' is used here to differentiate between the military commitments of various nations to UN peacekeeping missions and wars which specifically concern the nation in question as the primary aggressor or victim of military action.

(balkanisation of countries once regarded as single ideological entities by some of their inhabitants being an example of this), while in sport, though defeat may lead to significant rethinking or questioning of previously championed idealisations of national identity, it does not pose a threat to the existence of the nation's fundamental existence or ideological underpinnings.

Sport, therefore, offers a vehicle and platform for formations of national identity that is uniquely accessible, tangible and media-friendly. As a contest which functions as an 'expression of national unity and triumph' (Nohrnberg 2010, 99), it possesses a sense of significance and consequence underpinned by a sense of fundamental safety – a tacit knowledge that however devastating and disappointing sporting failure can be, the very fact that fans can continue to function afterwards demonstrates that such failure is not terminal to the individual nor the imagined community which the team represents. This key distinction is noted by Dunning (1999) who asserts that sport is often employed as a vehicle for the 'arousal of strong feelings of a great variety of types in societies which otherwise impose on people a life of relatively even and unemotional routines, and which require a high degree and great constancy of emotional control in all spheres of life.' (27). Sport may be 'war minus the shooting' (Orwell 1945) but that minus is critical to sport being a more palatable and engaging arena for national identity than war ever could be.

Significantly, too, sport facilitates the temporal conceptual flexibility which underpins the construction of national identity. Jason Tuck echoes Tom Nairn to expound on this flexibility, arguing that 'many national identities tend to be ambivalently positioned between the past and the present [...] there are simultaneous drives to return to past glories on a wave of wilful nostalgia, while wanting to progress deeper into modernity' (2003b, 496). The concept of national identity is reliant on shared myths of an idealised past, and of heroic figures that have shaped the nation; but to sustain itself, it must also make use of signifiers and events in the present and hold some notion of promise for the future. Sport is particularly well suited to allowing this temporal ambivalence a space to flourish. Maguire writes that sport is a particularly potent nostalgic device, constituting a public act of collective remembrance (1994). Through the unified body of the national team, whose lineage can be traced back through decades of matches under the same title and flag, sport acts as a powerful signifier of continuity. Dunning (1999), for instance, argues that support of sports teams serves as an anchor for collective identity amidst

wider political turmoil. However as David Rowe notes, sport is not solely reliant on nostalgia, its relevance to the present is continually reiterated through live matches, and also functions as a facilitator for predictions and hopes of the future: 'Sport can connect the past, present and future, by turns trading on sepia-tinted nostalgia, the 'nowness' of 'live' action and the anticipation of things to come' (1999, 73).

What is particularly notable about the manner in which sport embodies national identity is that sport does not merely function as a blank canvas on which to project preconceived ideas, but rather, the two act in a symbiotic relationship. The public performance and depiction of national identity which surround major sporting events are shaped by the results and style of the athlete or team. Furthermore, particular sports can develop specific cultural associations within national contexts – associations shaped by their traditions and organisation within that particular country. Markovits and Hellerman (2001) discuss the concept of a nation's 'sport space,' whereby certain sports become almost indelibly associated with certain aspects of a national culture and are thereafter ensured of near permanent popularity and prominence. They argue that 'sport space is not "filled" simply on a first-come, first-served basis, but rather disputed and contested by social groups and actors with particular sets of interests. Positions within any society's sport space can thus be denied by dominant groups and alliances of interests' (15). The relationship between sport and national identity is a reflexive one, which necessitates examination of the particulars of both sport and nation to explore the significance of how it functions.

Sport, therefore, is uniquely positioned to mobilise a sense of shared national identity in a globalised, postmodern society characterised by a fragmented sense of identity (McSharry, 2008). Albaraces et al (2001) identify sport as of particular importance for nations emerging from colonialism or previous amalgamation into a larger nation. They argue that widely watched international sporting events offer the most viable opportunity for these emergent nations to profile their distinct identity on the world stage (548). Anne Kelk Mager (2005) describes, specifically, how sport was crucial to the reimagining of South African identity in the wake of the end of apartheid: 'Sporting arenas became places where multiracial nationalism was imaged as spectacle' (184). Elsewhere, Mark Falcous (2007) laments how often the role of sport has been neglected in postcolonial studies and attempts to amend that by examining the cultural significance of the New Zealand rugby team. He asserts that 'the winning record of the men's

national team—the All Blacks—had historically been foundational in the legitimacy of first, colonial, and subsequently, postcolonial constructions of nationhood’ (379). It therefore becomes evident that assessing the socio-cultural impact of sport in Ireland (a nation that is something of a postcolonial oddity in being a European British colony) would make for a particularly intriguing study – an area that will be explored in the section 1:4 of this chapter.

Of course, national identity is not the only collective identity sport can tap into. Much work has been done on the imagined communities of club supporters. However, while these are undoubtedly significant, there remain particular facets unique to sport’s relationship with national identity which underline its ideological importance. Free and Hughson (2006) cite Willis in arguing that ‘that a phenomenon like Manchester United soccer club’s global brand destroys any traces of “organic community [since] the overwhelming majority of fans will never be part of the original sensuous community,” their contact being solely through the purchase of secondary commodities, from broadcast games to club merchandise’ (89). If we accept that the tangible sense of identity offered by sport to individuals in mass society can be thus undermined by the very conditions of mass society, the significance of national identity is tacitly underlined. Supporters of global brands such as Manchester United have their sense of community eroded by the seemingly limitless reach of the club, creating a fan base less than the sum of its parts with regard to how the passion of individual United fans is subsumed into a homogenous global whole, characterised (often by admittedly biased fans of other clubs, but also by elements of the more ostensibly objective media) as bereft of history and authenticity.⁴ Supporting a national team offers an antidote to this by providing individuals with more tangible justifications for their identification and the sense of both community and relative exclusivity. Anyone may support Manchester United for any number of reasons, but supporters of Ireland or England will largely

⁴ The notion of ‘authenticity’ with regard to sport supportership is complex and fluid while deriving its cachet from appearing natural and unalterable. Free and Hughson (2006) describe how supporters continually frame their authenticity against apparently less dedicated supporters. This dedication is enacted through consumption: emotional, temporal and financial – as supporters spend time, money and energy in performing their love for their team. This echoes Billig’s (1995) ideas regarding the idea of sacrifice being central to nationalism. Indeed, as is detailed in subsequent sections and chapters of this thesis, the concepts of authenticity as regards sport, advertising and national identity often intertwine.

be limited to those born in, raised in or with familial links to, that country, and their identification ultimately stems from those tangible factors.⁵

Therefore the ‘sport-nation nexus’ (Falcous 2007, 377) is a particularly potent site of collective identity, not least for its ability to appeal to non-sports fans on occasion. To draw on the above outlined example, Manchester United may be a global brand, but to non-football fans, they carry limited ideological significance. Whereas nations convey historical, political and cultural associations that can potentially win the attention of non-sports fans for international events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup. Gary Whannel alludes to this when outlining the concept of ‘vortextual sport:’

It is important here to distinguish between two different forms of television sport. The majority of sport on television, watched by small audiences, is in regular routinized slots, often well outside peak viewing times [...] The exceptions occur at times of major events which have their own regularity but not one that fits neatly into television’s weekly scheduled routines. Sport appears in peak time, on major channels. Schedules are disrupted to accommodate it. The event features prominently across media. Public interest becomes manifest, in a variety of forms. Audiences can be exceptionally large. These major events take on a ‘vortextual’ character (2009, 210).

It is certainly arguable that the more significant matches of the Irish international rugby and football teams often constitute vortextual events on a national level, more so than international club games or strictly domestic sport. Certainly recent television viewing figures add credence to this assertion; matches from both teams feature heavily in the 20 most viewed television events in Ireland from 2014 to 2017. The only other sporting events which feature heavily in these figures are matches from the latter stages of the FIFA World Cup and UEFA European Championship (not involving Ireland) and the All-Ireland Championships (both Gaelic Football and Hurling). Without entirely discounting the considerable socio-cultural significance of these events, it should be noted that they lack the potential to galvanise Irish identity to the same degree. The former, of course, while being a vortextual event on an international scale does not galvanise collective identity for any countries not directly involved (though the attention it

⁵ Interestingly, similar sentiments were expressed by supporters of the Irish international football team interviewed over the course of this research. Their views will be expanded on in subsequent chapters of this work, but they further reiterate that, despite the reservations of Williams (1994) and Blake (2011), national identity and international teams continue to hold unique appeal for sports fans.

attracts further emphasizes that the cachet of the sport-nation nexus extends beyond committed sports fans – it is notable that major live club matches, such as the final of the UEFA Champions League or European Rugby Champions Cup did not attract comparably large audiences in Ireland). While Gaelic Games, though of great significance to Irish culture, lack the international element which can function as a unifying element for the nation. Regardless of their victories and the media coverage and audiences they attract, the Kerry Gaelic Football team or the Kilkenny Hurling team can never claim to represent the entire country in the manner that the Irish international football or rugby team can.

The unique socio-cultural consequence of these teams to act as signifiers of, or ideological battlegrounds for, Irish identity has seen them attract a not inconsiderable body of academic work. Aidan Arrowsmith (2004) documented how football's international platform saw it depicted as representative of an emerging cosmopolitanism and framed against the Old Ireland parochialism of GAA, before detailing the complexities and contradictions in this binary. Jason Tuck (2003b), Liam O'Callaghan (2013) and Majella McSharry (2008) variously examine the role of rugby in shaping Irish identity, with the latter two paying specific attention to how the discourses constructed around the Munster rugby team work to reconcile the associations of the sport with traditional perceptions of Irish identity. Marcus Free (2013) is relatively unusual in directly comparing both sports, following on from Arrowsmith in exploring how football was initially associated with a more modern and pluralistic form of Irish identity, before arguing that, in many media quarters, it was superseded by rugby, which was depicted as a more fitting representative of the bullish confidence of the Celtic Tiger. This research project draws from these works, while approaching the subject through a medium rarely touched on by these scholars: advertising.

Falcous writes of 'the tendency for corporations to seek to capitalize on the sport-nation nexus as a way of resonating with national markets in their promotional media' (2007, 377). The commercial leverage of this nexus is illustrative not only of the cultural potency of sport, but also of the forms national identity is manifested in through sport. National identity continues to be a prominent element in the conceptualisation and production of Irish advertising. Neil O'Boyle (2011) asserts that this prominence is driven by industry priorities; Irish advertising agencies, he argues, emphasise the cultural specificity of the Irish market and their own knowledge of it, to

maintain a sense of unique capabilities in a competitive global market place. In addition, he writes that international clients often pressure agencies to draw from a familiar stock of Irish cultural clichés in their output. In such a commercial context, the appeal of sport to provide an engaging platform for succinct national identity narratives is clear. Sport's broad appeal to international advertisers was elaborated on in the preceding section of this chapter, but here there are some particularities regarding the Irish context which need to be expounded on (and will be further developed in the following section).

In their efforts to draw from their own experience of Ireland, the goals of their clients and the abiding tropes and imagery associated with the country; Irish advertisers are often caught in a quandary as to how to develop a commercial narrative that is both engaging and coherent (Fanning 2006, Kuhling 2008). Sport's temporal flexibility in being able to simultaneously appeal to past, present and future (Rowe 1999) provides an ideal antidote to the difficulty faced by Irish advertisers. Through sport, advertisers can represent both the bucolic, carefree Ireland of stereotype as well as aspirational visions of a modern, successful nation. The specific details as to how this flexibility is achieved in representational terms will be outlined in greater detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, but it is worth briefly touching on here. Sports fans can function as a representation of unity and continuity, linking a current iteration of a team with its historic forebears that they supported (and by extension linking the current team to the history of the wider culture they represent). Anne White (2000) notes how depictions of fans in advertising are often associated with nostalgia, with their irrational and seemingly selfless passion seen as a balm for the anxieties of modern life. Conversely, depictions of triumphant victories can function to frame the country as competing in a cutting edge competition on an international stage. Sport's role as a signifier of a nation's modernity or progression has been well-documented (Alabaraces et al 2001; Free 2005, 2013; Sark 2012), but advertising can harness this role in particularly pointed fashion, all the more so when the advertised brand carries its own connotations of modernity.

1:3. Advertising

This thesis is chiefly concerned with advertising with a view to illuminating the cultural role of sponsorship. Sponsorship can be considered a specific form of advertising which extends the relationship between advertiser and brand to include a sponsored property through which the advertising is achieved. The sponsorship of a sports team or event goes beyond simply increasing public prominence, sport actually presents advertisers with a potent platform to appeal to conceptual collective signifiers. David Rowe argues along similar lines, writing that 'When contemporary advertising relies so heavily on making very similar items (such as sugared drinks, cars with shared components, 're-badged' computers) appear different, sport's capacity to stimulate emotional identification with people and things is priceless' (1999, 73). The role of sponsorship is important to the examination of the central case studies of this thesis and is analysed in depth in Chapters 3 and 4. However, to gain a sufficient understanding of sponsorship's socio-cultural significance, it is first necessary to map out the distinguishing features of the advertising medium and industry. Exploring advertising illustrates how it (through sponsorship) provides a platform to shape the potent cultural associations of sport into specific and compelling discourses.

What then, are the qualities which distinguishes advertising from other media? And what is the significance of these qualities? Toland Frith and Mueller (2003) identify ubiquity as one, noting that 'The proliferation of advertising over the past few decades has been astonishing. In the United States, the average person may be exposed to 500 to 1,000 commercial messages a day' (2003, 255). The figures quoted may no longer be accurate, but it is doubtful that any other form of media text can match ads in terms of omnipresence. This ubiquity, however, creates a unique problem (from the point of view of advertisers), namely that unlike other media, advertising is largely foisted upon consumers without their intent. Advertisers must not only find a way of differentiating their work from the myriad others they can expect consumers to experience each day, but also distract or compensate from any potential negative feelings aroused by the perceived invasiveness of advertising. Audiences exercise a greater degree of conscious choice in what films they watch or books they read than they do in the ads they watch, and more liable to view ads as an unwelcome intrusion into their lives as a result (Toland Frith and Mueller 2003, 267). To be effective, therefore, advertising must operate on the level of myth, relying on

seemingly accepted ‘truths’ and unspoken rules that ‘accentuate particular versions of reality while marginalising others’ (Falcous 2007, 377). In this manner, the socio-cultural impact of ads is somewhat subtle, as they must seemingly only recreate or reflect existing conventions so as not to be perceived as overly jarring or irksome, however, in doing so, they shape these conventions, ultimately creating a situation in which it ‘becomes impossible to say which came first: the culture or the ad’ (O’Barr 1994, 206).

The ideological strategies of advertising stem from their format, as Marshall McLuhan (2001) writes ‘The medium is the message.’ Being an invasive and unwanted imposition on viewers, televisual advertising must limit itself to a short time frame (relative to the broadcast it ‘interrupts’) and print advertising rarely takes up any more than a single page. Relatedly, advertisements are designed for repeated viewing to a greater extent than any other entertainment medium, with the possible exception of pop music. Although, notably, pop music is purveyed in one form (the song, though it may be shortened or otherwise edited depending on the medium) while an advertising campaign can take various forms across a range of media, with the commonality of conveying the same message about the same brand. The omnipresence of advertising in modern society means that ad producers must anticipate – and, indeed, desire – that consumers will repeatedly be confronted with their ads across a range of mediums (television, internet, billboards, etc.). Furthermore, the line between advertising and the medium used to convey it grows increasingly blurred, as Springer argues: ‘Essentially what we see now is products, spaces and events more often becoming extensions of advertising campaigns’ (2007, 18).

Advertising is thus distinct from the other arts and media in the hypothetical ‘cultural conversation’ through necessity. Its brevity and ubiquity arises from its invasiveness – advertising must insinuate its way into the ‘cultural conversation,’ winning over audiences otherwise ambivalent (or even hostile) to commercial impositions and interruptions to their chosen forms of media entertainment. The tone and content are also largely shaped by this need to insinuate. As outlined above, advertising often relies on myth, on ‘common sense’ assumptions and associations designed to reassure rather than challenge its audience. That is not to say this unilaterally the case, many successful advertising campaigns have been based on deliberately jarring deviations from the values and narrative conventions of their contemporaries,

but the very fact that such campaigns base their appeal on this deviation suggests a broadly shared conception of advertising convention that they assume audiences will recognise.

In assessing advertising's unique qualities as a cultural medium, it is important not to entirely neglect the role played by individual agency in favour of completely focusing on its structures. Sean Nixon (2003) writes extensively about the employees within advertising agencies lead to the fostering of a work culture with pronounced stances with regard to what constitutes creativity, effectiveness and desirability. Nixon's observation that the creative departments of the agencies he examined were overwhelmingly made up of men is also significant. A 2015 survey of the Irish advertising industry conducted by IAPI (Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland) revealed that 78% of agency directors are male, and echoed Nixon's findings in demonstrating that the creative departments remain chiefly male (IAPI Industry Census, 2015).⁶

These findings indicate the significant ways in which the output of the advertising industry is shaped by the individual identities of those working within it, particularly within creative departments. In a roundtable discussion on advertising as a cultural form, Linda Scott (2005) asserted that advertising is becoming increasingly figurative, relying on 'tropes, [rather than] straightforward declarative propositions.' As the content and tone of advertisements therefore becomes more driven by creative ideas and associations, rather than the objective qualities of the service or product, the values and experiences of the individuals who construct these 'tropes' becomes significant in analysing the socio-cultural impact of particular advertisements. As a consequence of this significance, this project takes into account the role of individuals in shaping the advertising campaigns examined – analysing them with reference to wider discourses, but without losing sight of individual agency.

In examining the power of advertising to both create and play off socio-cultural associations, the concept of sponsorship deserves particular attention. The ability of advertisers to demonstrate knowingness is hugely pertinent to sponsorship, an arrangement in which commercial effectiveness is largely dependent on the sponsor brand affirming the legitimacy of their

⁶ This was also acknowledged during my interview with an IAPI professional who acknowledged that 'diversity is a real challenge' for the Irish advertising industry, noting the irony that while women make the majority of purchasing decisions in most households, 'there are very few women in the creative department[s]' of Irish ad agencies (IAPI Professional Interview, 14/7/2015).

association with the sponsored property. In essence, sponsorship is an arrangement which sees the parties involved (a brand and an external property, such as an event or team) seek to commercially benefit from association with one another. John Sinclair views sponsorship as part of a 'set of practices intent upon harnessing our ways of life for commercial purposes' (2015, 43). He discusses the concept of 'the line' which has for so long formed the conceptual framework for assessing different advertising mediums within the industry and in critical assessments of it. To summarise the concept in brief, it emerged in 1954 when advertising agency, Proctor & Gamble began paying their employees different rates depending on the medium they were working on. Advertising mediums traditionally deemed to be 'above the line' included television and radio advertisements, while non-media marketing such as promotional competitions and the distribution of promotional literature (brochures, pamphlets, etc.) and items (badges, stickers, etc.) were described as 'below the line.' Sinclair argues that the boundaries between one side of the line and the other have become increasingly blurred with the rise of online forms of advertising. Banner ads embedded in website pages are an interesting example – they could be argued to be a form of digital pamphlet and, therefore, below the line. However they sometimes contain some form of graphic or movement – or, in some cases, are comprised of embedded videos – which would make them fall under the umbrella of media and be considered above the line. Furthermore, if they are featured on widely popular websites, they avail of a mass media reach similar to television or radio ads. However, the personalised nature of internet ads – with their presence determined by algorithms monitoring the online tastes and habits of the individual user – is closer to many examples of below the line advertising, which can benefit from an employee (distributing brochures, badges or competition entries) personally engaging with a consumer and adjusting their promotional tactics accordingly – a degree of flexibility not afforded to above the line ads proliferated indiscriminately by mass media.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the relationship between sponsor brand and sponsor property is also increasingly fluid. The associative benefits of the arrangement have traditionally been viewed as more pertinent to the sponsor brand – with the property deriving financial support in return for providing the brand with exposure – but it can be argued that both parties exist in a mutually reciprocal relationship with regard to consumer opinion. Wakefield et al (2007) discuss sponsorship in terms of a relatedness heuristic and a prominence heuristic. The first of these concerns how the strength of the perceived natural association between the property and the

sponsor. They contrast the seemingly natural fit between an energy drink and a sports event, with the more incongruous pairing of a toothpaste brand and a baseball team to argue that a higher degree of perceived relatedness between the parties increases consumer recall of the brand. Robert Madrigal goes further in describing how such closely related partnerships may see the brand benefit from becoming associated with certain qualities consumers previously associated with the property (2000). Wakefield et al's concept of the prominence heuristic refers to the consumer perception that a prestigious event should be sponsored by a prestigious brand – therefore, they argue, affording the brand the opportunity to benefit from association with the prominence associated with important events or properties. Therefore to ensure they maximise these heuristics, sponsor brands – through their advertisers – must emphasise their 'worthiness' to sponsor the external property. This is all the more important when the sponsored property has a strongly developed consumer-fan community of its own. Sponsorship of sports teams is particularly significant in this regard. Madrigal (2000) argues that many sports fans demonstrate a particularly strong emotional attachment to their team and that sponsors can potentially tap into this for their own benefit, but must demonstrate their knowingness to do so. Sponsors must not only display their knowledge of, and respect for, the team, but also for the fans' awareness of the arrangement. Sponsors cannot hope to hide their commercial interest in a property to fans whose interest is largely emotional, but they can attempt to transcend this through using their commercial clout to create opportunities for fans to further their emotional attachment to the team.

While these scholars chiefly write from the perspective of examining the effects of the arrangement on the sponsor brand, it can be argued that many of their conclusions can be applied to the sponsored property. The property – whether it is an event or team – is just as dependent on consumer, or fan, support as the brand. With regard to this research, it is pertinent to examine the case of sports teams as sponsors and the potential effects of this arrangement on their relationship with their fans. Fans construct their identity through projecting meaning onto the team, or teams, they support (Maguire 1994; Bairner 2001; Free & Hughson 2006). If we accept that individual identity is in flux, being continually reconstructed and reshaped, then so too must fans' opinion of the teams on which they base part of their identity. From this assertion, it can be argued that the commercial interactions and decisions of the team – including sponsorship – play a key role in this perennial reshaping of fan opinion.

Marcus Free and John Hughson discuss the impact of consumer interactions between fans and their favourite team. They argue that when a fan purchases team paraphernalia, it is not simply a financial transaction, but a display of support which reaffirms the team's role in their identity: 'Purchasing is experienced as an act of support and investment – financial, emotional, symbolic – in a collectively meaningful cultural form, and is not simply a commodity purchase' (2006, 86). They go on to detail how the relationship between fans and sports teams differs from that of most other types of brand communities, chiefly because of the fans ability to directly influence the team's performance (they cite the difference between a team's home and away results as evidence of this). While – as has been discussed above – brand communities are always in some way shaped by the actions of their consumers, in this case, that shaping is more direct and more immediate than in other fields. Fans attending a match in person can provide reaction to the team's actions with much greater immediacy than aficionados of a particular brand can react to a new product or change to an existing product. Furthermore, the influence of fan reaction is more immediate (their cheers might spur a team on to victory or their chants might influence the coach's decisions, for instance) than would be the case with most brand communities, in which the attempts by the brand to react to consumer demand or discontent by introducing or rescinding certain changes might take days or even weeks.

With this in mind, the study of sports sponsorship is particularly distinctive and significant in the wider field of advertising studies. However much of the research conducted into the area focuses on sponsorship as a largely linear arrangement, assessing the effectiveness and socio-cultural significance of brands' attempts to associate themselves with the qualities of a particular team or event (Madrigal 2000; Wright 2003; Wakefield et al 2007). This work examines sports sponsorship as a symbiotic relationship between sponsor and sponsored that comprises of numerous active parties: the team, its governing body, its fans, the sponsor brand, and the advertising agency. As will be detailed in chapter 2 (on the methodology of this thesis), these parties are grouped into a triangular relationship that consists of the sponsor brand and advertising agency, the team and sport's governing body, and the fans and consumers. Through this framework, the conception, production and reception of sport sponsorship campaigns is traced, and, therefore, provides an exploration of the arrangement which accounts for the agency of all of the above mentioned parties. While exploring audience reaction is a far from neglected area in the field of advertising studies, sport, as described above, involves a uniquely empowered

and organised audience. Fans' agency and their reaction to commercial intrusions on their sport has been explored (Scherer and Jackson 2007; Delia and Cole 2015; Hutchins 2016), but these have largely depicted fans as a hurdle to be overcome by these institutions rather than shaping and being shaped by the commercialisation of the sport. The socio-cultural significance of sport and the body of academic literature devoted to it will be dealt with in the next section of this chapter, but to further illustrate advertising's role in leveraging and shaping this significance, it is first necessary to examine one of the chief qualities exhibited and appealed to through advertising's use of sport: masculinity.

If advertising can 'create stronger, more resonant messages by attending to [contextual] differences' (Toland Frith & Mueller 2003, 38), then its depiction of masculinity is particularly telling. While this work pays particular attention to the depiction of national identity, this concept is often linked with masculinity, particularly through sport (Ward 2009; Cooley 2010; Messner 2011; Park 2012). In subsequent chapters examining the two central sport sponsorship campaigns in detail, their depiction of masculinity is not be a central feature, but it does recur in a manner which reiterates those earlier claims of the ideological links between idealised national identity and idealised masculinity. In the recent past advertising could rely on constructing brand communities around figures of conventional masculinity. Strong, stoic and dominant characters such as the Marlboro Man or the Brawny Man were among the more prominent and popular examples of brands who derived their appeal through trading on aspirational masculinity. However, the second wave feminist movement of the 1970s and 80s led to an increased awareness of the constructedness of gender identity and, subsequently, an increased suspicion of the validity of traditional gender identities (Smith 2005; Tuncay Zayer 2010). While it is important not to overstate the impact of these developments – traditional conceptions of gender have far from disappeared in the wake of the increased awareness of them – it is nonetheless pertinent to this research to outline their influence on advertising. Masculinity has remained a potent totem on which to construct a brand community, despite the cultural scrutiny the concept has faced, but to do so, many advertisers have had to find some way of acknowledging and accommodating this scrutiny.

Tyson Smith writes that '21st century masculinity is fragile and always capable of being called into question. A man can be emasculated for being too gentlemanly and thus considered

“feminine,” or, on the other hand, too brutish and overly masculine, thus considered an unrefined savage’ (2005). In this context, he argues that advertisers must utilise a tone of implicit ironical playfulness to convey aspects of aspirational masculinity which still resonate with certain consumers. Rather than depict aspirational figures of masculine perfection, many advertisers celebrate the ordinariness and imperfections of figures they assume are more directly relatable to their consumers. Speaking in 2004, Doug Cameron, then strategy director at advertising agency, Amalgamated, describes this change as arising from the cultural and economic conditions of the previous decade. He argues that conventional career and social success was championed to a degree that was irreconcilable with the reality of many men who failed to demonstrate, or did not aspire to, ‘the turbo-charged, hyper-competitive work ethic’ prevalent during the era. Thus, advertisers altered their strategy in an attempt to ‘to flip this whole thing around and turn slackerism into a fairly cool thing’ (2004).

While this ironic celebration of the slacker may have represented an explicit tonal contrast with earlier commercial deifications of strong, successful masculine figures, it does not completely renounce the tenets of traditional idealized masculinity that these earlier efforts affirmed. Indeed, it can be argued that many of these newer ironic ad campaigns convey a sense of nostalgia for an era in which traditional masculinity was seemingly unassailable, or eschew overt nostalgia to insidiously trade on a similarly narrow conception of gender disguised in modern garb. Though such ads may give the superficial impression of postmodern playfulness, of an apparent awareness of the constructedness – and even, silliness – of the gender stereotypes they depict, they nonetheless champion them, however playfully. The ironic tone of these ads acts ‘as a useful escape clause against claims of sexism, elitism and gender essentialism’ (Ging 2009, 58), creating a binary in which those who accept or enjoy the ads and their gendered connotations are in on the joke, while those who find fault with them are killjoys, guilty of overthinking a simple bit of fun (Stevenson et al 2000; Smith 2005; Ging 2009). Smith asserts that this very tactic plays off expectations of traditional masculinity rooted in notions of control and competency. By inviting the viewer in on the joke, the ad offers them the impression of controlling their reception of its narrative and values: ‘Being fooled, duped, or coerced is associated with subordination and femininity’ (Smith 2005). Through these ironic celebrations of masculinity, the modern, self-reflexive consumer described by Muniz and O’Guinn can embrace the ad without feeling like they are being tricked by it.

While, as noted above and anon, the concept of gender is linked closely to the key concepts of this thesis (advertising, sport and national identity), practical structuring concerns limit the extent to which it can be explored here. In this work, the examination of gender is limited to its significance in shaping the central advertising case study texts that represent the point of triangulation of those three key concepts. Thus, masculinity is discussed, but largely in terms of how it has historically been intertwined with the concept of idealised Irishness (and, indeed, idealised national identities in general). As Free (2005) argues ‘Discourses of national becoming are also closely articulated to discursive constructions of masculinity’ (267). This thesis’ examination of masculinity is thus intertwined with its examination of Irish identity, rather than addressing masculinity on a broader, abstract level.

Specific examinations of the relationship between the concepts of masculinity and advertising (Nixon 2003; O’Barr et al 2004; Smith 2005), sport (Brady 2007; McSharry 2008; Madden 2013) and Irish identity (Free 2005; Cronin 2009; Ging 2009) are cited throughout, but in a fashion which focuses them on the point of triangulation the central Three Ireland sponsorship campaigns represent. It is precisely because of the seminal role of gender in shaping the central concepts of this thesis that gender itself is discussed in such deliberately specific terms. Attempting a broader exploration of gender would risk unbalancing the analytical scope of this thesis and would likely be unable to address four key concepts with sufficient thoroughness.

It is notable that in an advertising culture so proliferated with these playful, ironic celebrations of masculinity, sport is distinctive in providing advertisers with a vehicle for more straightforward depictions of aspirational male qualities. Sport is by no means unique in this regard – advertisements for particular products, such as cars or aftershave fragrances, often celebrate traditional aspirational masculinity without any discernible irony. However, sport allows products and services without these abiding associations to trade on aspirational masculinity. While Wakefield et al’s ‘relatedness heuristic’ indicates that brands wishing to effectively leverage sport sponsorship must not seem too incongruously distant from sport in consumer perception, the recent history of the arrangement is replete with brands with little or no obvious masculine connotations attempting to tie themselves to some variety of idealized masculinity. Ireland, for instance, has seen telecommunications brands such as Eircom (since rebranded as Eir), Vodafone, O2 and Three commission advertising campaigns which foreground their link to

the heroic masculinity of national sport stars. Further afield, Kimberly Wright (2003) notes how even brands such as junk food giant McDonalds and decidedly un-macho alcohol range Bacardi managed to effectively tap into the fervour aroused by India's participation in the 1999 Cricket World Cup. Relatively little research has been conducted, however, into the commercial strategies sponsors adopt to overcome their 'relatedness heuristic' deficiencies. This research project addresses this through exploring how brands can use sport sponsorship to tap into powerful socio-cultural totems such as masculinity and national identity, totems that they have negligible abiding associations with in public consciousness. This incongruity could lead to consumer backlash over a clumsy commercial intrusion into a defining element of their identity, but sport sponsorship allows brands to alleviate this risk.

Key to advertisers and sponsors avoiding such fan backlash is their ability to effectively construct a sense of authenticity around their commercial leverage of these emotively potent concepts. There are no universally accepted definitions of what constitutes authenticity in advertising, but it is generally argued to be the appearance of transcending conventional commercial tactics to reflect perceived 'truths' (O'Neill et al 2014; Becker 2019). Authenticity 'triggers feelings of sympathy or empathy, and helps overcome consumer scepticism toward ads' (Becker et al 2019, 24). Authenticity should not be understood as something inherent in a product, service or association, but as a quality that is constructed through the relationship between text and audience. Thus, when it comes to crafting sponsorship campaigns and advertisements based on the sport-nation nexus, authenticity is constructed through portrayal of tropes and tones which have become associated with that nexus on a wider cultural level. To be viewed as authentic, the commercial narrative must be seen as an extension or elaboration of the apparently 'natural' narratives of the sport and nation. An ad or sponsorship campaign that appears authentic to audience therefore reveals much about the culture it emerged from and is attempting to portray. The nature of these 'natural' narratives with regard to the specific case of Irish football and rugby is elaborated in section 1:4 of this chapter.

Advertising's use of the sports-nation nexus, therefore, is a site of considerable representational flexibility and ideological significance. In such ads, perceptions of national identity are not only framed in a vivid and idealised fashion through sport, but are crafted with emphasis on mass appeal, which demonstrates how the idea of national identity itself remains persistently engaging

while its particular form shifts owing to contextual factors. Previous studies into sports-nation advertising have noted this significance (White 2000; Wright 2003; Kelk-Mager 2005; Falcous 2007; Scherer and Jackson 2007). However, they have largely focussed on the actions of, or relationship between, particular parties, rather than providing the detailed examination of all of the relevant parties in the complex series of relationships that comprises sports sponsorship. One respect in which this work directly follows on from their research is in the decision to explore sport sponsorship through the prism of a single nation at a specific time and context. Such focus allows for a defter analysis of the cultural nuances at play in advertising's employment of the sport-nation nexus than would be achievable in a broad international overview of the topic. However, the approach of this work differs from these others in assessing the commercial depiction of two distinct teams from two separate sports – a decision which contributes to exploring the complexity of the relationship between sport and nation, and the particular strategies employed by advertisers to play upon this relationship and negotiate its hurdles. While, as has been detailed, international sport may function as a discursive tool to embody perceived national values and goals, the specific shape this manifestation takes is influenced not only by the relative success (or lack thereof) of the team, but also by the abiding associations that the team (and its sport) have accrued within the particular national cultural context. It is therefore necessary to examine this cultural context and outline what has shaped notions of Irish identity and what elements of this identity have become associated with the country's international football and rugby teams.

1:4. Irish Identity

The late 18th century saw the development of the modern nation state and, with it, the solidification and propagation of modern conceptions of national identity. The precise details of this historical shift are beyond the scope of this study, but it is nonetheless necessary to briefly outline its significance. Benedict Anderson traces the evolution of the idea of nationhood in *Imagined Communities* (1983). Anderson identifies the printing press as key development in creating and maintaining a shared identity among groups of people. Mass printing allowed central governments to more efficiently communicate with local communities at disparate points of the nation, facilitating the operation of a relatively unified political and economic system

within each country. However the advent of print also had significant cultural ramifications, fostering a sense of national unity and shared values that extended into less tangible realms than government legislation. The popularisation of a shared written language ‘created unified fields of exchange and communication,’ as the diverse local communities of nations who might struggle to ‘understand one another in conversation, became capable of understanding one another via print and paper’ (44). These ‘unified fields,’ however, ultimately facilitated the construction of a hierarchy of national identity, in which those dialects and modes of speech closer to the widely circulated, ‘official’ language of print came to be seen as more legitimate than others. This linguistic hierarchy in turn led to the construction and perpetuating of an ideal national character – a myth which prized certain attributes and attitudes particular to certain classes and cultures as ‘natural’ aspirations for the whole nation.

While there has been a considerable degree of research into the construction and propagation of ideas of national identity (Gellner 1983; Giddens 1985; Smith 1991), this work draws particularly from Anderson because his emphasis on the role of the media makes his analysis particularly applicable to examination of advertising. Furthermore, Anderson’s insistence on the importance of shared language to national identity is an interesting point to apply to the Irish case, since accepting it means that Ireland’s shared vernacular language with Britain (the official status of the Irish language notwithstanding) leads to the other elements which distinguish a nation (sport among them) becoming more significant. Anderson’s work is therefore a particularly interesting prism through which to view advertising’s impact on the relationship between sport and Irish national identity. Though throughout this work, use of Anderson’s ideas is supported with references to Michael Billig’s concept of ‘banal nationalism’ (1995) and subsequent developments in nationalism studies. While Anderson explores the origins of national identity, Billig examines how it continues to function, having evolved into subtler forms to thrive in the apparently less fertile historical context of the post-World War II world. Michael Skey has since followed on from Billig’s work, outlining a vision of modern nationalism with greater flexibility than the latter’s ‘banal-hot’ binary. In drawing from all three, this project will construct a thorough theoretical overview from which to explore its central case studies.

Anderson goes on to outline the period between 1820 and 1920 as hugely important to the modern understanding of nationalism. The development of the popular press and the relative

increase in literacy levels facilitated the cultivation of a collective culture that could react swiftly to shape perceptions of current events through the lens of a shared identity. Furthermore, technological advances saw an increase in the ability of state governments to directly influence and intervene with policy on a local level. With the hand of the capital felt all over the country – a sense of shared identity was necessary to insure that this was regarded as cohesive communal policy rather than alien directives from distant and unknowable government halls. It can hardly be accounted a coincidence that this period saw the organisation and codification of many of the most popular sports. Their transformation from folk games with rules varying significantly in each region to codified sports accessible nationwide via the popular press roughly parallels the political and cultural centralisation of the nation state. Sport, as has been outlined above, functions as one of the most tangible and engaging realisations of the imagined community of the nation. The two thus function in a symbiotic relationship; consumption and comprehension of sport was facilitated by national communication and transport infrastructure, while simultaneously reiterating the concept of a shared national identity. The emergence of international sport, pitting nations against one another, in the late nineteenth century was particularly effective in not only defining nationality but valorising it.

In the context of Irish national identity, it could be argued that sport played a particularly significant role, as the lack of a widely spoken unique shared language threatened to undermine the notion of Irish cultural and political distinctness from Britain. Anderson views ‘national print languages’ as ‘of central political and ideological importance’ to the nationalist movements at this time (67). While nationalist movements at this time did attempt to revive the Irish language – and while these efforts were not wholly without success or lasting cultural significance – the linguistic make-up of Ireland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries consisted of a vast majority of people (and media outlets) speaking the language of their neighbour and coloniser. Distinctive sporting teams and codes were therefore one of the more prominent and practical methods of affirming difference left to the nation. However, before addressing the case of sport in Ireland however, it is necessary to broadly outline how the emergence of modern nationalism impacted on the country during this period.

The discursive construction and mediated propagation of this more widely encompassing form of national identity offered Britain an opportunity to ideologically distinguish itself from its nearest

neighbour and colony in a manner which would re-enforce the hierarchy of their relationship. Although Britain had ruled Ireland in various degrees since the 13th century, the relationship between coloniser and colonised had been fundamentally changed by the Act of Union in 1800, which subsumed the Irish parliament into that of Britain and united the two nations as the single political entity of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Despite this nominal political unity, any sense of significant cultural unity between the two was not forthcoming. Until 1829 British law forbade Catholics, who made up the majority of the Irish population, from fully participating in public life (they were forbidden to vote and own property, for instance). Even after these prohibitive laws were lifted, Ireland sat uncomfortably in the discursive categories imposed on the peoples of the British Empire. They were neither the civilised, Protestant rulers of mainland Britain, nor could they be entirely lumped in with the non-white ‘savages’ of the Empire’s territories in Africa and Asia.

As a consequence, the discursive construction of the Irish national character emanating from Britain during this era was built on apparent contradictions. The Irish were simultaneously characterised as effete and weak, but also as aggressive and animalistic. These seemingly contradictory depictions may have been perpetuated from sources with divergent views of the Irish, but their ultimate effect was to construct an image of Ireland as Britain’s wayward child, a tender figure in need of external restraining from its baser instincts.

The Irish were often depicted by their colonial masters as a feminised, uncivilised race, characterised by their ‘sentimentality, ineffectuality, nervous excitability and unworldliness’ (Fanning 2002, 33). British rule over Ireland was therefore justified in socio-paternalistic terms, depicting Britain as the rational force restraining its colonised neighbour from indolence at best and anarchy at worst. This relationship paralleled the dominant gender relations of the age, with Britain positioned as the strong, logical man to Ireland’s emotional, fragile woman. This binary reached its apogee of articulation in the works of Matthew Arnold (1900), who argued for the natural benefits of the then forthcoming political union of Britain and Ireland by stressing cultural stereotypes as indelible national characters which rendered the two nations entirely suitable to their colonial relationship. He described the Act of Union as ‘the moment for the greater delicacy and spirituality of the Celtic peoples who are blended with us, if it be but wisely directed, to make itself prized and honoured’ (vii-viii). To Arnold, British rationality provided a

necessary counterpoint to Celtic sentimentality ('sentimental, if the Celtic nature is to be characterised by a single term, is the best term to take,' [100]) and the union of Britain and Ireland was necessary to ensure that the latter had the benefit of the former's restraining influence.

Significantly, despite - or because of - the ideological connotations of the 'un-manning' act of being colonised and Arnold's notions of the feminised romantic Celtic race gaining prominence, the predominant image of the Irish in media of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was the male figure. In noted contrast to the brave and rational coloniser, the Irish male was chiefly characterised as uncouth and depraved, in thrall to his semi-bestial emotions and desires. A contrast that was further underlined by visual representations of the Irish male as pointedly simian and subhuman in appearance and demeanour (Walter 1999). The perception pervaded internationally, with early depictions of Irish-Americans in US cinema centring on the notion of negative excess, such as lawlessness, drunkenness and violence (Rains 2007).

Ironically, subsequent efforts to champion the idea of an Irish culture distinct from that of Britain as part of a wider movement for political independence did not entirely reject Arnold's Celtic stereotypes. While, as will be detailed anon, the discursive positioning as the subordinate 'wife' of Britain was railed against with an emphasis on the depiction and cultivation of an idealised Irish masculinity, other elements of Arnold's 'typical Celt' were tacitly endorsed by Irish cultural nationalists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Celtic Twilight movement were a group of artists and writers whose pursuit of Irish cultural nationalism was suffused with the intent to lionise the Irish as more mystical, spiritual and artistic than their repressed and unimaginative neighbours. Broadly speaking, Irish identity was constructed in dualistic, semi-contradictory stereotypes from within and without. The emergent cultural nationalism – later to be officially championed by governments of the independent Irish state (Kiberd 1996; Gibbons 1996)– depicted the Irish as manly and virtuous, but also 'racy of the soil' and unashamedly spiritual. This was in deliberate contrast to how the British coloniser viewing Ireland in decidedly un-masculine terms, varying from Arnoldian feminised sentimental subordinates to brutish louts ruled by over eager passions. Despite the seeming disparity between these imperialist stereotypes, both can essentially be read as two sides of the one coin – both are based on the undermining of Irish masculinity on a psycho-national level in order to justify colonialism.

Thus, the main ideological battleground for Irish identity was centred on Irish manhood and it was on this ground that the Irish response to colonial stereotypes was based. In attempting to find an appropriate response to feminised state of colonisation that did not play into the British depictions of bestial Irish males, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was formed in 1884. Sara Brady succinctly asserts the cultural significance of the association's reimagining of the Irish male:

In order to assert power and independence from British cultural and political forces, the Gaelic body needed both to replace the colonial body made in the British image, and to redefine the depiction of Ireland as a female body. In the early years of the Free State, representations of Ireland were intensely conscious of gender [...] Gaelic football and hurling were fashioned to display male prowess, and in doing so, to show that the Irish were not weak. (2007, 31)

While the games themselves affirmed Irish manhood against the threat of colonized feminization, the organization and regulation of what had previously consisted of various local games with little sense of structure or order, the GAA transformed its players from the 'depraved' and 'sub-human' figures the British depicted them as (Walter 1999, 78) to civilized sportsmen – a Celtic riposte to the notion of the British imperial soldier being sculpted on the playing fields of Eton (Kiberd 1996).

The Catholic Church also played a key role in the response to Britain's discursive 'un-manning' of Ireland. Joseph Nugent argues that the Church folded 'the mystical rhetoric of Catholicism into the national search for an authentic form of Irishness' (2008, 588). The late 19th and early 20th century saw the Church construct certain figures from their pantheon of saints as paragons of manhood that Irish Catholics could look to as objects of inspiration and emulation when confronted with the British rhetoric of mystical feminised Celts and uncouth Irish savages. These saints had the notable benefit of the nigh-unimpeachable reputation of the long dead – a quality which stood in stark contrast with the all too fallible living figures on the contemporary Irish political landscape, most prominently Charles Parnell, whose perceived immorality in his affair with Katherine O'Shea undercut his position as a central figure of idealised Irish manhood. In response, the Church championed an Irish masculine ideal that was not only brave and strong, but also endowed with the quality of self-mastery – the authentic Irish Catholic man would be too devoted to creed and country to give in to his baser desires or weaknesses.

What emerged from this reconstruction of Irish national identity – and specifically, Irish masculinity – was not so distant from Matthew Arnold’s Celtic mysticism and the stereotypes on which British colonisation was built (Nohnberg 2010). The narrow anti-British sentiment on which its foundations rested led to an overweening emphasis on perceived rural, Catholic values, in opposition to the industrial, Protestant coloniser (Gibbons 1996; Arrowsmith 2004). Nugent succinctly sums up this emergent national ideal, asserting that ‘Bravery, self-mastery, and devotion to Ireland were proclaimed singularly Catholic virtues, the essential components of a recognizably Irish manliness—identifiable by its symbiosis of flesh and spirit and authenticated by its fidelity to a pristine past’ (2008, 600). The fundamental flaw in this conception of ideal Irish identity was that this ‘pristine past’ was largely invented and, therefore, impossible to emulate satisfactorily – a problem which became all the more pronounced following Ireland’s independence from Britain in 1922.

Indeed, Colin Graham views a closely policed notion of what constitutes ‘authentic’ Irish culture and identity to be one of the defining features of the state’s history: ‘authenticity has affected the basic discourses of Irish culture in its prevalence, which has given it a status near to that of a shared currency’ (2001, 61). This emphasis on a strictly defined authentic Irishness initially emerged as a response to colonial efforts to subsume Ireland’s culture into that of Britain. Foregrounding overt cultural differences was therefore a political imperative in the decades following independence. However, Graham argues that in modern Irish history, the idea authenticity ‘has increased in its value as a marker of what is Irish as Ireland has (partially) moved out of its anti-colonial mode’ (2001, 69) – how this development occurred is described in section 2:4.1 and subsequent chapters of this thesis. For the moment, it is sufficient to assert that Irish identity and culture has long been shaped by a persistent anxiety over what constitutes ‘authentic Irishness.’

With this anxiety such a powerful underlying element of Irish culture, it is little wonder that political independence saw little significant change from this rigid Anglo-Celtic binary. Indeed, the early decades of the new state saw an officially sanctioned calcification of many of the qualities championed by the Celtic Twilight writers and GAA founders (Kiberd 1996; Gibbons 1996). In broad terms, these qualities championed as ideally and intrinsically Irish could be described as centring on cultural isolationism, distrust in modernity and fetishisation of rural life

(Gibbons 1996). This reliance on the rigid conception of Irish identity that had emerged in reaction to British colonialism persisted for much of the early history of the Irish Free State (and continued too following the country's transition to the Republic of Ireland in 1949). Declan Kiberd claims that successive Irish governments soothed a public frustrated by economic stagnation and subsequent emigration with 'endless recollections of the sacred struggle for independence,' and championed artists who propagated traditional visions of Irishness (1996, 552). While economic progress was slow, Ireland had been spared the worst of the global depression of the 1930s and the World War of the 1940s, experiences that appeared to affirm the validity of Ireland's commitment to cultural and political isolationism (Girvin 2010). The abiding desire, throughout this period, to achieve the eventual unification of Ireland chimed well with the contemporary ethos of the GAA, the nativist organisation whose presence in all 32 counties implicitly undercut the power of partition over the island's culture.

1:4.1. The Place of Football and Rugby in Modern Irish Culture

While this stagnant cultural milieu shaped – and was shaped by – the GAA during the early decades of the state, it also had significant impact on the role and depiction of popular 'foreign' games such as association football (soccer) and rugby. Both were initially sniffed at by the cultural establishment who saw them as antithetical to the dominant narrowly nativist view of Irish culture (Arrowsmith 2004; O'Callaghan 2013). The Irish rugby team was viewed as too Protestant (in terms of player demographics) to truly represent Ireland (O'Callaghan 2013), while the national football team's strong links with urban and emigrant Irish society (Free 2013) saw it face similar suspicion.

Before examining the specific socio-cultural connotations football and rugby have developed in modern Irish culture, it is first necessary to outline their early development within the country. The Irish Football Association (IFA) was formed in 1880, some 17 years after the English had first codified the sport with the formation of the Football Association (FA). The organisation nominally had responsibility and authority over football all across the island, but for much of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was dominated by officials in Belfast, much to the chagrin of emerging clubs and organisations in other parts of Ireland, particularly Leinster. This burgeoning

divide reflected deeper cultural and political differences between the predominantly Protestant and unionist North-East and the largely Catholic and nationalist beliefs of the rest of the island (Byrne 2012). In June 1921, the Leinster Football Association (LFA), with the support of officials in Munster and Connaught, broke away from the IFA to form the Football Association of Ireland – just one month after the Government of Ireland Act had come into effect, creating separate governments for the 6 counties that would become known as Northern Ireland and the remaining 26 that would form the Irish Free State (and later, Republic of Ireland).

While this split was certainly representative of wider Irish political and cultural currents at the time, it eventually began to be seen as something of an anomaly. Football was the only major international sport which acknowledged the partition of Ireland. In 1922, the National Athletics and Cycling Association (NACA) was founded (with the support of the GAA, among other organisations) to organise Olympic sports north and south of the border (thus facilitating the entry of a single ‘Ireland’ Olympics team at the 1924 Games in Paris) (Cronin et al 2008). Irish rugby initially had separate administrations in the north and south of the island, but they amalgamated to form the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) in 1879 (Collins 2015). Indeed, the FAI was keenly aware of this unusual state of affairs and made multiple attempts to negotiate the possibility of an all-Ireland international football team with the IFA. It was not until 1969 that a motion along such lines was defeated in an FAI council vote (Byrne 2012, 223). It could be argued that the organisation’s eagerness to reach this compromise with their Northern neighbours stemmed from the derision they faced from government circles as representative of an unwanted state of partition, in addition to being viewed as a ‘foreign’ sport largely based in urban centres and the sites of former British garrisons. With early governments of the emergent Irish state championing an idea of authentic Irishness centred on rural-ness and anti-Englishness, it is unsurprising that football’s relationship to Irish culture would be viewed with suspicion.

The first half of the 20th century also saw numerous clashes between the FAI and IFA over the rights to field a team described as ‘Ireland’ in international matches, thus further undermining the perceived legitimacy of football to ‘stand’ for Irish identity. This insecurity over football’s place within Irish culture seemed to fade with time, however. In 1958, the FAI stood firm against church authorities’ demands to cancel a match in Dublin with ‘Godless’ Yugoslavia, demonstrating an unwillingness to toe the line of the monocultural Catholic Irish identity

championed by governments of the era (Byrne 2012, 202). Despite – and, in part, because of – such gestures, Irish football found itself at odds with what might be deemed ‘official Irish identity’ for much of the 20th century. As Free (2005) notes, Irish football arguably paralleled the country’s political and social evolution more than any other sport and yet for much of the 20th century, it had to fight for recognition as a symbol of national identity. The monocultural Catholic nationalism which emphasised ‘a traditional, rural image of Irishness’ perceived football as being too closely associated with unwanted legacies of British rule: urbanisation, emigration and ‘foreign’ culture (Arrowsmith 2004, 465).

Rugby suffered similarly with regard to public prominence. Although the international team could claim to represent the 32 counties of Ireland, its roots in Protestant, urban bourgeois communities (the IRFU was ‘formed by the middle classes for the middle classes’ as Byrne argues [2012, 11]) placed it at odds with De Valerian visions of bucolic Catholic communities. These associations would consistently dog rugby’s ability to engage with wider Irish culture and society, though the Munster team would become something of an outlier, drawing from the unusually cross-class history of rugby in Limerick to foster ‘a humble image of the team complete with a marked sense of place’ which is ‘seen to subvert the quintessential middle-class image associated with Irish rugby in general’ (O’Callaghan 2011, 183). Still, it would not be until the early 21st century that such an image truly resounded with the wider Irish public. Liam O’Callaghan neatly sums up the position of perceived ‘foreign’ culture – including foreign sport such as rugby – in the emergent Free State:

Among cultural purists of differing hues, the game of rugby, at best, was popularly held as having a “denationalizing” effect on the nation’s youth. And on the extreme end of the spectrum, rugby, along with other sports of British origin and a whole coterie of cultural pursuits including “indecent literature,” films, jazz music, and certain styles of dance, were symptomatic of undesirable foreign influence and modernizing tendencies. The discursive line between Gael and West Brit was drawn, and for a significant and vocal body of opinion rugby was on the wrong side (2013, 149).

Figures within Irish rugby during this time were acutely conscious of this perception and argued strongly for the sport to be accepted as an appropriate vehicle for Irish identity. Eamon de Valera – a figure often viewed as synonymous with this mono-cultural, narrow version of Irish identity – recalled the game fondly from his days at Rockwell College and argued that, alongside hurling,

it was more representative of the Irish ‘national character’ than any other sport. Significantly too, in 1925, a columnist in the *Irish Times* argued that the sport was uniquely positioned to represent Ireland as it ‘recognises neither politics nor partition, class nor creed’ (qtd in O’Callaghan 2013, 156) – in contrast to the overtly politicised and almost wholly Catholic GAA and the pointedly partitioned state of football.

Ironically then, it was football’s status as an international yet partitioned sport, representing the reality of the political entity of the 26 counties, rather than an abstract conception of a 32 county Ireland, which saw it rise to prominence in wider Irish culture. Marcus Free argues that the team came to represent ‘a more progressive, inclusive and less mono-cultural national identity than GAA games’ (2005, 266). That the team’s players and fans were largely drawn from Irish urban centres and emigrant communities came to be viewed as closer to the reality of modern Irish society than the bucolic rural idyll which had been for so long championed by the country’s cultural and political establishment (Bairner 2001; Arrowsmith 2004; Free 2005).

Persistent failure of the isolationist socio-economic policies of the early Irish state led the Sean Lemass helmed Fianna Fail government of the 1960s to seek investment from outside of Ireland, a decision that, combined with the arrival of a young, dynamic Irish-American US President on the world stage, led to the emerging notion that it was possible to ‘be Irish and modern at the same time’ (Kiberd 1996, 565). This broadening of cultural horizons and economic internationalism may have been a decades-long progression rather than a sudden shift, but it nonetheless had a significant effect on the evolving perception of football and rugby in the media and cultural establishment of Ireland. Furthermore, the onset of the Troubles⁷ led to the concept of traditional Irish nationalism in the Republic become somewhat tainted by association, particularly from the point of view of politicians. With nationalist paramilitary action resulting in both civilian and military casualties, aspirations for a united Ireland were viewed in terms of contemporary terrorism, rather than historical heroism. There were rumblings of this shift even prior to the escalation of violence in the North; De Valera evoked his hopes for Irish unification at the Easter Rising commemoration in 1966 ‘while behind him his young successors listened uneasily to this embarrassing reminder of their origins’ (Foster 1989, 595). The militant

⁷ This term is used to refer to the years of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland between paramilitary forces – both nationalist and loyalist – and the British government and armed forces, lasting from the late 1960s to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

nationalism and aspirations for a 32 county Ireland which were so linked to the ethos of the GAA (Cronin 1999; Hassan 2002; Arrowsmith 2004) were tacitly renounced in favour of an internationalism which sought to find the 26 county republic a beneficial place in the European and wider international community. As Richard English argues, from the onset of the Troubles, ‘Irish nationalism in the south [...] shifted from an anglocentric-anglophobic political obsession born of lengthy tensions with the British neighbour, to a more Europeanised focus’ (English 2007, 426). It can perhaps be read as symbolic that the FAI’s decision to vote down a proposal for a united Ireland team – and thus, implicitly embrace their status as representative of the reality of the 26 county Republic of Ireland – for the first time came in 1969, a year after discontent in the North escalated to the consistent violence that would become known as The Troubles (Foster 1989, 588).

Ireland’s entry to the European Economic Community (later to become the European Union) in 1973 furthered the ascent of this emerging conception of modern Irish identity. However, Brian Girvin argues that Ireland’s entry to the EEC brought ‘no perceived threat to the dominant norms and values [of Ireland]. Indeed, considerable political energy was extended between 1973 and 1991 to reinforce some of the conservative aspects of Irish political culture’ (2010, 77). Nonetheless, it was the very subtlety of this change in perceptions of Irish identity and nationalism that facilitated its perfusion throughout the nation’s wider culture. The influence of the Church and of traditional tenets of idealised Irish masculinity were slow to diminish, but the de-emphasis on 32 county unification as a matter of paramount importance; and relative openness to international trade and communication, created a more receptive culture for ‘foreign’ games and all they connoted.

Notably, this 1990s saw the emergence of cultural expressions characterised by ‘ironic authenticity’ (Graham 2001, 71). Graham cites a 1994 Smithwicks ad campaign (appropriately titled ‘Ireland’) as ‘uncover[ing] both the mechanics of authenticity and the cultural desire for authenticity.’ He argues that the campaign pokes fun at traditional authenticity, but ultimately tacitly embraces it by failing to offer an alternative. This development, whereby authenticity was questioned and loosened somewhat but still, ultimately, prized, would shape the context in which ‘foreign’ sports such as football and rugby were embraced as standard-bearers of Irish identity that was perceived as modernising but was nonetheless rooted in tradition.

With the above detailed emerging internationalist outlook, it seems relatively unsurprising that the Irish national football team should see its place within the national consciousness and media rise to prominence. Football being the most internationally popular sport, the team was uniquely positioned to represent Ireland on the world stage. Richard Giulianotti (1996) and Mike Cronin (1999) both argue that despite Gaelic Games continuing significance as an internal signifier and shaper of Irish culture, football's international platform gives the sport – and thus the Irish national football team – a unique position as a global standard bearer of Irish identity. Cronin asserts that 'Soccer allowed Ireland to revel in its identity on a world stage, confident that the nation had survived a long and difficult history, and presenting a modern inclusive celebratory nationalism through its soccer team' (1999, 135). Furthermore, Aidan Arrowsmith writes that as the 'spectre of the nationalisms of Northern Ireland' undermined the appeal of traditional Irish nationalism, the national football team – the most overt and prominent cultural realization of the political reality of the 26 county Irish Republic rather than the 32 county nationalist ideal – became 'a rare channel through which a different, more relevant form of 'Irishness' can be expressed' (2004, 466). Ultimately this disparity in international significance is why this research is primarily concerned with football and rugby over Gaelic Games. The latter's role in shaping, and being shaped by, wider Irish culture and society has been the subject of numerous significant studies (Cronin 1999; Fulton and Bairner 2007; Cronin et al 2008). More specifically its role in Irish advertising has also been explored (Connolly and Dolan 2012). This would appear to set the sport within the parameters of this research project, but its lack of international presence in terms of providing a platform for Ireland to compete against other nations⁸ means that it cannot be adequately compared with football and rugby within the terms of this research. Irish advertising's use of the sport-nation nexus is a flexible enough area to accommodate a study of the national appeal of the GAA's relationship to local identity, but this work is particularly

⁸ Technically, the GAA does occasionally provide such a platform in the form of the International Rules series with Australia. The first such event was in 1984 and consists of a series of matches between players from the two nations under a set of rules which is a compromise between those of Gaelic and Australian Rules football. The series has been played on an annual basis since 1998 (with the exception of 2007), but had previously been cancelled in 1990 owing to lack of interest. Similarly, compromise rules international matches between Scottish shinty players and Irish hurlers have taken place on a yearly basis since 2003. However, while public interest in both series has fluctuated over the years, even at their most popular, they can only offer a limited space for the realisation of the imagined community of Ireland. As Cronin argues 'A sport needs international success. Without it the sport might prosper domestically in terms of spectator numbers or participants, but it cannot galvanize a nation and become representative of a successful competitive identity' (1999, 127).

focused on the cultural potency of a national team as a symbol of collective identity and therefore addresses GAA to provide context for the significance of rugby and football in Ireland.

It should be made clear that despite the significance of the external political and cultural developments which facilitated the rise of the national football team to this position, equally important was the rise in the on-field fortunes of the team from the late 1980s onward. Under the management of Englishman Jack Charlton – whose appointment in itself can be interpreted as a shift from the isolationist anti-Englishness of traditional nationalism – the team qualified for their first major tournament in reaching the 1988 European Championship. While the team exited the tournament in the first round, their performances (most notably a 1-0 defeat of England) earned them national adoration and international plaudits. Further successes in qualifying for the 1990 and 1994 World Cups – tournaments in which they reached the quarter-finals and second round respectively – seemed to cement the team's status as a worthy standard bearer for modern Ireland. A nation which had for so long suffered colonial subjugation, economic mismanagement and mass emigration wholeheartedly embraced their globally successful team as representative of a new Ireland, more confident and less doggedly mono-cultural in outlook and practice (Arrowsmith 2004; Free 2005). In the previous section of this chapter, Markovits and Hellerman's concept of a nation's 'sport's space' and the difficulties of changing this cultural mind frame was discussed. It can be argued that while the success of Charlton's Irish team may not have displaced the GAA from Ireland's 'sport's space,' it certainly created a sea change within it – change which was both the result and cause of wider changes in Irish culture. Further changes would develop over the course of the late 90s and early 21st century, as the fortunes of the football team declined, while those of the rugby team and of the Irish economy improved.

In tracing this shift in sport's relation to Irish identity, it is important to refrain from overly simplifying the trajectories of the fortunes of, and relationships between, the parties concerned. The Celtic Tiger boom which transformed Irish economy and society is generally agreed as having begun in 1995, at a time when the fortunes of the football team had started to decline (they would not qualify for another major tournament until 2002) and those of the rugby team had not yet ascended (after a quarter-final appearance in the 1995 World Cup, they exited the 1999 tournament in the first round). The antipathy toward football and the idea of it forming a part of the emerging Celtic Tiger Irish identity stemmed not only from this lack of success but

also from an uneasiness surrounding several abiding associations of the team. In assessing football's role in reshaping Irish identity from its earlier narrowly nationalist conception, Mike Cronin writes that 'What soccer in 1990 and 1994 allowed the Irish to create was a new celebratory nationalism where it was acceptable and gracious to lose' (1999, 141). Yet it was this gracious acceptance of relative failure that was at odds with the burgeoning confidence of Celtic Tiger Ireland. The success of the 2002 World Cup campaign was overshadowed by an argument between manager Mick McCarthy and captain, Roy Keane which saw the latter leave the squad⁹ and the following decade was largely characterized by frustration and failure. Concurrently, there was ebullience, spurred by the economic upsurge, evident in many contemporary major media outlets, and they demonstrated increasing impatience, and even *schadenfreude*, at the team's failures (Free 2013).

Furthermore, in light of the football team's failures and the mood of triumphalism pervading many circles of Irish society in the early 21st century, certain aspects of the team began to be regarded with suspicion and cynicism with regard to their role as signifiers of wider Irish identity. The team's use of British-born players of Irish parentage (or grand-parentage), which had previously been championed as a progressive step in the nation's relationship with its history of extensive emigration, was now often regarded as an embarrassing relic of an era in which the nation was reliant on support from 'outsiders.' Arrowsmith (2004) identifies this as emerging into the public discourse following Roy Keane's anti-English comments to Mick McCarthy at the 2002 World Cup, but echoes Free (2013) in arguing that the perceived 'englishness' (he identifies accent as a key signifier) of the players unsettled an insidiously nativist idea of Irish identity. Free (2013) goes on to link this re-emergent nativism with the 2004 referendum on Irish

⁹ Indeed, Free (2005) argues that the reaction to this very event was further representative of the shift in Irish identity, and does not limit this argument to the fact that the Keane-McCarthy split overshadowed a relatively successful World Cup. He writes that 'Keane was cast, by his defenders, as embodying a new Irish professionalism deemed incompatible with Charlton's and McCarthy's anachronistic amateurism. In radio and television discussions, he became symbol and material example of Ireland's revived economic fortunes' (279). This discursive binary was characteristic of elements in the Irish media and political-economic spheres that were determined to emphasise the clear distinction between 'old Ireland' and Celtic Tiger Ireland, and would be evident in their subsequent reactions to the rugby team's triumphs.

citizenship¹⁰ – a newly successful nation was apparently willing to embrace increasing immigration as a sign of its status as culturally cosmopolitan and economically attractive, but still jealously guarded the status of citizen and the concept of authentic Irish identity.

Nor was this suspicion of Irish footballers' abilities to represent Celtic Tiger Ireland was not merely limited to British-born players– that the vast majority of Irish-born internationals were employed by British clubs was often construed as undermining their patriotic commitment. In a cultural climate which, despite the shift from vitriolic anti-Englishness, still saw patriotism avowed through crass displays of economic one-upmanship against Britain,¹¹ the persistent reliance on Irish football on British clubs to provide employment and an adequate standard of play for its footballers was viewed as particularly galling by some. Free argues this view illustrates 'the fragility of mapping amateur ideals onto emigrant working-class professionals' (2013, 218). Some awareness of this fragility was implicit in the continual efforts to affirm the links between the newly professionalized Irish rugby team with the sport's amateur roots during this period (which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4).

Even as the stringent definitions of the earlier De Valerian monoculture relaxed enough to allow for the emergence of rugby into corners of the cultural mainstream, it is notable how coloured coverage of the sport was by traditional conceptions of Irish identity. Jason Tuck notes how *The Times*' coverage of the Irish team during the 1995 Rugby World Cup, and the years preceding it, seemed rooted in Victorian stereotypes of wild, combative Celts, characterised by a surplus of passion and a dearth of organisation (2003b). However, this perception began to shift as the professionalization of rugby union that very year saw the gradual reshaping of Irish rugby and emergence of the Irish national team as an international force in the 21st century. Interestingly, the ascent of the Irish rugby during this period broadly (though by no means wholly) parallels

¹⁰ This referendum resulted in a change in the grounds which constituted eligibility for Irish citizenship. Previously, anyone born within Ireland was entitled to citizenship, but the referendum result saw this amended to limit automatic citizenship to anyone born with at least one parent who was already an Irish citizen.

¹¹ Fintan O'Toole (2009, 99) describes how a tricolour was flown from the roof of the famous Savoy hotel in London after it was purchased by an Irish developer in a triumphalist display of international financial success. Furthermore, Sinead Moynihan (2016) has argued that purchases of Anglo-Irish demesnes or 'Big House' estates by Irish developers have often been construed by the developers and certain sections of the media as patriotic acts in a modern day land war against colonial powers.

that of the national economy – a similarity that was often underlined and championed in elements of the Irish media during this time.

As mentioned above, 1995 saw the beginnings of Ireland's Celtic Tiger economic boom – an upturn in the country's financial fortunes built largely upon an influx of multinational companies attracted by Ireland's low corporate tax rate. This relatively sudden upsurge in the nation's economy resulted in significant social changes. A country which for so long suffered consistent and sizeable emigration now began attracting burgeoning immigrant communities. The effect of this shift on the perception of 'emigrant' footballers has already been detailed, but it had similarly significant effects on the media depiction of Irish rugby internationals, the majority of whom, played within the country. However, as was the case with the football team during the Charlton era, the rugby team's successful results cannot be discounted in any assessment of their socio-cultural significance. Under the management of Eddie O'Sullivan, they won the Triple Crown in 2004, 2006 and 2007; and reached the quarter-finals of the 2003 World Cup. Failure in the 2007 World Cup and 2008 Six Nations preceded the economic crash and notably foreshadowed the neo-liberal, quasi-Catholic guilt driven narratives of excess and hubris that characterised many prominent commentaries on, and analyses of, the recession. Notable too, was how the team's subsequent triumphs under managers Declan Kidney and, more recently, Joe Schmidt, have been interpreted as balms for the wounded Celtic Tiger. This was particularly evident in coverage of Ireland's Grand Slam achievement in the 2009 Six Nations which was depicted as a triumph of enduring Celtic Tiger qualities in the face of the trials of economic disaster (Free 2013, 222). The language used to transform the rugby team's victory into an elegy for the Celtic Tiger on this occasion was representative of a discourse which saw their rise in fortunes during the early 21st century paralleled and even conflated with economic boom through sports coverage suffused with business terms and business reporting employing a plethora of sporting metaphors (Free 2013, 222-224).

Underlying this celebration of the Irish rugby team as redolent of professional, modern Celtic Tiger values, and, indeed, the broader celebration of these values across Irish media during this time, was a subtle but potent cultural anxiety that, through embracing these values, Ireland was somehow losing touch with its traditions and identity. Kieran Bonner (2011) writes that underlying Irish society, there was an 'ambivalence about the implication of jettisoning one's

past' (60), a feeling of cultural whiplash brought on by moving from tradition to postmodernity while hardly 'stopping at modernity along the way' (Arrowsmith 2004, 466). This feeling of having thrown the baby out with the bathwater in the evolution of Irish identity and culture was particularly pertinent to rugby, a sport which, as has been outlined, had been viewed with suspicion for many years due to its perceived links with Anglo-Irish and upper class culture. Liam O'Callaghan (2011) details the efforts to combat this suspicion through emphasis of the Munster rugby team's supposed history of cross-class appeal in both its players and fans:

The retrospective invention of a proud playing record for the Munster rugby team has been matched by the cultivation of a distinctive image of what Munster rugby represents in terms of identity. The ubiquity of press comments such as 'the players are ordinary Joe Soaps, brought up in the local community and therefore conscious of the bigger picture' and 'it's ... been well documented that Munster players are playing for their parish, neighbours and families, and can scarcely walk down their local street without being recognised' are designed to inculcate a humble image of the team complete with a marked sense of place. In addition, Munster are seen to subvert the quintessential middle-class image associated with Irish rugby in general (183).

What O'Callaghan identifies is a marked ambivalence in the representation of Irish rugby. The success and supposed Celtic Tiger values of the team sees the team often depicted as heroic or mythic figures, but beneath these celebratory narratives, there is an almost anxious desire to emphasise the relatability and rootedness of the apparently super human players. There is an eagerness to demonstrate that while Irish rugby players may be international superstars, they have ultimately not strayed far from their cultural roots and traditions. This speaks to a dichotomy in conceptions of wider Irish identity; confident, cosmopolitan Celtic Tiger Ireland may seem to transcend the isolationist localism of traditional Irish identity, but it cannot entirely divorce itself from its conceptual forebears for fear of dissolving into cultural homogeneity. Essentially, what emerges from an examination of 21st century Irish culture is a continuous, anxious reaffirmation of the local to temper the growing suffusion into the global.

This research project follows on from work examining the socio-cultural undercurrents of rugby and football in Ireland to explore how they have been employed commercially. There is a relatively small but significant body of work dedicated to analysis of Irish advertising, most notably the work of Neil O'Boyle (2011) and John Fanning (2006). Both of these work to provide a thorough overview of the Irish advertising landscape through identifying how

production circumstances and industry conditions shape the ideology of the content produced (the former through detailed interviews with many figures within the industry, the latter through availing of his own lengthy experience of working for McConnell's Advertising Agency).

O'Boyle (2011) examines how this broad shift in Irish identity and culture has also had effects in shaping the distinct conditions within which the Irish advertising industry operates. He cites how the increasing globalism of the advertising industry sees Irish agencies chafing under the possibility of having international directives foisted on them with little possibility of local input. As a consequence, they strive to emphasise the 'ability to understand Irish culture and identity (as well as of course consumers in the more general sense) [as] a core component of the advertising profession's "jurisdiction"' (50). In the face of encroaching globalization, the Irish advertising industry attempt to stem the tide to an extent through affirmation of a unique and significant Irish cultural identity – seemingly indelible and largely unknowable to their international clientele and competition (as O'Boyle asserts: '*Being Irish* was seen to constitute a particular and non-transferable competitive advantage' [50]). To speculate to what extent this belief is drawn from a sincere assessment of Irish consumers and to what extent it is based on professional pride and self-interest is, from the context of this study, a chicken-and-egg scenario not worth pursuing in great detail. What is worth noting from this assessment of Irish advertising priorities is that it is the tendency for small but seemingly significant local differences affirmed because of, rather than despite, a sense of overarching global awareness.

Significantly, John Fanning (2006) sees a similar conflict at the crux of Irish advertising. He outlines how the commercial depictions of Ireland oscillate between 'images of bucolic, ancient, under-developed past' and idealised representations of a modern, cosmopolitan post-industrial nation – a dichotomy of modern Irish identity addressed in socio-cultural terms by Bonner (2011) and through sport by Arrowsmith (2004) and Free (2005, 2013). Notably however, Fanning sees this state of cultural flux as a potential opportunity for Irish advertisers. He identifies six 'Cultural Contradictions,' areas of uncertainty and conflict which brands can appear to reconcile through advertising. While Fanning makes no claims of such cultural uncertainty being entirely unique to Ireland, the fact that he and others have written so extensively on it facilitates further research on the subject. Particularly when there is a decided dearth of material which draws together the cultural-commercial commentaries of the likes of

Fanning and O'Boyle with the socio-cultural impact of sport as outlined by Free, Arrowsmith and others.

More specific research in the field of Irish advertising studies has tended to focus on alcohol advertising (Murphy 2003, Kuhling 2008, MacLaran and Stevens 2009). Very occasionally, this has progressed to examine the advertising of alcohol through sport; Barbara O'Connor (2009) addresses Guinness' sponsorship of Irish rugby, though only as a supplement to a wider analysis of national identity and the manner in which it is reiterated and emphasised. These studies certainly contribute significantly to a more nuanced picture of advertising's role in shaping Irish identity. Most notably Kuhling's assertion that 'The local and the global, community and society, tradition and modernity are not forms of life that supersede one another in linear historical progress [but rather] exist contemporaneously and intermingle with one another, and collide and collude with one another, in the time/space of contemporary Ireland' and her demonstration of how advertising attempts to reconcile this coexistence to its advantage have proved particularly pertinent to my own research. Similarly, MacLaran and Stevens' exploration of the peculiarities of Irish masculinity ('it is perhaps no exaggeration to suggest that Irish men have cornered the market in intense, soulful masculinity' [78]) provide an interesting perspective from which to view the depiction of idealised Irish sports figures in advertising.

However, as outlined in the previous section of this chapter, sports advertising occupies unique ideological territory in providing a vehicle for visions of idealised national unity and heroism. The idealised national identity of many modern sports ads is all the more striking for the manner in which it renders tangible and comprehensible something that is increasingly ephemeral and contested. Namely, that while the concept of a distinct unified national identity appears to be undermined by an increasingly globalised and media and pluralised society, sport possesses the potential to apparently arrest global homogenisation (Rowe 2015) and unite (albeit relatively and temporarily) a diverse nation, while advertising grants it the platform to accomplish this in vivid and succinct fashion. In essence, as the encroaching global increases the appeal of the local (Bairner 2001) and the media attempts to flourish within this site of anxiety and flux. And as Rowe (1999) points out 'sport's capacity to stimulate emotional identification with people and things is priceless' (73).

1:5. Digital Cultural Nationalism

The preceding three sections of this chapter have attempted to locate this research project within the broader fields it traverses: advertising studies, sports studies and Irish cultural studies. Through mapping out the context of each, this chapter illustrates how this work draws upon them to break fresh ground in the intersection of all three. In doing this, the intent is to justify the focus on a particular case within the much wider context of the unique socio-cultural significances of sport sponsorship beyond the obvious expediency of limiting the parameters of the research project to manageable specifics. What emerges from the convergence of these fields is an emerging phenomenon described here as digital cultural nationalism. Digital cultural nationalism arises from the desire to emphasise the local in the face of increasing globalisation, alongside the reluctance to articulate this emphasis in a way which seems xenophobic, overly militaristic or loaded with political connotations. It is used throughout as an umbrella term for the type of cultural nationalistic expression that emerges from a context characterised by these conflicting desires. Castello and Mihelj (2018) use the term ‘commercial nationalism’ as a type of nationalism which affords primacy to commercial practises, which itself speaks to the notable commercial appeal of national identity in the modern era. With national identity valuable yet problematised there are few feasible options remaining for effectively commercially representing it. Sport is foremost among these, despite its quasi-militaristic roots it can function as a celebratory form of nationalism rather than a chauvinistic one.

The name used here for this particular development, specifically the ‘digital’ qualifier, stems from two factors. The first is the role of the internet in contributing to economic and cultural globalisation on an unprecedented scale. Therefore ‘digital’ locates this development in the 21st century, distinguishing it from previous cultural nationalist movements or phenomena. The difficulty in regulating internet content means that significant culturally nationalist responses to it do not come in the form of legislation to stem the tide of modernity, but rather attempt to function within it. Digital forms of nationalist expression are particularly interesting given that the medium of the internet theoretically offers a global audience, dissolving any barriers to access beyond language (and use of an internet device, of course). Despite this opportunity, many internet content providers (both professional and individual) opt to limit their focus to material with a marked national or local interest. Skey (2014) notes the irony that ‘studies into

the architecture of the Internet [...] have shown how features such as domain names and hyperlinks are often predicated on national distinctions and preferences' (8). This raises the second factor behind the qualifier – namely that digital 'clickbait' content represents the most direct form of the mentality which drives digital cultural nationalism – national identity is affirmed but in an ironic manner which displays tacit awareness of the complications and controversies that have become associated with it. Notably, a 2018 article in *The Ticket* (the weekly cultural supplement of *The Irish Times*) addressing the enduring prominence of 1990s sitcom *Father Ted* within Irish culture argues that the 'fascination with insular Irishness has today metastasised into a vast industry.' The first example of the article lists of the products of this 'industry' are 'Daily Edge listicles'¹² (Power 2018). This work does not argue that all 'clickbait' is rooted in cultural nationalism, but rather uses the term to refer to an emerging subgenre which foregrounds the minutia of everyday local culture with a tongue-in-cheek tone that cannot entirely disguise the sentimental undertones of an attachment to a perceived distinct national culture which this minutia affirms. In many ways, the way in which these sites feature national identity functions in a similar manner to Smith's (2005) description of how modern advertisers' use masculinity, with irony employed to provide a balm against any suspicion of the incoherence or complications of the concept celebrated. Examples of such digital cultural nationalist content (pertaining to Ireland, specifically) can be found in Appendix 3.

Digital cultural nationalism is a concept that can be better understood through the lens of Lefebvre's 'new scarcities' and Laclau's 'empty signifier.' In the age of globalisation national identity can function as a new scarcity, but it is only through divesting it of its historical complexities and potential pluralities, and therefore rendering it an empty signifier, that it can be effectively commodified. These concepts and their application to sport sponsorship and the commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus will be expounded on in further detail in subsequent chapters, but here it is necessary to outline their broad significance in order to provide a theoretical overview for the coming chapters.

¹²*The Daily Edge* is a sister-site of online Irish news outlet, *The Journal.ie*. It describes itself, in somewhat tongue-in-cheek fashion, as being a source for 'high-brow gossip,' and much of its content can be characterised as ironic and irreverent celebrations of Irish cultural minutiae. Examples of some of the digital cultural nationalist content featured on the site can be found in Appendix 3:1.

It can be argued that for the commodification of identities to be commercially effective, the commodified identities themselves must be seen as rare, declining or even under threat. Elementary market logic dictates that no one will buy what they can get for free. Therefore in tying brands and products to intangible identities, advertisers rely on – and, indeed, further – the tacit belief that these identities are valuable because of their relative scarcity. While the earlier described concept of brand communities outlines how brands themselves can construct enticing identities, the situation whereby a brand attempts to associate itself with a pre-existing identity presents additional complications. Concepts such as masculinity and national identity may be culturally constructed, but an element of this construction is the perception that they are naturally conferred – beyond the reach of the market. Brands attempting to leverage qualities such as national identity must therefore not only strive to associate themselves with the concept, but also to tacitly convince consumers that their own association with the identity is enhanced or even validated through their commercial interaction with the brand. Henri Lefebvre (1991) expounds on the concept of ‘new scarcities’ – once abundant qualities whose perceived rarity imbues them with market value. Discussing these new scarcities in the context of civic planning and architecture, Lefebvre writes the qualities such as light, space and air are ‘formally abundant because they occurred ‘naturally,’ which had no value because they were not products, have now become so rare, and so acquired value. They have now to be produced, and consequently they come to have not only a use value but also an exchange value’ (329). His definition and exploration of the concept is limited to the commodification of physical elements, but here it is argued that his ideas can also be applied to ideological constructs. For Lefebvre, naturally abundant qualities can only gain exchange value and become part of the capitalist economy when their abundance is obscured. Rarity confers value, but rarity is a relative term. It is a malleable concept that can confer value whether it is a matter of perception or objective physical quantity. Indeed, Lefebvre affirms that this scarcity is very much a matter of perception; he writes that we cannot ‘legitimately speak of scarcity [...] because available or vacant spaces are still to be found in unlimited number.’ New scarcities are ultimately ‘a distinctly socio-economic phenomenon.’ Notably, Lefebvre does not claim that the construction of this perception of rarity is a single unified strategy on the part of capitalist land developers, but rather that it is a consequence of these natural elements ‘circulat[ing] within systems of production, allocation or distribution’ (1974, 330). These systems, of course, do involve deliberate construction of the

perception of rarity on the part of urban planners and land developers, but also refer to the economic and cultural undercurrents which shape dominant views of space and the perceived limits of its use.

Extending Lefebvre's new scarcities concept to ideological qualities necessarily means dealing in less tangible realms than urban planning. However, taken in light of the perceived decline of traditional national identity (Billig 1995; Mann 1997; Smith 1998), the parallels between the commodification of abundant elements by urban planners and the commodification of national identity by advertisers become clear. The appeal of cultural identifiers (such as national identity) in offering a sense of reassurance and solace in a potentially bewildering social existence has frequently been noted (Tuck 2003; Bairner 2003; Skey 2013), and so too has the increasing perception that the solidity of these identifiers is being eroded by postmodernity and globalisation, among other factors (Maguire 1994; Smith 1998). As with the physical qualities examined by Lefebvre, the wider socio-economic conditions shaped by late capitalism engender a sense of fragility, rarity and value about these identifiers, even before any more deliberate and specific strategies to foster this sense has been considered. However, there is much work in the field of advertising studies which alludes to such deliberate strategies (Ewen et al 2002; Smith 2005; Bagno et al 2006; Tuncay Zayer 2010). When discussing alcohol advertising and masculinity, for instance, Smith notes the wider socio-cultural developments which have created a sense of anxiety around traditional masculinity, but also describes how whiskey brand Jim Beam increased their market share through an ad campaign which focused on 'exploiting and exacerbating the contemporary anxiety among young males about how to be a man.' While Smith does not refer to Lefebvre, it is evident that the case he outlines could be regarded as the shaping of an ideological new scarcity. It is through application of Lefebvre's new scarcities theory that it is possible to effectively articulate and explore the factors which allow advertising to render intangible qualities such as national identity and masculinity commodifiable. In this manner, the continuing commercial and cultural cachet of national identity in a context which has seemingly undermined its ideological solidity is illustrated – it is precisely through becoming a new scarcity in the era of digital cultural nationalism that national identity fosters this sense of value.

Focusing specifically on the strategies through which this is achieved for the moment; advertisers attempting to tap into the appeal of identity totems face the difficulty that while the quality they are leveraging may hold appeal for consumers, these consumers will have their own culturally and socially specific opinions of the quality in question. Advertisers are therefore left with the seemingly difficult task of depicting these qualities in a vivid and engaging manner, while also not alienating significant amounts of potential consumers by rendering them unrecognizable or offensive. To understand how this is accomplished, this work employs Ernesto Laclau's idea of the 'empty signifier.' Laclau (2004) describes it as an 'absent totality,' using it to explain the powerful but vague concepts which command strong feelings, not merely despite, but because of, their apparent lack of tangibility or strict definition. Citing community as an example, he writes that it is because it 'is not a purely differential space of an objective identity but an absent fullness, it cannot have any form of representation of its own, and has to borrow the latter from some entity constituted within the equivalential space – in the same way as gold is a particular use value which assumes, as well, the function of representing value in general' (100). He goes on to pose the question of which signifiers come to stand for community, and why. In further chapters of this work, Laclau's ideas are employed to examine how advertisers can effectively convey a commercially appealing but uncontroversial depiction of Irish identity, and to explore the significance of the particular signifiers that are used to stand for it.

Empty signifiers are 'privileged nodal points that give ideological coherence to a particular discourse' (Phelan and Brereton 2010, 857). A nodal point can be understood as a privileged element within a discourse that functions to fix the wider meaning of the discourse from the theoretic openness of overlapping alternative meanings. Laclau and Mouffe (2001) describe the process thusly: 'The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse to the infinitude of the field of discursivity' (113). Thus, any attempt to articulate discourse can result in the creation of new nodal points which expand or shift the borders of discursive meaning.

Empty signifiers are therefore significant in the manner in which they break from Saussurean structuralism to divorce signifier from signified. The empty signifier refers to no one specific signified, and therefore calls to mind many intangible but nevertheless significant associations.

In other words, the empty signifier can signify a discourse and, in doing so, fix the parameters of interpretation to some degree. Von Groddeck and Schwarz (2013) cite ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ as examples of empty signifiers, noting that they ‘address a complex discourse without determining it, because the battle over the meaning of these terms is infinite. An empty signifier can mean everything and nothing at the same time and, therefore, has the potential to limit a discourse’ (32). Empty signifiers contain a discourse within a broad but potent set of associations – they essentially act as a discursive canvass on which to map specific meanings within the broader concepts they evoke.

They are, therefore, ideal for advertisers intent on playing upon the ‘values vacuum’ (Rowe 1999) to instil brands with a sense of socio-cultural significance. Empty signifiers can be employed by advertisers to locate a brand within a culturally potent discourse while avoiding being constrained by particular political interpretations. To expand on the examples offered by Van Groddeck and Schwarz, ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ can be played upon without the need for advertisers to address global conflicts arising out of the desire for such concepts in nations which ostensibly lack them, or the limits of these concepts within the countries in which the ad airs. Corzine (2010), for instance, details how the United Brewers Industrial Foundation (UBIF) in post-prohibition America broke new ground in marketing beers to women as well as men, emphasising a discourse of ‘freedom’ which obscured ‘sub-narratives reflecting issues of consumption, class, race and gender.’ Corzine argues that the UBIF’s marketing was successful because the central concept of freedom disguised the more complex hierarchies of freedom that were implied by the commercial narrative, namely that any newly won female freedoms would be subordinate to the duty to facilitate male freedoms. He describes these implications as ‘the visions of social reality glossed over by paeans to freedom and tolerance’ (844). The power of these empty signifiers is to allow advertisers to not only connect a commercial narrative to a culturally potent symbol, but also to hide elements of the narrative within the symbol.

Given that digital cultural nationalism has arisen from a context when expressions of national identity are simultaneously problematised and fetishised, it is evident that such an ideological ‘emptying’ process would be necessary to ensure that they can continue to flourish – particularly in the commercial sphere. By viewing digital cultural nationalism through the lens of Laclau’s empty signifier, the thin line between eliciting emotion and arousing controversy is illuminated.

The cultural context from which digital cultural nationalism is one characterised by an uneasy awareness of the instability and incongruity of traditional national identity in the modern world, therefore this process of ‘emptying’ is a crucial element to such ideas continue to function in such a context. Digital cultural nationalist texts strive to evoke historical resonance and cultural connotations without inviting deeper debates concerning national history and culture.

The irreverent and ironic online expressions of national culture which are so characteristic of the context outlined here can be understood as occupying an extreme point on what may be described as a spectrum of acceptable nationalism. This concept builds on Michael Billig’s *Banal Nationalism* (1995) which provides a framework for understanding how the mundane minutiae of everyday life within a particular state work to underpin a sense of continual latent nationalism. He distinguishes between the banal nationalism of unquestioned everyday rituals and symbols and the hot nationalism of military rhetoric and passionately celebrated national occasions, but he ultimately views both as existing in a symbiotic relationship. Billig’s ideas have since been followed upon by Michael Skey, who argues for a greater flexibility with regard to what is perceived as banal nationalism and what is perceived as hot nationalism (2015; 2018).

In some ways, it could be viewed as following on from the ‘playful nationalism’ outlined by Kyriakidou et al (2017) in their study of the Eurovision Song Contest. This is a form of national expression characterised by ‘a playful nature, performed through flag-waving and dressing up, but not in competition with the other participant nations’ (2). In the era of digital cultural nationalism, sport occupies an interesting position as an alternative to the comedic ephemera discussed above, emphasising national identity in a context deemed significant enough to dispense with ironic exaggerations and unabashedly proclaim apparent sincerity. Castello and Mihelj (2018) describe ‘consumer nationalism’ as ‘consumer choices driven by nationalist beliefs [...] serv[ing] as a means of expressing one’s national belonging’ (565), while elsewhere Free and Hughson (2006) describe how sports fans affirm the authenticity of their support through acts of emotional and financial investment. It follows that in the era of digital cultural nationalism, the sport-nation nexus is a distinctly lucrative area for advertisers and sponsors. Sports sponsorship’s significance arises from its ability to shape sporting events and figures into clear discursive shape through advertising. While a sporting event may be interpreted through a variety of lenses in the immediate media reaction, these are subjective accounts of objective

events. Advertising, on the other hand, interweaves a subjective commercial discourse with the objective ‘fact’ of sporting events and figures into a single text. Advertising also stretches the emotional power of sport beyond the live experience of a match, tapping into memories of past triumphs and stoking hopes for the future.

Therefore the subsections of this chapter began by outlining sport as the most tangible and engaging manifestation of the cultural concepts such as masculinity and national identity, and, indeed, the synergy between the two. As such, sport is notably valuable to brands looking to leverage such qualities in order to further consumer perception of them. Furthermore, sports sponsorship provides advertisers not only with a vehicle for the qualities they want to associate with the brand, but with a pre-existing audience of sports fans to tap into. However, sports fans are also uniquely empowered to voice their discontent with their team and its commercial partners, and possess a sense of attachment and investment in their team that cannot be ignored (indeed, as we have seen, advertisers have often availed of romanticised versions of this fan-team bond). Sport, therefore, provides advertisers with a uniquely powerful method to tap into national identity in the era of digital cultural nationalism, but brings with it distinct complications and actors whose agency cannot be fully dictated or constrained.

Following on from this, advertising’s role in shaping the construction of identities was outlined, with particular attention paid to how sponsorship transforms this role into symbiotic relationship between sponsor and property, in which both influence the public perception of each other. With regard to the public, their seemingly contradictory position in advertising’s impact on identities was examined, how they wield power that is often too diffuse to be anything more than theoretical in having any immediate effect on advertising’s portrayal of the culture and society they inhabit.

Section 1:4 of this chapter addressed the specific case of Ireland; outlining how prominent perceptions of Irish identity were shaped and re-shaped, and how this cultural history (alongside socio-economic factors) shaped the state of sport and advertising in the country. Through examining the specific case of Ireland allows for exploration of the particular cultural connotations that have become attached to particular sports, and thus explore their commercial depiction in a nuanced and structured fashion. Furthermore, it draws from previous research in the field of Irish cultural studies while also breaking new ground in examining Irish sports

advertising in such detail. This section is, necessarily, the longest – as it works to draw from the preceding sections and link them together in a manner which provides the specific context from which my research can proceed from. It was therefore split into two subsections, the first of which established the cultural and historical context for Irish identity, and the second of which explored the significance of football and rugby within that context.

In contextualising these three fields and weaving them together, this chapter has aimed to demonstrate how the specific context and case studies central to it relate to wider fields of study. While their selection has, of course, been partly derived from practical concerns of providing a focus for the research, this interweaving approach also serves to demonstrate the relevance of each field when attempting to understand digital cultural nationalism. To address it purely in terms of advertising studies would neglect sport's role as the most potent collective signifier for national identity, while a study of the confluence of sport and advertising without specific attention paid to the particular national context from which both emerge risks offering an overly simplistic and homogenous view of a fluid and nuanced development.

Thus, sport provides digital cultural nationalism with arguably its most engaging and effective manifestation, while Ireland offers a case study of a country in which its appeal seems particularly potent. An examination of Irish sports advertising, therefore, yields the possibility of exploring how digital cultural nationalism accommodates itself to flourish within a national culture undergoing a period of flux owing to factors extending beyond encroaching globalisation. Irish identity, as has been expounded on in this section, has been an increasingly fraught concept, the site of numerous apparent oppositions; Catholic/secular, rural/urban, tradition/modernity, which have been exacerbated by the country's recent economic fluctuations. With this in mind, an analysis of the presentation of the 'corporeal substance [of the] imagined community' (Norhnberg 2010, 100) of Ireland through society's 'distorted mirror' (Toland Frith and Mueller 2003, 12) offers not only the most direct examination of the production and appeal of commercial national mythmaking, but also an ideal case study for the wider development of digital cultural nationalism and concept sponsorship.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2:1. Introduction

This research was first conceived with the intent of exploring sport's unique potential to act as an embodiment and ideological battleground for conceptions of national identity. Ireland was chosen as a case study of national identity, not merely for familiarity or convenience sake (though they were, of course, factors to some degree), but rather for its recent – and much documented – cultural and economic upheaval. The onset of the Celtic Tiger economic boom and its subsequent recession created a context in which Irish identity was in flux, with different elements vying for cultural predominance in media, the arts and the public sphere. Ireland is certainly not unique in this regard, but it is nonetheless interesting. Additionally, that football and rugby (the two most popular international team sports in the country) are loaded with connotations of broadly overlapping but ultimately distinct versions of Irish identity also contributes to the significance of studying the intersection of sport and national identity in Ireland. The decision to study this intersection through advertising stemmed from the assertion that advertising both creates and contributes to culture (Hall 1980). Furthermore, that advertising does this in a markedly idealised fashion, offering 'a distorted and unidimensional view of society through the idealised world of happy, pleasure-orientated financially secure consumers which it presents to us' (Moran 1984, 84). Analysing the convergence of advertising, sport and Irish identity thus offers an opportunity to not only analyse the socio-cultural significance of the former two areas, but also to explore the third in its most deliberately idealised and engaging form.

Further elaboration on the choices behind the chief areas of study of this thesis can be found in section two of this chapter, but they are briefly outlined here in order to provide context for the overall methodological approach taken in this work: interpretivism. When the very area of study is fundamentally bound up with culturally contextual factors (such as shifting perceptions of national identity and the distinct socio-cultural connotations different sports accrue in different countries), it seems appropriate to adopt a methodological approach which proceeds from the principle that 'attempts to find understanding in research are mediated by our own historical and cultural milieu' (Walliman 2001, 168) This thesis is therefore consistently concerned with the

inescapable subjectivity of its analysis and therefore does not posit that its findings can be ‘codified in laws by identifying underlying regularities’ (168). Instead it attempts to analyse them in a manner which illuminates the complexity of the subject and opens the way for further investigations and understanding of it.

While this study examines a variety of sports advertising and sponsorship campaigns in the Irish market, it focuses in considerable detail on ‘An Ode to Fans’ (2013) and ‘All it Takes’ (2015), campaigns commissioned by Three Ireland (a subsidiary of the international telecommunications brand, Three) in their role as sponsor of the Irish international football and rugby union teams respectively. The initial motivation to examine these particular campaigns for this project stemmed from the curious circumstance of Three simultaneously sponsoring the two most popular international sports teams within the same country (a period of overlap that lasted from 2014 when Three’s takeover of O2 led to them replacing the latter as Irish rugby sponsor, to 2016 when Vodafone became the new sponsors of the Irish rugby team). While this situation was so unusual as to perhaps have negligible direct applicability to other sport sponsorship scenarios, it facilitated research on the subject through the significant practical advantages it offered.

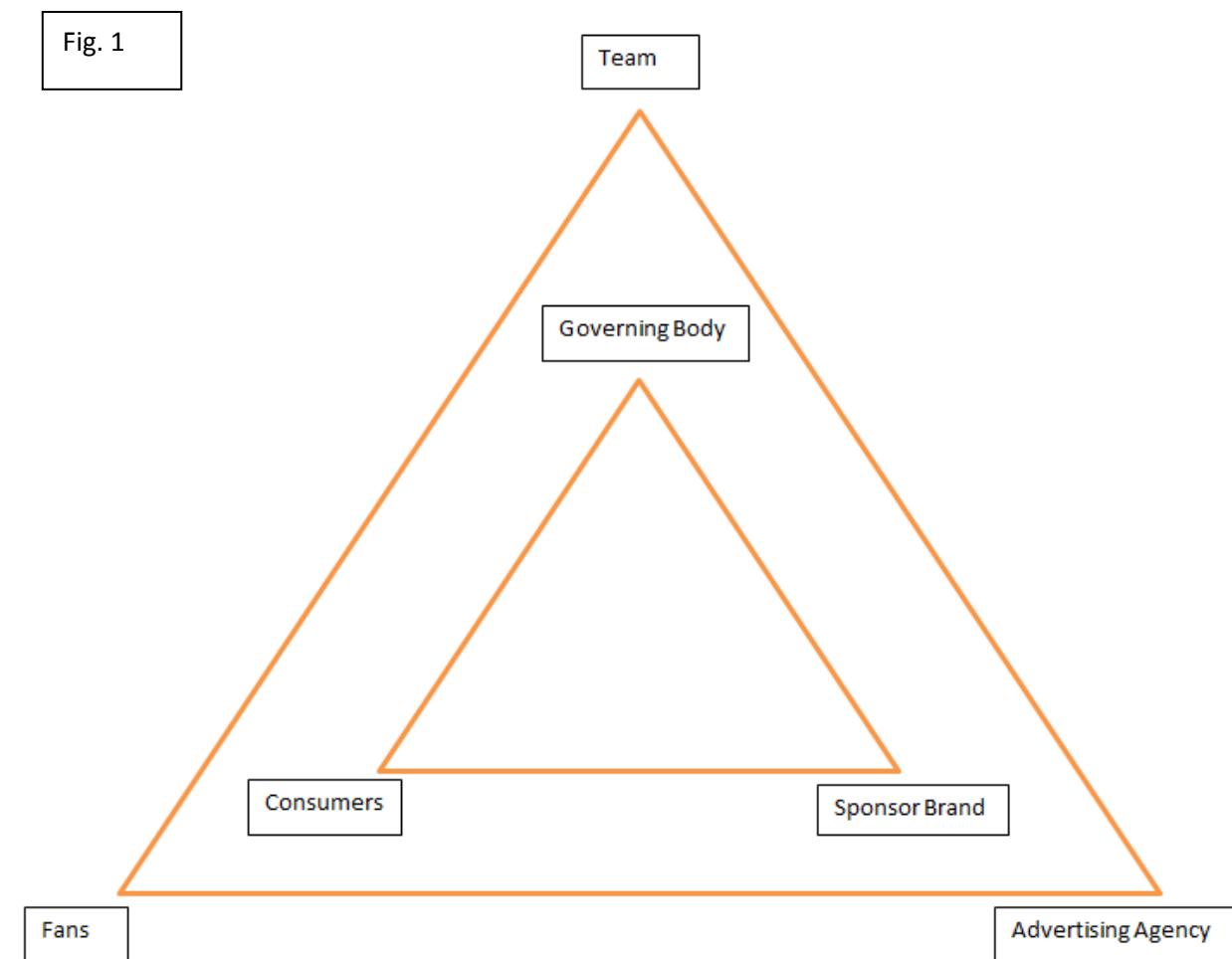
Furthermore, these ad campaigns emerged from a particularly intriguing Irish cultural milieu. The nature of this milieu is further expounded on in section 1:4 of the literature review chapter, but to surmise in brief here, this period encapsulates the latter part of the Celtic Tiger economic boom and subsequent crash, a period of cultural upheaval that left the notion of Irish identity in continual flux. The De-Valerian visions of a bucolic paradise that had previously dominated official national narratives were largely accepted as outdated at this time, and yet there existed a tension of disposing of tradition in order to forge a more appropriate identity for modern Ireland, all the more so when the nation’s newfound optimism was severely dented by the economic downturn in 2009. Writing in 2011, Kieran Bonner summed up the upheaval of the period before, during and following the boom as one which saw ‘changes in demography, mobility, and affluence that [...] seem to have had their effect on the most fundamental practices of everyday life’ (52). The advertisements depicting and celebrating Irishness through sport during this period are locked in ‘a struggle with cosmopolitanism [which] involves mediating between the meanings of the loss of the old in relation to the gains of the new’ (60).

Notably too, the situation of having to produce advertising campaigns for both teams meant that Three (in addition to the ad agency employed for both campaigns, Boys and Girls) would view the process of constructing an appealing commercial narrative based on the sport-nation nexus with greater nuance than other national sport sponsors. It can be argued that their consciousness of the necessity of ensuring the campaigns were distinct while both relying on the same central appeal made them a unique case study for investigating the wider social significance of sport sponsorship and contemporary cultural nationalism. This work follows Marcus Free in paying particular attention to the ‘contestability’ (2013, 6) of media sport texts, with the view that such a focus avoids the risk of simplifying their significance. The Three campaigns selected were considered to be particularly suitable subjects for this focus as the necessity of creating the similar-but-distinct versions of national identity (itself a frequently contested quality) would result in texts which would be more likely to provoke ‘contested’ viewings owing to (direct or indirect) contrast with one another and the wider contexts from which they emerged (in particular, the abiding associations with each sport in Ireland). David Rowe writes that ‘Among the ironies characterizing contemporary sport it is evident that, as sport becomes more global and transnational in nature, the national is constantly re-asserted as a locus of collective identification’ (2015, 693). This is an argument which this work follows in focusing on sports ad campaigns which foreground national identity (as opposed to the many which depict broader idealisations of masculinity, though the links between idealised masculinity and idealised national identity are not overlooked here). Furthermore, Rowe cautions researchers against being too analytically “‘soccer-centric” [as] most countries are multi-sport environments with intersecting fan bases’ (2015, 694), a potential problem is alleviated here by Three’s sponsorship of rugby alongside that of soccer.

While there has been much academic investigation into sport sponsorship, it can be argued that much of it has neglected to thoroughly examine the symbiotic relationship between all of the parties involved¹³. In this work those parties are defined as forming a triangular relationship that

¹³ Madrigal (2000), White (2000) and Wright (2003) provide interesting explorations of sport’s cachet for sponsors and its commercial use, but comment little on fans (and fan agency) beyond their status as desired consumers for the sponsor. While Arrowsmith (2004), Tuck (2010) and Free (2005, 2013) examine the symbiotic relationship between sport and national identity from an Irish context, but with a focus on the role of the wider media rather than that of advertising and sponsorship. Wakefield et al (2007) do address the interconnected relationship of the sponsor, the sponsored and the consumer, but do so from a general perspective, which therefore does not address the unique

consists of the sponsor brand and advertising agency, the team and sport's governing body, and the fans and consumers. Though it is imperative to remain conscious that the parties grouped together within each of the points of the triangle (see Fig. 1) represent distinct entities from one another and should not be confused or conflated, this model can nonetheless provide an efficient and thorough approach to exploring the topic. It allows for the full exploration of every stage of preparation, production and reception of the campaigns – a structure followed in this chapter, outlining the approach to investigating each stage before accounting for the occasional limitations and pitfalls encountered over the course of the study. Firstly, however, I will outline my academic background and research interests, and their role in shaping my approach to this research.



nature of sports teams as an object of sponsorship and sports fans as the recipients and targets of this sponsorship (this uniqueness is further expounded on in the literature review section of this work).

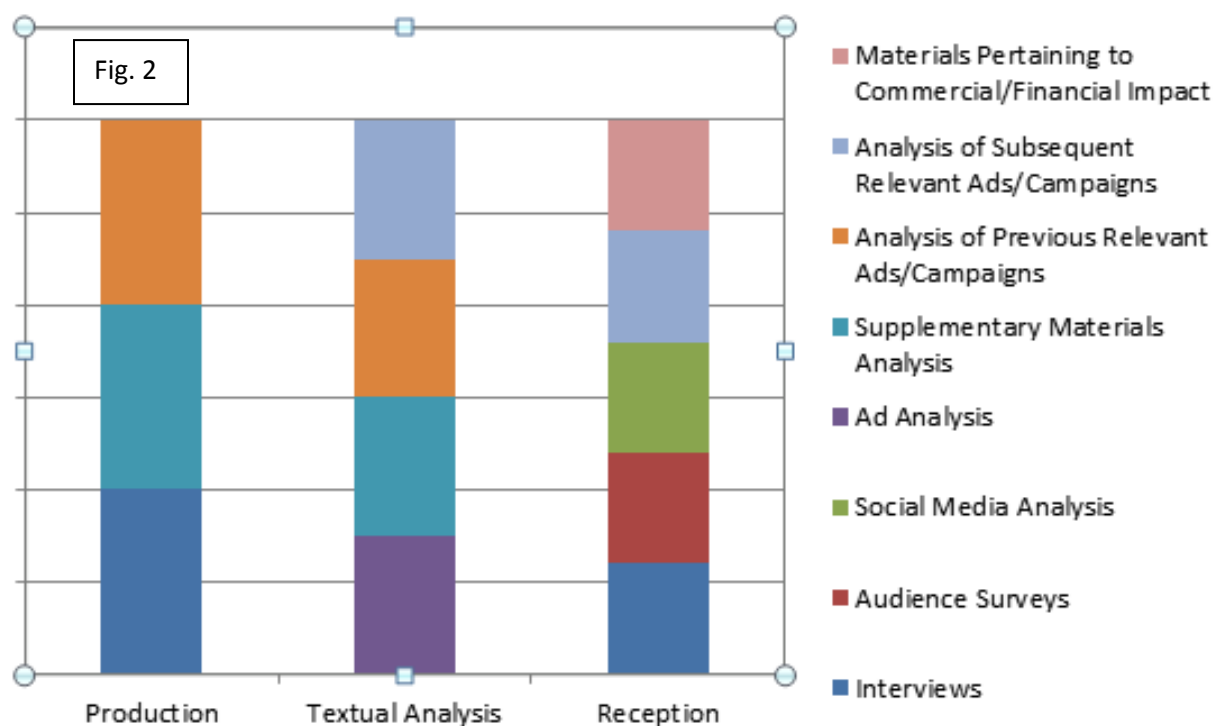
2:2. Background

My personal interest in sport initially motivated me to investigate the topic at an academic level. Though my previous academic experience had involved research in the fields of cultural, media and communication studies, I had rarely focussed my attention on a topic which not only was one of my great passions, but also something which has had an enormous and occasionally overlooked role in shaping society and culture over the previous century. When initially conceiving this project, the advertising element felt like an effective way of grounding the work, of ensuring its relevance beyond being an exercise in projecting or extracting mythological symbols onto sports coverage. As Toland Frith and Mueller point out ‘advertising agencies do far more than merely provide commercial information as they disseminate advertising messages. They also transmit values, influence behaviour of both individuals and value-forming institutions, and even sway national development policies’ (2003, 10). Therefore the study of advertising helps locate my research within a dynamic and continually shifting industry with a very well documented impact on wider culture. In this regard, I follow Adele E. Clarke in attempting to ground my work in the empirical reality of how discourses relate to the cultures they emerge from, ‘instead of muttering vaguely about some mythic “society”’ – analysing advertising as discursive texts while remaining aware that ‘discourses can be dangerous places to get lost’ (2005, 154).

Discourse analysis is, of course, a key element of my approach to research, as Clarke asserts ‘discourse analysis is valuable precisely because it allows us to connect media representations to people, discourses to our daily practices of subject making (including the resistant)’ (2005, 152). However, I am careful to ensure that my analysis rests on a solid contextual foundation, aware that, as Thomas R. Lindlof argues, communication scholars have often been guilty of glossing over ‘the cultural and historical variation of events of social participation’ (1995, 22). My literature review chapter attempts to construct this foundation for this work by progressing from the wider world of advertising to the cultural specificities of Irish sport advertising, via explorations of international sports advertising and Irish culture, and this was an approach I adopted throughout my research – attempting to identify findings of significance to the wider field of study while remaining aware of the socio-culturally specific variables which shaped those findings. Again, this decision is underpinned by interpretivist approach which above all

emphasises the importance of context and subjectivity in analyses social and cultural phenomena. Any attempt to analyse advertising's depiction of the sport-nation nexus from a broader point of view would neglect the specific cultural factors which shape this depiction distinctly in each country and, thus, proceed from a shaky foundation of perceived universality.

I remain conscious that 'no theory is ever complete; no theory reaches its goal of describing, explaining, understanding, predicting and controlling any particular communication phenomenon fully' (Frey et al. 1991, 41). As a consequence I adopt a flexible approach to theory and method, employing various approaches at the junctures when I deemed them most useful and appropriate to the task at hand. The specific methods I employed for each of these are detailed in the following three sub-sections of this chapter, but in brief they can be summarised as a discourse analysis approach to text analysis, supported by interviews with the various relevant parties and supplemented with thematic qualitative analysis of surveys and social media content related to the chosen ad campaigns (see Fig. 2 for a full illustrated breakdown of the methods used to examine each stage of the central sponsorship campaigns).



2:3. Production Process

The exploration of the production process of the sponsorship campaigns at the heart of this research was chiefly rooted in interviews with the parties who determine this process: the sponsor, their chosen advertising agency and the governing bodies of both sports. This approach was based on a belief that interviews are on the most effective methods of gathering qualitative data (Walliman 2001, 238) which would be more suited to an interpretivist project than quantitative data as it leaves more room for interpretation. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner and lasted between approximately 30 and 60 minutes. The duration of the interviews was deemed sufficient to gain the detailed insight of the subjects, while being short enough to accommodate their busy schedules and therefore make them amenable to offering their views. The semi-structured approach was chosen because it allows for ‘further development’ of the answers to scheduled questions (Walliman 2001, 240), rather than constraining the interview to follow a strict adherence to a pre-set list of questions. This approach is particularly appropriate to gathering qualitative data, as it does not constrict the organic nature of such data by acknowledging the possibility of data arising outside of the researcher’s question-answer schema, and, indeed, the importance of such data.

While the data accrued from these interviews was original and detailed, it was explored with a consciously interpretivist approach. Throughout the process of gathering and analysing this data, a recurring concern was that ‘interview talk is the rhetoric of socially situated speakers, *not* an objective report of thoughts, feelings, or things out in the world’ (Lindlof 1995, 156). To elaborate, this work follows Lindlof in demonstrating continual awareness of the subjectivity of the interviewees and the contextual factors which might significantly impact their views and responses. So while an interview might attempt to gain an idea of how the FAI influences the commercial depiction of the Irish football team, the analysis must demonstrate the consciousness that however well informed the officials interviewed might be, their responses (particularly on more nebulous or generalised matters such as what they considered the aspects of Irish football which were attractive to sponsors) could not be unilaterally regarded as objective expressions of the collective consciousness of the FAI. Rather, they should be regarded as the subjective views of individuals which could be set within a wider context and thereafter analysed to gain an insight into the culture and outlook which permeates the organisation. As Frey et al note:

‘because of differences in the way individuals manage and create meanings for messages, communication researchers take great care when generalising findings from one set of people to another’ (1991, 38).

The semi-structured approach to interviews allowed for sufficient flexibility for spontaneous follow-up questions to particularly pertinent comments made by the interviewees. While the interviews were focused on discussing key elements of the research, this flexibility was particularly important. Birks and Mills assert that ‘the greater the level of structure imposed, the less able the interviewer will be able to take the optimal route’ (2011, 73). This approach provides the potential to establish a rapport with the interviewees. Lindlof underlines the importance of rapport for researchers, asserting that ‘it clears away the burden of having to translate what one wants to say into a formal or foreign style. It clears away the fear of being misunderstood. It means that, for this occasion, conditions are right for disclosing thoughts and feelings more readily’ (1995, 180). Through establishing a rapport, certain questions could be raised at the most opportune moment, rather than attempting to shoehorn them into the flow of conversation and receive stilted responses as a consequence.

In examining the production process of ‘All it Takes’ and ‘An Ode to Fans’ the decision was made to interview figures from Three Ireland, Boys and Girls (the advertising agency employed on both campaigns), the FAI and the IRFU. Specifically, interviews were conducted with a sponsorship executive from Three, an advertising strategist from Boys and Girls (who had worked on both campaigns explored in this project), a marketing executive and sponsorship and marketing manager from the FAI, and the director of commercial and marketing in the IRFU. The intent was to glean the extent of input each party had into the advertisements and, in doing so, trace the fault lines of the relationship. This contributed to an exploration of the variations and similarities, not only in the goals and priorities of these parties, but also in their conceptions of what Irish sport does or should symbolise in wider Irish culture. Prior to seeking an interview with any of the parties in the above described triangular relationship, contact was made with the Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland (IAPI). Interviewing a senior figure within the organisation provided a well-rounded overview of the advertising landscape in Ireland, of its priorities and problems, which established important context for further interviews with figures within the industry. In attempting to critically analyse the ideological significances of sports

advertising, there was a risk that the officials interviewed might balk at some perceived imposition of apparently overstated cultural significance onto their work and become less responsive to questioning as a result. Thus, it was important to gain some experience in efficiently structuring and phrasing questions for such interviews and establishing the degree of rapport which Lindlof describes.

Indeed, the only time a rapport could not be established was during the initial interview with an official from the IRFU. The interview was conducted over the phone and the interviewee had specifically requested to read the list of questions beforehand (an offer made to other interviewees, though none of them had opted for it) and as a consequence, their responses were somewhat perfunctory and lacked the spontaneity which had characterised other interviews. As Birks and Mills note ‘subtle non-verbal cues can be missed or misinterpreted when interviews are conducted at a distance’ and caution that ‘the absence of these cues could be significant and greater attention to verbal communication may therefore be required’ (2011, 73). However, despite these limitations, the data collected from the interview was sufficient in providing the views of the IRFU on rugby’s relation to Irish identity and how it’s advertised.

Overall, the priority in collecting information on the production process of these campaigns was to explore the different priorities of the various groups involved and their roles in shaping the production of the campaigns. Their consciousness of how sport – and advertising depicting it – influences the construction of Irish identity was also gleaned during these interviews. Analysis of the views of the various figures involved was coloured by an interpretivist approach which attempted to shape this analysis into a coherent argument rather than present them as an infallible account of how this production process precisely functions. This argument concerns the wider intersection of sports, advertising and national identity but – through these interviews – is grounded in the nuances of the relationships between, and roles of, the numerous parties involved.

2:4. Textual Analysis

The textual analysis element of this research focused primarily on exploring the various advertising texts that comprised the ‘An Ode to Fans’ and ‘All it Takes’ campaigns. Primarily, of

course, this involves analysing the televised ads, but also took in supplementary material, such as press releases, billboard or poster ads and behind-the-scenes videos issued on Three Ireland's official YouTube channel. The supplementary texts were examined with a view to learning whether they supported the discourses present in the televised ads, or even introduced or emphasised discourses not present – or not as prominent – in them. As noted in the previous chapter, advertisers divided their output according to 'the line,' with media advertising – such as television or billboard ads – were deemed 'above the line,' while non-media marketing – such as competitions or in-store displays – were described as being 'below the line.' However John Sinclair argues that 'with the growth of the Internet, it becomes more evident that advertising is just the most visible and public dimension of a much broader, but still quite familiar, set of practices intent upon harnessing our ways of life for commercial purposes,' and therefore that 'the line has been crisscrossed so much now that it is obliterated' (2015, 43). Thus, while the televised ads are undoubtedly the most viewed elements of each campaign, the significance of the supplementary texts in shaping the dominant narratives of the campaign and influencing consumer opinion of the brand, the team and, to an extent, the nation, cannot be underestimated. In doing so, this work follows the approach of theoretical sampling, defined by Glaser and Strauss as 'the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges' (1967, 45). Effectively, by widening the 'net' of sampling to include these supplementary advertising texts, theoretical flexibility is retained, and the campaigns can be explored with greater nuance. This accommodates any unusual or unexpected material discerned within them rather than myopically focusing on a pre-selected theoretical course. There was a concerted effort throughout the initial analysis to retain 'theoretical sensitivity' (46) in coding the content of the campaign texts, identifying and categorising particular discourses (such as 'selflessness' in 3:3 and 'man versus nature' in 4:3) after viewing the texts, rather than approaching them with specific codes and categories already devised.

The role of cultural context is vital in assessing these texts – a view which shaped the structure of the literature review chapter, which traced a through line from the broad fields of advertising and sports studies to the specific context of modern Irish sport sponsorship, and, in doing so establish the concept of digital cultural nationalism – a development which illuminates the significance of

contemporary Irish sport sponsorship. This work employs this approach in textual analysis as well, not only for practical reasons (for, as Frey et al, argue: ‘overly broad or complex topics have to be narrowed to bring them within the constraints of available time and resources’ [1991, 43]), but also to ensure that the significance of my analysis could be coherently applied to wider contexts without undue generalisations or negating the influence of the context from which the texts emerged.

Further context for the analysis of these texts was gained through comparison with other recent Irish ad campaigns centred on football and rugby. The selection of these campaigns was limited to ads aired in the ten year period of 2007 to 2017. This period was chosen so as to include ‘#MakeHistory,’ the campaign Three produced as sponsors of the football team in promotion of their participation in the 2016 European Championship. The Championship would prove to be a seminal event for Irish football, and particularly for the worldwide perception of Irish football fans. 2016 was also the year which saw Vodafone take over from Three as primary sponsors of the Ireland rugby team and the campaign they produced the following year is an interesting indication of the shifting cultural connotations of Irish rugby and their implications for advertising. Analysing these two succeeding campaigns offers insight into the impact of ‘An Ode to Fans’ and ‘All it Takes’ on the commercial landscape. Furthermore, as Stephen Potter writes, ‘readiness to accept limitations of what can be achieved’ within the limits of PhD research is ‘a feature of research that it is important to consider from the outset’ (2006, 61). Therefore setting 2007 and 2017 as the chronological cut-off points for the selection of these contrasting texts made the exercise more feasible, as this project does not have the scope to take in the entire history of Irish sports advertising in detail. It also ensures that the ads dealt with emerged from broadly the same cultural milieu as ‘An Ode to Fans’ and ‘All it Takes.’ As outlined above in section 2:1, this milieu is characterised by a struggle between traditional and emerging Irish identities, a struggle underpinned by a tacit fear of global homogeny. These texts were thus analysed with a view to exploring this struggle, tracing the different strategies employed to deal with them. In addition to providing context for the textual analysis, the influence of previous campaigns is also explored to an extent in the production sections, while subsequent campaigns is also addressed in the reception section with a view to exploring the influence of the central campaigns on the wider field of Irish sport sponsorship.

With regard to this, John Fanning's concept of cultural contradictions was a particularly useful analytic tool. As both a former chairman of McConnells Advertising and Adjunct Professor of Marketing at Trinity College, Fanning offers an interesting hybrid perspective on Irish advertising, possessing insider knowledge of the industry with the critical perspective of an academic. In his *The Importance of Being Branded* (2006), Fanning outlines six areas of cultural contradiction in contemporary Ireland, which he feels are fertile ground for savvy advertisers to act upon.¹⁴ Fanning follows Douglas Holt in asserting that 'the most successful brands in the future will be the ones that engage in [...] "cultural branding"' (300), competing with other cultural texts (such as television, literature and music) to address the central cultural myths, discourses and anxieties of the society they operate within. Addressing the case of early 21st century Ireland, Fanning describes six oppositions which shape social priorities and anxieties and expounds upon examples of brands which have played on them. While this project's analysis of the advertising texts is not solely based on Fanning's ideas, they were nonetheless very useful analytical tools, taking into account 'the cultural and historical variation of events of social participation' which Lindlof argues has been so often neglected in qualitative textual analysis (1995, 22).

2:5. Reception Analysis

The approach of this work to analysing the reception of 'All it Takes' and 'An Ode to Fans' was multi-faceted, attempting to bridge the distinct positions of sports fan and (potential) Three consumer in coherent assessment of the commercial appeal and socio-cultural implications of both campaigns. This approach consisted of focus group interviews with dedicated supporters of

¹⁴ These six 'cultural contradictions' will be explored in detail when applied to the two sponsorship campaigns central to this work, but it is worth describing them in brief here: (1) Freedom vs Constraint refers to the worries brought on from a societal shift of widespread cultural conservatism to cultural liberalism. (2) Individualism vs Community refers to the worry that liberating oneself from social constraints isolates one from traditional community rituals. (3) Globalisation vs Dinnseanchas refers to the conflicting desire to embrace the perks of globalisation while wishing to preserve a sense of traditional and unique culture. (4) Affluence vs Affluenza refers to balancing an aspiration to greater wealth with the perceived worries and loss of values that wealth accumulation may cause. (5) Control vs Chaos refers to the impact of technology and the desire to see technology enrich society while being aware of the risks it poses. (6) Conformity vs Creativity refers specifically to artistic ventures and the desire to innovate without alienating others.

both the Irish rugby and football teams, surveys administered to audiences after screenings of the ads and analysis of social media feedback of the campaigns. All of this was in turn supplemented by an examination of the commercial impact of the campaigns through analysis of ADFX reports¹⁵ and Three press releases. This economic and commercial element was a vital appendage to the reception analysis. Kelly et al note in their study of Irish advertising that within the industry economic imperatives usually trump artistic ambition in the hierarchy of the agency's priorities, with tension often arising between the two, but the former ultimately driving the latter (2008). Therefore, it was important not to lose sight of the mundane commercial success of the campaigns amid the more colourful analysis of the reception of their cultural signifiers.

The more colourful elements of the analysis alluded to above emerged chiefly from the focus group interviews. Gathering data concerning fan and consumer reaction that could be deemed justifiably applicable to the wider context of the study was a difficult process (the specific difficulties are further outlined in section 2.6 of this chapter). Throughout, it was necessary to heed Schroder et al's caution to audience researchers, that we are 'several steps removed from that which we wish to study' as 'we cannot study audiences empirically without at the same time interfering with the very phenomenon we wish to study' (2003, 16). Therefore the data gathered from these interviews is not regarded as undiluted fan sentiment and desires in this work, but rather the articulation of feelings that may otherwise go unelaborated or, in some cases, directly acted upon. The data should thus be compared that gathered from the texts' various producers with a view to assessing the conflicting undercurrents in their respective priorities, rather than viewed as evidence of anti-corporate fan activism.

The decision to limit the focus groups to two (one with football fans and one with rugby fans) derives from viewing the value of these interviews as being an elaboration of fan feeling rather than an aggregator of overall fan sentiment. Data accrued from conducting a greater amount of focus groups could not legitimately claim to be an accurate representation of the feelings of rugby or football fans in general. Instead, the data accrued from the two focus groups is used

¹⁵ The ADFX Awards (previously known as the Advertising Effectiveness Awards) are organised by IAPI with a view to celebrating the ad campaigns which produce the most significant proven impact on their clients' sales and market presence. To further their aim to 'promote the role of advertising as an effective element in the marketing process,' IAPI requires entrants to submit reports detailing how their advertising campaigns clearly benefitted their client.

throughout to supplement and elaborate the data and analysis drawn from other sources (audience surveys, social media reaction analysis, etc.). The emphasis of the research conducted for this thesis was qualitative rather than quantitative, aiming to collect ‘resonant, fertile data to enable the development’ of ideas, rather than relying on data to accurately reveal a ‘static,’ objective reality (Walliman 2001, 203). In order to gain data on the opinions of this potential consumer base, a classroom survey (n=76) was administered after airing both ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ (covered in detail in Chapter 4) to a class of second year students at an Irish university immediately after a lecture in their Analysing Advertising module. The module was optional and therefore the students present were drawn from a variety of business, arts and media programmes. Most students were in the 19-22 age range, with just four in their late 20s. In addition, most identified as Irish though there were a sizeable portion of international students hailing from a range of countries (including Sweden, the USA, France and Australia). Most respondents identified as middle or upper middle class, with just four identifying themselves as working class. Further questions pertained to respondents’ interest in specific sports, so as to compare and contrast reactions to the ads by fans of the sports they focused on and viewers with less defined associations or emotional attachments to the ads’ subjects.

These surveys did allow for some crossover between the overlapping categories of fan and consumer with a question pertaining to whether respondents were fans of particular sports. However there is a distinction between the dedicated organised fandom of the focus group supporters and a more casual interest in watching a sport – therefore when comparing data between the focus groups and the surveys, particular care was taken toward assessing the similarities and differences between the views recipients who identified themselves as fans of a particular sport and those of the focus group interviewees pertaining to that sport. This was facilitated by the survey format – as Schroder et al write, surveys ‘streamline talk’ (2003, 207) and therefore allow for responses to be efficiently categorised and analysed. There remains the risk of extrapolating some short responses into an unduly elaborate conclusion. To mitigate this, this work foregrounds the fact that this survey research is drawn from convenience sampling and therefore, taken in isolation, ‘provides only a weak basis for generalization’ (Walliman 2001, 234). The survey recipients in this case, being advertising students chiefly in their early twenties, could not – and are not – deemed to be an accurate cross section of society. Rather, their views

are triangulated with other reception data to form a nuanced analysis of the campaigns' connotations, rather than attempting to make a claim to have 'uncovered' their 'true message.'

However, the specific demographics of the survey respondents do provide particular insights into this thesis' central concerns. Given that the students are some years removed from the ads initially airing, any positive responses could be read as particularly indicative of the abiding appeal of the cultural qualities associated with Irishness through sport (and the ads' success in leveraging them). Furthermore, given that the respondents were made up of an Advertising Studies module, their responses to the open questions of the survey were hoped to be (and indeed, often proved to be) particularly detailed and nuanced. However, caution was needed here to resist the temptation to read markedly articulate individual responses as indicative of the wider public's views of the ads, rather, they were employed alongside the other reception data detailed in this section to triangulate an overall outline of the reaction to the campaigns. The data drawn from the survey is thus used chiefly to provide context, comparison or contrast with the more detailed interview data.

The final element of reception analysis in this work was an examination of social media feedback to Three's posts pertaining to both teams (with particular attention paid to reactions to posts concerning the chosen case study campaigns). Specifically, there was a focus Three Ireland's official Facebook page and YouTube channel. Informal online communication is particularly prone to misinterpretation. Chris Mann and Fiona Stewart argue that when analysing such data: 'the text which appears on computer screens must provide all available information about the communication as well as being the communication. It has to be both location and social context' (2000, 197). Accordingly, any temptation to speculate into the motivations or demographics of commenters beyond what was readily available on screen was curbed. Additionally, there was also the issue of anonymity. While comments drawn from Facebook were likely to feature users using their real names, YouTube allows its users to post comments under pseudonyms.¹⁶ Tone can be difficult to discern in any form of written communication, but anonymity increases (but by no means guarantees) the possibility that the user is 'trolling' by posting deliberately provocative or offensive comments that do not reflect their views (or at

¹⁶ YouTube began phasing out anonymous user accounts in favour of users interacting with the site via their Google+ accounts (which were largely not anonymous) in November 2013, but it continues to be possible to post comments under pseudonyms.

least, a pointed exaggeration of them). Furthermore, while the reaction to each comment is to some extent measurable, there remains a risk of overestimating the importance of particular comments, particularly as social media users were likely (though by no means guaranteed) to be largely drawn from a relatively youthful age demographic which could not be deemed representative of the majority of fans (Thelwall et al 2012). However, despite these potential limitations, these comments represented the most immediate form of recorded public response to the ads and were therefore an interesting topic to analyse and supplement my study of the consumer and fan reaction to the sponsorship campaigns. Furthermore the response to each comment (in terms of likes on Facebook or YouTube's thumbs up and thumbs down options) gives some measurable indication of the level of agreement or disagreement noteworthy comments attracted. While 'audience research can never claim to find the truth about audience practices and meanings, only partial insights about how audiences use the media in a specific context' (Schroder et al 2003, 17), the ability to discern the level of support for these comments offers more secure ground for generalisation of findings than would otherwise be possible.

Both the social media data and the audience surveys were assessed with an intent towards 'theoretical sensitivity' (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 46), coding the responses in the most general terms (positive, negative or ambivalent with regard to the ads, sponsor or sports teams) before teasing out more nuanced discourses once all of the responses had been initially assessed. As Glaser and Strauss argue 'potential theoretical sensitivity is lost when the sociologist commits himself exclusively to one specific preconceived theory' (46). While this reception data would of course be analysed in light of the thesis' wider intents to trace the fault lines of the multi-faceted relationships that make up sport sponsorship and the socio-cultural nuances of the sport-nation nexus, the intent was to maintain sufficient flexibility in these overriding ideas to allow for avenues of exploring them alternative to the ones planned at earlier stages of the research. In this, effort was made to heed to the assertion that 'the main purpose is to generate theory, not to establish verifications with "facts"' (47).

2:6. Limitations of Study

While this work strove to ensure the efficiency and applicability of its research, it is nonetheless undeniable that the methods employed were by no means perfect, nor are the findings all encompassing. In this, this work follows Clarke in viewing the importance of complicating itself through openness regarding the ‘contradictions and incoherencies in the data, not[ing] other possible readings, and at least not[ing] some of our anxieties and omissions’ (2005, 15). This openness not only facilitates further research which can progress from the foundations of this work, filling in any gaps in it, but also thoroughly outlines the parameters of the research, allowing its findings and analyses to be assessed with the greatest possible depth and clarity.

To a certain degree, this thesis’ reflections of the perception and role of rugby within Irish culture were complicated by ongoing developments with regard to the Belfast rape trial. Conducted through the latter half of 2017 and early 2018, the trial concerned four men, including Irish rugby players Stuart Olding and Paddy Jackson, accused of the sexual assault (and subsequent attempts to cover it up) of a woman at a house party. Though they were eventually found not guilty in March 2018, the verdict aroused contention from significant amounts of the Irish public. Furthermore, the revelation of misogynistic WhatsApp messages passed between the four men stoked public anger and led to media debates about the influence of their professional rugby playing lifestyle on their attitudes towards women. A month after the verdict, the IRFU cancelled Jackson and Olding’s contracts with Irish rugby, citing the organisation’s commitment to maintaining ‘the core values of the game; respect, inclusivity and integrity.’ Attempts to gauge the long term impact of the trial on the sport’s place within wider Irish culture and society were deemed too speculative to be included in this thesis, but it is something that will be integrated into future work emanating from this project.¹⁷

Efforts were made during the interviews conducted as part of the investigation into the production process to gain access to official materials pertaining to the planning of the two central sponsorship campaigns, but they were unsuccessful. Privacy protocol in the organisations

¹⁷ Viewing figures for Ireland’s opening 2019 Six Nations fixture against England would suggest the sport has lost little of its public appeal in the immediate aftermath of the trial controversy.¹⁷ Notably too, ‘Everyone In,’ the Vodafone-commissioned TV ad which aired throughout the competition leaned further towards the idea of the Ireland rugby team attracting a national community of diverse supporters, suggesting that, in the short term at least, advertisers seem confident that the public perception of Irish rugby will ride the storm of the rape trial controversy in the wake of Jackson and Olding’s contractual termination.

dealt with make it unlikely that anything could have been done about this, but their absence does deny the project a certain degree of accuracy and authority when discussing the fault lines of the relationships between sponsor, sponsored body and advertising agency. However, the interpretivist approach taken here means that the exploration of the central sponsorship campaigns was conducted with an emphasis on constructing a convincing and enlightening argument rather than purporting to present an objectively true detailing.

Textual analysis of the campaigns is somewhat stretched by the volume of peer texts to draw from for comparison and contrast. Section 2:4 detailed the rationale behind the chronological cut-off points for selecting similar Irish sports ads and sponsorship campaigns to provide context for the discussion of the two campaigns central to this project. However, even within this decade-long period, there is a plurality of texts to draw from that shed intriguing light on the shifting cultural connotations of football and rugby within Irish society. Practicality and coherence dictated that these texts only be focused on in so far as they augment the exploration of either of the two central campaigns. This was accomplished effectively but it meant leaving much material mined during the research process untapped within the final work. A broader, long-term overview of Irish sports advertising over the past decade might be better placed to make use of such material.

However, perhaps the most notable limitation of the research concerns the reception analysis section. While it is arguable that the analyses of fan and consumer reaction in conjunction with the sponsor brand and the sponsored object provides a more thorough exploration of sport sponsorship than the majority of previous studies, there were nonetheless difficulties in gathering data on fan opinions that can be accurately applied in assessing overall fan opinion. Malcolm Williams writes that ‘the interpretivist attitude to generalisation is rather like that of the Victorian middle classes towards sex. They do it, they know it goes on, but they rarely admit to either’ (2000, 210). To remedy this persistent limitation of the approach, a balance must be struck between presuming the findings can speak for all fans and consumers, and developing their application beyond the isolated and specific contexts from which they are drawn. Finding such a balance was not simple - while the football fan focus group interviewed were effusive and informative in the opinions they offered, they were comprised of dedicated season ticket holders, and could therefore be argued to have more passionate opinions on matters concerning the team

than the majority of more ‘casual’ fans which Three also attempt to appeal to through their sponsorship. Furthermore, the difficulty of finding an equivalent group of Ireland rugby supporters to interview (addressed in detail in section 4:4), there was not as clear a parallel between both focus groups as could have been hoped for. As Frey et al point out ‘Because of differences in the way individuals manage and create meanings for messages, communication researchers take great care when generalising findings from one set of people to another’ (1991, 38). Such care was taken in this work, but this does not preclude the possibility of alternative findings emerging from interviews with less dedicated fans, nor that such findings might contribute further towards understanding in the field.

Nevertheless, a certain degree of generalisation is somewhat necessary as it would be unfeasible to collect data from the thousands who attend live matches, or the millions who regularly, or periodically, follow the team on television or the internet. Hansen et al succinctly address the compromises necessary in conducting audience research, stating that ‘it is impossible to survey literally every person, it is important to develop a way of selecting a representative sample of the public under investigation’ (1998, 230). While the focus groups offered useful insight into fan culture, it remains difficult to assess how accurately those insights can be generalised across the spectrum of fans and consumers. Conducting audience surveys of the chosen advertisements was an attempt to compensate for this. However, even this approach had its limitations as the audience was, as previously mentioned, drawn from convenience sampling, comprised of college students chosen for their feasibility given my resources, and therefore somewhat limited in terms of their demographics (chiefly white, Irish, middle-class and in the 18-22 age bracket), but as Hansen et al assert, compromises ‘do not necessarily devalue the worth of the research,’ but for the research to be of value, it must take into account these compromises adapt itself to them (1998, 230). Ultimately, the analysis chapters of this work will attest to its success in adapting to the necessary compromises of its methodology.

2:7. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed assessment of the methods employed in the exploration of the case study ad campaigns, in addition to exploring the rationale for choosing to focus on these

particular campaigns. Underpinning my approach to the various areas examined in the course of this research is an interpretivist assertion that ‘knowledge is constructed, not simply discovered’ (Stainton-Rogers 2006, 80) and that the goal of my research is therefore to probe the motivations behind and factors involved in this construction. This involves a commitment to remaining conscious of how subjectivity shapes the work. As Hansen et al point out ‘objectivity dies hard in journalism, but it dies even harder in the social sciences. There are still researchers who claim to be value free and objective’ despite the growing realisation of the subjective factors that influence the choice of research question and methodological techniques (1998, 11). In foregrounding awareness of the subjectivity of this research it functions as a more coherent work than it have been had it progressed under any misguided presumption of objectivity. Furthermore, through acknowledging my own self-shaped research parameters, I feel I am paving the way for future research into the area which can consciously adapt a different approach to my own. Geertz argues that the purpose of qualitative research is ultimately to enrich the sum of human discourse rather than produce a formally strict body of knowledge (1973), and this is a sentiment I echo in hoping that my research will further discussion rather than claiming to be the last word on the subject.

Ultimately the overall research strategy for this work is characterised by an interpretivist reflexivity and flexibility, by a commitment to ‘an active process of systematically developing insight into [my] work as a researcher to guide [my] future actions’ (Birks and Mills 2012, 52) and therefore a continuing awareness that to study media and social reality ‘requires various theories and approaches applied together’ (Hansen et al 1998, 29). This chapter began by noting the unusual nature of the case study this work focuses on, and it is this reflexive, flexible approach which facilitates not only the deft exploration of this complex case, but also the potential extrapolation of my findings to the wider world of digital cultural nationalism.

Chapter 3: ‘An Ode to Fans’

3:1. Introduction

This chapter will focus in detail on the ‘An Ode to Fans’ campaign, examining in its three stages of development: production, the text (the televised ad and the behind-the-scenes video issued as part of the campaign) in its produced form, and the reception of this text, before examining relevant developments subsequent to the campaign and ending with an exploration of the theoretical significance of ‘Ode’ (as it will hereto be referred) as it pertains to the concept of digital cultural nationalism. The following chapter will follow a similar trajectory. Both will incorporate the relevant data and methods outlined in Chapter 2. This structure facilitates comparison and contrast between the two campaigns, which will reach full fruition in Chapter 5 which will synthesise the findings of the preceding chapters under the afore-mentioned three stages, before interpreting and contextualising these synthesised findings through a detailed theoretical framework. In the inverse of how Chapter 1 was structured as to provide a pathway from the broad context of sport sponsorship and advertising to the specific example of Three’s campaigns relating to the Irish international rugby and football teams, the following two chapters focus on the particulars of each campaign, before broadening to set them within a wider context of contemporary Irish sports advertising. Chapter 5 then begins by focusing on the specifics of both campaigns, before expanding to construct a wider theoretical framework for contemporary commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus. In the case of this chapter, this broadening will consist of sections 3:5 and 3:6, with the former adding further context to the exploration of ‘Ode’ through offering a brief ethnographic examination of ‘#MakingHistory,’ the campaign Three commissioned as team sponsor in 2016. The latter section provides theoretical context by using the details of Ode’s development and reception as a platform to explore the socio-cultural significance of football advertising in modern Ireland. In the case of the former, while it might seem to transgress the practical limits of this project to examine (albeit briefly) events and sponsorship campaigns after ‘Ode,’ this approach sets that central text within a wider context which accounts for its influence within Three’s sponsorship strategy, in addition to related outside factors which have (and very likely will) also shape that strategy.

The preceding chapter described the decision to focus on ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ as emerging from the curious circumstance of a single sponsor (and advertising partner) developing advertising campaigns for the two most popular international sports teams within a single country within such a relatively short amount of time. However, this chapter allows some space to expand on the uniquely interesting qualities of ‘Ode’ as a case study of sports sponsorship and digital cultural nationalism. Notably, ‘Ode’ represents something of a turning point in Irish football advertising. Its focus on fans over players, and its tone of romantic, occasionally comedic, celebration is one which has not only been adapted by both Three and other brands in subsequent ad campaigns, but also is significant with regard to the wider perception of football fandom in post Celtic Tiger Ireland. Specifically, fandom of the national football team – as this chapter will go on to expound – has come to stand as narrative shorthand for selfless passion and carnivalesque revelry, a highly visual and communal display of national fervour which acts as a thematic bridge between traditional Irish cultural nationalism and the globalised reality of modern Ireland. This has made it an important totem in what Kieran Bonner (2011) describes as the ‘struggle with cosmopolitanism involv[ing] mediating between the meanings of the loss of the old in relation to the gains of the new’ (60).

After the financial crash and the sobering experience of austerity, the Celtic Tiger is viewed by the Irish public with a mixture of suspicion and envious longing – not only in economic terms but also socially and culturally. There is a simultaneous desire to return to, or hold onto, the elements of traditional Irish culture which seemed to be left behind in the wake of the Tiger, while also holding on to certain aspects of the modernity and globalism associated with that era (Moore 2011; Morash 2012). In representational terms, football fandom offers a compromise – a modern Ireland that has not lost touch with its cultural roots and sense of traditional community. As a case study, ‘Ode’ is therefore unique to its cultural and historical context, and thus is ripe for in-depth analysis. Examination of the campaign is divided chronologically according the three stages of its conception and dissemination, with attention paid throughout as to the exploration of sports sponsorship as a unique and significant form of digital cultural nationalism. Specifically, this chapter is divided into three main subsections: production, textual analysis and reception, with two subsequent sections which build upon the foundations established about ‘Ode’ in the preceding three. Section 3:5 examines developments in the public perception of Ireland football fans after the release of ‘Ode’ and how the campaign’s approach was built upon

for Three's 2016 sponsorship campaign, while the concluding section demonstrates how the campaign functions as an example of digital cultural nationalism, drawing from interviews and other data to bolster the thoroughness of this exploration. This structure will help extrapolate the thread of digital cultural nationalism that illustrates the wider significance of the campaign, while not losing sight of the immediate, practical concerns which shaped it.

3:2. Production

'Ode' was commissioned in 2013 and aired on television in March of that year to coincide with important World Cup qualifying matches pitting Ireland against Sweden and Austria. It was produced as part of Three's wider '#SupportWorks' marketing campaign¹⁸ (the earlier ads produced to that campaign will be discussed below in the next sub-section). It was shown on six TV channels, RTE 1, RTE 2, TV3, 3e, Sky and E4, and supplemented with social media material circulated by Three Ireland's official accounts. Three have been the official primary sponsor of the Republic of Ireland football team since 2010, but 'Ode' marks the first campaign in which they employed the services of advertising agency, Boys and Girls (who, at the time of writing, remain their creative partner).

3:2.1. Three-FAI Sponsorship Campaigns Prior to 'Ode'

Notably, Three's most recent prior campaigns produced as part of '#SupportWorks,' (produced and aired prior to the team's participation in the 2012 European Championship) had featured Ireland players and coaching staff alongside fans and actors. This campaign featured two televised ads in which crowds of fans alongside a handful of players and then team manager Giovanni Trapattoni, encourage the ads' protagonists in mundane but important tasks. 'Greens' sees them cheer on Dave, a young boy, as he eats unappealing but nutritious vegetables at dinner,

¹⁸Although 'Ode' was promoted under the '#SupportWorks' banner, it is very much a distinct campaign than the earlier ads produced in 2012. It features its own distinct supplementary texts (press releases, behind the scenes video, etc.) and was produced by a different ad agency than the 2012 texts. Furthermore, as is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, it emerged from a very different context with regard to the public perception of the Ireland team and was therefore informed by this post-Euro 2012 context.

while ‘First Dinner Date’ sees them offer advice to Pat, an office worker, in his attempts to ask his attractive colleague Stephanie out for a date. The tone is thoroughly parodic with the exaggerated groans and cheers of the crowd of fans and players, mimicking the actions of supporters at a match. They are deliberately dissonantly ludicrous when presented as a sort of Greek chorus to the everyday struggles of Dave and Pat. The fans in the ads function as a symbol - one that is employed with self-deprecating irony – and serve more as background to the players, staff and protagonists, creating a sense of unity between fans, team and wider public, in a similar manner to how Wright (2003) describes Indian cricket sponsors creating a sense of collective identity between players and fans through depiction of shared patriotic symbols.

One of the notable features of these ads is the decision to provide names for their characters, a choice which is particularly notable given the brevity of both ads. Naming these characters gives the audience an impression of familiarity with them. This sense of familiarity is further fostered by how the players and coaching staff featured in the ads are referred to by nicknames when Three shared the ad across their social media accounts. ‘See how the Ireland supporters, Shay, Doyler, Johnno, Stephen Ward, Trap and Manuela encourage Pat to ask Stephanie out on a date,’ the caption for ‘First Dinner Date’ on Three’s official YouTube channel reads. This appears to run contrary to points made by an advertising professional interviewed for this project, who notes the prevalence in Irish fans referring to football players by their surnames while referring to rugby players in more familiar terms. This, he argues, emerges from a feeling of distance between fans and the football team: ‘The football team plays in England – Robbie Keane plays in LA – they do live a very protected life, whereas with the rugby team, you go the Ranelagh and you see half the lads from the Leinster team going for lunch. They live in our neighbourhoods’ (27 April 2016). A combination of geographical distance and income disparity makes fostering familiarity between players and fans difficult. However, it should be noted that this interview was conducted in 2016, 4 years after Ireland’s disastrous Euro 2012 campaign. It could be argued that the players failure to live up to fan expectation during this tournament detracted from the possibility of fostering the same degree of para-social kinship the fans apparently feel with the (relatively) successful rugby team. As ever, when analysing sports advertising (or the wider interaction between sports and media in general) it is important not to lose sight of the role results and performances have in shaping the underlying socio-cultural nuances of the text.

Fig. 3: Televised Ads of Three Ireland FAI Sponsorship Campaigns

Year	Ad	Advertising Agency
May 2012	‘Greens’ & ‘First Dinner Date’	McCann Erikson
March 2013	‘Ode’	Boys and Girls
April 2016	‘#MakeHistory	Boys and Girls

3:2.2. Production of ‘Ode’

In contrast to these previous ads, ‘Ode’ was focused firmly on the Irish fans and takes a more straightforwardly laudatory tone – a fact which Three were keen to emphasise. They described their reasoning behind drawing the fans depicted in the campaign from an actual Ireland supporters’ group in both the official press release and the behind-the-scenes video (issued via the Three Ireland YouTube account) detailing the making of the main televised ad anchoring the campaign. According to Three CCO, Elaine Carey:

We recruited You Boys in Green because they are the fans that travel all over the world to support their team. Their reactions were amazing on the day. They didn’t need to act. They just showed what they do every time they go to a match, every time they watch a match, every time they travel away to a match. Their emotion is what the true Irish fan is about and Three wanted to demonstrate that. Our ad captures the raw emotion that each and every Irish fan displays when showing support for their country (Three Press Release, March 12 2013).

One of the more obvious reasons for this shift in focus was the on-field fortunes of the team. ‘Greens’ and ‘First Dinner Date’ had aired following Ireland’s qualification for a major tournament for the first time in a decade. However, the team performed poorly at Euro 2012, losing all three of their matches in comprehensive fashion and accruing the worst record of any of the 16 teams participating in the tournament. One of the few consolations to emerge from the dismal Irish experience of the tournament was the plaudits attracted by the Irish fans after they continued to sing (most famously, ‘The Fields of Athenry’) and cheer for their team in the face of a 4-0 hammering from eventual champions, Spain. Their steadfast support was officially

recognized by tournament organising body, UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) who presented the fans with a special award to “recognise their great behaviour and contribution to UEFA EURO 2012” (RTE, June 30 2012). Three were understandably keen to leverage the only positive experience Ireland had had at the tournament. In both press release and behind-the-scenes video, Three creative director, Rory Hamilton cites the fans’ performance in the defeat to Spain as an inspiration for ‘Ode.’ He describes it as “a spine tingling moment in world football” and that it “encapsulated what support is about. It isn’t about winning or losing, it runs much deeper than that. Support is a positive act, regardless of the circumstances” (Three Press Release, March 12 2013).

Another notable feature of the campaign was its production values – and Three’s desire to champion them. The press release notes that the ad cost close to €1 million to make, while also detailing the big brand experience of director Zak Emerson (who had previously worked on ads for Adidas and Heineken) and describing the cutting edge filming equipment used. In her study of Scottish ads, Stephanie O’Donohoe notes that viewers often condemned ads produced within the country as “cheap”, “tacky”, “horrible” or “nasty” (1999, 685). The perceived low budget and shoddy production of these ads aroused embarrassment in O’Donohoe’s Scottish viewers who notably expressed a desire that the ads would not air internationally and negatively colour outsiders’ view of the country. It could be argued that Irish viewers hold similar anxieties over their native advertising. Kelly et al (2008) describe Irish advertising as suffering ‘from a lack of confidence.’ The 2015 IAPI (Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland) industry census supports assertions from O’Boyle (2011) that Irish agencies frequently labour under directives from internationally based clients who have little regard to the nuances of the Irish market. They therefore have to struggle to produce quality advertising with a distinctly Irish sensibility (rather than, as an IAPI official described, ‘the Irish flavour’ of an ad merely consisting of a redubbed voiceover [July 10 2015]). Three assuages these anxieties and tacitly elevates their campaign above the expectations of conventional Irish advertisements. The audience may be unaware of the industry conditions outlined by O’Boyle and the IAPI census, but they would likely have some awareness of the prevalence of redubbed international imports and therefore be impressed, or at least curious, at Three’s financial commitment to a campaign solely intended for the Irish market. It is notable that in an audience survey administered for this project, several respondents

highlighted the impressive production values as a particularly positive aspect of the ad – a point that is further elaborated on in section 3:4.

Overall, the promotional material emphasised Three's desire to celebrate the Irish fans in the wake of their show of unwavering support during the disappointment of Euro 2012. A Three sponsorship executive interviewed for this project, however, maintained that their campaigns 'usually try to focus on the supporters as much as the team' and asserted that the international reputation of the Irish fans was a continual boon for sponsors understandably wary of basing their strategy on the far from certain success of the team (26 February 2016). Nonetheless, the absence of the team from 'Ode' (and to a lesser extent, its successor, '#MakeHistory') is in marked contrast to the approach employed in the earlier '#SupportWorks' campaigns. The notion of the fans being one of the foremost positive associations with Irish football, and therefore a valuable part of any communication strategy on the sport in the country was echoed by officials in the FAI and Boys and Girls. An advertising official who worked on the campaigns asserted that Ireland have "always got that reputation of being great fans", while officials in the FAI asserted that the past actions of the Irish fans had attracted "huge, huge glory" that advertisers were eager to leverage (27 April 2016). The promotion of the fans extended to the ad's narrator, Emmet Kirwan. Kirwan is an actor of relative local renown – at the time of filming, he was most famous for his lead role in RTE's 2009 sitcom *Sarah and Steve* and the 2001 film, *Inside I'm Dancing*. However, it is noted in the press release that Kirwan "was specially chosen not just because he's a great actor but more importantly because he's a huge football fan. Three wanted that genuine voice to cut through and carry real emotion representing every Irish fan."

Notably, however, the FAI, though pleased with how the fans had been used in the 'Ode' campaign, asserted their belief that the current Irish team had built a strong identity over the Euro 2016 qualifying matches and there would be "a clamour to use the players" in upcoming sponsorship campaigns (8 December 2015). This turned out not to be the case with Three and Boys and Girls. The successor to 'Ode' ('#MakeHistory') began airing in April in anticipation of Ireland's participation in Euro 2016 that summer and followed on from its predecessor in largely focussing on the fans (though two of the players and team manager, Martin O'Neill are briefly depicted). An official from Boys and Girls agreed with the FAI that the team was progressing, but maintained that "it'd be foolish for us to not keep building on the support that we have,

because it's something we're absolutely famous for" (27 April 2016). A difference in the priorities of the FAI and their commercial partners is evident with regard to the production of sponsorship campaigns. Boys and Girls opt not to focus on the players largely due to the possibility of the team underperforming and attracting fan backlash, but throughout the interview, there was also an undercurrent of awareness of the possibility of being construed as a commercial interloper by fans. A strategist who worked on both 'Ode' and '#MakeHistory' claimed that while sponsors should be seen to "the one to kind of rally people, to be seen to be rallying people around [the team]", they must walk a fine line between "between encouraging people to support and showing them how to support" (27 April 2016).

As sponsor, Three, through their campaigns devised by Boys and Girls, must stray carefully around fans. Ironically, this is less of a priority for the FAI, who are resigned to the criticism they will inevitably attract from dedicated fans who view the team and the association as entirely "separate identities." Essentially, Three must present themselves as an official fan of the team, rather than a commercial partner of the FAI. Scherer and Jackson (2007) discuss a case in which a team (in this case, the New Zealand rugby union national side) suffering an unexpected failure was linked back to the sponsor by a disappointed public who criticised Adidas for their 'extensive commodification' of the team (270). They highlight the fine line sponsors must tread in attempting to not be perceived as claiming 'ownership' of the team, but rather to be viewed as enhancing the affinity between fans and team (273-274). This chimes with the arguments of Madrigal (2000) whose study of sports sponsorship posited that sponsors should earn fan gratitude with actions that 'foster a sense of community' between team and fans rather than those which seem aimed at short term profit (21).

In the production of 'Ode' this anxiety to be perceived as a genuine supporter rather than commercial interloper is evident in the repeated emphasis placed on the campaign's use of actual supporters rather than professional actors. The fans featured in the ad were drawn from Ireland supporters' group, 'You Boys in Green,' a fact lauded in the press release and behind-the-scenes video. Hamilton, Three's creative director, asserts that the ad 'is meant as a quiet celebration of Irish football fans, their trials and tribulations – the great moments and the bad' (Three Press Release, March 12 2013). This sentiment was echoed in an interview with a Boys and Girls strategist who agreed that the ad was to 'highlight the real, true supporters who'll be there

through thick and thin,’ and that it was they, not the brand, who were the true ‘role models’ of Irish football (27 April 2016). This somewhat self-contradictory eagerness to create a divide between the authenticity of the real supporters and the stage managed profit driven process of branding is most clearly illustrated in a moment in the behind-the-scenes video in which Elaine Carey, lauding the supporters chosen for the ad, claims “they didn’t need to act,” as footage of the fans being directed to cheer by the ad’s crew is shown.

Interestingly the incentive to depict the team and fans in a way which appeals to abstract desires for a shared sense of Irishness arises from the necessity of commercial arrangements. Discussing Three’s desire to ‘help unify the country in a certain way,’ a sponsorship executive described how the exclusivity of tournament sponsorship deals prevent them from explicitly referring to the competition Ireland will be competing in. Instead, ‘we’ll speak about Ireland and we’ll speak about football’ and rely upon the audience’s own associations to fill in the blanks, with the ultimate aim of ‘build[ing] upon all the passion and get[ting] everyone on board [...] capitalis[ing] on the excitement that’s going to be in Ireland around that time’ (26 February 2016). This admission of the loopholes sponsors seek to exploit in order to capitalise on the hype for such events can be further elaborated through Whannel’s concept of ‘vortextuality’ (2009) and Gray’s writings on ‘paratexts’ (2010). These theoretical tools will be employed in deeper exploration of both ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ in Chapter 5, but here it is worth noting the more complex undercurrents at play in Three and Boys and Girls’ efforts to play upon the media attention afforded to major sporting events.

While the parties most heavily and directly involved in the production of the campaign were sponsor brand, Three and their advertising partners, Boys and Girls, the role of the FAI also warrants investigation. The substance of the content of the campaign may be determined by sponsors and advertisers, but they nonetheless exercise a vaguely defined but evidently significant influence. FAI officials interviewed for this project disavow the term ‘veto’ with regard to their influence over sponsorship campaigns, but maintain that ‘If there was something we weren’t absolutely happy with, we would work with them [sponsors and advertisers] to change it’ (8 December 2015). These officials were keen to stress that their feelings on these matters were chiefly dictated by pragmatism: ‘From our point of view, it would be more: “is it doable? Logistically, is it possible?”’ Unlike the case of the IRFU (Irish Rugby Football Union)

and Irish rugby players (a contrast noted by one of the officials interviewed), Irish international footballers are not contracted directly to the FAI and are therefore not obliged to take part in any of the organisation's sponsorship campaigns. Their participation is something of a goodwill gesture which is encouraged by the organisation's attempts to ensure that sponsors do not place players or coaching staff in situations 'in a position where they would be embarrassed' (8 December 2015).

Though these FAI officials expressed satisfaction with their working relationship with Three and the campaigns that had been produced over the course of this relationship, they alluded to past occasions on which they had to rebuff unnamed sponsors or advertisers who proposed potentially embarrassing ad ideas. Ultimately however, the FAI seemed open minded to a wide variety of commercial depictions of the team and sport, as they viewed Irish football's appeal as emerging from ubiquitous popularity which facilitates a diversity of commercial approaches and objectives. There are notable differences in the goals and priorities of the FAI and their commercial partners when it comes to ad campaigns, but the FAI feel confident that these differences can be easily accommodated within the working relationship. Nonetheless, they are worth noting: whereas the FAI, though making a clear distinction between the identity of the team and the identity of the organisation, view the two as linked – certainly more linked than the identities of the fans and the organisation – and were understandably enthusiastic about the potentially heightened commercial profile of the players following the team's qualification for Euro 2016 (8 December 2015). As mentioned above, the players' participation in such ads on behalf of the FAI is a goodwill gesture rather than formal obligation. However, this goodwill is easier to cultivate and maintain between FAI and players, than it is between the association and the fans. The FAI officials interviewed for this project drolly noted the inevitability of fan discontent, claiming that if the organisation "cured cancer" there would still be some fans who would find fault with it. Despite this apparent inevitability, the FAI are not wholly unconcerned by potential fan discontent and take it into account when considering their communication and commercial strategies (8 December 2015).

Overall, the FAI's role in the production of 'Ode' can be viewed as driven largely by practical concerns. The officials interviewed claimed that no research had been conducted into the identity of the team or association. It was something they expected to emerge organically from the team's

performances and their coaching staff and players' interactions with the media. They are therefore largely receptive to the ideas advanced by sponsors and advertisers, so long as they did not risk irking any players or coaching staff involved, or discredit the association. However, their allusions to rejecting particularly strange or potentially problematic ideas serve to underline the significant – if somewhat indirect – role they play in shaping the production of sponsorship campaigns such as 'Ode.'

3:3. Textual Analysis

This section of this chapter focuses on conducting an analysis of the 'Ode' campaign texts, primarily the main televised ad, but also not neglecting supplementary materials. This analysis draws from semiotics while setting the imagery of the ad in the Irish cultural context as expounded in 1:4. It is necessary, therefore, to begin with a thorough examination of the ad, before progressing to identifying the discourses and connotations within it.

3:3.1. *Analysis of Televised Ad*

The opening shot of the ad is of a chubby man in early middle-age drinking a cup of tea in his living room. He looks directly at the camera, his face is painted in the Irish colours and he is clad in the team's jersey. This is followed by a rapid travel montage; a quick shot of the view from an airplane window, followed by rapid shots of in-flight meals, a metropolis at night – shot at double speed, and a jersey-clad fan sprawled asleep across airport chairs with a child sleeping on bags piled beneath the chairs. Stock footage of penguins in an arctic blizzard precedes a shot of Irish fans queueing up outside a stadium, shivering in the snow, which is in turn followed by a shot of a female Irish supporter shouting for the team despite the snowy conditions. This 'section' of the ad, depicting the adverse weather conditions supporters endure, closes with a shot of an Umbro branded football encased in ice which quickly explodes.

The camera then skirts over a comic depicting an Irish football match before proceeding to a brief slow-motion shot of the football – previously encased in ice – now on fire and soaring across the screen, which is followed by a quick shot of a concrete wall cracking as if something

has smashed into it. The next shot is of disappointed fans in a darkened living room, followed by rain smattering on a choppy sea. This is followed by a shot of a Lego-type toy figure of former Ireland goalkeeper Packie Bonner saving an oversized toy football, and then by an image of ex-Ireland player Ronnie Whelan celebrating a goal. This image is pointedly grainy and low resolution, as if seen on an old television. The next shot is of five Ireland fans chatting amiably around a pub table. They are briefly obscured by passer-by and when they are visible once more, their heads have been overlaid with humorously oversized replicas of that of then-Ireland manager Giovanni Trapattoni. This is followed by a shot of a café table with imaginary painted arrows and circles demonstrating that football tactics are being sketched out with kitchen utensils and condiment containers.

An Ireland jersey being ironed is followed by a slow-motion shot of a fan carrying a flare leading others up a street, and then by a group of fans watching from their house, rising from their chairs in tremulous anticipation. The initial focus of this scene is a teenager, but a second shot focuses on children in the same room, giving the impression of an extended family gathered together to watch the match. The closing sequence of the ad is a rapid montage of close-up shots of Ireland fans facing the camera. They range in age and gender (though are uniformly white) and the final fan featured, a pale, dark-haired, slightly gawky looking young man, is lingered on by the camera for a few moments before the ad closes with the Three logo over the words “three.ie” which then flip to “#SupportWorks.”

Throughout, the ad is narrated by actor and football fan, Emmet Kirwan, who recites a poem lauding the Irish fans in a distinctly working class Dublin accent:

For those who paint their faces, and follow the team to far flung places. Who stand for hours huddled in the cold, for a rare glimpse of Celtic gold. Who chew their nails, brought close to tears, and argue the greatest over beers. Who might disagree with both team and formation, never turn their back upon their nation. For every man and woman, boy and girl, that they call the best fans in the world. That’s support as it should be.

The imagery of the ad often serves as a direct visual metaphor supporting the narration. Kirwan’s remark about fans “brought close to tears” is underscored with the shot of rain on the sea, while his mention of “hours huddled in the cold” is set against the shots of penguins in the arctic and fans at a snowy away match. As has been noted above, Kirwan’s background as a genuine and

committed Ireland supporter was championed just as much as his acting fame and prowess in supplementary materials to the campaign.

In light of the team's recent lack of success and the plaudits earned by the fans for their support in spite of that, perhaps the most notable feature of the ad is how it strives to depict Irish fandom as a thoroughly unglamorous activity. The ordinariness of the fans is consistently emphasised throughout the ad in a variety of ways. The first fan depicted in the ad is markedly ordinary; chubby with a conventional hairstyle, engaged in the most commonplace of Irish pastimes (drinking tea) against the muted colours of a dull sitting room. His most visually striking feature is his Irish tricolour face paint and team jersey. Citing Connel, Smith (2005) argues that 'not many men can actually meet the normative standards' of masculinity traditionally championed by ads and other aspirational media. It is therefore an effective advertising strategy, he asserts, to celebrate mundanity and so appear more relatable and more knowing to viewers presumably confronted with unrealistically idealised figures and lifestyles in other ads. Similarly, advertising professional Doug Cameron (2004) argues that the 1990s and 2000s saw a shift from the 'hypercompetitive mainstream ideology' which championed visions of idealised success to something more grounded in the contemporary economic and social reality. Parallels can be drawn with post-Tiger Ireland, as it adjusted from idealising opulent financial success to the chastened emphasis on traditional and communal values.

Reading the ad in light of lingering guilt over Celtic Tiger overindulgence, its depiction of the lengths which fans go to follow the team to away matches is significant. The idea of following the Irish team around the continent (or indeed, the world, in some cases) being a glamorous hobby is entertained briefly with the shot of the bustling night-time metropolis, but this is undercut by the ad's editing. The images preceding it are a rapid montage of airline meals, and it is immediately followed by a shot of (what is presumably) a father and son sleeping in an airport. These images undercut the perceived glamour of foreign 'away days' with pointed assertions of the unappealing reality of such long distance travel – with the image of sleeping at the airport subtly hinting at a night flight or awkwardly timed transfer presumably purchased cheaper than a more conveniently timed flight. Later depictions of the adverse weather conditions fans endure to support the team contributes to the idea of 'away days' as a duty rather than a holiday.

The task of interpreting the ad within its cultural context is further facilitated by viewing it through the lens of John Fanning's 'cultural contradictions.' Though by no means exhaustive, Fanning's contradictions provide a useful perspective with which to regard Irish ad campaigns, bridging the gap between theoretical analysis and industry experience. Fanning describes one of these contradictions as an opposition between what he describes as 'affluence' and 'affluenza.' He describes this as a wish to indulge in the benefits wealth brings, while feeling anxious over potentially over-indulging. In 'Ode' this opposition is negotiated implicitly with fans being depicted as having enough money for international air travel in their efforts to support the team at away matches, while depicting this activity as a pilgrimage to be endured rather than a holiday to be hedonistically enjoyed. This is compounded in the behind the scenes video which features, Chloe – one of the fans interviewed – recalling that she was reduced to 'eating cheese on toast for a month to pay for her flights [to Euro 2012].'

Another of these cultural contradictions is defined as 'Globalisation vs Dinnseanchas' (an Irish word referring to cultural roots or heritage). In 'Ode' this contradiction is resolved through the celebration of a unique Irish football fandom within the global context of international football. The ad depicts an Irishness which can traverse the globe without risking losing its sense of loyalty to its roots. A third contradiction centres on the notions of conformity and creativity – the wish to express oneself and stand out, while feeling anxious not to risk being ostracised for going beyond community values or opinions. 'Ode' can be viewed as implicitly addressing this issue through its depiction of Irish football fandom as a collective identity which acknowledges and even encourages individual differences within it. This is most clear in the shots which depict a group of fans as 'armchair managers' arguing about football tactics, but could be argued to be continually present throughout in the manner in which a single collective identity unified by shared goal (supporting the team) and symbols (replica jerseys and the colour green in general) encompasses a wide range of individuals, varying in age, gender, background and even the manner of their support (watching at home, in a pub or in the stadium). This is further augmented by the behind the scenes video which fleshes out the personalities and experiences of some of the fans involved in the filming of the ad.

Another of these contradictions is between freedom and constraint; a dizzy feeling brought on from the societal transition from conservatism to relative liberalism, simultaneously conscious of

the opportunities and potential pitfalls this transition has created. In ‘Ode’ this is negotiated through its appeals to nostalgia. The shots of the ‘Roy of the Rovers’-style comic strip about Irish football, the lego-style figure of Packie Bonner saving a toy ball and the pointedly grainy television depicting Ronnie Whelan playing for Ireland in the 1980s or 90s are the most clearly nostalgic images of the ad, and Three made no secret of their intentions in this regard, with the press release noting that such techniques were employed to add “a touch of nostalgia” (Three Press Release, March 12 2013). Alongside these nostalgic visual flourishes sit alongside nods to a liberal modernity, such as the numerous shots of female fans, which act as implicit nods to the shift in Irish cultural mores over recent decades. As recently as the 1970s, many pubs forbid women from entering or ordering pints, thus denying them from participating in an important social ritual for watching football.

Analysing the ad through the lens of Fanning’s cultural contradictions, it becomes evident how attuned to the context of contemporary Ireland it is. This not only supports O’Boyle’s (2011) assertion concerning Irish advertisers’ view of the importance of the sense of ‘cultural national belonging’ that informs their work (50), but also chimes with the assertion of an IAPI professional interviewed who argues that a particular priority for Irish agencies is affirming the uniqueness of the Irish market (10 July 2015) to highlight their advantages over internationally based alternatives. As was noted in section 3:2, Irish advertisers’ desire to express themselves creatively is hindered by a relatively small market size which often sees international clients reluctant to spend on Irish-based campaigns. ‘Ode’ represents something of an exception to these trends, not merely in financial terms, but also in the pointed Irishness of its content. While broad, easily recognisable symbols of Irishness (such as green jerseys and tricolour face paint) are present throughout ‘Ode,’ it also displays a more nuanced knowledge of contemporary Irish culture and identity. By relying on such knowledge as a key part of its commercial appeal, ‘Ode’ acts as an implicit rebuke to international clients who feel they can effectively tap into the Irish market by limiting the local flavour of their ads to a redubbed voiceover.

3:3.2. Analysis of Supplementary Video Produced for Campaign

A close analysis of the supplementary ‘making of’ video produced for ‘Ode’ further underlines the significance of the perception of Irish culture and identity present in the main televised ad. Entitled ‘Behind the Scenes with the best fans in the world #SupportWorks’ (hereafter referred to as ‘Behind the Scenes’) and published via the official Three Ireland YouTube account on March 19th 2013 (one week after ‘Ode’ was published to YouTube), the video attracted notably fewer viewers than its parent text (a mere 1,186 views to ‘Ode’s’ 43,545¹⁹). However, despite this lack of viewership, it nonetheless warrants examination as the very act of filming and editing it attests to the importance Three (and Boys and Girls) placed in documenting the care and expense they had put into ‘Ode,’ as well as their desire to reiterate certain elements of the campaign which they deemed to be key to its appeal.

The video begins to the sounds of the same piano based theme that is played in the main ad. Footage of the ad being filmed (both the shots of fans and some of the more FX-based shots, such as the flaming football) is depicted before cutting to an interview with Three creative director, Rory Hamilton who outlines the sponsor’s vision for the ad (describing, as has been outlined in section 3:2, the inspiration derived from the dedication of the ‘real Irish football fans’). The next shot depicts a book outlining the main concepts for the ad, as another voice begins to explain how the script was written. The ad cuts from the book to reveal that the voice is that of Three chief commercial officer, Elaine Carey. Carey describes how supporters group, ‘You Boys in Green,’ were recruited as extras for the ad because of their authentic dedication to, and experience of, supporting Ireland. As noted in Section 3:2, there is a strange irony at play as Carey describes how the fans ‘didn’t need to act’ over footage of the fans reproducing their support in the context of a scripted ad. Clearly Carey is making a distinction between acting as a sort of emotional simulacra (imitating or inventing feelings the actor has no genuine experience of) and acting as a process which draws upon genuine experiences to depict fictional ones, deeming the latter to be distinguished from the former through its relation to authentic experience and therefore not truly acting. Carey’s assertion only makes sense if the audience shares this specific definition of acting, but it was clearly deemed pertinent enough to the ad’s appeal to be shown in ‘Behind the Scenes’ and repeated in the official press release for ‘Ode.’

¹⁹ Correct as of time of writing: November 1st 2017.

The construction of authenticity in 'Behind the Scenes' is further underlined by the subsequent portion of the video which interviews with individual fans are intercut with footage of them socialising and relaxing between takes on the set of 'Ode.' The dedication of the fans is emphasised as they recount the amount of international journeys they have undertaken to support Ireland. Notably, the audience learns the name of each fan interviewed through captions overlaid on the screen. This not only further underlines the authenticity of their experiences as Ireland supporters, but also gives the audience a sense of familiarity with figures who were depicted as a largely anonymous symbolic group in 'Ode.' 'Behind the Scenes' parent text actually seems to attempt a similar effect in the rapid montage of close-ups in its closing moments, highlighting the individuals united by their collective identity as Ireland supporters. Notable throughout the fan interviews are the continual testaments to how far they go to 'follow the team with all your heart,' as Hamilton puts it. One fan jokes about 'eating cheese on toast for a month' to afford flights from Australia to Euro 2012, while another recounts how he shed a tear of emotion at the crowd's rendition of 'The Fields of Athenry' during the infamous thrashing from Spain. 'Behind the Scenes' closes with Darren, a young man, who recounts how his girlfriend continually questions his support because the team are "rubbish", but feels he has to stick with the team through thick and thin because they represent his country. The video demonstrates the eagerness of Three to emphasise the authenticity of the vision of Irish football fandom they are presenting. Colin Graham (1999) posits that authenticity is a particularly potent cultural symbol in the Irish market: 'Authenticity's ability to co-exist with the market has not only enabled it to survive after decolonization but has allowed it to become, in some circumstances, as Griffiths says, a 'mythologised and fetishised sign'' (19). By emphasising the authenticity of the fans, Three not only tap into a very marketable element of Irish football culture, but also implicitly distance themselves from any accusations of commercialising the sacred relationship between team and fans. Sport sponsorship may present unique opportunities to sponsor brands, but it also presents unique challenges, such as the continual risk of arousing the discontent of an organised and passionate fandom over perceived illegitimate intrusions into the identity of a beloved team or event (Scherer and Jackson, 2007; Jensen et al, 2008; while elsewhere, Hutchins [2016] discusses fan discontent with mediatisation of sport from a more general perspective).

3:4. Reception

The reception analysis carried out on ‘Ode’ consisted of gathering data from a variety of sources in order to explore the nuances of the ad’s effects. A focus group interview with members of an Ireland supporters’ club was conducted in order to gain an understanding of how dedicated Ireland fans felt about the advertising of the team they had such a strong sense of identity with, in addition to their feelings on the commercial depictions of Irish supporters. Furthermore, this interview was conducted to gain an idea of how they conceived of their identity as supporters and of the socio-cultural significances of football in Ireland beyond its function as a form of athletic entertainment.

However, in sponsoring the Irish football team, Three is not merely trying to tap into their base of dedicated supporters, but also appeal to the wider potential audience who follow the team when their more high profile matches become ‘vortextual events’ (Whannel 2009). To accomplish this, they aim to play upon the wider cultural associations between the team (and its supporters) and Irish identity itself. The audience survey (detailed in 2:5) provided a lens through which to assess Three’s success in achieving this, as the survey’s respondents were removed by some years from the initial airing of the ad and included many people who were not football fans (and even a small number who were not Irish). Their reactions to the ad therefore proved an interesting litmus test for the wider awareness and wider appeal of the tropes associated with Irish football and Irishness more broadly. One obvious but notable conclusion that was immediately drawn from an analysis of this survey was the clear correlation between respondents who identified as football fans and respondents who reacted positively to ‘Ode.’ The survey contained a yes or no question inquiring whether respondents’ were sport fans and a further multiple-choice sub-question pertaining to which sport(s) they followed. Questions pertaining to their reaction to the ads were open ended, allowing respondents to answer the question of whether they liked the commercial with a simple yes or no, or elaborate as to their feelings on them. While those who reacted positively were not solely comprised of football fans, almost all football fans reacted positively. This indicates that Three were successful in leveraging the popularity of the sport, and the team, to bolster their brand image. As is outlined above, Three are evidently not limiting their appeal to dedicated football fans through the production of ‘Ode,’

but its wider success is to a large degree dependent on the positive reaction of self-identified Irish football fans and supporters of the Irish team.

Notably in elaborating on their reasons for liking the ad, and in a further question concerning how the ad depicted Irish identity, many respondents cited the diversity of the fans depicted and the sense of community the ad constructed as notable positive points, with only one of the 76 respondents not perceiving a strong sense of Irishness in the ad. The diversity (often unelaborated on) presumably refers to the fact that ‘Ode’ depicts both male and female fans from a wide range of ages and appearances (body shape, hairstyles, the settings they occupy, etc.). These opinions may be influenced to some degree by an implicit contrast with ‘All it Takes’ (screened alongside ‘Ode’ during the survey process) which features three, young, fit, male rugby players as its sole protagonists. This positive reaction to perceived diversity is in notable contrast to the comments section of ‘Ode’ on Three’s official YouTube channel which featured a heated argument after one user (who was otherwise positive about the ad) lamented the lack of ethnic diversity in its depiction of Irish fans. However, this interpretation of the ad’s diversity (or lack thereof) did not go entirely unnoticed by the survey respondents with some, with one respondent (female, 20, white Irish) asserting that the ad portrays Ireland as ‘a predominantly white middleclass patriotic nation.’ It is worth noting that the few who perceived a lack of diversity in the fans depicted in ‘Ode’ were evidently unaware or unmoved by Three’s much vaunted recruitment of “true fans.” This indicates that while sport sponsorship may have considerable potential to tap into audiences beyond fans of the sport or team in question, it carries the complication of devising an ad campaign which will be able to appeal to dedicated fans without alienating non-fan viewers. Similar confusion was aroused in non-rugby fan respondents over the accent of Irish head coach Joe Schmidt, the narrator of ‘All it Takes’ (which will be covered in more detail in the following chapter). Delia and Cole (2015) discuss the potential for a sponsors’ presence to go largely unnoticed by dedicated sports fans if the sponsor does not develop a way of articulating the connection between its brand and the sponsored event or team. Here, there is a converse effect in action, whereby sports fans are more engaged by ads which reference (visually and aurally) their knowledge and culture, while non-fans are left nonplussed, or even confused, by these references.

In an attempt to gain a wider view of the socio-cultural significance of Irish football (and specifically, Irish football supporters), a second survey was devised, focussing on reaction to videos of Irish fans at Euro 2016. These were three viral fan footage videos consisting of Irish fans engaged in activities of good-natured revelry at the tournament in France (singing lullabies to a baby on a train, serenading an attractive French woman, cleaning up after partying on the streets), while the fourth was a news bulletin from Al-Jazeera affiliate AJ+ consisting of a laudatory montage of the Irish fans antics at the tournament. As in the previous survey, there were questions pertaining to the age, national background, class and interest in sports of the respondents in order to provide context for their responses.

Reception data was also gathered through an analysis of social media feedback to ‘Ode.’ Specifically, analysis was conducted of comments on the video posted on Three Ireland’s official YouTube and Facebook accounts. These were selected not merely for the practical convenience of being digital locations which gathered a wide variety of comments directly relating to the video together (as opposed to looking for diffuse reaction across the internet) but also because they represent the clearest demonstration of social media allowing the audience to ‘talk back’ to advertisers and potentially utilise their autonomy as consumers and fans. Sinclair (2015) argues that for all the opportunities social media provides brands with, it also poses them with new challenges, as it allows consumers the opportunity to publically parody, ignore or undercut their official narratives. This chimes with Jackson’s (2010) assertions that ‘The advent of social media has enabled consumers to talk among themselves, shutting out the brand in the process.’ Indeed, despite the clear commercial benefits of connecting a brand to a vortexual sporting event, some researchers have questioned the effectiveness of such sponsorship arrangements, speculating as to whether audiences focus on the sport while largely ignoring the sponsor brand (Delia and Cole 2015). The IAPI official interviewed for this thesis downplayed the risk of interest in the sport overwhelming any attention paid to the sponsor brand, and discerning whether this is the case with Three’s sponsorship of the Ireland football team would be an undertaking beyond the scope of this project. Nonetheless, it is a factor that was worthy of consideration during analysis of social media feedback in the wider context of how people perceived Irish football, the brand and the latter’s use of the former in ‘Ode.’

Before going into these responses in detail, however, it is first necessary to address the commercial impact of ‘Ode.’ According to ADFX case study by Boys and Girls, Three’s Bill Pay SIM Card sales rose by 214% over the course of 2013, not least because of the success of this campaign. The study claimed that ‘Ode’ had provided Three with a strong sense of identity which had sorely been lacking:

Up to 2012, Three’s growth had been built on a similar strategy to the competition; highly tactical campaigns that chipped away at the other players. While successful in maintaining modest growth in market share, it failed to build a brand as it sacrificed its long-term brand building approach in favour of short-term gains. The cost? By the end of 2012 Three was lost, with no clear ‘place’ in the market - with little to stand for beyond value and little for the consumer to recognize it by.

The report claims that association with Irish football helped Three convey a stronger sense of identity to consumers which, in turn paid dividends via their increased sales. Of course, it goes without saying that it is very much in Boys and Girls’ interest to emphasise the importance of the ‘Ode’ campaign to Three’s financial wellbeing. However, the report portrays the contribution of the advertising agency as being a small but vital contribution which helped Three realise its potential rather than framing it as a miraculous intervention which reversed the fortunes of a stagnant client. It asserts that despite “great products, the hard work and continual investment in the network the brand still suffered [...] what it was crying out for was a great brand story to bring it all together.” It is therefore important to view the effects of ‘Ode’ (and subsequent sport sponsor campaigns) as a galvanising force for Three’s ascent within the Irish market, and to not lose sight of the other factors for that success.

Nevertheless, ‘Ode’ attracted considerable plaudits and its role in Three’s growth was significant. In a column for *The Evening Herald*, Michael Cullen, the editor of Marketing.ie, deemed it the best TV ad of the year, arguing that it “really captures what it means to be part of the Green Army” (Cullen 2013). Three would go on to win ‘Sponsor of the Year’ at Irish Sponsorship Awards in 2015. A Three sponsorship executive interviewed for this work cited the work done as sponsor of the football team as one of many factors behind this award (and it will be covered in more detail in the following chapter, which focuses on the ‘All it Takes’ campaign which was disseminated in 2015), but such an accolade is all the more striking as it comes just three years after the company “was lost [...] with little to stand for beyond value and little for the

consumer to recognize it by.” ‘Ode’ can be argued to be a catalyst in this reversal of fortunes concerning how strongly (or not) the brand’s identity was perceived by the public and by others within the industry.

The supporters’ group interviewed for this work were generally enthusiastic about how Three’s sponsorship had depicted Irish football fans in their advertising (both in ‘Ode’ and subsequently in ‘#MakeHistory’). Interestingly given Three’s eagerness to stress the financial and technological weight behind ‘Ode,’ the aesthetic standards of Three’s sponsorship efforts were complimented, with one fan deeming them “very well put together.” With regard to how the ads represented fans, feelings were also quite positive. One interviewee noted the ad’s tendency to depict fans as “stereotypically ‘happy head Irish people,’” but felt happy with the positive note the ads struck, asserting that the production team behind such ads are “very good at emulating all the good.” Following on from this note of ‘emulation,’ others argued that the ads were successful because they had a store of positive imagery surrounding the fans to draw from, and therefore need only reproduce the deeds of the fans rather than resort to exaggeration or invention. One fan cited the Ronseal Paint slogan of ‘It Does Exactly What it Says on the Tin’ to illustrate how Irish fans supplied advertisers with enough potential material before claiming that the ads had captured “the nature of the nation” (3 February 2017).

Others involved in the group interview expressed irritation in that Ireland’s sponsorship arrangements means that (unusually in international football) all official Irish replica jerseys carry the Three logo (as opposed to those worn by the team in competitive matches, which do not). They felt no major enmity toward Three for this (and, indeed, identified that once the precedent had been set during the era in which Opel sponsored the team, subsequent sponsors were not being unreasonable in pushing for the same arrangement during negotiations with the FAI) but were irked by the lack of the choice they had as fans in acting as ‘human billboards’ (McFarlene-Alvarez 2014) for the sponsor. As one interviewee said: “I’m not an advertising board for *Three*, I’m an advertising board for Irish football when I go away” (February 3, 2017). Such sentiments underline the strong distinction fans draw between their emotional and cultural relationship with the team, and the sponsor’s financial arrangement with them. While conscious of the commercial and financial priorities of the sponsor and of the FAI, the fans assertion of a distinction between their relationship with the team and with the sponsor, implies that there are

limits to the degree that sponsors can impinge on the team's image before arousing greater discontent from the fans.

Similar to the case of its idealized depictions of Irish fandom, it is unlikely that such minor discontent would be enough to see Three deviate from a successful strategy. The visibility the brand receives as part of its ubiquitous presence on replica jerseys is an enviable arrangement to other brands forced to take a subtler tact when attempting to gain commercial leverage through their association with international football teams. However, that such discontent is present among people who identify as dedicated fans of the team would indicate that there may be limits to the extent with which Three (or any future sponsor) can encroach upon the relationship between team and fans with overtly commercial intent. The fans interviewed were aware – and somewhat understanding – of Three's commercial priorities, but they also identified the lack of commerciality – in comparison to club football – as a key factor in their passion for international football. The organizer of the group expressed this to general agreement from the others present:

Well if you look around football, even clubs with great cultures and great traditions of not having sponsors have all caved in to this. Because football is no longer about football, it's about business. All these clubs; Man United are a PLC, their rivals now are eBay, Amazon and Google and things like this. They are floating on stock markets. Football is gone. Modern football is dead. Hence, why international football is still so beautiful, so raw, because there's no transfers, no agents, there's no one [outside] involved (February 3 2017).

This echoes Free and Hughson's (2006) assertion that the most successful clubs in modern football have become alienated from their core fan base through the capitalistic nature of their global success, denying fans a sense of 'organic community' which the supporters interviewed for this work experienced as part of following the Irish team. Williams (1994) notes that many working class fans are conscious of this increasing alienation and speculates as to the unrest it may eventually lead to. If a key element of the appeal of international football – specifically, supporting the Irish team - is rooted in its function as an escape from the alienating commercialism of the club game (or at least, its higher levels) and as a source of perceptually authentic communal identity, then that would seem to indicate the potential for a fan backlash to increasing commercialization of this sphere. This reading chimes with Jackson's (2010) assertion that effective leverage of sports sponsorship should allow brand and consumer to communicate

together as fans, rather than the latter viewing the former as a commercial interloper. However, as noted above, the advertising executive interviewed for this work demonstrated awareness of this potential tension between fans and sponsors, noting that brands could only keep fans respect if they “recognise what it means to be a fan” (April 27 2016).

There is the potential too, for the increased visibility of Three via replica Irish jerseys to backfire on the brand. McFarlene-Alvarez (2014) writes of the risks of depending on ‘human billboards’ or ‘brand ambassadors;’ she argues that ‘they are human and subject to human error and indiscretion, sometimes dragging the brand with which they are associated into the spotlight of similar judgment and scrutiny.’ Three’s arrangement with the FAI may be enviable from the point of view of other international team sponsors who have to settle for less ubiquitously visible methods of promoting their brand through the team, but it could be a risk if the fans wearing those jerseys at media vortexual occasions such as major tournaments engaged in any condemnatory behaviour. At Euro 2016, where Three were likely delighted with the laudatory media coverage of the antics of the Irish acting as ‘advertising boards’ for the brand (which will be discussed in greater detail in section 3:5.2), a significant minority of English and Russian fans engaged in acts of hooligan violence with both each other and the French police. It is hardly fanciful to speculate that Vauxhall and Huawei, the primary sponsors of the English and Russian teams during the tournament, were happy that their brands were not tainted by appearing on jerseys sported by rioting fans. Notably, some of the positive online reactions to YouTube videos of Irish fans at the tournament (again, examined in greater detail below) pointedly contrast their cheerful bonhomie with the aggression of their English and Russian counterparts. It should also be noted though that those dissenting voices (in the media, online and in the focus group) who took issue with the ‘cringe worthy’ antics of the Irish fans did not connect them to Three, nor did they view the brand’s celebratory depictions of fans in their advertising as having encouraged this behaviour.

Some of these themes also recurred in the analysis of online reaction to ‘Ode.’ This analysis was limited to comments on Three’s initial posting of the ‘Ode’ on their official Facebook and YouTube channels. These were chosen not only because they are two of the social media platforms in which Three are most active and most followed on, but also because their formats foreground responses in a manner that other platforms do not. They represent the most readily

available and publically visible opportunities for consumers to talk back to the sponsor brand and disrupt the narrative it is trying to construct around itself, the team and the fans. However, in a similar manner to how the textual analysis of ‘Ode’ was supported with references to other Irish football-related ads, this element of the reception analysis is supported with references to further relevant interactions between Three and the public on posts pertaining to their sponsorship of the Ireland football team.

Three’s Facebook post of the link to the ‘Ode’ video came on an event page they had created to mark the launch of the ad. The invites to the event were issued to members of ‘You Boys in Green,’ the Irish football fans used as extras in the ad. This may have been something of a promotional misstep as the post received notably less attention (in the form of likes and comments – it attracted just 25 likes and 9 comments) than many contemporary posts on Three Ireland’s official Facebook page. However, the creation of the event page and the invites to the fans involved in the ad could be read as an attempt to foster a feeling of community with the fans used in the ad, and through that, to demonstrate that Three understands Irish football fans and wishes to celebrate their dedication, rather than simply viewing them as potential consumers or commercial leverage. The comments posted on the video link are almost uniformly positive, with most expressing enjoyment of the ad (‘That is excellent, kudos to whomever produced it’), pleasure at having been a part of it (‘Thats great, was fun filming too’) or cheery self-deprecation at how they look on screen (‘jaysus i looked off me head!!’). The lone exception is a comment expressing frustration with how the FAI ‘screwed over’ fans featured in the video by rejecting their applications for tickets to Ireland’s Euro 2016 qualifying match in Scotland. This comment demonstrates again that the very features which make Irish football fans such an attractive consumer base for Three to appeal to are also those which also create the potential for them to disrupt the sponsor’s carefully crafted commercial narratives. The fans are passionate, numerous and organized – all qualities which allow them to be effectively utilized as appealing and authentic protagonists in ‘Ode,’ also contributes to their strong sense of identification with (or even ownership of) the Ireland football team and their ability to mobilise and express discontent with perceived ill treatment of them or ‘their’ team by official authorities such as the team’s sponsor and governing body.

On Three Ireland's official YouTube channel, the video has gained over 43,000 views and attracted 39 comments (as of November 2017). Early comments are largely positive or expressions of support for Ireland. One user, 'Fawkes,' takes issue with Three's seemingly tangential connection to the text of the ad, writing that 'the video told me nothing about what 3 [sic] actually do, apart from buy advertising.' Another user who takes issue with this comment displays a similar discernment concerning the financially driven motives of the sponsor that some of the members of the focus group did, sarcastically questioning Fawkes as to whether any other national team sponsor goes beyond financial contributions in their arrangements with the team.

However, a more notable argument throughout the comments thread centred on complaints about the hypocrisy of Ireland fans embracing the mantle of 'best fans in the world.' These complaints cited their lack of support for Irish club teams and the occasional (though unspecified) poor attendance figures for the national team's home matches as arguments against the much vaunted dedication of the fans as they are depicted in 'Ode.' These complaints were responded to by users with assertions of their own dedication to club and country ('If you say that you dont know shit about the airtricity league [sic] i go to all the home games of shamrock rovers and have been since 2009') or dismissals of the idea of questioning their authenticity as Ireland fans in this manner ('some of negative comments are ridiculous...club and county is totally different.'). Videos depicting the much lauded antics of Ireland fans at Euro 2016 attracted similar complaints of inauthenticity and hypocrisy (again, this will be discussed in greater depth in 3:5.2), but they were generally greatly outnumbered by those expressing positive opinions about the fans. On 'Ode,' 8 of the 39 comments are positive reactions to the Ireland fans²⁰, both implicit (through praising the ad, and by extension, its celebration of the fans) and explicit (often in response to comments questioning the loyalty or passion of Ireland fans); while another 8

²⁰ 'Ireland fans' is used throughout, rather than 'Irish fans,' so as to avoid any confusion between fans of the Ireland national football team and Irish fans of various club teams, both in Ireland and in the UK. Of course, in demographic terms, there is significant crossover between the two, but being an 'Ireland fan' remains a distinct identity from an individual's club affiliations. Notably in 'Ode' and other advertisements examined as part of this work, fans are depicted solely in terms of their support for Ireland with no reference to any club-based identifications (or divisions stemming from them). As will be expounded upon in this work, this narrative eschewal is occasionally disrupted by disgruntled commentators wishing to undermine the distinction between idealistically depicted 'Ireland fans' and the perceived disappointing and mundane reality of 'Irish fans.'

were complaints that Ireland fans were unworthy of the praise heaped on them by the ad (specifically the ‘best fans in the world’ moniker).²¹ Two somewhat obvious but nonetheless significant factors in this shift toward greater acceptance of the media lionization of Ireland fans are the upturn in the on-field fortunes of the team, and the fact that – notwithstanding the accusations of performativity – the fan footage during Euro 2016 was obviously perceived as a more organic and natural depiction than a scripted ad. The comments decrying Ireland fans in the YouTube post of ‘Ode’ were made during a World Cup qualifying campaign in which Ireland were definitively unsuccessful, while the fan footage of Euro 2016 emanated from a tournament in which Ireland performed credibly (and had arguably defied expectations in even qualifying for). The discursive impact of a sports team or athlete may drive or reflect various socio-cultural undercurrents but the mundane reality of competitive success (or lack thereof) often plays a key role in shaping the extent of this impact (Alabarces et al 2001; Free 2013).

With reference to the organic fan footage being more positively received than a scripted ad, it may well be argued that a more appropriate contrast for ‘Ode’ would be the reaction to the ‘#MakeHistory’ televised ad but such a comparison is hindered by Three’s decision to disable the option to make comments on their YouTube post of the latter. Comments under the video on Three Ireland’s Facebook page are consist almost unilaterally of praise for the ad, or complaints about Three’s service (the majority of which did not mention the ad, football or Ireland, though there was the occasional wry speculation as to how much Three spent on the ad compared to what they spent on their service). This latter category of comments certainly underlines how social media offers a platform for consumers to disrupt brand narratives (though Three seem to have anticipated this occurrence and the majority of complaints are addressed solicitously with a reply from the brand’s account), but the overall picture emerging from an examination of the Facebook post is that the ad (and, implicitly, the Ireland fans it celebrates) is notably more well received than ‘Ode,’ which – while allowing for the later ad being perceived as a more effectively constructed advertising text than its predecessor in terms of narrative and aesthetics –

²¹ In cataloguing these comments, I have discounted those which stem from initial denunciations of Ireland fans but relate more to the state of the League of Ireland (the Republic of Ireland’s domestic club league) or the question of Irish fans supporting British clubs that do not feature any direct references to Ireland fans or how supporting the international team affects these issues.

indicates that the general air of goodwill around the team and fans had increased significantly by the time ‘#MakeHistory’ was released.

One incident worthy of note in the reactions to the YouTube post of ‘Ode,’ thought it did not engage the amount of users that the above detailed argument did, concerns a user who complimented the ad while lamenting its lack of racial or ethnic diversity in its depiction of Ireland fans. The user described the ad as ‘Beautiful’ but asserted that it was a ‘slight slap in the face for all the Irish of foreign descent. We love our boys in green too! Someday hopefully a fearless representation of our countries [sic] multiculturalism will be recognized.’ His complaints chime with some of the observations in the audience survey conducted for this work, though they also contrast with other respondents from the same survey to whom the lack of racial or ethnic diversity went unnoticed in the face of other areas in which ‘Ode’ was perceived to have displayed admirable diversity (such as age and gender). This comment drew an angry response from a user who perceived it as an attack on Irishness itself: ‘Fuck off with your multiculturalism, you anti-irish prick!!’ This comment is notable for how it implicitly limits Irish identity to white ethnic identity and strictly native ancestry, as it decries the initial user as ‘anti-irish’ (and therefore, not Irish) despite his identification as an Irish person of foreign descent. This aggressively nationalistic and narrow conception of Irish identity is presumably what Three wanted to avoid when they set out to ‘celebrat[e] all the lovely things about the Irish fans’ in their sponsorship campaigns. Notably though, they made no attempt to remove the comment and its significance as regards its potential to taint their brand should not be overstated. Indeed, representatives from both Three and the FAI interviewed for this work had unconcernedly resigned themselves to the inevitability of attracting negative comments from some fans. However this incident does serve to underline the sensitive and commercially unseemly issues bubbling beneath the surface of the patriotic passion Three is attempting to appealingly tap into through sport. In light of this incident, it is notable that Three disabled comments on the video post of #MakeHistory and ‘All it Takes.’

Another curiosity worth briefly noting is one user who questions why ‘It’s always a Dublin townie accent whenever there’s something like this. Do only that particular demographic represent soccer in this country?’ His comment is referring to Emmet Kirwan’s narration, but it’s unclear what he means by ‘something like this.’ No other immediate contemporary Irish football

ad features a ‘Dublin townie’ accent as the sole voice of the fans. Three’s previous efforts, ‘Greens’ and ‘Dinner Date’ featured Dubliners as protagonists, but their accents are decidedly unlike the markedly urban, working class tones of Kirwan in ‘Ode.’ However, his comment does seem to anticipate some ads made after ‘Ode,’ such as Ford’s ‘The Twelfth Man’ (2015), a mini documentary on the history of Ireland’s home matches against England narrated by a quintessentially Dublin accented figure purported to be a long time fan of the team. The idea that Ireland football fandom is conflated with working class, urban identity in Irish popular consciousness is something which will be further explored in section 3:6.1.

Ultimately, the reception of ‘Ode’ was a largely positive one for Three when viewed in broad commercial terms. It played a role in the 214% increase in their SIM card sales the year it was released and helped Three forge a distinct brand identity in a competitive Irish mobile services market. Furthermore, as attested by the FAI and Three officials interviewed for this work, the discursive flexibility of football has allowed the brand to shift the manner in which they leverage their sponsorship according to their priorities. After initially being employed to gain a relatively small brand identity, and therefore attention, Three’s sponsorship of Irish football has subsequently been employed to help retain consumers taken on after they took over the O2 network (26 February 2016). The FAI was undoubtedly pleased with the ad, and indeed Three’s work as sponsor in general, a 5 year, €8.9 million, renewal of the sponsorship arrangement was announced in November 2015. However, analysis of the public reception of ‘Ode,’ supplemented by examination of reaction to Ireland fans at Euro 2016, suggests certain limits to which Three can effectively link itself to the team and their fans. The fans interviewed expressed some discontent with the encroachment of the Three logo on their support of Ireland and the commercialism of the sport in general, sentiments supported by some comments online and in the audience survey which expressed bewilderment and even irritation at the perceived lack of connection between the content of ‘Ode’ and the brand which commissioned it. Delia and Cole (2015) describe how sponsors lacking a ‘natural fit’ with the sponsored property can ensure the effectiveness of the arrangement through carefully crafted ‘articulation’ of their identity and connection to the property. Three attempt to accomplish this through celebrating Ireland football fans in a manner which demonstrates their respect for the selfless and passionate support the fans show for the team, therefore implicitly rebuffing any suspicion of an ignorant and illegitimate commercial intrusion on what is perceived as an emotional bond arising from shared experience

and national pride. Furthermore, their celebration of a seemingly organic and selfless community characterized by shared revelry and dedication constructs a subtle connection to the idea of Three as a brand which facilitates community building (rather than contributing to smartphone induced isolation). However, the small but significant expressions of discontent for the media lionization of the Ireland fans (which is further detailed in section 3:5.2), combined with reticence over Three's commercial intrusion into the team-fan/nation-citizen bond underlines the sensitive ground this hitherto successful sponsorship strategy rests on.

3:5. Post 'Ode' Ireland Fans and Their Implications for Future Sponsorship

This section examines some of the significant developments, since the release of 'Ode,' in the wider perception of Ireland fans and how they pertain to Three's sponsorship of the team. Earlier, it was noted that 'Ode' signalled something of a shift in Irish football advertising by focussing entirely on the fans with little or no depiction of the team's players or management. Its successor campaign, '#MakingHistory' would follow on from this approach (though its televised ad does feature a brief shot of two players) and the subsequent laudatory international media coverage of the Irish fans at Euro 2016 seemed not only to confirm the commercial potential of focussing on the fans, but also pointed to further fan-centred avenues for future campaigns.

3:5.1. *Ethnographic Assessment of Production of '#MakeHistory'*

Additional, if indirect, insight into the production process of 'Ode' was gained during an experience on set as an extra for the '#MakeHistory' ad. It would obviously be inaccurate to assume that such an experience perfectly reflects the production of the 'Ode' televised ad, but given that both were commissioned and produced by Three and Boys and Girls, a certain amount of overlap is likely. Notably '#MakeHistory' shared its predecessor's concern with fan authenticity. The official casting call (issued by Antidote Productions, an advertising agency which assisted Boys and Girls in shooting the ad, see Fig 4:1) requests "FOOTBALL FANS and SUPER-FANS of all ages, shapes and sizes." The call goes on to ask potential extras four questions probing their support for the team in the past, their level of excitement for the

tournament and who their favourite player was. Initial contact with Extras Ireland about appearing in the ad it was requested that applicants wear Irish jerseys (or other Ireland team paraphernalia) to the audition. The auditions took place in the Central Hotel on Exchequer Street in Dublin and featured applicants interviewed in groups of four or five. The interview process was quite informal – applicants were asked about their experience of supporting the team and their plans for the tournament. Although subsequent questioning on set for the shooting of the ad uncovered several extras who professed that they were not particularly dedicated supporters of the team, though they seemed to be in the minority.

Interestingly, there was a semi-conscious acknowledgement of the contradiction of trying to capture genuine, sincere fan feeling in the staged environment of an ad shoot. As the extras were being directed to celebrate the goal which had guaranteed Ireland's qualification for the tournament, the director joked that he was probably describing the goal incorrectly, but could rely on the extras' actual experience of that moment to ensure we knew how to replicate their celebrations. Overall, the experience of being involved with the production of the ad supported the importance placed on the appearance of authenticity. Smith (2005) writes that 'In many of today's ads, there is a subtle wink to the viewer that suggests, "Yes, we know you are sharp and not going to be subject to advertisements like the rest of the public."' In Three's eagerness to foreground the authenticity of their celebration of Irish football fans, we see a similar tacit acknowledgement of audience savviness take a different form. They are positioning their viewers as loyal and genuine fans who won't settle for a brand "hand[ing] over money in exchange for the logo on the shirt" (27 April 2016). Through demonstrating that they "recognise what it means to be a fan," Three are interpolating their audience and themselves as respectful and cognisant of the dedication of "real" Ireland fans, distinct from the unmentioned but implied brands who attempt to woo fans with inauthentic or inaccurate depictions of their passion.

The other notable element to emerge from the experience as an extra for the ad was the 'What to wear' instructions included in an email sent to all extras the day before shooting. It encouraged extras to wear Irish jerseys and fan apparel, with a preference towards those carrying the Three branding, rather than previous sponsors, Opel and Eircom. Wearing green was, of course, encouraged, but "solid colour garments" in red, blue and orange were forbidden. This may have been driven by aesthetic or lighting concerns, but it is notable that the colours prohibited were

those which are chiefly associated with unionism and British identity. In addition, there was also a pointed instruction for extras not to wear “tracksuit bottoms” to the shoot. Such garments carry negative associations with working class culture (Archer et al 2007; Hollingworth and Williams 2009). Football fandom also carries working class associations, but in an arguably more positive form. The instruction could therefore be read as an attempt to alleviate the risk of the potentially negative connotations of the associations the ad was playing on contaminating the positive ones. Though this idea did not come up directly in any of the interviews for this project, the Three executive interviewed admitted that one of the more difficult elements of sports sponsorship was the “balancing act” between celebrating the positive aspects of football fan culture while avoiding any potential negative connotations. Specifically, the interviewee acknowledged that in their celebration of Irish fandom, Three were keen to avoid portraying fans drinking and partying as the team’s (or indeed, the country’s) sole distinguishing feature (26 February 2016).

Overall, the experiences attest to the level of dedication Three and their advertising partners with regard to crafting a commercial narrative that leverages the authenticity associated with Ireland fans. Furthermore, it also underlines the awareness of the parties involved in the production of such ads that for all the commercial potential of sponsoring a national football team, there remains a continual possibility of arousing fan discontent through representing the team (or sport) in a way that is deemed inauthentic or inappropriate. While section 3:4 described how Three were relatively successful in avoiding significant fan discontent (and, indeed, the extent to which fan discontent can hinder sport sponsors or organising bodies will be discussed further anon), the production of ‘#MakingHistory’ suggests that this is a delicate, if not overly difficult, balancing act that remains a key part of the conception of any sponsorship campaign.

3:5.2. *Reaction to Ireland Fans at Euro 2016*

As has been alluded to earlier, Euro 2016 proved to be a seminal event in the wider depiction and perception of Ireland football fans. Though the team performed credibly in reaching the second round before being defeated 2-1 by hosts, France; the antics of the fans earned international media plaudits. Coverage of the fans engaging in various acts of carnivalesque bonhomie (such as singing while cleaning the street en masse, singing a lullaby to a baby on a packed train and

helping an elderly couple fix their car) was captured on smart phones and quickly achieved viral status, earning attention from mainstream media outlets, not only in Europe, but also in the US and Australia. This culminated in the fans (along with their Northern Irish neighbours, whose behaviour also attracted widespread praise) being presented with the prestigious Medal of the City of Paris in July 2016. While Ireland fans had long been perceived positively by the international media, and occasionally lauded as among the best in the world (not least in ‘Ode,’ which was itself a reaction to the previously detailed praised Ireland fans attracted in the wake of their team’s calamitous performance at Euro 2012), but Euro 2016 saw this reputation enhanced enormously. This, of course, is a boon to Three and their advertising partners, having shifted attention to the fans in ‘Ode,’ they have now been gifted with an ample stock of positive imagery to draw from if they opt to take a similar approach in future sponsorship campaigns.

However, reception data gathered as part of this work indicates that Three must tread carefully lest they overstep the mark in heaping praise on Ireland fans. The subject of the media coverage of the fans during Euro 2016 came up during the course of the focus group and was discussed with some reticence by the fans interviewed, with one describing the antics of the fans during the tournament as ‘a bit cringe worthy, to say the least.’ Of course, Three’s idealized depiction of Irish fans and their carnivalesque antics in ‘Ode’ and ‘#MakeHistory’ predate the viral fan footage of Euro 2016, but given previous assertions from those involved with the production of these ads about their eagerness to tap into the fans’ reputation for good-natured revelry, it seems unlikely that they will not attempt to reference (whether implicitly or explicitly) the coverage of the Irish fans at Euro 2016. The interview comments, however, indicate that this may not be as straightforward a path to commercial success as it might seem.

Indeed, for all the plaudits from the media (both domestically and internationally), there was an element of backlash from the Irish public over the perceived performativity and inauthenticity of the Irish fans in France. In response to an article in Irish sport website, The42.ie (2016) titled, “This Irish fan led a one-man cleanup after the street party in Bordeaux last night,” one reader (Brian Murray) commented: ‘What a gob#hite [sic]. Irish fans are going overboard with the nice guys image. Starting to believe their own publicity. It’s embarrassing.’ Likewise, responding to an article in The DailyEdge (2016) titled “French people have completely fallen in love with Irish fans at the Euros,” Meanderinsz commented: ‘Let’s be honest, it’s very contrived. Look

how great we are, get a video and share it.’ Similarly, another reader (Maggie Elizabeth Walsh) commented: ‘This is getting embarrassing now.’ This discontent should not be overstated – the comments listed here, and many others in the same vein elsewhere, tended to attract disagreement from other users, who deemed their comments to be a pedantic and unduly sour responses to something they viewed as worthy of celebration – though it is worth noting that these complaints attracted support in the form of numerous “likes.”²² The abiding complaints emerging from these dissenting voices centred on the questionable authenticity and perceived performativity of the fans in the videos, who were viewed as playing up to Irish cultural stereotypes for an international media audience. In addition, their dedication to the team was frequently questioned, with dissenting users accusing them of only following the team while it was successful.

This complaint was echoed in certain sections of the Irish media. Daniel Kelly, writing on OffTheBall.com, a sister site to that of national radio station, Newstalk, questioned the Irish fans being described as ‘the best fans in the world’ (a sobriquet frequently employed in the media coverage of the fans at Euro 2016), pointing to the fact that ‘the Aviva Stadium rarely sells out for internationals apart from the major qualifying matches or the odd glamour friendly’ and questioning whether they were really any more passionate than ‘their Swedish, Belgian and Italian counterparts?’ (Kelly 2016). John O’Sullivan of The42.ie echoed Kelly in questioning whether the Irish fans unduly benefited from contrast with the hooliganism of the English fans at the tournament, writing that ‘some of the videos - particularly the Yaya/Kole Toure chant - might be perceived differently if it was English rather than Irish fans at its core. In fact, our starting position is probably identical to 99% of English supporters: we drink a lot, we get very loud and we probably make people more uncomfortable than we realize’ (O’Sullivan 2016).

Though the negative reaction to the coverage of the Irish fans at Euro 2016 was far out-weighted by the positive, both domestically and internationally, the not insignificant presence of the former in both media and fans circles suggests a potential for backlash against future idealized

²² Furthermore, an analysis of comments of similar videos of Irish fans at Euro 2016 posted on YouTube (a site with an international audience and user base) reveals very few negative reactions, with many users not only praising the fans in the particular video but also expressing positive feelings about Ireland and the Irish in a more general sense. Of course, while this is positive news with regard to football’s relationship with the wider international reputation of Ireland, it is less pertinent to Three – a sponsor brand concentrating on appealing to the domestic market.

depictions of Ireland's supporters. Springer (2007) outlines how the 21st century has seen advertising shift its approach to wooing consumers from 'push' to 'pull,' coaxing audiences into a perceived choice rather than attempting to instruct or overwhelm them. If Three persisted in lionizing the Irish fans in their advertising, there is the possibility that their approach would be viewed as 'pushing' rather than 'pulling,' forcing an unwanted and apparently unrealistic image on a sceptical audience. It is a concern that the Boys and Girls strategist interviewed for this work seemed somewhat conscious of when he said that brands must be wary not to be seen to be 'patronising to people, you don't want to be condescending and wag the finger and say "you've got to be a better supporter"' (27 April 2016). Toland Frith and Mueller (2003) outline how most advertising is viewed as an unwelcome intrusion by viewers and that the greatest challenge facing modern advertisers is distinguishing their output from the proliferation of others that surround it (254-255). Three have appeared to compensate for this through a sponsorship arrangement which allowed them to tap into a subject of considerable interest and passion for a great proportion of their audience, but the appeal of this subject in this context is still contingent on how it is presented. There is the possibility that leaning too heavily on the 'best fans in the world' theme might attract backlash in the long term, but in the immediate future, it seems they will continue to depict idealized visions of Irish fandom in the vein that was so successful in 'Ode' and '#MakeHistory.'

3:6. Digital Cultural Nationalism

Having detailed the findings from an analysis of the production, broadcast and reception of 'Ode,' in addition to exploring some of the more significant related developments since the release of the campaign, this material will now be augmented by further analysis in the context of the concept of digital cultural nationalism. This section will therefore consist of unpacking the significance and connotations of the cultural tropes utilised in the campaign – examining why and how they were used and exploring the reaction they evoked. Ultimately, this section aims to examine 'Ode' as a cultural text which is singularly the product of the globalised, digitised media landscape and yet also ultra-specific to the context of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland and the cultural role which the international football team and its fans play within it.

3:6.1. *The Cultural Cachet of Irish Football Fandom for Advertisers and Sponsors*

Diane Negra (2001) claims that ‘the majority of Irish-themed material in current popular culture strives to give middle-class Americans the feeling that they are still morally in the working class’ (234). It could be argued that within Ireland, football fandom is used in commercial contexts to similar purpose. Section 1:4 addressed Ireland’s sense of cultural whiplash during and after the Celtic Tiger – the feeling of transforming from ‘a largely rural, traditional society into the ‘postmodernity’ of the international Celtic Tiger’ while ‘barely bothering to stop at modernity along the way’ (Arrowsmith 2004, 466). In terms of national identity, traditional Ireland cultural myths were dependent on the idea of the idealized peasant – most notably championed by then Taoiseach Eamon De Valera in his 1943 St. Patrick’s Day speech. Smyth (2012) asserts that such cultural myths never bore much resemblance to reality (135). However inaccurate these bucolic visions may have been, they nonetheless played a significant role in shaping ideas of authentic Irishness well beyond De Valera’s time in power (Negra 2001, 2006; Brereton 2006; Kuhling 2009). The increased affluence of the Celtic Tiger created an unsustainable dissonance between the goals and priorities of modern Irish society and the fantasies of its traditional national identity (Moore 2011; Bonner 2011). The collapse of the economic boom, however, meant that any sense of new or emerging values that it had created was rendered questionable. The vision of self-sacrificing communal identity presented in ‘Ode’ could be viewed as an implicit attempt to assuage this Irish identity crisis. It is hardly fanciful to imagine brands and advertisers shaping their strategy around such socio-cultural undercurrents, as Holt (2004) argues; ‘iconic brands perform national identity myths that resolve cultural contradictions’ (232).

Within an Irish context, O’Boyle (2011) writes that a knowledge and sense of ‘cultural national belonging’ is regarded as an important trait for Irish advertising practitioners (50). Indeed, the notion of sports sponsorship campaigns trying to tap into wider currents and conflicts in contemporary Irish culture is supported by the interviews conducted for this research. An advertising strategist interviewed spoke of the irony of how mobile telephony technology had both facilitated greater communication while also contributing to isolation. It was in the interests of Three, they argued, as a mobile services provider, to be seen to combat this isolation and facilitate moments of communal feeling. Sport, they argued, was a significant way of creating such moments: ‘sport – and live sport particularly, it’s one of those moments where you might

still have this [phone] but you stop looking down and you look up, and you feel part of a community again' (27 April 2016). Similarly, a sponsorship executive from Three claimed that the aim of the ad campaigns was to 'tap into that moment' when sport triggers communal joy – 'putting up flags in your house and decorating the car and kids in the street' (26 February 2016). What emerges from these interviews is an awareness of contemporary Ireland as a fragmented culture and of the potential of sport to (temporarily, at least) create a sense of shared identity and purpose.

On a wider global level, the irony of communication technology fostering isolation rather than community, as noted by the Boys and Girls strategist, has been much documented. Indeed as technological and political developments increased the pace of globalisation, many commentators had argued that this led to a corresponding decline in notions of local community and identity. However, as Maguire (2011) argues 'an increased awareness of a sense of the world as a whole' has led to 'a concomitant resurgence of the local/national' (400). While he goes on to assert that cultural and social pluralization undermine the idea that any one sport can truly stand for a nation, he nonetheless asserts that sport is 'an arena where processes of personal habitus/identity testing and formation are conducted' (409-410). Sport provides a rallying point for national identity, offering events which can be communally experienced (in the stadium or via the media) and readily identifiable shared signifiers (team colours, jerseys, flags, etc.). As was detailed in section 1.3, sport allows advertisers to tap into these feelings of communal and national identity, and in this respect, 'Ode' can be understood as a reaction to the globalized context, but its particulars (the sport it concerns and its focus on the sport's fans) are in many ways specific to its national context.

Football, and football fandom, is evidently perceived by the figures involved in this campaign as a potent symbol for reconstructing communal feeling and collective cultural identity in contemporary Ireland. Giulianotti (1996) views Irish football fandom as representing a form of the 'carnavalesque.' Carnivals, he claims, are 'characterised by an abandonment to hedonistic excesses, and the psycho-social *jouissance* of eating, drinking, singing, joking, swearing, wearing of stylised attire and costumes, engaging in elaborate social interplay, enjoying sexual activity, etc' (112). The parallels with football fandom are evident, but it is notable that Giulianotti also asserts that a further parallel between the two is how they temporarily facilitate

‘the collapse or inversion of social boundaries and hierarchies’ (113). This notion is central to the perception of football fandom (and specifically the events central to it, such as assembling in a stadium or pub for a match) as a symbol of collective contemporary identity. Football fandom facilitates the carnivalesque elision of social boundaries and facilitates the creation of a strong feeling of community across a variety of disparate individuals, ostensibly united only by their shared support of the team. Notably too, Giulianotti points out that ‘carnival can also facilitate internal monitoring of behaviour and self-policing; a ‘civilising’ role, in effect, which interpolates to participants where the boundaries of ‘over-stepping the mark’ are’ (113). This ‘self-policing’ element was also mentioned by Ireland fans interviewed for this project, and can also be seen as a key element of Irish football’s commercial appeal, given Three’s afore-mentioned anxiety not to be seen to be celebrating a vision of Irishness characterized wholly by drunken abandon. Some of the fans in the focus group expressed the strong belief that a key factor in the fans’ positive international reputation was that ‘we police ourselves’ against overstepping the mark in their (frequently alcohol-fuelled) carnivalesque conduct at major tournaments and qualifying matches. In addition, this resonates somewhat with the speculation in section 3:4.1 that the instruction not to wear tracksuits on the set of ‘#MakingHistory’ was an effort to ensure the campaign would evoke positive associations with Irish working class identity while eschewing negative ones. For Three (and their advertising partners), the wild working class bonhomie associated with Ireland fans is a culturally potent association for the brand, but one that must be depicted with due care in much the manner that the excesses of the carnivalesque are continually policed.

Football fandom (and specifically, following the Ireland national team) therefore functions within the context of modern Ireland as an appealing, ‘safe’ way of expressing a feeling of positive national identity which temporarily transcends the alienating effects of globalization and post-Tiger socio-cultural flux (or, at least, generates the perception of doing so). Because of this, it is an attractive identity for advertisers appealing to the Irish market to tap into in efforts to assuage consumers’ cultural anxieties in much the manner that Fanning (2006) outlined. With this in mind, it is interesting to examine the specificities of how Ireland football fandom is depicted in ‘Ode’ (as well as other relevant contemporary ads). As was hinted at the beginning of this section, there is a notable emphasis on working class in many Irish depictions of football fandom (both in ads and in other cultural texts. This is certainly the case in ‘Ode,’ with its depiction of uncomfortable travel, unglamorous homes and grainy televisions, all of which is

augmented by Emmet Kirwan's distinctly working class Dublin tones. Furthermore, texts such as 'Joxer Goes to Stuttgart' (a song by folk musician Christy Moore) and *The Barrytown Trilogy* (three books authored by Roddy Doyle), noted by Mike Cronin (2017) to have played a crucial in cementing the experience of supporting Ireland at particular major tournaments in the national consciousness, feature distinctly working class protagonists and milieus. Notably too, *A Night in November*, Marie Jones' play celebrating Ireland's qualification for, and participation in, the 1994 World Cup sees its Northern Irish protagonist reject the trappings of bourgeois unionism for a working class, carnivalesque atmosphere, selling his golf clubs to go to New York and watch Ireland's match against Italy in a pub with other fans.

What is particularly notable about these examples of Ireland football fandom being conflated with working class identity is that they are largely urban in nature; specifically, they are often based in Dublin working class culture. While Dublin is the most heavily populated area in the Republic of Ireland, the country is also the fourth most rural in the EU (McMahon 2016), so the repeated focus on Dublin in these celebrations of football fan culture is notable. As was explored in section 1:4, Dublin (along with Belfast, prior to partition) has been traditionally associated with football in Ireland, though the prominence and success of the Charlton era saw the sport's popularity spread over much of the country. Viewed in terms of its socio-cultural connotations, the persistent association of Ireland football fandom with Dublin working class identity in post-Charlton, post-Tiger texts such as 'Ode' can be read as an attempt to bridge the gap between De Valerian idealized peasantry and the bourgeois cosmopolitanism championed by the Celtic Tiger (Cronin 2002). Ireland fans as celebrated in 'Ode' seem urban enough to tacitly rebuke the traditional Irish fetishisation of rural life (Gibbons 1996) yet display a sense of community not generally associated with urban modernity. They are cosmopolitan enough to travel internationally, yet they do so in support of their country rather than as a glamorous indulgence, displaying a kind of rooted cosmopolitanism.

Within a modern Irish context, the idealised working class Dublin identity represented by Ireland football fandom assuages any latent anxieties concerning cultural alienation and the potential elision of a distinct national identity. This is demonstrated not only in 'Ode' but also in 'The Twelfth Man,' a 2015 mini-documentary commissioned by Ford (the 'Official Vehicle Supplier to the FAI') and disseminated via their official YouTube channel of Ford Ireland. As was noted

in the preceding section of this chapter, one YouTube user's complaint about 'Ode' bemoaned the supposed ubiquity of the 'townie' accent on 'something like this' seemed to reflect a discontent with repeated celebrations of working class Dubs supporting Ireland as an almost uniquely culturally authentic identity, and it feels particularly prescient with regard to 'The Twelfth Man.' Nominally commissioned to mark Ireland's upcoming friendly match with England – the first time they had played their old rivals in a home match in 20 years – 'The Twelfth Man' recounts the history of matches between the two teams at Dalymount Park²³ since the end of the Second World War. It is narrated by an elderly man with a pronounced 'townie' accent who mythologises the experience of having attended these matches. Notably, the titular twelfth man is represented by both the narrator, a character grounded within a specific historical milieu through his personal recollections of supporting Ireland and represented through one shot of an elderly man (shown as the narrator proclaims "I was their twelfth man") and also through a faceless, but evidently younger, figure clad in an Ireland jersey with the number 12 emblazoned on the back. The facelessness of this latter figure allows him to serve as a symbolic proxy for modern Ireland fans, and through his shared identity with the narrator as 'the twelfth man,' modern fans are linked with the apparent authenticity of the working class Dublin identity of the narrator. Notably, this ostensibly archetypal Dubliner chuckles at modern Ireland "blowing" its money on "the shopping centres and the fancy coffees," and this dismissal of Celtic Tiger hubris allows modern fans to feel similarly superior to this rootless indulgence (rather than complicit in it, or struggling with its consequences). 'The Twelfth Man's' visual aesthetics are particularly noteworthy when reading it as an attempt to reconcile 'authentic' Irish identity with modern Irish society; archival footage and newspaper stills of historic matches sit alongside shots of modern day Dalymount Park and contemporary Dublin. The beginning of the ad sees the narrator's evoking of post-war Dublin juxtaposed with shots of a car driving through the glamorous, redeveloped docklands of modern Dublin, while the narrator's description of the historic matches against England as "16 milestones" in his "otherwise ordinary life" is set against shots of a travelogue through the modern city from a moving car. This aesthetic intermingling of historic and modern Dublin could be read as a further part of the attempt to imbue post-Tiger Ireland

²³ Dalymount Park is the home ground of Bohemian FC, and for many decades also served as the home of the Ireland team until they began playing at Lansdowne Road in the 1980s. The final Ireland match to be played at the stadium was a friendly against Morocco in 1990.

with a sense of cultural authenticity associated with the selfless passion of Ireland football fandom and the down-to-earth values of old world Dublin.

‘The Twelfth Man’ follows on from ‘Ode’ in appealing to nostalgia and working class Dublin identity in its efforts to imbue modern Ireland football fans with a perceived cultural authenticity, but the differences between the two are also instructive. While both purport to speak to (and about) Ireland fans as a whole, ‘Ode’ achieves this through its depiction of a wide variety of fans, both male and female (and later, ‘#MakeHistory’ would do the same); ‘The Twelfth Man’ on the other hand, primarily depends on the symbolic, jersey clad, young male fan. ‘Ode’s’ diversity (in showing male and female fans of a variety of ages) found favour with some the respondents in the audience survey administered for this work, but ‘The Twelfth Man’ eschews this for a pointedly male vision of the Ireland ‘every-fan.’ The triangular conflation of idealized visions of male identity, national identity and popular sport has been much documented (Whannel 2002; Tuck 2003a; and specifically examining an Irish context: McDevitt 1997; Free 2005; Nohnberg 2010), but it is conveyed with a curiously militaristic edge in the Ford mini-documentary. The narrator begins the ad by recounting that as World War II was coming to an end, “Ireland waged its own war,” in reference to a 1946 match with England. Military rhetoric peppers the narration throughout; the pitch is a “battlefield,” the players “were ready for battle” and their passion is attested to by the claim that “should the English draw any blood from their veins, it would run green with the grass and become one with the soil.” Again, the conflation of sporting achievements with notions of military heroism has been addressed in detail elsewhere (Cooley 2010; Messner 2011; Park 2012), and, indeed, the roots of football, rugby and Gaelic Games - when they were first being codified and organized for national participation and spectatorship in the 19th century – are tied closely to notions of muscular Christianity and a particularly bullish form of Victorian nationalism. It’s persistence into the context of 21st century Irish football advertising is particularly curious, given that the Ireland football team came, from the late 20th century onwards, to represent a less militantly nationalist form of Irishness than the GAA and its reliance on a sharp Irish-British identity binary (Arrowsmith 2004; Free 2005).

The reliance on such warlike rhetoric to bolster claims to authentic national identity in ‘The Twelfth Man’ is largely, as has been noted, absent in ‘Ode’ (although comparisons can be made to ‘All it Takes,’ the rugby sponsorship campaign discussed in the following chapter). However,

there are some, albeit somewhat indirect, parallels to be drawn in the manner in which ‘Ode’ celebrates the selfless support Ireland fans display in following their country. Throughout the ad, as was detailed in section 3:2, emphasis is placed on the hardship Ireland fans endure (adverse weather conditions, uncomfortable travel, disappointing results) which nevertheless fail to daunt their passion for their team (and, by proxy, their country). The fans sacrifice their comfort for their country and, in a certain symbolic way, grow closer to it in the manner outlined by Billig (1995), who argues for the link between sacrifice and nationalism, writing that ‘in dying for his country, a soldier becomes one with the wider body politic of the imagined community of the nation’ (124). This could be argued to be particularly resonant in the case of Ireland, given that the Easter Rising of 1916, an event sanctified in the national narrative, was essentially a ‘blood sacrifice’ (in the words of rebel leader Patrick Pearse) deemed necessary for the cause of Irish freedom. Ireland football fandom becomes a more palatable vehicle for traditional nationalist values in ‘Ode,’ as well as in the likes of ‘#MakeHistory’ and ‘The Twelfth Man’ (however unsubtly the latter might wear those values on its sleeve). In the context of modern Ireland, eager – after decades of relative cultural stagnation – to embrace global technological and social change, but wary of abandoning a distinct national identity and culture, these encapsulations of idealized Irishness carry significant commercial cachet.

In advertising then, football fandom can function as a potent but ultimately ‘safe’ signifier of a society and culture in which postmodern and technological social alienation are briefly overturned as individuals unite in common colours, passions and goals. In depicting the effect of sport in such a fashion, the brand hopes to create a ‘triangular causality’ (Wright 2003) between team, fans and brand, in which use of the brand creates an association between team and fans. Three’s strategy may be more indirect than other national sport sponsors – at no point in any of their ads do they explicitly portray use of the Three network as something which will improve consumers’ experience of supporting Ireland – but the act of linking their brand to depictions of fan communities ultimately serves the same aim.

3:6.2. *The Conception and Construction of Ireland Football Fandom as Digital Cultural Nationalism*

To further explore this notion of ‘safeness’ and the subsequent commercial appeal that this quality imbues Ireland football fandom with, it is instructive to examine Laclau’s notion of the empty signifier. The empty signifier is ‘an absent totality’ (2004), a vague symbol carrying significant discursive weight in its ability to act as a sort of umbrella concept for subtler, unarticulated ideologies. In this case, an Irish national identity weighed down by militantly mono-cultural roots and dogged by the legacy of the Troubles is communicated through generalized references to sacrifice and passion which are imbued with a sense of national distinctiveness by the symbols and imagery of the Ireland football team and its supporters. This appears to ground it in reality and history, but sport also offers a conceptual flexibility not bound to the context of its own history. Sport can connect past, present and future, melding nostalgia, excitement and anticipation with a degree of deftness almost unparalleled among cultural forms (Rowe 1999). Sport can repurpose its past to better suit the version of the present that is desirable to depict. O’Callaghan (2011), for instance, writes of how the Munster rugby team’s famous 1978 win over the formidable All-Blacks was reshaped into a symbol of the cross-cultural, cross-class nature of Munster and their fans (and, by extension, the sport in the country in general). Similarly, Alabarces et al (2001) discuss how the Argentinean football team’s two stylistically disparate World Cup victories (in 1978 and 1986) are continually reinterpreted as positive or negative in contrast to each other in order to validate or condemn the current team’s style of play, and even the current political climate of the country (552-553). Of course, sport is hardly unique in providing potential for historical reinterpretation, but what is particularly significant about sport is how its mediated nature allows this reinterpretation to be managed swiftly and engagingly. Familiar footage of a past match need only require a fresh voiceover or musical score to re-frame its connotations, and editing techniques allow it to be seamlessly interwoven with the present (or a vision of the future). Such connections between past and future are facilitated by shared symbols (team jerseys, colours and flags) which emphasise the validity and apparent naturalness of these links. And while this deft historical repurposing is particularly easily achieved by a short audio-visual medium (such as television advertisements) it is eminently achievable in textual media, where allusions to statistics, results and trophies (won or

lost) lend the reinterpretation of sport's past a patina of legitimacy as it is employed to shape opinions on the present or future.

This quality makes sport particularly attractive to advertising. According to Laclau, the empty signifier can be used to illuminate the process whereby commercial entities divest themselves of any political roots or potentially controversial historical significances in order to broaden their appeal. This, of course, is particularly appealing to advertisers who, for all their efforts to segment the market and cater advertising accordingly, ultimately hope to effectively communicate with as wide an audience as possible. Sport, as was discussed in Section 1.2, allows them to do so, but doing so is often contingent on downplaying the complex connotations particular sporting events or figures may have accrued – on reducing it to Laclau's empty signifier. National identity, hotly debated, historically loaded and yet nationally engaging; is ripe for such 'emptying' by advertisers, all the more so when it can be grounded and coloured by sporting signifiers.

The commercial transformation of national identity into an empty signifier may not be an entirely new phenomenon, but it is lent a particular significance by 21st century developments in technology and politics, and the subsequent impact of these developments on the socio-cultural climate, and is this significance which shapes digital cultural nationalism. While the rise of globalization and the elision of distinct national cultures has been the subject of considerable anxiety for decades (Held 1989; Bairner 2003; Ariely 2012), the global communication and cultural exchange fostered by the internet has exacerbated these anxieties and yet also provided a new platform for construction and celebration of national cultures and identities. Just as Anderson (1983) cites the national press as crucial to shaping the identity of the nation-state, and just as Billig (1995) describes how subsequent media innovations such as the film and television industry have re-enforced the idea of national identity, so too can the internet (and the changes it has influenced in other forms of media) play a role in emphasizing and shaping such concepts. However, this is occurring at a time when a resurgence in right-wing nationalism has increased suspicion, or at least discomfort, with such celebration. As a consequence, much of the national identity related content produced by successful, professional online outlets is characterised by an ironic tone coloured by the context of digital cultural nationalism, a quasi-acknowledgement of the absurdity of celebrating the mundane cultural ephemera they focus on (in lieu of attracting

controversy through focusing on the more substantial and contentious historical or political elements of the particular national identity – see Appendix 3 for examples). This is particularly true of Ireland, where, as Arrowsmith (2004) notes ‘Expressions of patriotism hold a dubious currency in a country dominated for so long by that unpopular Catholic nationalism and then, since the 1960s, by the spectre of the nationalisms of Northern Ireland’ (466). Indeed, in an Irish context, the development is beginning to attract some attention in the media with a 2018 edition of *Irish Times*’ supplement *The Ticket* (Power 2018) citing ‘an obsession with the minutiae and ephemera of Irish culture’ which, the writer argues, began in the 1990s (notably, a time when the country was beginning to emerge from the shadow of Catholic-dominated mono-culturalism and peace in the North was becoming a distinct possibility). The article notes the ‘vast industry’ that has arisen from this obsession and cites academic Anthony McIntyre who argues that this is due to ‘a void in terms of the defining features of Irishness’ (created by the decline of traditional institutions such as the Catholic Church and the onset of globalization).

Sport allows advertisers to leverage the appeal of celebrating national identity in a manner which appears to ‘fill’ the empty signifier with more significance without posing significant risk of arousing controversy. Sport may provide a platform for divisive debate on national and cultural identity, but as David Rowe (2010) notes, advertising has the ability to drain controversial sporting moments of their political resonance (366). Of course, this is not always – if ever – so simply and completely achieved by advertisers. Preceding sections of this chapter have outlined the discontent ‘Ode’ provoked from some viewers, both from those who were irked by its depiction of concepts they regarded with considerable sensitivity and from those who expressed scepticism over attempts to instil such ‘empty’ ideas with emotional or cultural significance. Nevertheless, the success of ‘Ode’ speaks to a clear public and commercial appeal in sport’s ability to transform national identity into a palatable and easily digestible text.

Again, it bears noting that this process of converting complex ideologies and historically charged discourses into a more nebulous, commercially palatable form is not being argued here to wholly be a deliberately planned strategy on the part of advertisers and brands, but rather a consequence of the contemporary cultural and economic context. It is an aid to understanding the commercial priorities intertwined with the shaping contemporary culture rather than an attempt to unmask a neo-nationalist conspiracy. Nevertheless, there is evidently a certain degree of awareness on the

part of the parties involved the production of ‘Ode’ as regards the socio-cultural connotations of Ireland football fandom and their significance in the current climate. The level of deliberation involved in the conception, production and distribution of this campaign certainly includes consideration of how to minimise the perceived complexities of Irish identity while emphasising its most commercially palatable associations.

Assessing the campaign in light of the concept of digital cultural nationalism it becomes evident that the parties behind the production of ‘Ode’ regard Irish identity as something of an ideological new scarcity and shape the campaign to reflect this. As alluded to in the previous chapter, Henri Lefebvre’s new scarcities concept concerns the shaping of naturally occurring qualities into apparent rarities so as to confer them with exchange value, but is employed here with reference to ideological ‘qualities’ – most pertinently, national identity. Digital cultural nationalism is predicated on an anxiety over how to express or experience any sense of shared national culture in an age of fragmented identity and globalized media. The role this anxiety has played in the resurgence of right wing nationalism on a political level is covered elsewhere and beyond the scope of this work, which defines digital cultural nationalism as an implicit reaction to this ideology – an uneasy search for a less contentious form of expression for national identity. While he did not directly connect sport to the idea of new scarcities (ideological or material), Lefebvre nonetheless demonstrates an awareness of its ideological potential, noting that ‘Sport is an activity which is apparently incompatible with illusion, and yet in fact it confronts us with a reverse image, a compensation for everyday life’ (1991, 36). Lefebvre’s ‘new scarcities’ concept does not describe the manufacturing of perceived rarity wholly by individual design but rather the commercial exploitation and escalation of the wider socio-economic circumstances that have created this rarity. Similar exploitation and escalation is present on an ideological level when it comes to digital cultural nationalism, and, specifically, ‘Ode’s’ depiction of the sense of national identity fostered by the Ireland national football team.

The advertising professional’s comments about shared experience of Ireland matches being a rare moment in which we “feel part of a community again” indicate a vision of a society in which individuals are otherwise largely alienated from any sense of shared identity or community. Notably, this isolation arises from the proliferation of communication technology (“As we’ve become more mobile, we’ve actually got a little more disconnected” [27 April

2016]) and is therefore positioned as a uniquely modern dilemma. Advertisers' embracing of this view is echoed in a roundtable discussion held by *The Advertising and Society Review* (2006) in which several advertising professionals discuss Mastercard's 'Priceless' campaign (which began in 1997 and continues to form a key part of the brand's advertising). The advertisers cite a shift in social values over the decade preceding the campaign which saw 'a movement toward doing things that satisfied you intrinsically' over material gains. This demonstrates the depiction of a context in which the communal and familial are overwhelmed by celebrations of commercial goods, and are therefore all the rarer and more valuable. As with the production team behind 'Ode,' the professionals discussing 'Priceless' describe the perceived rarity of the feelings and qualities they are trying to tap into as arising from wider socio-cultural trends which they do not explicitly reference in their campaigns, but which instead forms the implicit cultural backdrop against which the appeal of their portrayal of idealized communal values are framed. This chimes with Lefebvre's description of new scarcities as part of a broad consequence of capitalism rather than an economic strategy deliberately enacted by individual actors. In the case of Three's efforts to play upon a sense of shared Irish identity, the advertising strategist interviewed concedes that his agency's client may represent the issue of phone-induced social isolation, but limits their response to the issue to finding a way to assuage anxieties surrounding it via advertising. Thus, digital cultural nationalist texts proceed from a point of view which regards the anxiety surrounding the perceived diminishment of national identities and communal cultures as inevitable, which implicitly negates criticism of their reaction to (or exploitation of) this cultural climate.

With all of this in mind, 'Ode' can be read as a digital cultural nationalism text which underlines the unique potential of sport to function as a potent symbol in the construction and depiction of national identity in this culturally fraught context. It allows national identity to be 'emptied' of the majority of its potential controversies and historically loaded elements, while still lending a sense of significance and consequence to the text. 'Ode' is an ad which can only emerge from its specific historical context, not only for the production techniques involved or that its depiction of Ireland fans flows from the fall-out of Euro 2012, but also, crucially, for the manner in which its central appeal is drawn from 'selling' its audience a concept that is, theoretically, freely available to them. Just as Lefebvre's capitalists can only 'sell' light and space in a context wherein both they and the consumer accept that the apparent rarity of these naturally occurring qualities is an

inevitability, largely outside of the control of any of the parties involved in the transaction; ‘Ode’ can only be commercially viable if its vision of idealized Irish identity and community is regarded by viewers as an exceptional and desirable deviation from the reality of modern Ireland.

3:7. Conclusion

From this in-depth study of ‘Ode,’ it becomes evident that the ad adroitly plays upon the appeal of Ireland football fandom and that it therefore reveals much about the socio-cultural significance of the identities it plays upon. Through the continual references to the authenticity of the fans’ support over the course of the campaign, we see how the fans’ perceived sincere dedication is viewed not merely as a uniquely potent quality within their own sport, but within wider Irish culture as well. Furthermore, Three’s desire to celebrate this perceived authenticity demonstrates not only its commercial appeal, but also sheds light on the thin line sport sponsors must thread; on the strategies Three must employ to be seen as an ‘official fan’ of the team rather than a ‘commercial partner’ of the FAI. Through examining its production and reception, we see that it is far from merely a matter of a brand siphoning public attention through association with a popular team, but rather a careful effort to marry the brand’s ‘story’ to that of the team and fans. In doing so, it creates an ad that does not appear to advertise, a commercial sleight of hand that allows Three to take temporary possession of hotly contested or sensitively guarded identities (Ireland football fandom and, by extension, Irish national identity) without arousing significant discontent.

From a wider perspective, ‘Ode’ can be read as a digital cultural nationalism text in the manner in which plays upon a ‘safe’ version of Irish identity and derives appeal from the perceived rarity of moments of communal identity and experience which it celebrates. The success of ‘Ode’ serves as an illustration of the reawakening of the appeal of the local within the encroaching global and the potency of sport to tap into that appeal. Yet it also illustrates that sport comes with its own complications and connotations – both the sport’s governing body and its fans will have their own ideas of what it represents and how it should be portrayed. Furthermore, the discursive parameters of the portrayal of the sport in campaigns will be dictated by factors beyond the sponsor and advertiser’s control (team results, players’ mediated personalities, historical events)

and therefore even celebrating the ‘empty signifier’ of national identity must be achieved through deft navigation of the possibilities within these parameters. McLuhan claimed that ‘the medium is the message,’ but here it is the sport that dictates a large part of the message. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, ‘All it Takes’ attempts a similar celebration of idealised Irishness through sport, yet the form this takes is markedly different.

Chapter 4: ‘All it Takes is Everything’

4:1. Introduction

Just as the preceding chapter identified the uniquely interesting features of ‘Ode’ and open a path for the exploration of the campaign as a digital cultural nationalism text, this chapter attempts a similar examination of ‘All it Takes.’ The campaign will be analysed not merely for its unusualness in being produced by the brand which concurrently sponsored both football and rugby Irish national teams, but also for what it reveals about the shifting commercial appeal and cultural connotations of rugby within wider Irish culture.

‘All it Takes’ marks a significant step in the continuing attempts to broaden the commercial appeal of Irish rugby and help it transcend its traditional Anglo-Irish bourgeois associations. As will be expounded on in the succeeding sections of this chapter, the campaign was notable for the manner in which it attempted to reconcile its celebration of the players as superhuman heroes with the urge to ensure they remained relatable within the context of post-Tiger Irish society. Whereas previous Irish rugby ads relied on emphasising ties to the sport’s amateur past to communicate a sense of groundedness in Irish culture. Irish rugby, as was outlined in section 1:4.1, has long been dogged by suspicions that the sport is purely the realm of the urban middle classes, but the advent of professionalization brought the further complication for advertisers and sponsors, namely that consumers may become alienated by players owing to a gulf in salary and consequent disparity in lifestyles. The strategies ‘All it Takes’ adopted to allay these potential sources of alienation are therefore particularly significant in the manner in which they diverge from previous approaches.

Furthermore, investigating the campaign also sheds considerable light on the unique commercial appeal of rugby in the Irish context and the ability of sport to galvanise an elusive sense of shared national culture. As in the preceding chapter, these issues will be explored through the three-pronged approach of production, textual analysis and reception; tracing the campaign from its development to its ramifications from sponsor brand and sponsored property, and assessing the input and divergent priorities of the various stakeholders and interested parties. In addition, it briefly explores relevant developments with regard to sponsorship of Irish rugby subsequent to ‘All it Takes.’ Furthermore, as with the previous chapter, this chapter will also attempt to set the

campaign within the wider context of Irish rugby advertising and assess its impact on the future of that field. This will then provide a context for the exploration of ‘All it Takes’ as it relates to digital cultural nationalism, with reference to useful theoretical concepts such as new scarcities and empty signifiers.

4:2. Production

‘All it Takes’ launched on February 5th 2015 with the release of a teaser video featuring Robbie Henshaw on Three Ireland’s YouTube channel, while the main ad began airing on television soon afterwards and was released on YouTube on February 13th. The campaign was scheduled to coincide with Ireland’s defence of their Six Nations crown.²⁴ It was commissioned by Three and produced by Boys and Girls. Three had gained the sponsorship of Irish rugby following their takeover of telecommunications rival O2 in May 2014 (though they had been in discussion since mid-2013 and the takeover only came into full effect in March of the following year). They would hold the position as primary sponsor until May 2016 when the position was taken by Vodafone. Three had the benefit of taking over as team sponsor during a period in which Ireland were very much in the ascendancy. Leinster’s successful New Zealander head coach, Joe Schmidt had taken over the management of the team following a disastrous 2013 Six Nations Championship, and the team went on to win the following year’s Championship in 2014, before retaining their title in 2015. Prior to the disappointment of 2013, Ireland had also performed credibly at the 2011 Rugby World Cup, gaining a famous win over a formidable Australia team in the group stage before exiting somewhat anti-climatically in the quarterfinals to Wales.

The campaign was heavily promoted by Three, as they produced not only the main televised ad and a ‘behind the scenes’ documenting its production (as was the case with ‘Ode’) but also three teaser videos to build anticipation for the main ad, as well as the #AllitTakes film series, three biographical mini-documentaries focussing on the lives of the three Ireland internationals featured in the campaign (Johnny Sexton, Robbie Henshaw and Paul O’Connell). A press release was issued to mark the launch of the campaign, while a subsequent one was released to mark

²⁴ The Six Nations is a rugby union championship played throughout February and March in a round-robin, mini-league format between Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, France and Italy. With the notable exception of the Rugby World Cup, it is regarded as the premier international competition for northern hemisphere nations.

O’Connell’s 100th cap for Ireland and promote the bio mini-documentary commemorating his career. In the rhetoric surrounding the campaign (such as the press releases and official social media captions) there is a notable emphasis on Three as a facilitator for a closer relationship between the public and the team. The press release for the overall campaign quotes Three CCO Elaine Carey as saying that ‘Three wants to bring fans closer to the team, showing them the mental and physical barriers Irish rugby internationals constantly overcome in order to deliver the world-class performances on the rugby pitch.’ The #AllItTakes film series is lauded as featuring ‘featuring exclusive, never before seen footage’ (see Appendix 2 for press releases and other supplementary materials).

The player employment arrangements of Irish rugby see any Irish player based within the country directly contracted to the IRFU. Sponsorship arrangements with the IRFU therefore provide sponsor brands with a level of direct access to the players almost unparalleled within Irish professional sporting organisations (Irish footballers, for instance, are not contracted to the FAI, but to their clubs and their participation in sponsorship campaigns is thus based on mutual goodwill rather than formal responsibilities). It is therefore not surprising that Three chose to take advantage of these circumstances by focussing on star players for the campaign. The brand’s choice of players is notable, however. Firstly because O’Connell, Sexton and Henshaw represented a neat ‘past, present, future’ snapshot of Irish rugby, and, secondly, because it could also be viewed as an efficient way effectively communicating to as wide an Irish audience as possible. O’Connell played for Munster, Henshaw for Connacht, and though Sexton played for Racing 92 of Paris during the time of the ad’s broadcast, he began his career at Leinster (and indeed would later return there). In selecting players from the three provinces which formed the bulk of the Republic of Ireland, Three helped ensure the ad would underline that the team represented Ireland as a whole (rather than the urban bourgeois it was historically associated with) and that the brand’s message would meet with a receptive audience in rugby fans all over the country. They notably chose not to feature any players from the Ulster team, even though Three have a stake in the Northern Irish telecommunications market.

The manner in which the players were to be portrayed in the campaign was also shaped by the input of the IRFU, who hold strong views on how the team is represented. An IRFU marketing official interviewed for this work revealed that the organisation had consulted a branding

consultant to develop a strong sense of identity for the team. The official was reluctant to reveal the details about the nature of this identity, but he notably cited Guinness' 'Born of Our Land' campaign (which depicted Irish rugby players as mythic man-tree hybrids) as too 'alien' for the organisation's tastes. He was clear that the IRFU would not presume to interfere with the details of sponsorship campaigns, but that it would be nonetheless firm regarding the manner in which the team is depicted, asserting that: 'we're positioning the team as representative of the country; humble and hardworking, so it doesn't suit us if you bring out an advertising campaign that's kind of cocky and snide, or edgy and alien-type players' (25 July 2016).

This view of the players as 'humble and hardworking' certainly chimes with how they are portrayed in 'All it Takes' (discussed in greater detail in section 4:3), but the extent to which it directly influenced this portrayal is less clear. An advertising strategist who worked on the campaign framed the focus on hard work and effort as part of a broader tonal shift in sports advertising in an interview conducted for this work. He noted that 'a lot of recent sport sponsorship is less about winning, and more about the preparation that goes into winning,' and argued that this made players seem more relatable to audiences, as their seemingly superhuman deeds in the rarefied arena of elite sport become more appreciable when framed in universally relatable terms such as effort and struggle. Taking this approach with regard to the Irish rugby team was made easier by the accessibility of the players, but also, the strategist argued, because of the pre-existing public perception of them. The fact that the majority of the players were based in Ireland allowed fans to cultivate a perceived relationship with them, he claimed, citing fans' frequent use of players' first names or nicknames in discussions (in contrast to football fans' tendency to refer to players by surname) as a sign of this. He asserted that the geographical proximity of players to fans 'allows you to have a bit more of a one-on-one relationship with the players, and I think they're less superstar than the soccer players are; there's less risk of them having that kind of "hero worship"' (27 April 2016).

Of course, this shared view of how Irish rugby players should be portrayed by advertisers need not be viewed as arising from a purely linear process, whereby the sponsor and advertisers are happily dictated to by the IRFU. The shared view of both advertiser and sporting body (and the branding company they employed) can be viewed as emerging from observation of the socio-cultural associations surrounding the sport outlined in section 1:4.1. One area in which there

were some differing ideas between the parties involved in the campaign concerning how the team was represented concerned the physically dangerous nature of the sport. A Three sponsorship executive interviewed for this work voiced concern over the possibility of the campaign being seen to glamorise potentially injurious tackles: ‘we just had to be a little bit delicate, because one of the pieces was Paul O’Connell running into a rhino, and there was a lot of issues to do with concussion and so on. So it had to be delivered in the right message, because you don’t want to [...] be seen to not take the issue too seriously, because concussion is such a serious issue and you don’t want to belittle it in any way.’ The executive noted the irony of one of the most appealing features of the sport – its physicality – being so intertwined with one of its most off-putting – the risk of incurring of brain injury – and described crafting an appealing campaign around the sport as ‘a balancing act’ (26 February 2016). However, when this was put to the IRFU marketing official during the interview, he emphatically downplayed the potentially negative associations caused by the risk of concussion, arguing that ‘Sometimes the concussion thing gets a little bit overdone – there’s concussion in lots of sports, people can get concussed doing all sorts of different things. But at the end of the day, I’m a parent, I have a son who plays rugby and the pluses far outweigh the negatives’ (25 July 2016). The interviewee may have felt loath to express too much concern for an issue that the organisation has been eager to emphasise is under control, but the contrast in the levels of concern over the issue do indicate a potential fault line in the sponsorship arrangement – namely, that the sponsor (and the advertising agency they employ) must be conscious of potentially negative associations the sport carries, which the governing body would rather not discuss.

What ultimately emerged from this confluence of opinion and influence on the campaign was perhaps most notable for its divergence from some of the narrative and aesthetic tropes employed by previous prominent Irish rugby ad campaigns. As discussed above, the IRFU official interviewed for this project appeared to take a dim view of Guinness’ ‘Born of Our Land’ and its overt transformation of the Irish rugby team into fantasy titans, so the decision in ‘All it Takes’ to humanise the players (though not entirely abandon the idea of mythologising them through fantasy imagery) is not surprising, but given Guinness’ formidable reputation within the Irish advertising industry, it is notable. Indeed, the same official who expressed his dislike for ‘Born of Our Land’ described Guinness as ‘the best marketers in the country’ and noted their long and

successful history of commissioning Irish rugby ads.²⁵ Thus, it is all the more notable that ‘All it Takes’ also eschewed Guinness’ more recent alternative approach to balancing attempts to mythologise the sport without alienating viewers from it.

In 2014, Guinness released four ads focussing on specific figures and narratives from the history of English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish rugby. The ads aired on British and Irish television at roughly the same time as that year’s November internationals series. The Irish-focussed ad, entitled ‘David and Goliath,’ depicted Munster’s famous 1978 victory over the All-Blacks. The victory has long held a vaunted position in the mythology and popular memory of Irish rugby (and to an extent, Irish sport in general) owing to the formidable record of the New Zealand team and the fact that no Irish side would match Munster’s achievement until a victory by the national team in 2016. The match has been the subject of a play (*Alone it Stands*, John Breen), a book (*Stand Up and Fight*, Alan English) and numerous retrospective articles. A recurrent feature in the mythologising of the event has been the emphasis on the perceived ‘egalitarian nature or “ordinariness” of Munster rugby,’ (O’Callaghan 2011, 181) which renders their victory over the international titans of the All-Blacks all the more remarkable. This underdog discourse is prominent throughout Guinness’ contribution to the mythology of the 1978 match. This is most clear in the title, but is reiterated in the narration (provided by actor, Colm Meaney) which positions the All-Blacks as nigh-unbeatable giants of rugby:

One team dominates the game of rugby: The All-Blacks. Rivals surrender before a ball has even been kicked. ‘And that’s your fate today,’ the Munster team was told. But none of them listened. Not even their smallest player. With a single tackle he stopped Goliath dead. And every Irishman grew 12 feet taller.

In relation to ‘All it Takes’ and the different approach the Three commissioned campaign took, what is most significant about ‘David and Goliath’ is the manner in which it attempts to transform a nearly 40 year old regional victory into an event worthy of 21st century national celebration. O’Callaghan (2011) describes how the traditional egalitarianism of rugby culture in Limerick has been retrospectively imposed onto all of Munster through media mythmaking, and

²⁵ Though not a primary sponsor of the Ireland team, Guinness have a long history of rugby sponsorship which intersects with the IRFU. For many years they have sponsored the Autumn International Series, which pits top international teams from the northern hemisphere (invariably including Ireland) against their southern counterparts. They are also currently the sponsors of the Pro14, the primary league competition for professional Irish, Scottish, Welsh and Italian clubs. In both capacities, they have commissioned televised advertising for Irish rugby.

‘David and Goliath’ attempts to further stretch this reputation onto all of Ireland. It was released to mark Ireland’s participation in the 2014 Six Nations, but focusses specifically on a single province, attempting to create an implicit association between the achievements and character of the 1978 Munster team with those of the 2014 Ireland team in the minds of any viewer with even a casual knowledge of rugby. Notably too, the ad is narrated by the recognizably Dublin tones of Colm Meaney which contributes to the impression that Munster’s victory is something to be shared and celebrated by fans beyond the boundaries of the province. The narration further contributes to this impression by asserting that ‘every Irishman grew 12 feet taller’ with Munster’s win. The ad attempts to transform a regional triumph into a national one, and through doing that, associate modern Irish rugby with the underdog, everyman qualities of the 1978 Munster team. Notably, ‘David vs Goliath’ was later re-aired in November 2018 in the build-up to a highly anticipated test match between Ireland and New Zealand.

With this in mind, it is therefore notable that ‘All it Takes’ does not attempt to render the Irish rugby team more relatable through association with the sport’s amateur past. Guinness were not alone in this approach; O2, Three’s predecessor as primary sponsor of the Ireland rugby team, produced an ad prior to the 2007 World Cup which featured current players passing the ball backwards in time to former Ireland greats. The ad’s narration asserts ‘It’s not who stands on front of you that’s important. It’s who stands behind you,’ creating a clear link between the players of the amateur era and the modern professional superstars. That the players of previous eras are represented, not through footage from their heyday, but with contemporary images shot specifically for the ad. Ageing, mud-splattered men, each clad in the version of the Irish jersey most famous in his playing days, pass the ball to progressively younger compatriots, a sequence which culminates with powerful, youthful, contemporary Ireland captain, Brian O’Driscoll in possession of the ball. The sequence creates a sense of progression, a sense that Irish rugby is continually improving, building the modern perfection of O’Driscoll on the foundations of its past. This continuity with the past ensures that the superstar glamour of an elite professional such as O’Driscoll (and his Ireland teammates) is not regarded as alienating, as their hard work and passion are authenticated through connection with their markedly unglamorous amateur forebears.

With these previous efforts in mind, that ‘All it Takes’ does not attempt to ensure the relatability of its featured rugby stars by linking them to the sport’s humbler past is significant. Despite the sport’s burgeoning popularity in Ireland, rugby still carries lingering associations with the Anglo-Irish bourgeois which render its position in ‘authentic’ Irish culture questionable to some. ‘All it Takes’ therefore invests considerable confidence in its ability to wow audiences into regarding the players as titans of the sport, and that pride in their status as international superstars will transcend any suspicions about the sport’s place in Irish culture. This raises a complication inherent to sport advertising – namely, that it cannot rely on the unpredictable results of a team or athlete for its appeal, and yet the perception of any ad featuring (or referencing) a team or athlete will inevitably be coloured by their recent fortunes. All of the parties involved in the production of both ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ interviewed for this work avowed the importance of not basing a sponsorship campaign’s appeal on the results of the team, but ‘All it Takes’ is nonetheless (albeit somewhat obliquely) founded upon the contemporary success and prestige of the Irish rugby team. While the ad does not refer directly to recent or upcoming games (or, indeed, the 2015 Six Nations in general, though timing would make such an association inevitable in the mind of any viewer with even a casual knowledge of rugby), its repeated references to the players and team as being among the international elite rely on the viewer’s agreement with this assessment of Ireland’s status. The advertising strategist who worked on the campaign interviewed for this work argued that the emphasis the ad placed on the players’ effort and sacrifice made the ad more effective than had it merely praised their prowess, but their effort and sacrifice are emphasized with regard to how they have contributed to the players’ achieving a status as among the international elite. This status was unlikely to be adversely affected by a single bad result, but a repeat of the disastrous 2013 Six Nations performance in the 2015 competition may well have derailed the campaign’s narrative.

Of course, such a disaster did not occur (instead, Ireland would win the 2015 Six Nations), but the possibility of it affirms the importance of the player bio videos to effectively articulating the campaign’s overall narrative. The IRFU want the team to be portrayed as ‘humble and hardworking’ and are decidedly wary about the possibility of them being perceived as too alien, but for all the emphasis ‘All it Takes’ places on the players’ ‘hardworking’ nature, it manifests this nature through superhuman powers depicted through special effects. The bios (which are further explored in section 4:3) function to ground these supermen in the familiar reality of Irish

culture and ensure the fantastical imagery of the main ad does not render them too alien. The importance of these bio videos to the narrative of the overall campaign further illustrates Sinclair's (2015) arguments about the increasing blurriness of 'the line' once used to define advertising techniques. The bio videos could be described as being 'above the line' in the sense that they constitute pre-recorded audio-visual media texts (similar to radio or television ads), and yet they have certain qualities traditionally associated with advertising techniques deemed 'below the line.' Chief among these is that the consumer can exercise a choice about whether or not to experience them (as opposed to television or radio ads which the consumer may experience as involuntary interruptions to the content they intend to consume).

Ultimately, an examination of the production of 'All it Takes' indicates a shift in Irish rugby advertising (and perhaps wider sports advertising as well). Despite the lingering negative associations with Anglo-Irish bourgeois culture, the campaign demonstrates a relative confidence in consumers' acceptance of Irish rugby stars as legitimate totems of Irish culture. It opts not to resort to evocations of a humble past to temper its celebration of modern success in the main televised ad. However, such tempering is present in the bio videos promoted through Three's social media. The manner in which these videos function to humanise the supermen of the main ad and root them firmly in notions of traditional Irish community and culture is expounded on in the following section of this chapter, but here it is worth noting that they convey a distinct and important aspect of the campaign's narrative which is absent from the 'above the line' texts.

4:3. Textual Analysis

This section examines 'All it Takes is Everything,' the main televised ad of the 'All it Takes' campaign in detail, and supplements this through further analysis of its various supplementary texts. These supplementary texts include three preview teaser videos for the main ad, and four video mini-documentaries, all issued on Three Ireland's official YouTube channel. The first mini-documentary is a 'making of' video of the main ad, while the three others are biographical features on the three players featured in the ad. These supplementary videos have not only attracted a significant number of viewers, but also illustrate the manner in which rugby's socio-

cultural significance in contemporary Ireland is constructed and leveraged throughout the campaign.

4:3.1. *Analysis of Televised Ad*

The opening shot of the main ad is of a rugby ball soaring through the night sky. This is quickly followed by a sharp tonal contrast: blue-green butterflies resting on a lamp built into a stark white wall. There is then a shot of a player (later revealed to be Robbie Henshaw but largely indistinguishable here) hunched over in a darkened weights room, steam visibly rising from his sweating body. He turns to face the camera, before the ad cuts to a shot of Paul O'Connell leaping to catch a rugby ball. O'Connell is based near the goal-frame on a mist-strewn, floodlit pitch. Like Henshaw, he is shot from a mid-range angle and is therefore not immediately recognisable to the first time viewer. O'Connell begins to run with the ball before the ad cuts to Johnny Sexton. He is seated alone on a bench in a starkly white locker room, tossing a ball in his hands and wearing an expression of concentration. The camera emerges from behind a wall to reveal Sexton in a mid-shot, before cutting to a close-up. Unlike the previously depicted players, he is quickly recognisable to the viewer because of the bright lighting and the use of a close-up. Immediately afterwards, Henshaw is shown in close-up, puffing out his cheeks in exertion and looking determined. The object of his gaze is then cut to: an enormous, black barbell mounted on a weight rack.

The camera then cuts to O'Connell, shot from behind as he charges up an empty pitch, ball in hand. He is then depicted in profile, close-up, gritting his teeth in exertion. The camera then returns to a close-up of Sexton, spinning the ball in his hands and looking resolved. He turns his head toward something away from the camera, but the first time viewer does not immediately learn what, as the ad cuts to Henshaw, shot from a side angle as he mounts himself beneath the barbell. As he begins to lift the weight, his face tight and sweating, flames start to rise from his shoulders. The action then returns to a close-up of Sexton's arms holding the ball in the stark white locker room. As his arm slaps the ball, it appears to ripple. A shot of Sexton sitting on the bench, his whole body visible now, sees him strike the ball with his other hand and instantly explode into hundreds of the blue-green butterflies depicted at the beginning of the ad. They

swarm around the room for a moment before the ad returns to O'Connell charging up the pitch. He from the side, first in a mid-range shot, before the camera switches to a long-range shot from the same angle. Just before it cuts away from him, some dark, massive creature enters the frame from the right, running directly in O'Connell's path. Before the first time viewer gets a close look at this creature, the ad cuts to Henshaw, shot from behind as he prepares to lift the massive barbell from his shoulders. His entire back is now covered in flames, completely enveloping his Ireland jersey. The ad then returns to the white locker room, where the butterflies rapidly reassemble into the form of Sexton. He strides towards the exit, taking one last look of resolve into the room before leaving.

The next shot is of a large rhino, charging headlong into the camera on a floodlit pitch. This is the creature running towards O'Connell in the earlier shot. He is depicted with a close-up highlighting his determined expression as he charges to meet the animal. The ad cuts to a wide-shot of animal and man running to clash with one another. Then there is a close-up of O'Connell, shot almost as if he is seen from the rhino's point of view as he readies himself for a tackle. The ad returns to the wide-shot as O'Connell tackles the rhino and shatters it into tiny fragments, emerging unbowed from the clash, slowing his pace. O'Connell is then depicted in a mid-shot, coming slowly to a halt with the ball still in hand. The final shot depicts the Three logo against a white background with the caption 'Proud sponsor of the Irish rugby team' beneath it, while a narrator speaks this line.

The ad is sound-tracked by a minimalist piano theme; a repeating riff which begins as the lone source of music before being joined by clashing drum and guitar sounds as the ad progresses and the tension rises. The sound mixing of the ad is worth noting too. The sounds marking the players' actions (Sexton slapping the ball, O'Connell catching it, Henshaw gripping the weight, etc.) are markedly pronounced, conveying a sense of force and significance behind each action. In addition to an Irish voiceover declaring Three to be 'Proud sponsors of the Irish rugby team' at the end of the ad, it features narration from the New Zealander tones of Ireland rugby head coach Joe Schmidt. Schmidt's narration has the air of a team talk, focussing on the commitment required to win important matches:

These are... psychological battles, as much as they are physical ones. All it takes... is everything that you can dig out. Everything that you can process. Everything that you can

physically deliver. All it takes is knowing that no matter who or what's coming at you, you'll be ready. All it takes is everything.

Throughout, the ad works to strike a balance between lauding the players as heroic figures of superhuman abilities and emphasising the hard work and determination required to attain and hone these abilities. While the ad culminates in visualising the players' strength and resolve through surreal imagery, this is built towards with a naturalistic depiction of their struggle and hard work, conveyed through body language and facial expressions. It is a subtle but important balance for the ad to strike in order to resonate with viewers. Pegoraro et al (2010) note how ads overly intent on celebrating the perceived glamour or greatness of their celebrity subjects can alienate audiences. Indeed, she notes that 'advertisements tend to neglect the negative aspects associated with the topic of the advertisement' such as 'a depiction of the amount of work required to achieve something' (1459), something which Boys and Girls aimed to specifically address in its conception of the ad. An advertising strategist for the agency interviewed for this work notes that 'a lot of recent sport sponsorship is less about winning, and more about the preparation that goes into winning' (27 April 2016). He asserts that few previous rugby ads had taken this route and interviews with the players made the agency aware of the effort that went into their conditioning and preparation, and the appeal this had for a commercial narrative.

This theme of hard work is also emphasized in the caption posted with the video of 'All it Takes is Everything' on Three Ireland's YouTube channel: '100% is all it takes to play rugby at the highest level. Here, Three uncovers the mystery of the Irish rugby team, to reveal the dedication and commitment of Paul O'Connell, Johnny Sexton and Robbie Henshaw.' This caption also features a reiteration of the heroic qualities of the players by asserting that they 'play rugby at the highest level.' These ideas are likewise prominent in many of the supplementary texts of the campaign.

4:3.2. *Analysis of Supplementary Videos Produced for the Campaign*

The 'behind the scenes' video of the ad (issued via Three Ireland's YouTube channel and officially titled '#AllitTakes Series – Behind the Scenes') echoes the main ad in its thematic thrust. The video was uploaded to Three Ireland's YouTube channel on February 13th 2015 (the

same day as the main ad) and has garnered 6,495 views.²⁶ Similarly to ‘Ode’ and its own ‘behind the scenes’ video, there is a significant disparity in the views attracted between the main ad and this supplement. Nonetheless, it warrants examination for what it reveals about the main discourses central to the campaign and how they are communicated. Like ‘All it Takes,’ the ‘behind the scenes’ video features motivational narration from Joe Schmidt. The Ireland head coach (who notably speaks at greater length than he does in the main ad) extols the hard work and determination that characterise elite level players:

The truly test match level player works that hard that he makes sure that when he’s got something, he’s greedy. Belief is absolutely essential. We need the players the best equipped to cope in those really high pressure moments. To be the best prepared, it is doing the work before the match. It is being in the gym, it is being on the pitch, working hard, so that physically you’re going to rebound there. It is going places where you didn’t think you could get enough oxygen in to take another step to get into the defensive line. To play at this level, all it takes is everything.

Playing alongside Schmidt’s narration is a tinkling piano theme – a more upbeat version of the riff from the main ad. Together these soundtrack a rapid montage of shots demonstrating how the ad was made intercut with snippets of footage from the main ad. There is a particular emphasis on the special effects and the technology used to create them. There are frequent close-ups of cameras and computer screens. The video has a basic structure, focussing on each player in turn and showing how their depiction in ‘All it Takes’ was achieved. Sexton is shown in a set of the white locker room, sitting in the pose he takes in the ad while receiving instructions from film crew members. A computer monitor depicting a blank CGI figure striking a rugby ball and exploding into butterflies is intercut with a shot Sexton mirroring the figure’s movements in the main ad. Henshaw is depicted in the set of the weights room, which is intercut with shots of a jersey on a stand being set on fire with a blowtorch, which in turn segues into a shot from the main ad, of flames rising from Henshaw as he lifts the barbell. Paul O’Connell is shown being dusted down by crew members and being filmed running on a treadmill, before footage of his clash with the rhino from ‘All it Takes’ is shown. The Sexton segment begins with the screen overlaid with large white text reading ‘Featuring Johnny Sexton,’ and identical font featuring just the players’ names appear on screen in the segments focusing on Henshaw and O’Connell.

²⁶ Correct as of time of writing: 25th January 2018.

There is an evident desire in this video to emphasise the expense, technology and technical expertise employed in the making of ‘All it Takes.’ At times this impinges upon the campaign’s efforts to celebrate the hard work of the players, such as when Henshaw and O’Connell are depicted having dust and water applied to them before shooting so as to convey the impression of great physical exertion. This hardly a glaring flaw in the campaign’s narrative, but a minor moment of inconsistency which serves to illustrate the many motivations at play from the various stakeholders involved. In the press release Three issued to announce the campaign, company CCO, Elaine Carey claimed that ‘All it Takes’ would ‘bring fans closer to the team, showing them the mental and physical barriers Irish rugby internationals constantly overcome in order to deliver the world-class performances on the rugby pitch.’ There is evident concern for courting fan goodwill and ensuring a positive portrayal of the team, and it could be argued that the foregrounding of the ad’s budget and technical expertise are a tacit way of assuring viewers that these intentions are being taken seriously. Indeed, it could also be read as an eagerness on the part of Three and their advertising partners to assure the IRFU of the brand’s enthusiasm and expertise to serve as the primary sponsor for Irish rugby – as was mentioned above, Three were in this position by default following their acquisition of O2. Whatever the brand’s intentions, the effect of positioning footage of the work that went into the ad’s production alongside Schmidt’s narration is to convey a parallel between the effort made to become a ‘truly test match level player’ with the effort involved in crafting an effective ad. As was outlined in the preceding chapter, sponsors of passionately supported sports institutions must tread carefully in positioning themselves as an ‘official fan’ of the team, rather than being viewed as exploiting the team for commercial benefits. Three tread this line quite effectively in ‘All it Takes,’ but the implicit parallel drawn between the commitment and prestige of the players with that of the ad (and by extension, the ad agency and sponsor brand) is notable for being as close as they come to using Irish rugby to advertise their brand in a direct or conventional sense.

Three’s efforts to build anticipation for the ad were notable, with three teaser videos – each one focussing on one of the three players in the main ad – released on the Three Ireland YouTube channel in the lead-up to the release of ‘All it Takes.’ These teasers are each roughly twenty seconds long and depict the featured player accomplishing his feat of superhuman strength and determination from the main ad without any intercutting to those of his teammates. Each one finishes, like ‘All it Takes,’ with the Three logo displayed on a white background, above a

caption stating ‘Proud sponsor of the Irish rugby team’ while a narrator repeats this phrase. Each teaser also features narration from the featured players, all of which close with the player saying the slogan, ‘All it takes is everything.’ The rest of the narration focuses on overcoming doubt through determination and are worth reproducing here for the sake of clarity. Sexton’s teaser has him telling the audience: ‘They’re there [the butterflies, depicted fluttering on the light] from the second you wake up, like a sort of nervous anxiety. But they just mean you’re ready.’ While Henshaw’s has the player saying: ‘You feel like you’re going to fail, like your muscles are going to give up on you. You just have to keep fighting.’ Lastly, O’Connell’s narration features him saying: ‘It’s a big psychological battle. No matter what’s coming at you, you’ve got to be ready to go through him.’ Notably, these narrations echo the main ad’s discourse of determination and effort being key to reaching the top of one’s field. However they also place greater emphasis on the fear and threat of failure than their parent text. This could be argued to further humanise the players and temper any alienation the audience may feel from the otherwise idealised, seemingly superhuman players.

This humanising intent is very much evident in the three biographical mini-documentaries commissioned for the campaign. Described in the campaign’s press release as the ‘#AllItTakes film series’ and released on the Three Ireland YouTube channel, the bios are each roughly 3 and a half minutes long. Each one focuses on one of the players featured in the overall campaign in detail, sketching out his childhood, local community, beginnings as a rugby player and ascent to the top of the sport. In contrast to other supplementary materials such as the ‘behind the scenes’ video, these bios attracted a considerable audience – with the features on Henshaw and O’Connell attracting over 60,000 views, and the one on Sexton earning just shy of 100,000 views.²⁷ The bio centred on Henshaw was released on February 6th, a week prior to the release of the main ad, while the one on Sexton was released over a week after the main ad on February 24th, and the one focussing on O’Connell was released on March 11th in anticipation of the player winning his 100th cap for Ireland, an event Three marked with a press release. These bios emphasise the themes of hard work and elite skills present in the main ad, but elaborate upon them in significant ways and make use of notable narrative devices to further humanise these supermen, and are therefore worthy of detailed examination.

²⁷ Correct as of time of writing: January 26th 2018

The Henshaw bio (officially titled ‘Robbie Henshaw stars in #AllitTakes is Everything’) opens with a close-up shot of traditional musicians and a caption reading ‘Athlone, County Westmeath.’ The scene is revealed to be an Irish traditional music session with Henshaw playing alongside his grandfather. His grandfather jokes that the player could have been an All-Ireland level traditional musician if not for his rugby career. The beginnings of this career are then depicted with Henshaw reminiscing about ‘cold, cold Saturday mornings’ when he was 7 years old and his father would bring him to play on ‘frosty pitches.’ This is visualised with rapid shots of children playing rugby, intercut with what appears to be home movie footage of Henshaw playing as a teenager. The head rugby coach at Henshaw’s secondary school is then interviewed and he asserts that while the player possessed considerable raw talent even during his time at school, his achievements are chiefly because of his hard work: ‘natural ability is great, but you have to put the work in.’ He lauds Henshaw’s ability to continually raise the bar of his performance, finishing by observing ‘school’s cup to World Cup in three years, sure it’s phenomenal.’

The video then cuts to interviews with Henshaw’s father and the player himself as they recall him playing his first senior game for Connacht the day after his debs ball. Henshaw’s mother and father then discuss their emotion when their son received his first senior cap for Ireland. Henshaw himself discusses his initial nerves at meeting the other Ireland players during his first training session. His grandfather then jokes about his wife lighting so many candles for her grandson that she’s likely to burn the house town. Intercut with pictures of him enduring tackles while playing for Ireland, Henshaw discusses the importance of playing past the pain barrier. The ad closes with shots of Henshaw signing autographs and taking pictures with groups of young supporters, as his grandfather asserts that ‘Every time you pick the paper up, he’s there, he’s looking at you. But it never made a bit of change to him. He’s the very same Robbie as when he was going to school.’

The Sexton bio opens with a shot of a town high street with the caption, ‘Listowel, County Kerry.’ The camera then focusses on a pub bearing the name ‘John B. Keane,’ and follows this up with a close-up on a plaque outside the pub which lists it as the former premises of the legendary Irish playwright of the same name. As these images are screened, there is a voiceover describing how when Sexton was just a teenager, he asked whether he could mark his inevitable

first cap for Ireland by putting his jersey behind the bar. The speaker is revealed to be pub owner, Billy Keane (listed as Johnny's godfather by a caption) who chuckles at the player's cheek, but notes that he always possessed remarkable self-belief. The title 'All it Takes – Johnny Sexton' is then displayed in large white text against a close-up shot of a rugby ball.

Footage of the secondary school Sexton attended is shown as the school's rugby coach praises the player's focus. Home movie footage of Sexton playing for the school follows this, with Sexton himself describing the huge level of training and commitment he and his teammates demonstrated at school level, noting that 'not a lot has changed.' This is followed by further footage of Sexton's school rugby performances while Billy Keane notes the hours of preparation he would put into improving his kicking, despite his considerable natural talent. He and Richie Hughes, Sexton's school's coach, then reminisce about the player coming on a substitute in a Leinster Schools Cup final at 16 years old to score a last minute winning drop goal – noting the composure he displayed in a moment that might have overwhelmed his peers.

The bio then swiftly transitions from Sexton's school career to his professional career. Footage of him at Ireland training is shown while his former teammate (and then coach at French club, Racing 92), Ronan O'Gara describes his perfectionism. Sexton ascribes this to needing to maintain the respect of his teammates. His godfather then reveals that Sexton is more emotional than he might seem, although he does not show it, describing his greatest motivation as playing for Ireland and being 'a proud and brave Irishman.' Sexton asserts that there is always an extra reserve of effort that any player can tap into when they feel 'there's nothing left,' while Ireland kicking coach, Richie Murphy, contrasts Sexton with more contented players who don't improve. Ronan O'Gara notes Sexton's drive and predicts that he will 'hit a new level' in the next 2 or 3 years. These interviews are interspersed with footage of Sexton at Ireland training sessions, constantly moving and repeatedly sending kicks soaring through the posts. The ad then transitions back to footage of Listowel as Billy Keane claims Sexton is still the young boy who would hone his game by kicking a ball against the gate at the back of the pub, laughing as he recalls his father, John B. Keane, joking that they could only get 'a bit of a lie-in in the morning' when Sexton had returned to Dublin.

The O'Connell bio begins with footage of a landscape zooming by from the vantage point of a train window with a caption reading 'Drombanna, County Limerick.' A voiceover describes an

occasion as emotional. When the speaker is shown, there is no caption detailing who he is, or indeed, what event he is referring to, but from his appearance and mentions of ‘the family,’ most viewers would discern him as O’Connell’s father. The title, ‘All it Takes – Paul O’Connell,’ is then displayed in large white text against the background of a floodlit rugby pitch. Shots of a swimming pool and a picture of O’Connell as a child swimmer are shown as his father, Michael (now identified by caption), asserts that his son was ‘unbelievably competitive.’ His swimming coach speaks similarly of O’Connell and remembers how he told the young boy that he would go to the Olympics. O’Connell himself then details the enormous amount of time he spent swimming training in his childhood.

This is followed by a close-up shot of a shop front, as John Gleeson, the owner of Gleeson’s grocery store, recounts how O’Connell used to work in the shop and that even then he would proclaim to sports fan customers that his employee would play for Ireland one day. This is intercut with pictures of O’Connell playing rugby in muck-coated conditions and the bio transitions to his early rugby career Kieran Kiely, a coach at Young Munster, who admits that he never expected the player to reach the heights he has. Footage of O’Connell’s youth rugby days are interspersed with interviews with Kiely and the player himself, who attest to his competitiveness and dedication. The bio then transitions to O’Connell’s senior career with a picture of him playing for Ireland while his teammate Ronan O’Gara, and his father, attest to the standards to which he holds himself to and his capacity for self-criticism. Footage of players training at night is shown as O’Connell describes how the moments that bring improvement as a player are usually the ones which bring pain or exhaustion. Sexton and O’Gara then praise O’Connell’s leadership qualities as Ireland captain. Their interviews are intercut with pictures of O’Connell in action for Ireland and footage of him addressing the team at training. This is followed with footage of O’Connell signing autographs for young fans, interspersed with interviews from O’Gara and his swimming coach, attesting to his strength of character and status as a role model to children. O’Connell’s father then describes playing for your country as ‘the pinnacle’ and describes his son’s 100th cap as a ‘great milestone’ as the bio draws to a close.

4:3.3. *Analysis of Overall Campaign Discourses*

As stated above, these bio videos attracted significant viewing figures. Furthermore Three invested considerable time, resources and energy into them, as evidenced by their production values and – in the case of the O’Connell bio – special press release. Therefore it is instructive to examine how they emphasise and expand the discourses of the ‘All it Takes’ campaign. One of the most prominent elements of all three bios is a pronounced sense of place and rootedness. All three begin with a caption locating us within a particular locale and county. Each player’s career is portrayed as a journey beginning from this location. These locations are shown to have shaped them as players and as people – in the case of Henshaw and Sexton, the influence of their school is emphasised, while O’Connell’s local swimming pool and local shop are shown to have shaped his work ethic and competitive spirit. The manner in which the bios transition swiftly from these local, sporting roots to the players’ professional and international careers is also notable. While the editing may be influenced somewhat by the desire to ensure a short runtime, it nevertheless functions to create a sense of seamlessness between the players’ roots and the place they have ascended to at the elite level of rugby. The fact that the interviewees who appear in the early portion of the bios to offer information on the players’ childhoods (family, youth coaches, etc.) are also interviewed during later sections pertaining to their senior careers furthers the sense of connection between where they began and where they have reached. This impression is further contributed to, in the case of the Henshaw and Sexton bios, by the choice to give the last word to someone who has known the player their entire life asserting that fame has not changed him. In the main ad, elite rugby is presented as a surreal dreamscape populated by supermen, but here it is depicted as tangibly connected to the humble grassroots of the sport – working to ensure that however idealised the players may be, they will not be alienated from the world of their fans.

Free (2013) identifies this sense of rootedness as key to the public appeal of the Ireland rugby team in the Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger eras. He argues that the fact that – as opposed to their football counterparts – the majority of the Irish rugby team played for clubs based in Ireland contributed to them being portrayed in the media as sincere standard bearers for their community rather than mercenaries working for foreign clubs (223). He also describes how Munster’s 2006 and 2008 Heineken Cup victories were frequently ascribed to the passion the players’ summoned in their efforts to do their community justice: ‘notions of playing for “the parish” and “the

jersey,” representing family and community, were frequently invoked’ (224). The bio videos’ seamless transition from local community to national stardom conveys a similar sense of rootedness, allowing playing for Ireland to simultaneously mean representing the whole country and representing the player’s particular local community (and, indeed, achieving the former through the latter). O’Callaghan (2011) also explores how the idea of Munster transcending rural-urban and class divides which had dogged Irish rugby (and, to some extent, Irish society in general) was employed in the media to contribute to the idea of the sport as rooted in a sense of genuine community. He argues that ‘perception of Munster as a classless aberration within the bourgeois-dominated confines of Irish rugby’ helped dispel some of the traditional scepticism among the wider Irish public that the sport was solely the realm of the urban middle classes (185). The bio videos’ emphasis on rural, traditional community could be read being driven by a similar, implicit desire to fend off any unwelcome Celtic Tiger connotations that rugby may still carry in post-crash Ireland.

This is most notable in the Sexton bio, which pointedly opts to focus on his godfather’s home of Listowel (as opposed to the bios of Henshaw and O’Connell which root themselves in the places the players grew up in). Sexton grew up in an affluent south Dublin suburb, and the decision to eschew focussing on his boyhood home in favour of his godfather’s small town pub is arguably an attempt to ensure the player is associated with traditional Irish culture rather than the perceived shallowness of Celtic Tiger bourgeois society. As was detailed in section 1:4, ideas of what constitutes authentic or traditional Irish culture and identity have long been dominated notions of the idealised rural (Gibbons 1996; Kiberd 1996), and the confident cosmopolitanism which emerged from Celtic Tiger Ireland must be seen to not entirely abandon this if it is to be perceived as representing Irish identity positively. Sexton (who at the time of the ad’s release was one of the few Irish internationals playing outside the country, having moved to Racing 92 of Paris) can be celebrated as a model Irishman for his success abroad, but must maintain a tangible sense of connection to Ireland for that success to chime with the public – it is significant that that connection is routed through Listowel rather than Terenure.

Another noteworthy feature of the bio videos is how they echo what might be termed the persistent ‘man overcoming nature’ rhetoric of the main ad. This contributes to the impression that the players have not merely reached the pinnacle of their sport but also the pinnacle of

physical achievement. This rhetoric can be divided into categories: man overcoming nature imposed from the outside (adverse weather conditions, substandard pitches, etc.) and man overcoming his inner nature (bodily limitations, exhaustion, etc.) In the televised 'All it Takes' commercial, the former is chiefly evident in the sections depicting O'Connell charging along a visibly frozen pitch, with his physical and mental strength represented by his fierce tackling of a monstrous rhino. The idea of nature as an inevitable hurdle in the players' path to greatness is furthered in the bio videos: Henshaw identifies the start of his career with childhood games played on 'frosty pitches' on 'cold, cold Saturday mornings,' Sexton's school coach asserts that 'rain, hail or snow' the player showed total focus, and the O'Connell bio features numerous pictures of the player caked in mud.

The discourse of man overcoming his inner nature is reiterated throughout the campaign, through both narration and imagery. The latter is evident in the main ad, which uses surreal imagery to act as a visual metaphor for the perceived limitations the players overcome. The butterflies in Sexton's section of the ad represent the nerves he must overcome – this could be applied to any of the players, but as out-half – tasked with kicking the team's conversions, penalties and drop goals – Sexton would be more likely to be placed in frequent high pressure situations. Similarly, the flames rising from Henshaw's back and shoulders represent the strain and tremendous muscular effort needed to lift the enormous barbell. The sense of superhuman effort required to overcome physical limitations and mental fragility is underlined in Joe Schmidt's narration, which elaborates on the discourse implicit in the title 'All it Takes is Everything,' by claiming that succeeding at the top level of rugby means giving 'everything you can physically deliver.' This is echoed in his narration for the behind the scenes video, which claims this effort involves 'going places where you didn't think you could get enough oxygen in to take another step.' In the teaser videos released to build anticipation for the main ad, the players' narration strike similar notes. They are brief but all follow the structure of establishing mental or physical adversity before affirming that it needs to be overcome. Henshaw claims that 'you feel like you're going to fail, like your muscles are going to give up on you.' O'Connell characterizes the match as 'a big psychological battle.' While Sexton claims that the butterflies are there 'from the second you wake up, like a sort of nervous anxiety.' All of them finish with the assertion 'All it takes is everything.'

Similarly, the bio videos are replete with assertions of the limitations the players have overcome to reach the position that they have. In the Henshaw video, the camera focuses on a picture of the player being tackled while playing for Ireland as he tells the audience ‘you have to stay mentally strong to push yourself through the pain barrier’ and asserting the need to ignore the ‘little voice in your head telling you to give up.’ In Sexton’s bio, the player himself asserts that ‘when you feel you have nothing left, there’s always that little bit more you can put in.’ While the O’Connell bio is less explicit in its construction of this overcoming limitations discourse, it nevertheless features a comment from the player’s youth team coach reminiscing about his initially skinny build and admitting to scepticism about whether he could make it at the top level of rugby. This comment works to slightly undercut any assumptions the viewer may have had about O’Connell’s height and build providing him with natural advantages for playing rugby – the comment implies he had to overcome the initial limitations of his body to become the veritable giant he is today.

This notion of overcoming physical and mental limitations can also be seen as part of one the central discourses of the campaign: the importance of hard work. Specifically, throughout the campaign hard work is repeatedly, with varying levels of subtlety, emphasised as more important than mere natural talent. Through hard work comes control; the ability to overcome limitations, shape one’s self and the matches one plays in. The notion that effort takes priority over talent in a player’s attempts to shape himself into a top athlete is most clearly evident in the Henshaw bio when his school rugby coach notes that for all the player’s natural talent, he would not have achieved what he has if he had not ‘put the work in.’ In the bios focussing on Sexton and O’Connell, the aspects of both players’ abilities which are most significantly emphasised are mental, rather than physical. Sexton’s coaches praise his perfectionism, with Richie Murphy noting that it prevents him from (like lesser players) falling prey to complacency, while Ronan O’Gara asserts that this attitude will see him continue to improve in the near future. Similarly, O’Connell’s competitiveness is emphasised by those who know him, with his father implicitly invoking the spectre of complacency as he notes that while he, a mere observer of the sport, might think that his son has played well, the player himself is always finding opportunities for self-critique.

In many ways, this rhetoric of supreme effort and complete self-control echoes the discourses which have traditionally dominated conceptions of ideal Irish manhood. Nugent (2008) describes how the concern that the experience of colonialization had emasculated Ireland saw the 19th century Catholic Church champion the saints as paragons of masculinity which Irishmen should aim to emulate. Specifically, he cites Father John Vaughan lauding Irish Catholic heroes as ‘those surely who have conquered not kingdoms, but themselves; who have vanquished and subdued not peoples and nations, but their own rebellious appetites, unruly passions, and wayward propensities’ (599). This emphasis on men conquering their own weaknesses and apparent limitations has clear parallels in Schmidt’s narration in ‘All it Takes,’ and that of the players in the teaser videos. The persistence of these tropes of idealized Irish masculinity over the course of a century is curious and serves to illustrate O’Boyle’s (2011) observations concerning ‘cultural conservatism’ of Irish advertising, which he claims continues to rely on visions of traditional community first established by the Celtic revival of the late 19th and early 20th century (69).

O’Boyle cites a GAA sponsorship campaign commissioned by AIB (a banking chain) to elaborate on the persistence of these traditional tropes, and it is instructive to consider the degree to which ‘All it Takes’ echoes GAA ads. The abiding tropes relied on in commercial depictions of the GAA can be broadly summed up as the emphasis on traditional local community identified by O’Boyle and, conversely and yet relatedly, a lionising of the sport’s players as superhuman paragons of virtue. Fanning (2006) was caustic, but not without accuracy, in his assessment that ‘the level of heroism’ with which GAA players are depicted ‘has now become a little demented, but the advertising industry was never one to hide its hyperbolic light under a bushel’ (331). It could be argued that the former anchors the latter, allowing GAA players to be depicted in arrestingly heroic terms without risking the alienation that Pegoraro (2010) highlights as a risk for sports advertising. Irish rugby ads commissioned by previous sponsors, such as Guinness’ ‘Born of Our Land’ (2009) and O2’s ‘It’s Who Stand Behind You That Counts’ (2007), seemed to vary between either of the tropes so central to the success of GAA ads. ‘Born of Our Land’ with its mythic tree-creatures engaging in a titanic scrum attempts to portray Irish rugby players as fantasy heroes, while O2’s effort foregrounds tradition through its depiction of past generations of players as aged and tiring, but nevertheless essential to the success of the current team. ‘All it Takes’ is therefore significant for the manner in which attempts to marry both

approaches in manner similar to successful GAA campaigns. The significant viewing figures of the bio videos and the effort Three put into promoting them lend credence to the idea of considering them a key part of the campaign and its discourses, and in viewing them as such, it becomes evident how they provide the significant role of humanising the supermen of the main ad and grounding them within local community in a way which makes their heroics in the minimalist dreamscape of 'All it Takes' all the more laudable. The decision of those behind 'All it Takes' to follow the GAA approach to Irish sports advertising is all the more notable for the frequency with which Irish football (soccer) ads eschew it in favour of a more irreverently humorous approach. The differences between these approaches will be expounded on further in the next chapter of this work, but the very fact of them is worth noting here to underline the significance of 'All it Takes' choice of approach.

In terms of advertising appeal, GAA draws its relatability to the amateur status of its athlete, which allows them to be simultaneously vaunted as supermen while also being credibly rooted in their local community. Rugby, as was detailed in section 1:4.1, became a professional sport in 1995 and has long been dogged by the suspicion that it is a sport for the urban (and suburban) bourgeois. The sports claims to relatability, within the context of the Irish advertising landscape, are therefore worthy of scrutiny. Broadly, it can be read as an attempt to render the superhuman deeds of the players as a visual metaphor for the achievements and goals of the audience.

The attempts to ensure the players' relatability taps into the appeal of the sport for the management class of Ireland in particular. For all the sport's spread in popularity in recent decades, and for all the stereotyping it has endured, rugby nonetheless has and continues to have a significant bourgeois following. The extent to which highly placed rugby fans wield influence to distort or magnify the sport's popularity and socio-cultural significance in Ireland is hotly debated²⁸ but Free (2013; 2018) argues that this influence has contributed to the perception of the rugby players as more 'professional' than their football counterparts and created something of a

²⁸ Journalist Ewen McKenna has argued vehemently in this regard, citing his experience at the now defunct *Sunday Tribune* national newspaper as evidence, claiming that in 2010 journalists were paid to travel to Argentina to cover a tour of the Ireland rugby team's reserves, while the paper's chief football writer had to cover his own travel to the 2010 FIFA World Cup. McKenna claims that 'people in key positions in newspapers, television stations and whatever else, people on a boardroom level often tend to come from private rugby playing schools and I think they set the agenda: "this is our sport, this is our game." I think that's why it gets so much coverage. I think it's overblown how popular it is and I think they defend the players over the top' (Team 33 2015).

lucrative cottage industry for these players in motivational speaking and leadership seminars. Section 1:4.1 detailed how the ascent of the Irish rugby team during the Celtic Tiger period saw an intertwining of discourse and rhetoric between sport – specifically rugby – and business. This linguistic intermingling has persisted after the end of the Tiger economic boom. In 2018, for instance, the acumen of the Italy national team’s Irish head coach Connor O’Shea was lauded by fellow Irish coach Bernard Jackman with an assertion that the organisational abilities O’Shea had displayed in his coaching role proved that he ‘could be a CEO for a company, that’s the type of man he is’ (Off the Ball 2018). Similarly, the phrase ‘put on the green jersey’ was used repeatedly by politicians and like-minded commentators to galvanise the country into adapting the austerity-based economic policies which they argued were necessary to rebuild the country following the 2008 economic crash. Notably, the IRFU official interviewed for this work was quite open about the relationship between rugby and ‘corporate Ireland,’ lauding the networking opportunities that international matches could provide and noting that ‘a lot of business gets done around rugby matches, which is something that’s very important’ (27 July 2016).

The repeated references to hard work, sacrificing and overcoming fear of failure functions to remove the seemingly superhuman deeds of Sexton, Henshaw and O’Connell from the realm of sports (or indeed, from the realm of the purely physical) and transform them into visual metaphors which can resound with the dominant discourses of the management professional class. The bio videos of ‘All it Takes,’ of course, attempt the wider goal of rendering the players (and, by proxy, the team and the sport in general) more reassuringly grounded in popular notions of traditional Irish culture and community, but that its rhetorical qualities chime so closely with those of a particular group so often associated with the sport in Irish popular consciousness is nevertheless significant.

Applying Fanning’s cultural contradictions (the significance of which was elaborated in greater length in the previous chapter) to ‘All it Takes’ sheds further light on the nuances of its depiction of rugby in relation to Irish identity. While not all of them are entirely applicable to the campaign, those that are illustrate its socio-cultural resonances. The concepts of globalisation and *dinnseanchas* are deftly balanced by the manner in which the bio videos depict the players’ seamless transition from the grassroots of the sport in their local community to the elite level of international rugby. The bios establish a subtle but strong sense of continuity between the player

representing his local community in matches against nearby parishes or schools, and the player representing his nation in matches against other nations played all over the world.

The apparent opposition between individualism and community is assuaged through the manner in which the players' individual brilliance is lauded while the support of their teammates, coaches, family and wider community are emphasised as key factors in their success. At a broad level, team sport is particularly well suited towards resolving this apparent contradiction, as commercial depictions allow for individual players to be celebrated while being framed within a discourse of the collective sacrifices and achievements of the team they represent (and, indeed, the community or country that team represents). In the main ad for the 'All it Takes' campaign, all three players are depicted in personal struggles and are never shown on screen together, but their dedication to a greater, shared cause is underscored by their Ireland jersey and the narration provided by their coach. Again, the bio videos serve to ground the player in notions of local community and illustrate the role of figures in this community played in his development, fostering the idea that the player's individual achievements are tied to his individual community and act as a proxy for its values and merits.

The seemingly opposing concepts of conformity and creativity are balanced through the main ad's juxtaposition of surreal special effects and coaching rhetoric. The special effects elevate the players' sporting skills, mental resolve and physical strength into vivid expressions of their unique abilities. The players are depicted as distinct superheroes with their own particularly emphasised powers, rather than as homogenous products of top level fitness and training regimens. However, the narration, provided by their coach, grounds the players in the structure of an organised and well-drilled team. Fanning (2006) writes that part of the suspicion around unchecked individualism in Irish culture is based on the perception that individual success 'can only be achieved at the expense of others.' The ad spotlights the individual skills of the players while simultaneously underlining the idea that they are united by a shared goal and identity as Ireland teammates.

Finally, the apparent contradiction between affluence and affluenza can be argued as unavoidably and implicitly addressed through the campaign's attempts to reconcile a sport traditionally associated with the wealthier elements of society, with the idea of representing wider Irish culture and society. As has been discussed above, the campaign notably downplays

Sexton's roots in middle-class Dublin suburbs in favour of emphasising his link with that fixture of Irish society, the family-owned rural pub. However, while the ad does not directly acknowledge these associations, the parties behind the production of the campaign seem somewhat aware of them. Figures from Three and Boys and Girls interviewed for this work noted that rugby, for all its considerable popularity, did not traditionally attract the degree of nationwide support that football did, although the latter was emphatic in stressing the relatability of the players. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to argue that viewers of 'All it Takes' and its supplementary texts may have had such associations in mind and that the repeated emphasis on sacrifice and hard work throughout the campaign might therefore function to counteract them. In an interview conducted for this work, a Boys and Girls strategist who worked on the campaign asserted that such emphasis on the hard work and preparation of elite athletes helped to 'take some of the edge of the fame and the fortune' which might otherwise alienate them from viewers (27 April 2016).

4:4. Reception

Reception analysis of 'All it Takes' involved gathering data from a range of sources in order to illustrate the complexity and diversity of response to the campaign. The feelings of dedicated Irish rugby fans were gleaned from focus group interviews, which provided an illustration of the cultural weight the sport carries for dedicated supporters and in doing so indicate the parameters of how it can be effectively commercially depicted. The feelings of the ad's wider audience was gleaned from an analysis of the comments under Three Ireland's Facebook post of 'All it Takes.'²⁹ This was in turn supplemented by the audience survey discussed in section 3:4. This survey was administered to a mainly Irish audience (though there were some international

²⁹ The post is a link to the video on YouTube, but starting directly at the source and analysing the YouTube comments (as was the case with the reception analysis of 'Ode') was impossible as Three Ireland had chosen to disallow the option for users to comment on the video (a decision which will be further expounded on in this section). Drawing from the Facebook posts arguably provides a more limited audience than YouTube (where any user could theoretically encounter the video) as comments would largely be made by users who have already 'liked' the Three Ireland page, which suggests they are or have been customers of the network in the recent past. However, this does not necessarily mean they would be any more inclined towards a positive view of the ad than a user with no affiliation to the network as the page is frequently the platform for customer complaints. Furthermore, there is also the possibility of Facebook users who have not 'liked' the Three page and have no affiliation with the network commenting on the video after they saw it because of a friend's interaction with it.

participants) of young Irish students, some of whom considered themselves rugby fans and some who followed other sports or none at all. They therefore provide an interesting indication of how effectively the ad leverages the ‘vortextuality’ of the Ireland rugby team to gain the attention of viewers beyond dedicated fans or Three customers. The views of the audience provided an insight into the cultural connotations of the Ireland rugby team in addition to the perceived effectiveness of Boys and Girls’ advertising techniques. Finally, reception analysis also included assessing the subsequent decision of the IRFU to take up a sponsorship deal with Three’s rivals Vodafone, which provides a platform for the further examination of the direction the advertisements produced under this arrangement have taken in section 4:5.

Firstly however, it is necessary to examine the direct commercial impact of the campaign on Three’s brand. As was noted in section 3:4, Three won ‘Best Sponsorship Team’ at the 2015 Irish Sponsorship Awards. The award recognises ‘the team that has worked best to achieve cut through, innovation and differentiation in sponsorship. The team will have demonstrated initiative, creativity and leadership in the creation and delivery of sponsorship strategies and/or campaigns.’ The Three sponsorship executive interviewed for this work asserted that ‘All it Takes’ had played a key part in earning the award, but placed it in the context of the overall work the brand had done in managing its numerous sponsorship arrangements, particularly in light of the fact that it had taken on many new ones following the takeover of O2. The executive characterised Three’s sponsorship portfolio as being ‘the top of everything, [...] the best of everything.’ She went on to say that in aligning themselves with ‘the best properties we’re showing what we think of ourselves’ – that such associations were important to Three progressing in the public’s perception from the young, identity-less brand they had been only a few years before in 2012 to a market leader with pronounced connotations of quality and reliability.

Despite these plaudits, the IRFU opted to make Vodafone the organisation’s primary sponsor in May 2016 when the arrangement with Three expired. O2 had agreed a 10 year sponsorship arrangement with the IFRU in 2006, which Three then took on following the takeover of O2. The four year deal with the Vodafone network went into effect in June 2016, but rumours of it had been circulating in the Irish media the previous summer. Some of these early reports posited that the Vodafone deal would be worth in the region of €50 million – twice as much as the

arrangement with Three – though this figure was scoffed at by the IRFU chief executive, Philip Browne (Kinsella 2015). Notably when the new sponsorship deal was officially announced in May 2016, no figure was attached to the value of the deal, though some sources claimed that it was significantly more than the €2.5 million per annum of the Three arrangement (Sport for Business 2016). Three saw a 5% loss of revenue in 2016, which was offset by cost cutting to see it the brand grow by 8%, including a 2% rise in active subscribers (Paul 2017).

If the rumoured figures of such a significant increase in sponsor payments to the IRFU by Vodafone are true, then it would be myopic to interpret audience reaction to ‘All it Takes’ with a view to assessing why the IRFU opted for a different a sponsor, but this cannot entirely be dismissed from consideration of the reception analysis. The audience survey (detailed in 2:5) was a case in point in this regard – positive reactions to the ad significantly outweighed negative reactions, with 57 of the 76 respondents expressing clear enjoyment of the ad. In the 19 who disliked (or expressed ambivalence for) the ad, there are nevertheless intriguing points regarding the limitations of Three’s abilities to tap into the ‘vortextuality’ of the Irish rugby team and play upon its cultural associations to resonate with the wider Irish public. One notable point gleaned from the surveys was a number of female respondents who expressed a certain dislike for ‘All it Takes’ for the manner in which it was perceived to celebrate traditional masculinity. To some of them (notably non-rugby fans), the exclusive maleness of the ad merely made it less relatable; ‘none of the situations resonated with me’ as one respondent (female, 19, White Irish) put it. Another respondent (of the same demographics) criticised the ad for ‘almost being too aggressive [...] though it’s trying to be motivational’ and contrasted it unfavourably with ‘Ode,’ describing it as ‘a typical “macho” advertisement for sport.’ The Three sponsorship executive noted the irony of rugby’s most attractive commercial qualities being so closely linked with one of its more controversial and unattractive. She was referring specifically to how celebrating the strength and physicality of rugby players could tread dangerously near to the rate of concussion and other accumulated brain injuries in the sport. However, in the comments of these dissatisfied viewers, it is evident that celebrating the sport’s rugged, physical masculinity also risks alienating female viewers (as well as male viewers jaded by such portrayals of traditional masculine values).

Furthermore, many respondents who did not identify as rugby fans were confused and occasionally irked by the distinctly non-Irish accented voiceover, with some of them incorrectly identifying the narrator as Australian. Conversely, a rugby fan respondent (male, 20) enjoyed the voiceover and claimed that ‘Schmidt’s voice would appeal to every Irish rugby fan.’ This illustrates the complication of trying to depict a sport in sufficient depth to please its fans while also ensuring it can engage with a wider audience with a more casual knowledge of the sport. In addition, it also underlines the limits of the campaign’s supplementary texts to shape perceptions of the main televised ad. Schmidt’s presence is heavily promoted in the press release and ‘behind the scenes’ video, as well as being trumpeted on Three’s social media channels, but the risk of viewers failing to recognise him, and therefore make sense of his place in the ad’s narrative, remains nonetheless.

Aspects of the ad that were repeatedly described in positive terms included the impressive production values on display and how the human values of self-belief and hard work are championed. The previous chapter featured speculation that Three’s eagerness to champion the production values of ‘Ode’ stemmed from a perception that many Irish produced ads are cheaply funded and unadventurously produced. The surveyed reactions to ‘All it Takes’ certainly indicate that while they may not be explicitly aware of the limitations of the Irish ad market, viewers of the ad nonetheless view it as a distinctly impressive example of filmmaking within that context. This response was particularly prominent in respondents who did not identify as sports fans. One respondent (female, 21, White Irish – and notably not a sport fan) explicitly stated that she was impressed by the ad because it ‘looks like a very expensive add [sic].’ Another (female, 20, White Irish – and, again, not a sport fan) described the ad as ‘so well made,’ while another (female, 20, White Irish – also not a sport fan) claimed it was ‘very well made – graphics are unreal.’ Although the ad’s focus on celebrating conventional masculinity and reliance on a certain degree of knowledge of Irish rugby alienates some non-fans, its impressive production values evidently act as something of a counterweight, winning the admiration of viewers with little interest in the sport. Similarly, the numerous positive reactions to the ad’s emphasis on dedication and mental strength seems to indicate that these themes extended its appeal beyond rugby fans. One respondent (female, 19, Asian Irish – not a rugby fan) enjoyed the ad and described its message as ‘how hard you try, the further you go. The more you put in, the more you get out.’ Furthermore, these themes were highlighted as positives by many respondents who

identified as rugby fans, such as one (male, 20, White Irish) who ‘loved’ the ad and wrote that its core message was highlighting ‘the dedication and sacrifice of the player.’ Such responses affirm the points made by the Boys and Girls strategist who identified the ‘physical and mental pain barriers to get to the pitch’ as an area ripe for celebration in Irish rugby advertising.

Some of these impressions were leant further weight by the fan focus group interviews. Before delving into the details, it should be noted for clarity’s sake that these interviews proved more difficult to arrange than they had in the case of the exploration of ‘Ode’ and Irish football fandom. Tickets to Irish rugby international matches are allocated through rugby clubs and via the IRFU’s official ‘Irish Rugby Supporter’s Club,’ a program which offers benefits and opportunities to individual members rather than gathering them together as a collective supporter group. It was therefore unfeasible to meet an equivalent to the independent supporters’ group interviewed for the previous chapter. Instead a focus group interview was conducted with members of a rugby club who had been fans of the sport for decades. Owing to some unforeseen scheduling complications, these interviews were split in two: one conducted with two fans, followed by a second one-on-one interview with a fan that had arrived late.

With regard to Three’s sponsorship of the team, it was notable that one interviewee singled out ‘All it Takes’ as one of the best examples of Irish rugby advertising he had seen. The other interviewees had little immediate recall of the ad, but given that it had been over a year and a half since Three ceased to be the sponsor of the Irish rugby team, it was unsurprising that they would have less pronounced opinions on the brand when contrasted with the reactions of the football fan focus group (given that Three were still the sponsors of the football team at the time that interview was conducted). Aside from this one piece of direct praise, the most notable aspect of the interviewees’ attitude to sports advertising was the somewhat contradictory form it took. When questioned as to their favourite Irish rugby ads, the interviews discussed them with evident affection, but followed that by summarily dismissing the idea that advertising had any effect. These assertions were in turn followed by musings on the money generated by the advertising industry and tacit admissions of the effectiveness of sports sponsorship. The clearest example of the latter occurred when one of the interviewees discussed the benefit of beer brand Heineken remaining a sponsor of the European Champions Cup (the premier international club competition in European rugby) despite no longer holding the naming rights:

I don't know how Heineken make money out of the European Cup. A lot of people would still call the European Cup, the Heineken Cup, even though Heineken don't sponsor it anymore. It's a bit like how people call vacuum cleaners Hoovers, even though it's just a brand. The European Cup is associated with Heineken. They do sponsor it still, don't they? [...] But they're just one sponsor of many, and they're trying to call it the European Champions Cup, but everyone calls it the Heineken Cup (6 February 2018).

Heineken had previously held the naming rights to the tournament, which was known as the Heineken Cup until it was re-organised and rebranded in 2014, yet as the interviewee observes, many fans continue to see the brand and the competition as synonymous despite the loss of naming rights. Similarly, another interviewee disavowed the idea that he would be more inclined to become a Vodafone customer because they sponsored the Irish rugby team, before noting that the exposure the brand gained through the presence of their logo on the Irish jersey during high profile matches was a huge boon for the company. Such assertions chime with Toland Frith and Mueller's (2003) observations about how advertising's influence on the public is all the more significant because of how often it is dismissed or ignored.

With regard to commercialization of the sport and teams they followed, the fans interviewed were, as noted, quick to dismiss any influence this development had on them, but their attitude was not one of apathy or complacency. Some indicated their resolve not to buy a jersey bearing a sponsor logo, not out of any particular antipathy toward the brand in question, but rather because 'I wouldn't buy a jersey with a logo on it anyway, as a matter of principle. Why should I go around advertising Vodafone? Even though I use them, by the way.' Notably too, alongside these sentiments a broader mistrust in the sporting authorities and their concern for fans was also expressed. The fans felt that the Irish rugby authorities would follow the same line as other big companies in valuing profit over passion: 'They put the prices up. There'll be extortion in the grounds because they've leased all the franchises out for drink and food and you're paying exorbitant prices. [...] They don't care about the fans. They know if you don't go, someone else will go.' The notion that sports organisations and governing bodies can indulge in commercial exploitation with a blithe confidence that it will not significantly detract from the loyalty or custom of the fans is an interesting one, and points to sport's unique position within the variety of collective cultural experiences. Sport fandom commands a high degree of loyalty – fans may disagree with the decisions made by a team's management, coaches or players, but to 'abandon' one's team is to lose one's authenticity as a sports fan. The fans interviewed for this project

evidently believe that even within a crowded sporting market with a variety of alternatives theoretically available to them, the authorities can remain confident of their loyalty regardless of unpopular decisions. The comments of another fan supported this, albeit with less evident dissatisfaction with the authorities. He said that the most common cause of fan discontent concerned ticket availability, but maintained that it was not a hugely divisive issue as ‘generally speaking it would be my opinion that rugby people are by and large fairly passive.’ Here the manner in which loyalty compromises sports fans ability to affect change from the authorities is expressed to be particularly true of rugby.

One notable positive for Three and other Irish rugby sponsors to emerge from the discussion was the fans’ firm disavowal of any notion of alienation from the players. They acknowledged the abiding association of Irish rugby with the urban bourgeois, but claimed that while there was some validity to this perception, it was ultimately an outdated stereotype: ‘There’d be a certain perception that that would be the situation: rugby playing, fee-paying schools. To a degree, it’s true, most of the Irish team come from that strand of society.’ Another opined that ‘the perception that the Leinster team were all Dublin 4, college educated kids’ was ‘a misconception.’ Furthermore, the fans rejected the idea that the relatively recent advent of professionalism had created any schism with regard to relatability between rugby supporters and rugby players. Indeed, they were largely positive about the developments brought on by professionalization and contrasted the modern levels of athleticism and organization favourably with those of the amateur era. Despite the increased salaries and celebrity status of top internationals in the professional era, one fan maintained that ‘there’s a connection. There’s no sense in which these guys are living in a different world or a different planet, you know.’ Such comments support the decision of Three (and Boys and Girls) to focus on the players for the campaign, and illustrate the potential for further depictions along the line of the bio videos. The efforts of the latter to humanize the players and ground them in conceptions of traditional community were evidently not undercut by any perceived irreconcilability between the players’ current positions and their lives before their ascent to stardom.

One fan asserted that the physically demanding nature of rugby worked to anchor the players to reality: ‘Oh no, there’s no sense of alienation between the players and the... First of all, if you compare the two sports, there’s no sense that a rugby player out on a pitch, going at full tilt is

having an easy ride.’ The reference to ‘the two sports’ pertains to football owing to the phrasing of the preceding question (as detailed in section 3.4, some of the football fans interviewed saw their relationship with the Irish team as transcending the alienating commercialism of the club game). It is worth noting that the Boys and Girls advertising strategist interviewed for this work also asserted that fans felt ‘closer’ to the rugby players than they did to the Ireland footballers, but he ascribed this chiefly to the fact that the rugby players are based in Ireland and fans are therefore more likely to run across them in an everyday, non-sporting context. The idea that rugby’s physicality renders the players more relatable, less alien in spite of their relative wealth and stardom, is an interesting one and potentially adds an extra dimension to what is already one of the sport’s most marketable aspects (particularly evident in ‘All it Takes’ in the sections celebrating O’Connell and Henshaw’s strength). The Three sponsorship executive interviewed opined that the physical nature of rugby was one of its most commercially attractive elements, yet also noted that it took a ‘balancing act’ on the part of the sponsor and their advertising partners not to overstep the mark in their celebration of the sport’s physicality and be seen to be glorifying dangerous play or ignoring the risk of serious injury. The same fan who viewed rugby’s physicality as a key factor in ensuring that the players were not ‘living in a different world’ than the fans argued that such a balance was what made rugby unique: ‘There’s no tolerance for... eh, thuggery. A thug is no good to you on a rugby pitch: he’s going to get red-carded and yellow-carded and you’re down a man. In my opinion, of all the games, the game is brutal but not thuggish. It’s a game that’s played at the edge of what’s acceptable.’ Taken alongside the Three executive’s comments about the ‘balancing act’ of advertising rugby, the notion of the sport being ‘played at the edge of what’s acceptable’ raises interesting questions about the distinct appeal, and inherent complications, of celebrating traditional rugged masculinity through sport in the modern cultural climate.

Viewers’ perceptions of ads are inevitably shaped by outside context, by knowledge and preconceptions already held about the figures, situations and other elements featured in a particular ad, and the significance of this contextual knowledge is heightened when it comes to sports advertising. The widely varying reactions Joe Schmidt’s voiceover in ‘All it Takes’ provoked from the audience survey discussed above demonstrates the fine balancing act sports advertisers must tread, between leveraging knowledge of the sport to win fan plaudits while also trying to remain accessible to the casual viewer. The awareness of rugby as a physically

demanding sport and of Ireland as successful proponents of the sport is hardly limited to insiders, however. Therefore Irish rugby in general could provide the context for an acceptable and engaging commercial celebration of rugged, aggressive masculinity. Smith (2005) describes how cultural developments in recent decades, most notably feminism, have made it difficult for many advertisers to rely on the traditional idealized gender roles they depicted in the past. Notably, he describes contemporary alcohol advertising's celebrations of masculinity as walking 'a fine line' between celebrating toughness and celebrating anti-social behaviour. Noting the 'fragility' of modern masculinity, he writes of this balancing act that 'a man can be emasculated for being too gentlemanly and thus considered 'feminine,' or, on the other hand, too brutish and overly masculine, thus considered an unrefined savage.' Irish rugby may be able to provide advertisers with a rare outlet for direct and unapologetic idealisations of masculine 'toughness,' with contextual knowledge of the sport providing the 'balance' which ensures viewers will not view the players, or the ad, as 'too brutish.' This is certainly supported by McSharry's (2008) discussion of how the modern Munster rugby team has come 'to embody the meaning of heroism in the modern Irish context [...] to exemplify a particular brand of masculine heroism' (90).

In terms of social media response, the post of the video of 'All it Takes' on Three Ireland's Facebook page was largely successful. It has been viewed over 158,000 times, attracting over 2,200 likes and 543 shares. These likes and shares clearly attest to significantly positive reactions from many users, as Lee et al (2017) point out, social media users share content 'as a way to transmit their sense of identity and increase their self-worth' (76). These shares therefore represent a form of identification with the ad - and thus, tacitly, the Three brand - and illustrate the potential of the Ireland rugby team to galvanise feelings of collective identity.

Further nuances of the social media response to the ad can be gleaned through an analysis of the comments left on the video post. There were 95 comments, only 8 of which could be characterised as definitively negative (either with regard to the ad, or to the Three network in general). Two of these negative comments are particularly worthy of exploration, one for providing elaboration as to why the user disliked the ad (whereas others denounce it in broad, absolutist terms), while the other demonstrates the fault lines between Three's brand image as Ireland sponsor and the realities of its service as telecommunications network. The former sees a user criticise the ad as 'a bit cringeworthy [sic] and over the top,' writing that the caption lead

them to expect it would be a 'back to basics type ad.' Comparisons could be drawn with this comment and the audience survey respondents who expressed dislike for the ad's apparently overly macho masculinity. The latter used the video as a platform to voice their discontent with Three's service ('Hope Ireland have better luck with three support them [sic] than I had they just don't care about the people using their network') which prompted the network to attempt to address this criticism. A customer service representative (using the Three Ireland Facebook profile to comment) left a comment beneath the complaint, inquiring how Three might be able to help the user. The user then elaborates on their issues with Three's services, which is in turn responded to by Three with a reminder of the user's contract details and an offer to elaborate further on this via email. Another user then enters the conversation pointing out that this is the wrong forum to address such complaints, which prompts a sarcastic response from the initial user. The final comment in the thread comes from a third user in support of the initial complainant: 'That is the only thing any of these networks take note of.' This exchange demonstrates the risk social media poses for brands, as it grants consumers a chance to talk back to them and disrupt their official narratives. Furthermore, it demonstrates consumer awareness of this ability to disrupt as one of the few powers they possess in what they perceive as an unequal relationship between uncaring brand and irked individual.

26 comments were simply comprised of one user tagging another (or multiple others) without any further elaboration. These 'taggings' can be broadly read as positive reactions, as they essentially constitute a more personalised form of sharing, an action with which users endorse content as worthy of specific friends' interest. In the comments which elaborated on the user's positive reaction to the ad there is often a direct conflation of affection or respect for the team with enjoyment of the ad: 'Love it. Now to win the 6 nations again,' 'Brilliant ad and brilliant players,' 'Likes [sic] all messages from Joe S it is very simple but demands everything.' Such conflations are a clear example of what Madrigal (2000) described as one of the most appealing features of sport sponsorship, namely that 'some of the cognitive associations or personal meanings people hold toward the property (e.g., fun, youthful, exciting, excellence) may become linked in memory to the brand' (13). Madrgial goes on to write of how a person's perception of themselves as a sports fan (or, indeed, as a fan of a particular sport or team) becomes deeply integrated into their sense of identity (14), and while a sponsor brand could not feasibly hope to forge a similarly strong level of personal connection, leveraging the bond between fans and their

sport or team to shape consumers' sense of affection to or connection with the brand is eminently possible. In a similar vein, some users explicitly described the ad in terms which identified the ad as enhancing their experience as fans: 'if that doesn't get you up for the match nothing will !! I can see people in pubs now,' 'I love the whole mentality of the Irish setup. They give it absolutely everything for their [sic] country.' The latter is particularly notable as while it explicitly refers to a general respect for the Irish team, its context as a comment on 'All it Takes' implies the user felt that the ad had offered him an insight into the 'Irish setup' and therefore contributed to his respect for the team.

This reaction is evidently what Three hoped for. The caption describing 'All it Takes' on their official YouTube channel promises that the brand will 'reveal the mystery of the Irish rugby team,' and Boys and Girls spoke in similar terms about the aims of the campaign, asserting that the priority was 'to uncover a new insight' about the team. This speaks to the efforts of Three to be seen as an official fan of Irish rugby rather than a commercial partner of the IRFU – they want the ad to be perceived as an insight into the team for its loyal fans, rather than an explicit attempt to celebrate the brand's association with the team. It also chimes with some of the sentiment expressed by rugby fans in the audience survey who viewed the ad as a worthy and accurate celebration of the dedication and prowess of their heroes, which implies a tacit assumption that Three are helping 'uncover' a truth about the Irish team. This perception of authenticity is crucial to the success of a sports sponsorship campaign. The strength of fans' sense of attachment to their team and the extent to which this sense forms a significant part of their identity is largely rooted in the notion of their support constituting a more authentic, selfless and permanent passion than other interests or affiliations. Free and Hughson (2006) write that 'authenticity is undone by relinquishing or shifting allegiance' and that is founded on the culmination of 'financial, emotional and intellectual investments' in the team by the fans (89). Crucially, they also note that authenticity of support cannot be sustained if that support is perceived as being the product of 'external compulsion' (89). Efforts by brands such as Three to leverage the passion of supporters must therefore adapt a veneer of authenticity to be successful. They must not be seen as acting as an external pressure weighing on the relationship between team and fans ('You don't want to be patronising to people, you don't want to be condescending and wag the finger and say "you've got to be a better supporter"' as the Boys and Girls strategist put it) nor must they be seen to be distorting the image or 'spirit' of the team for their own purposes. Brands must be

seen to ‘uncover’ a ‘truth’ about the team that is of interest to fans in ostensibly selfless act (‘All it Takes’ does little to directly champion the Three network) of apparently genuine support that belies the impermanent nature of sponsorship arrangements. Three’s sponsorship deal with the IRFU may have only extended to May 2016, but their support of the Ireland rugby team must be viewed as permanent and unquestioned. This is not to posit that such strategies obscure the commercial imperative of sponsorship from fans (though the comments of some of the focus group interviewees regarding the effectiveness of sponsorship point to a certain degree of this), but rather that successful attempts at this pose of authentic support divert attention from this potentially thorny matter and work to implicitly position supporters and sponsors alongside one another as fans of the team.

4:5. Post ‘All it Takes’ Rugby Players and Their Implications for Future Sponsorship

This section comprises a brief overview of the developments in the public perception of Ireland rugby players in the years following the release of ‘All it Takes.’ While there have been no international media sensations on the scale of the coverage of the Ireland football fans at Euro 2016, there have been some significant developments in the mediated perception of the Irish rugby team, which will be discussed here, alongside an examination of the sponsorship campaign produced by Vodafone and how it builds upon some of the themes and narrative devices of ‘All it Takes.’

4:5.1. *The Aftermath of ‘All it Takes’*

Working with advertising agency Target McConnells, Vodafone used the slogan ‘Team of Us’ to promote their sponsorship. Their 2017 campaign, ‘Who We Are is How We Play’ echoed ‘All it Takes’ in focussing on particular players (going one better than their predecessors in showcasing four players rather than three). Vodafone had the good fortune to be taking over as primary sponsor of the Irish rugby team at a time when the team was experiencing a period of significant success. In November 2016, mere months after Vodafone had taken the baton from Three, Ireland defeated the reigning world champions, the formidable New Zealand All Blacks, for the

very first time. In early 2018, while the ‘Who We Are’ campaign was still being aired, Ireland won the Six Nations championship, completing a Grand Slam in the process. Furthermore, it directly follows in the footsteps of the bio videos produced for the Three campaign. ‘Who We Are’ consists of four televised ads, each focussing on a different player (Rory Best, Connor Murray, Tadgh Furlong and Tiernan O’Halloran) and presenting a rapid montage dramatizing their rise from childhood fandom to international superstardom. There are distinct differences between these ads and the bio videos of ‘All it Takes,’ of course, chief among them being the choice to depict the players’ personal histories in dramatized form (with actors playing younger versions of the featured individuals before culminating in shots of the players themselves in the dressing room before a match) rather than Three’s documentary approach, and additionally, the Vodafone commissioned texts are necessarily shorter than the bio videos which benefited from the more flexible time constraints of online advertising. Despite these differences the similarities between the campaigns are illuminating. Vodafone placed a similar emphasis to Three on the authenticity of the commercial texts they had constructed with Target McConnells Joint Creative Director Karl Waters asserting that ‘Almost every scene you’ll see in this ad is based on an actual event in the players’ lives.’ In much the manner that the bio videos of ‘All it Takes,’ ‘Who We Are’ strives to ground the players within perceptions of traditional Irish community and culture. Vodafone head of brand and communications, Anne Mulcahy stated as much:

The focus of the ‘Who We Are is How We Play’ is the real, regular people behind the players’ on pitch personas. While they may be capable of extraordinary feats when they put on an Irish rugby jersey, they have had upbringings and experiences that every Irish person can relate to – whether it’s your mother telling you for the fifth time to come in for your tea or memories of going to your first match with your dad. It was important for us to share these moments with Irish rugby fans and connect them with the players on a more personal level, because ultimately you shout louder for someone you know (AdWorld 2017).

That ‘Who We Are’ adopted (consciously or not) the approach of the supplementary materials of ‘All it Takes’ for its main campaign could indicate an interesting shift in the perception of rugby in wider Irish society. The ads aired during a very successful Six Nations campaign for Ireland. Joe Schmidt’s team began with a dramatic last minute win over France in Paris and went on to win the competition, ascending to second place in the World Rugby Rankings (behind world champions New Zealand) in the process. This success (and the public interest it attracted)

triggered a media debate as to whether rugby had become ‘the people’s game’ in Ireland. The idea that the sport had claimed this vaunted position in the national consciousness was leant weight by contemporaneous disappointment in the Ireland football team, who had failed to reach the World Cup after being beaten 5-1 by Denmark in Dublin the preceding November. While claims that rugby had captured the public imagination to a greater degree than football or GAA were met with scepticism or scorn by many journalists and social media users (Hannigan 2018) that such a debate occurred at all demonstrates a certain shift in the cultural connotations of rugby, or, at least, the desire for such a shift. In the *Irish Times*, journalist Mary Hannigan drolly noted that the RTE panel discussion which sparked the debate was comprised entirely of rugby coaches and pundits with an implicit bias towards championing the sport above others, and similarly, Vodafone, as team sponsor, have a vested interest in contributing towards the perceived vortextuality of the sport within Ireland. It is perhaps too early to tell whether there is substance or longevity to this perceived cultural shift, but that Vodafone and Target McConnell regard it as significant enough to shift away from the supermen of ‘All it Takes’ or the mythological past of ‘David and Goliath’ is worthy of note. The online bio videos of ‘All it Takes’ may be the most direct antecedents of ‘Who We Are’, but in terms of Irish televised ads, Vodafone’s campaign echoes most clearly is the AIB commissioned ‘Club and County’ GAA campaign from 2015. ‘Club and County’ comprised of three ads, each depicting a particular Gaelic footballer’s journey from childhood to elite sportsman in rapid montage. As amateurs, GAA players have long held a mythologised status in Irish culture (not least in advertising) as symbols of community spirit and selfless passion (Fanning 2006), and the decision to portray rugby players in a similar way to their Gaelic Games counterparts speaks to a confidence in the broadening of the sport’s appeal, or, at least, of its cultural connotations.³⁰ Free argues that Irish rugby has been able to successfully maintain a perception of balance between ruthless professionalism and rooted amateurism, claiming that elements of the former are all the more palatable ‘because [they are] more easily anchored in an ideal of communal service, rootedness,

³⁰ In her article on the debate about the extent of rugby’s appeal to the Irish public, Hannigan observed that even the sport’s ardent champions on RTE admitted that the sport still lagged behind others in terms of participation and attendance, so a distinction must be drawn here between the dedication of ardent fans and the wider public’s casual interest and perception of rugby’s relationship with Irish culture. A 2017 report produced by Sport Ireland supports the idea that, for all the attention it gains in the media, rugby remains relatively under attended and participated in compared to other sports. Notably, it does not feature in the top 10 most participated sports in Ireland, and only 1.9% of the population had attended a rugby match in the year of the report (Sport Ireland 2017).

amateur ethos, and professional training as education and “home grown” development through the provincial “academies” (2013, 228). Rugby advertisers are therefore well placed to pursue strategies which position Irish players and teams as simultaneously internationally renowned and nationally authentic, neatly assuaging one of the cultural contradictions outlined by Fanning with regard to wider Irish society.

4:6. Digital Cultural Nationalism

The preceding sections of this chapter outlined the findings of this work’s investigation into the production, materials, and reception of the ‘All it Takes’ campaign. With this accomplished, this section will build on this by exploring the campaign with regard to its significance for the modern commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus.

4:6.1. *The Cultural Cachet of Irish Rugby Players for Advertisers and Sponsors*

Modern advertisers frequently struggle with acceptable and engaging ways of depicting masculinity in an attempt to depict a balance between emasculated weakness and brutish strength (Smith 2005). This is particularly resonant within an Irish context, where – as was outlined in section 1:4 – efforts to develop a positive national identity were dogged by suspicions that the country had been ‘un-manned’ by colonisation and frequent foreign representations of Irish men as wild, sub-human thugs. MacLaran and Stephens (2009) argue that Irish advertisers have in fact been more successful in resolving this particular cultural contradiction than their foreign counterparts. In their study of cider brand, Magners’ advertising, they assert that the ad:

draws on nostalgic, age-old images of the Irish male as being in touch with his deeply romantic, sensitive and emotional 'feminine' self, thereby creating a space and restoring a sense of the 'intense masculinity' that has become displaced and unfashionable in 21st century representations of masculinity. Indeed it is perhaps no exaggeration to suggest that Irish men have cornered the market in intense, soulful masculinity [...] the power of this myth is that it enables young male consumers to resolve a salient contradiction in their lives (Holt, 2004), as they find themselves caught between the 'sissiness' of the feminine and the widespread disapproval of the 'brutish' masculine (78).

With this in mind, it is illustrative to examine Irish rugby as particularly potent ground for advertisers attempting to hone in on the appeal of ‘intense, soulful masculinity.’

The ‘balancing act’ of crafting a campaign such as ‘All it Takes’ has previously been addressed with regard to celebrating the physicality of rugby in a manner which avoids being perceived as careless or even callous to the potential danger of serious injuries. However, a further aspect of ‘balance’ in rugby’s physicality was discussed by a focus group interviewee who opined that the sport’s appeal derived from being ‘played at the edge of what’s acceptable’ with a seemingly healthy celebration of strength, endurance and aggression, but ‘no tolerance for thuggery.’ The notion of rugby players maintaining gentlemanly conduct in the midst of aggressive clashes with opponents is undoubtedly influenced by deeper socio-cultural currents, but, again, the role of on-field events should not be discounted. Unlike the other most prominent field sports in Ireland (football and GAA), top level rugby union see the referees equipped with a microphone, facilitating the broadcast of their conversations with players to the television audience. This works to ensure players remain relatively civil in their interactions with the referee, generating a respect for authority which chimes with traditional conceptions of ‘gentlemanly conduct.’ The perception of rugby as a uniquely respectful field sport extends beyond the playing field to perceptions of the halls of power, as a report by business journal, *Marketing*, demonstrated when it asserted that ‘For such a mucky game, rugby remains comparatively clean, marred occasionally by bad behaviour from individual players, often alcohol-related, rather than corruption.’ The sport’s reputation for ‘strong values’ and ‘high standards’ is clearly one of the aspects of the sport most attractive to sponsor brands (Griffiths 2015). This discursive link flows both ways, with rugby players and coaches regularly being discussed (and often lauded) with frequent reference to business terminology, as Free (2018) asserts; the ‘active promotion of rugby’s business links in the guise of journalism is quite common’ (225).

Of course, while this perception of ‘strong values’ is rooted in more than frequent displays of respect for authority and organizational bodies relatively free of recent scandal, the notion of rugby as a ‘gentlemen’s game’ had limited its appeal in Ireland (and elsewhere) for much of the 20th century, but it has also worked to the sport’s advantage, imbuing it with a patina of old world Corinthian spirit to temper (and indeed, compliment) the aggression and physicality inherent in its play. The old adage that ‘Football is a gentlemen’s game played by thugs and

rugby is a thug's game played by gentlemen' was cited, jokingly, in the rugby fan focus group interview, but there were also more serious references to the academic achievements of many of the players: 'Somebody told me that St Gerard's school last year, the senior cup team, the average score in the Leaving Cert was 510 points. They're authentic sportsmen primarily, but they also stick with the academic side because they know the career is short.' Ed Madden (2013) asserts that, in Ireland, 'rugby is still mostly associated with the privileged who attend fee-paying rugby-playing schools' (254) and, by extension, it is associated with the perceived ethos and achievements of such schools. Free (2013; 2018) writes extensively of the plaudits lauded on the Irish rugby team by the 'professional-managerial class' of Celtic Tiger Ireland whose feelings of commonality with the team saw frequent intermingling of sporting and business metaphors. The perception of the players as retaining the academic excellence and 'professional-managerial' ethos of the private schools which the majority of them attended certainly contributed to them being viewed as emblematic of Celtic Tiger values.

The other aspect of rugby's reputation which contributes to this sense of 'strong values' is the perceived preservation of the game's amateur ethos. Rugby union was professionalized in 1995, and while this has led to great change on and off the field for the sport – and while this change, as is evident in the focus group interviews, has been largely positively received by fans – there remains an eagerness to play down the extent of its impact on certain aspects of the game. The preceding sections of this chapter detailed the efforts of advertisers to emphasise that, despite their fame and fortune, Irish rugby players remain as connected to their fans and community as they were in the era in which amateurism blurred any sense of distinction between them. In some cases, such as the efforts of O2 and Guinness, this involved direct reference to the amateur era, while in others (such as 'All it Takes' and Vodafone's subsequent efforts) there were pointed efforts to depict the 'ordinariness' and 'everyday-ness' of the players. These representations are the result of a wider perception of elite Irish rugby players as relatable and accessible despite their wealth and celebrity, as was evidenced in the interviews conducted for this work ('There's no sense in which these guys are living in a different world' [6 February 2018], 'So many people do know them, because they went to the same school as them, or they've a friend who knows them, and they feel like they're much more closer to us' [27 April 2016], etc.) and in the news media. In an *Irish Times* article analysing the fallout to the afore mentioned claims that rugby had become 'the people's game' in 2018 Ireland, Mary Hannigan noted that the panellists on

RTE who asserted this point rooted that argument in the fact that ‘international rugby players are based in Ireland, and not “Walthamstow or somewhere like that,” like our footballers, that made them more accessible to the public’ (Hannigan 2018). It is notable how often these assertions of connectedness are framed, implicitly or explicitly, against other sports (most frequently football) in which the players are perceived as being alienated from the fans. This echoes Tony Collins’ (2008) observation that, prior to the professional era, rugby’s amateurism ‘defined itself in opposition to the “other” of professionalism’ (3). The implicit notion is that Irish rugby players are not significantly alienated from the sport’s fans, because stars of other sports are more alienated. Regardless of the merits or accuracy of such a binary, it has nonetheless served reinforce the notion of rugby retaining a sense of amateur rootedness in the professional era.

The abiding positive reputation of this perceived amateur ethos and private school culture allows a form of quasi-Victorian muscular Christianity to survive in modern Irish culture. The ‘bravery, self-mastery and devotion to Ireland’ which Nugent (2008) identifies as ‘the essential components of a recognizably Irish manliness’ (588) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries may no longer have the overtly Catholic trappings of the Irish muscular Christianity he describes, but the similarities are marked nonetheless. If the original intent of organizing sports such as rugby in the private schools of the 19th century was to allow the future of the British empire to match the strength of their savage subjects without stooping to their level of moral and intellectual degeneracy, it could be argued that the private school associations and perceived amateur ethos of Irish rugby facilitate a similar discursive balancing act; allowing the players to be perceived as ‘brutal but not thuggish’ (6 February 2018). Indeed, Free (2018) argues that the persistent influence of a distinctly Catholic value system continues to shape the conduct of contemporary Irish sports figures. Citing rugby players as particularly representative of this Catholic-influenced publically espoused dedication to humility and self-discipline, he writes that it acts as an ‘implied warning against the potential corruptions of professionalism even as obeying its disciplinary demands constitutes a moral imperative’ (221).

The notion of Irish rugby players as uniquely positioned to act as totems of idealized masculinity in modern Ireland is discussed by Majella McSharry (2008): ‘for men in particular, the Munster players came to embody the meaning of heroism in the modern Irish context. Lauded by the state [...] and by civil society [...] and adored by their fans, the team seem to exemplify a particular

brand of masculine heroism' (90). McSharry specifically focuses on the role and reception of the Munster rugby team, but her points can quite feasibly be applied to the national team. In chapter 1, the potential of sport to function as a channel for idealized conceptions of national and masculine identity was discussed – a channel all the more significant because of the relative paucity of mediated cultural events which can celebrate these identities in an un-ironic and unthreatening manner in modern Ireland and the wider Western world – and in the Irish contemporary context, the rugby team is a particularly potent totem for a form of heroic masculine Irishness. Colonisation and its immediate aftermath saw Irish masculine self-image dogged by Arnoldian stereotypes of 'Celtic sensibility' which positioned Ireland as Britain's wife on one side, and racist caricatures of uncontrollable, simian Irishmen on the other. The Troubles subsequently problematised the idea of celebrating any potentially aggressive conception of national heroism, which in turn contributed to the rise of the gentler, grounded, happy-go-lucky form of Irish identity associated with Irish football fans, which, as Arrowsmith (2004) writes, made it 'acceptable and gracious to lose' (141). This, of course, stood in stark contrast with the associations surrounding the Irish rugby team during the Celtic Tiger which, according to the contemporary media: 'conjures images of [Ireland coach] Eddie O'Sullivan giving his charges a thousand lines before bed every night. I am here to win. Being a Paddy no longer means being the loveable loser' (qtd in Free 2013, 220). With such historical and cultural context, it is evident that Irish rugby carries a unique appeal as a symbol of a distinct form of idealized Irishness.

Ireland may 'have cornered the market in intense, soulful masculinity,' but this has been achieved over the course of significant historical and cultural development and 21st century Irish rugby arguably stands as the culmination of this development, facilitating the celebration of an Irish identity that is both aggressive and soulful, heroic but not alienating. This, of course, makes gives it a distinct value for advertisers intent on strengthening brand identity by resolving the 'cultural contradictions' of modern Ireland (Fanning 2006) and filling the 'values vacuum' of their consumers (Rowe 1999).

4:6.2. *The Conception and Construction of the Ireland Rugby Team as Digital Cultural Nationalism*

To extrapolate the distinctly flexible national-masculine signifier that Irish rugby has become, it is once again necessary to return to some of the central theoretical tools of this work. As was outlined in section 3:6.2, Irish identity is a potent but complicated concept when considered as a potential advertising tool. When employed by sponsors, it is therefore often rendered an empty signifier. It becomes ‘an absent fullness’ (Laclau 2004), an enticing, evocative, but ultimately shallow concept, sustained by symbols and tropes rather than any notable political or historical content. Sport is an ideal vehicle for this process of ‘emptying,’ as it provides advertisers with emotive and easily recognisable symbols of nationhood which ensure that in transforming this potentially contentious concept into an empty signifier, they do not wholly diminish its appeal. In the case of ‘All it Takes’ (like ‘Ode’) this is all the more so since the ad depicts players representing the national team, an institution which legitimises Irish identity through locating it in a field of peers and opponents. Skey (2014) writes that ‘it is often the existence of “other” nations—represented by their own particular icons, food, histories, preferences, and landscapes—that provides us with a key sense of who “we” are’ (6), and international sport is a prominent platform for manifesting the identity of these “other” nations. Any reference advertising makes to the Irish rugby team implicitly carries a reference to the nations they have played against, historically or recently, in the minds of audiences, further ensuring against a given ad’s depiction of Irishness being too empty to be engaging.

With Irish identity weighed down by historical and contemporary debates, it is beneficial for sponsors and advertisers to render it an empty signifier, while using sport to support this ‘emptied’ identity category with broad but powerful associations of sacrifice, self-control and courage. Furthermore, any sport (particularly one so prominent, in an Irish context, as rugby) comes with its own history to draw from when constructing engaging commercial narratives. That history may carry its own debates and controversial associations, but it is certainly more malleable than the wider history of a nation. Rowe (2015) argues that sport can never be entirely divorced from wider socio-political context and that much of the media coverage of a given sporting event or figure is likely to, consciously or unconsciously, ‘reproduce racialized hierarchies, discrimination and prejudice’ (578-579). However, elsewhere he notes how a

sporting event can be ‘drained of its politics’ through repeated re-appropriation by advertisers (2010, 366). Sporting moments are particularly susceptible to reshaping by advertising and the wider media for many reasons. Its apparently meritocratic and statistically measurable nature means that arguments challenging or reframing the accepted narrative of a particular event (or figure or team) need only cite selected ‘facts’ and figures (pertaining to performance, victories, defeats, etc.) to lend the argument a veneer of legitimacy. In addition, the still prominent tendency to dismiss sport as ‘only a game’ and ignore its connections to wider socio-political context means that any such attempts at reframing are likely to arouse less controversy than similar attempts to challenge dominant historical narratives.

While many such reframings in the wider media may engage or challenge the socio-cultural and political associations surrounding particular sporting events, advertising largely aims to eschew these complexities in favour of evoking broad but powerful reactions. To trade on the ‘values vacuum’ (Rowe 1999) by promising consumers more than mere products or experiences without alienating certain demographics, advertisers must make use of resonant and emotive concepts like sport and national identity while rendering them an uncontroversial empty signifier. This process is very much evident in ‘All it Takes,’ with the televised ad’s minimalist dreamscape setting working to pointedly not ground the featured players in any setting which might evoke socio-cultural associations with Irish rugby, or wider contemporary Irish society. Instead, their Irishness is limited to their jerseys, and any associations the viewer may have with Irish rugby is actively redirected towards broad, positive qualities such as hard work, self-sacrifice and determination. However, these broad qualities are, in turn, rendered more significant and engaging through association with the players depicted and the sporting Irish heroism they represent in their status as successful internationals. Thus, the ‘emptying’ of Irishness and Irish rugby leaves ample room to project a commercially appealing narrative based on general positive qualities and tropes, but also ensures this narrative is coloured by these ‘emptied’ but vivid concepts. Transformed into empty signifiers, Irish identity and Irish rugby deliver ‘ideological coherence to a particular discourse’ (in this case, the commercial discourse of ‘All it Takes’) while any ‘attempt to fully totalize or close their meaning always remains elusive’, therefore limiting any audience discontent (Phelan and Brereton 2010, 857).

However, as has been outlined in previous sections of this thesis, it is not enough to empty national identity of its contentious political connotations to render it a commodity. Advertising exists to foster desire and there is no desire for something that is apparently freely available. Sponsorship is founded on the notion of an exclusive association and cannot make any claims to exclusivity when it comes to concepts that consumers perceive themselves as already (or even inherently) possessing. Sport sponsorship functions to leverage fan affection for the team (or athlete) onto the brand. To do so, as the previous two chapters have outlined in detail, sponsors must be seen to be facilitating the bond between fan and team, rather than obstructing it through overt attempts at profiteering and marketing. In Three's case – with regard to their sponsorship arrangements with both the FAI and IRFU – the brand attempt to position themselves as an 'official fan' of the team whose celebrations of the team (in the form of the ads they commission) enrich fans' experience of supporting the team. Free and Hughson (2006) describe how fans validate the authenticity of their support through implicit and explicit contrast with fans they perceive as less authentic or dedicated, so while sport supporter identity may seem to be conferred easily by the act of watching and rooting for the team (be it on television or in the stadium), it ultimately remains fragile enough to be tapped into by sponsors and advertisers. In the case of Three's sponsorship campaign of 'All it Takes,' the brand is attempting not merely leveraging rugby supporter identity, but also Irish identity.

National identity, like sport supporter identity, is at once easily claimed and continually under question. Skey (2010) outlines how the trend towards 'liberalised, "global" systems of economic production and consumption, increasingly mobile populations and the rapid interchange of ideas through the mass media that are seen to challenge relatively well-established belief systems and practices, including those associated with the nation' (720). In effect, national identity has become what might be described in Lefebvrian terms as an ideological new scarcity. Lefebvre describes new scarcities as abundant qualities that have been rendered apparently rare, and therefore valuable, through 'circulat[ing] within systems of production, allocation or distribution' (1974, 330). Lefebvre limits his application of the concept to the case of previously abundant physical qualities (light, space, etc.) and their relationship to urban planning and the property market, but here it is extended to ideological qualities, namely, national identity.

Sport, as has been described in preceding sections of this work, remains one of the most prominent platforms for temporarily manifesting and solidifying an increasingly tremulous sense of national identity on a mass scale. It is therefore an ideal vehicle for advertisers to leverage not only to sell the new scarcity of national identity in an engaging form, but also to underline that very scarcity through implicit contrast with the vividly realised conception of nationhood presented in the ad. The advertising strategist who worked on 'All it Takes' asserts that live sport 'resonates so strongly with people, because suddenly they feel part of something again' (27 April 2016). 'All it Takes' does not evoke this feeling of vortextual national community as overtly as 'Ode' does, but it can be perceived as an underlying discourse of the campaign. Visually, the green of the players' Ireland jerseys in the main televised ad provide a rare touch of bright colour amid the otherwise stark visual aesthetic of the text, subtly contributing to the impression of the Ireland rugby team as a vividly enthralling experience amid a largely mundane society. However, it is in the mini-documentary supplementary texts that the perception of Irishness as new scarcity is more clearly foregrounded. The pointed efforts to ground the players in perceived tropes and rituals of traditional Irish culture not only fend off any latent suspicion of the sport as the domain of the Anglo-Irish urban bourgeois, but also underlines that Irishness is a key part of the campaign's appeal. If the main televised ad's narrative is based on broad positive tropes (bravery, dedication, etc.) that could be argued to be universal, then these supplementary texts which bolster the campaign's promise to 'bring fans closer to the team than ever before' (Press Release 2015) work to tie these wider qualities to a distinct sense of Irishness. The fact that this Irishness is deemed a key selling point of the campaign indicates an underlying confidence in its value (and therefore also in its comparative scarcity).

The term digital cultural nationalism was coined in this work to act as an umbrella term for forms of acceptable nationalist expression that have emerged in an era characterised by encroaching globalism and awareness of the negative potential of traditional forms of political nationalism. It is therefore very often bound up with a distinct sense of ironic distance, a tendency to implicitly poke fun at the idea of celebrating an identity that seems so tenuously manifested through mundane routines and everyday experiences. In such a cultural climate, sport is notable for offering a rare unapologetically un-ironic channel for the celebration of national culture, and for manifesting national culture in a manner which seems tangible and engaging. This latter point is particularly significant. Skey cites Tuan arguing that 'the modern nation as a

large bounded space is difficult to experience in any direct way' (2011, 238) – international sport is a clear exception to this assessment, being a vivid and vortextual experience of shared national consciousness. With this in mind, the supplementary mini-documentaries of 'All it Takes' can be read from an alternative angle. While they ground the players in banal activities and settings associated with traditional Irish culture in order to implicitly reiterate the players' relatability to fans, the Irishness of the cultural ephemera presented is, in turn, reinforced and unified through the presence of celebrated Ireland rugby internationals. Taken in isolation, any of the activities, rituals or settings (the local shop, school sport tournaments, pubs balls, etc.) presented as part of the influence of the local community in shaping the featured players could be viewed as too mundane to attest to any sort of shared national identity. However, when presented as part of a unified narrative documenting the path of a player toward the privilege of representing the Ireland team in a prominent international sport, one of the most potent and tangible ways of manifesting the imagined community of the nation, these activities, rituals and settings become touchstones of national culture. Thus, the viewer, whose tenuous experience of Irishness may be limited to mundane cultural ephemera, is offered the chance to participate in a more enjoyable and ostensibly more meaningful experience of Irishness through supporting the rugby team. An experience which tacitly lends a sense of meaning and significance to the more mundane experiences of national culture.

Interviews with those involved in the production of the campaign, in addition to analysis of campaign material (press releases, captions, etc.) reveal a pointed desire to emphasise the internationally renowned status of the featured players (and by extension, the Ireland rugby team in general). The advertising strategist who worked on 'All it Takes' may have viewed the public perception that the Ireland rugby team had less of an alienating 'superstar' quality than famous football stars as a positive, and emphasised the importance of depicting their determination and sacrifice, but these qualities are ultimately set in such a positive context by the players' status as elite internationals. Commenting on the overachievement of the team, he said: 'I think we definitely achieve more than we should; if you look at the size of the country and the rugby playing population of Ireland versus England and France. You go: 'how are we beating these guys?' [...] we've beaten Australia – we've beaten every big nation bar the All-Blacks, and it'll happen at some point, which is immense' (27 April 2016). Similarly, the press release and caption of the post of the televised ad on Three's YouTube channel both refer to the players

playing ‘at the highest level.’ While the press release to mark O’Connell’s 100th Irish cap (and accompanying mini-documentary) lauds his dedication and courage, it also makes clear that he has won ‘some of the most prestigious domestic and international honours in the game.’ Many digital cultural nationalist texts reveal a powerful but uncertain desire to celebrate national identity, which is undercut by anxieties of how to conduct such celebration – and, indeed, confusion over what is worth celebrating – but ‘All it Takes’ facilitates an unabashedly po-faced celebration of Ireland through the idealised qualities of the country that are represented through the players.

The conception of ‘All it Takes’ may necessitate Irishness (and Irish rugby) being emptied of its more contested historic and political underpinnings, but this leaves the identity to fix a narrative based on broad, incontestably positive qualities such as dedication, discipline and self-sacrifice. Consequently, Irishness itself, while lending the commercial narrative a sense of cultural resonance and significance, is legitimised and idealised through its association with these qualities and its vaunted position within a prestigious hierarchy of elite international sport. Laclau himself claims that his notion of the empty signifier arises from ‘irrepresentability’ rather than ‘abstraction’ (2004, 280). To elaborate, it arises less from a concerted effort to construct emptiness (though this work has argued that this is a factor in its use in advertising) but out of an attempt to represent an ‘absent fullness.’ He cites ‘justice’ with regard to this, writing that it is less a defined concept and more of a desire for a positive reverse of a perceived wronging – it is, thus, intangible, contextual and yet culturally powerful. With this understanding in mind, the notion of Ireland, and Irishness, as an empty signifier which gives significance, and is given tangibility by vortextual sporting events – which are in turn given greater coherence by commercial narratives such as ‘All it Takes’ can be better understood.

4:7. Conclusion

Through examining ‘All it Takes’ in the context of its place in the Irish sports advertising landscape and wider socio-cultural trends in the country, the campaign’s significance is apparent. It can be read as demonstrating a transition in the commercial depiction of Irish rugby, shifting from earlier celebrations of mythic heroes and lionisations of the sport’s humble past to an

attempt to reconcile both approaches within a single campaign, with the bio videos shedding light on the humble truth behind the supermen of the televised ad. This points to fresh avenues of exploration for future advertisers (such as Vodafone), but also points towards a shift in the cultural connotations of rugby in Ireland. While the abiding associations of Anglo-Irish bourgeois society and private school affluence continue to colour perception of the sport, the cultural shift brought on by the Celtic Tiger and, not insignificantly, the (largely) continuous success of the Ireland rugby team in the 21st century have contributed to the sport's potential to serve as a collective national signifier.

What is particularly interesting is how, given widespread contemporary trepidation around celebrating any perceived form of aggressive nationalism – particularly pertinent in Ireland's case as has been discussed above – is how rugby can function as a symbol of an almost quasi-Victorian variant of Irish national identity. It allows for the idealised depiction of a form of Irishness characterised by strength, determination, self-control and community. Such an identity offers the potential to eschew the irreverent, self-effacing underdog associations of other, earlier forms of Irishness (characterised most notably by the international and domestic perception of Irish football fans) in favour of a more bullishly confident approach that chimes with many Celtic Tiger values while avoiding the stigma of hubris attached to that bygone boom period. The significance of rugby facilitating the shaping and celebration of a national identity, many elements of which had been previously discredited, will be expanded on further in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Theoretical Synthesis

This chapter will begin by following on from the structure of the previous two in being subdivided into sections on production, textual analysis and reception. The content of these sections will focus on synthesising the details and analysis of ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ with a view to comparing and contrasting them in order to further explore their significance as exemplars of their respective sports’ relationship with Irish culture and subsequent commercial potential. In doing so, the parallels between the campaigns will be illustrated and, thus, their connections to one another will be underlined beyond the obvious similarity of sharing a sponsor brand and advertising agency.

Having illustrated the parallels between both campaigns, this chapter will then go on to expound on their wider significance as emerging from a context which has simultaneously problematised the notion of a distinct national identity and the manner in which it can be effectively presented, while also heightening its cultural and commercial appeal. This section of the chapter will draw on previously outlined concepts such as the empty signifier, new scarcities and banal nationalism to explore sport’s unique potential as a vehicle for the commercial celebration of national identity in the hyper-globalised internet era of digital cultural nationalism.

5.1. Production

As has been described in the preceding two chapters, while both ‘All it Takes’ and ‘Ode’ were commissioned by Three and produced by Boys and Girls, there were nonetheless considerable differences in the circumstances of their respective productions. Perhaps the most significant of these differences was the divergent circumstances which led to Three’s sponsorship arrangements with the FAI and IRFU. Three had been the sponsor of the FAI since 2010 and the two parties would go on to renew the arrangement in 2015 with a five year deal. Conversely, they had inherited the sponsorship of the IRFU in 2014 when they took over telecommunications rival, and previous Irish rugby sponsors, O2 (though the initial movements of the acquisition began in 2013). This arrangement would last until 2016 when Vodafone agreed a four year sponsorship deal with the IRFU. This would imply a more comfortable and mutually

appreciative relationship between Three and the FAI than between the sponsor brand and the IRFU, but this was rarely apparent throughout the research conducted on these respective relationships for this work. The IRFU official interviewed for this work was eager to emphasise the organisation's happy working relationship with Three. He noted that the unplanned sponsor transition was a challenge (all the more so because the brand already sponsored a major Irish sports team), but asserted 'that the relationship was really good – we worked really well together. I had no issues. They're good people' (25 July 2016). The FAI officials interviewed alluded to past occasions when they had disagreed with sponsor brands over how the team should be presented, but largely expressed satisfaction with their relationship with Three. It was hardly likely that these officials would divulge details of any significant rift with their commercial partners (former or current) over the course of these interviews, but in discussing more general matters on the commercial presentation of the team, there was little indication that the methods or suggestions of Three and their advertising partners caused any more consternation than was usual in sponsorship dealings.

Undoubtedly however, there were notable differences in the attitudes of the FAI and IRFU with regard to the presentation of their respective teams. The IRFU had previously commissioned the services of a branding agency to help develop a stronger identity for Irish rugby. While the IRFU marketing official interviewed for this work was reticent to elaborate on the details of this identity, he was clear about its influence on subsequent sponsorship campaigns:

We articulated that position turned that position into a presentation, went round to all our sponsors and said "Look, in all your communications and advertising centred around the Irish rugby team, this is how we would like to inform your campaigns with how we position the team. So we're not saying you have to use our tagline or things like that, but we're positioning the team as representative of the country; humble and hardworking, so it doesn't suit us if you bring out an advertising campaign that's kind of cocky and snide, or edgy and alien-type players" (25 July 2016).

These comments also reiterate the centrality of the players to Irish rugby sponsorship campaigns – a priority shaped by the practical circumstance of the players being directly contracted to the IRFU and therefore available for use in such campaigns, but also by the high profile and renowned reputation of the players given Ireland's high status within international rugby. Indeed,

the IRFU marketing official asserted that the ready availability and celebrity status was a key part of the organisation's appeal for sponsors:

We have all of our top players playing in the country. We have access like the GAA has locally, but we also have an international dimension which the GAA probably lacks a bit. Our advantage over soccer in some respects are that the players play at home and they're all household names, so you see Keith Earls walking around Limerick, Ian Henderson around Belfast, Luke Fitz or Johnny Sexton around Dublin. The players are accessible, they're of the people and they're there (25 July 2016).

The combination of readily available players, a team with a reputation for success and an organisation with a strong sense of brand identity make the IRFU an undoubtedly attractive prospect for sponsors, but also constrain the flexibility of advertisers to develop their own narrative to compellingly tie brand, team and nation together.

The FAI, on the other hand, were less strict in their conception of the team's identity and the sponsor's freedom to depict it. When asked specifically about how the idea of the Ireland team representing the image of the nation internationally, one of the officials interviewed for this work replied: 'I don't think the association has a position on that.' Again, the practicality of the FAI's formal working arrangements played a significant role in shaping this attitude. Irish international footballers are not contracted directly to the FAI as their rugby counterparts are to the IRFU, and the majority of them are based abroad (chiefly in the UK). The FAI characterised their participation in sponsorship campaigns as a 'gesture of goodwill.' Consequently while the use of players in sponsorship campaigns may often be desired by the organisation, they put little pressure on sponsor brands and advertisers to ensure that this is the case. A further consequence of this looser association between team and organisation is a public perception of the two as separate entities: 'there's the Irish team and then there's the FAI: they're two separate identities and we're very conscious of that' (8 December 2015). This may have influenced the organisation's decision not to develop a specific, strong branding identity in the manner of the IRFU as they realise that what sponsors can effectively depict is outside of their control and in the hands (or rather, the feet) of the team.

In section 1:4.1, the case was made for Ireland international rugby and football matches constituting vortextual events within the confines of the national habitus, and this vortextual quality was indirectly acknowledged in interviews with the key parties of the campaigns'

production. Speaking of the build-up to major football tournaments, the Three sponsorship executive claimed the brand tries to ‘capitalise on the excitement that’s going to be in Ireland around that time’ (26 February 2016). Similarly, the advertising strategist interviewed discussed how Three could tap into the sense of event and community that temporarily arises during important sporting events, claiming that ‘people will throng to pubs or they’ll be in house parties or they’ll go to venues that have big screens or they’ll go to the match if they’re lucky enough and be part of a community’ (27 April 2016). Three can rely on viewers to fill in the blanks regarding the context their ads implicitly refer to, because, as Whannel (2009) outlines: ‘Some major events dominate the headlines, and, temporarily, it is difficult for columnists and commentators to discuss anything else, even if they have no abiding interest. The media agenda is compressed, and other topics either disappear or have to be connected to the vortexual event’ (211). This reliance on viewer awareness of wider events positions the ads as paratexts to the central vortexual text of the match (or wider competition), though from the point of view of Three and Boys and Girls, the positions are reversed; it is the match (or matches) that serve as the paratext for their central text, the ad. The vortexual event of Ireland’s participation in high profile matches and tournaments function as a filter ‘through which we must pass on our way to the film or program, our first and formative encounters with the text’ (Gray 2010, 2). For Three, awareness of the paratext of the match will inform viewer experience of their main text, the ad. While they can rely on the paratext of the match to ensure viewer comprehension of the context their ad refers to, they can exercise little control over it (something which, as noted above, prompted repeated assertions from Three and Boys and Girls about the untenable risk of basing a campaign on the presumption of the on-field success of a team). Gray writes that paratexts can ‘change the nature of the text’s address, each proliferation either amplifying an aspect of the text through its mass circulation or adding something new and different to the text’ (2) and while Three are keen to avoid triumphalist visions of Irish success that would quickly ring hollow if the paratext of the match deviated from their expectations, public opinion of the team can shift from match to match which can in turn influence their reaction to an ad. An ad received positively when it aired in the days leading up to an important match, could strike a sour note with viewers after the hopes and excitement it plays upon have been dampened by a disappointing result – again the example outlined by Scherer and Jackson (2007) of the public backlash against Adidas

in the wake of the New Zealand rugby team's failure at the 1999 World Cup is a pertinent example of this risk.

For all this relative flexibility however, the FAI still maintained a strong sense of responsibility for maintaining the dignity of the team and the organisation. The officials interviewed for this study alluded to past occasions when they had quashed proposed sponsorship ideas which they felt would depict the players or coaching staff in an unflattering light and perhaps dampen the 'goodwill' they work to sustain. Ultimately though, the FAI's attitude toward the commercial depiction of Irish football affords sponsors and their advertising partners notable leeway in comparison with the IRFU. This was eminently demonstrated with '#MakeHistory,' the campaign released in anticipation of Ireland's participation at the 2016 European Championship. During an interview with FAI officials months prior to the production of the televised ad of that campaign, and shortly after the Ireland had secured qualification for the tournament, they expressed satisfaction with the fan eulogising approach of 'Ode' but were confident that following the success of qualification, the next campaign would showcase the players. Despite this confidence, Three, and Boys and Girls, opted to focus on the fans once more in '#MakeHistory,' justifying the approach by explaining: 'we want to be a little bit more "we are excited and we are going to go and support better than anyone else." And the team is going to go and do their job, but we're not quite saying "let's go and win this," because, let's face it, we know where we are' (27 April 2016). Ultimately, this approach proved successful, as the campaign won public attention and media plaudits, and significantly, if somewhat fortuitously, prefaced the vortextual international media lionisation of the real life Ireland fans at the tournament (O'Boyle and Kearns 2017b). The closer connection (both in terms of public perception and working arrangements) of the IRFU and the Ireland rugby team, conversely, means that, as the advertising strategist interviewed put it: 'the campaigns get run by Joe Schmidt, because he's dictating the tone for the players on a daily basis, he's got a very process driven strategy where it's not about celebrating, where it's about "if you score a try, what's the next thing you do? It isn't run around celebrating, it's get back in position"' (27 April 2016).

Despite these differences, and despite the necessity of ensuring both campaigns were appropriately distinct from one another, there are some notable similarities between the two. With regards to the supplementary materials issued to create interest for the main televised ad,

both campaigns markedly foreground the expense and technical expertise involved in the production of these ads. The press release issued to hype ‘Ode’ emphasises the cost of the ad, noting that it cost close to €1 million to produce and noting the big brand experience of its director. It goes on to detail the advanced production techniques used in the ad: ‘Sections of the ad were shot on a Phantom Camera which shoots at incredibly high speeds (1000 frames per second), allowing you to slow the images right down, while others were animated in stop frame animation, or illustrated comic book style adding a touch of nostalgia.’ While the press release relating to ‘All it Takes’ does not eulogise the ad’s production values in a similarly direct manner, the behind the scenes supplementary video detailing the making of the ad highlights them visually and sets them alongside Joe Schmidt’s narration lauding the determination and passion needed to succeed at the top level of sport (see Appendix 2 for full press releases). As was noted in the previous chapter, the audio-visual parallel of the effort and skill of elite Irish rugby players with that of the ad’s production team is, in some ways, the nearest Three come to leveraging their sports sponsorship to champion the network’s qualities in a direct manner.

The consistent eagerness to highlight the production values of both campaigns could be read as an effort to underline the perceived sincerity of the sponsor’s support of both teams. An advertising strategist who worked on both campaigns noted the importance of sponsors being seen as doing more than merely handing over money in exchange for displaying their brand logo on the team’s jersey, and he is far from alone in viewing sports sponsorship as an arrangement that requires careful navigation to ensure its commercial effectiveness. Merely trumpeting the money they have invested in the team will not win a sponsor respect from the team’s fans, but portraying that money as a proxy for their investment of passion in the team could go some way toward doing so. Significantly the sponsor’s passion is seen to facilitate that of the fans, improving their experience of supporting the team, as evidenced by the rhetoric of the blurbs of both ads on Three Ireland’s social media channels. With ‘All it Takes,’ Three promises to ‘uncover the mystery of the Irish rugby team’ and ‘reveal the dedication and commitment’ of the players, while the press release issued for ‘Ode’ promises to ‘pay tribute to real Irish football fans’ (see Appendices 1 and 2). This therefore positions the sponsor as a bridge between fans and team, rather than a commercial imposition on their organic relationship.

While the sponsor and advertisers must walk this delicate line to win fan approval (or, at least, minimise fan disapproval), both the IRFU and the FAI shared a relatively sanguine attitude to attracting potential public discontent. With sports fans generally demonstrating a strong sense of ownership over their teams, clashes with the authorities officially tasked with governing those teams are inevitable. This is somewhat more pronounced in the case of the FAI. As officials within the organisation freely admit, fans perceive the organisation as entirely distinct from the team they support, and therefore feel few qualms about loving the latter and loathing the former. The FAI officials seemed blithely resigned to this state of affairs, asserting that ‘no fans will ever agree on everything. Never ever, ever, ever in the history of the world.’ They felt that ‘abuse’ (used here in the colloquial, light-hearted sense) was very much ‘part of the territory’ of being involved in the organising and marketing of the Ireland football team. Nevertheless, they emphasised that, despite the inevitability of negative feedback, they ‘have supporters club networks that we engage with constantly’ and would have ‘the opportunity to go and talk to them’ if the fans expressed serious and significant discontent to a particular aspect of the team’s representation (8 December 2015). Similarly, the phrase ‘comes with the territory’ was expressed by an official from the IRFU, who noted that while they organisation would be failing in their duty to promote the sport if fans were not passionate – positively or negatively – about results, there was little backlash concerning the commercial representation of the team. He argued:

you don’t see something going out that makes idle boasts or empty boasts that we’ll win the World Cup or that we’re the best team in the world. We don’t make any fatuous statements and our sponsors certainly don’t. Most of them track very strongly and very accurately how the public perception and mood around them is. As a consequence we don’t get too carried away with success or too down with failure (25 July 2016).

Ultimately, both organisations display a marked blithe resignation to the possibility of fan discontent over their commercial dealings – though the IRFU seemed to regard it as unlikely. They view the unique ability of sports fans to ‘speak back’ as an occasional inconvenience (though the FAI officials also asserted that they appreciated the input of the various supporters’ groups they liaised with) but not a major stumbling block in their efforts to shape and promote the image of the team. Tulloch’s assessment of fans as a ‘powerless elite’ (2007) is evidently pertinent to the realm of sports sponsorship. Fans may be a significant party in the arrangement,

but this is due to their value rather than their influence, which remains nebulous and somewhat indirect if ultimately meaningful.

Of course, while the different working arrangements of the FAI and IRFU, and the divergent circumstances through which Three acquired the position of both organisations' primary sponsor influenced the differences in the production of both campaigns, these differences were also shaped by the obvious creative and commercial imperative to ensure that neither campaign would seem derivative. Essentially, both campaigns are striving to achieve the same end in presenting an idealised vision of Irish identity through the prism of sport and attracting positive fan feelings towards the brand for this seemingly unprofitable (in a direct sense, at least) celebration of the team they support and nation they love. Both the IRFU and FAI want a campaign that will engagingly depict the qualities their respective national teams (and respective sports) are celebrated for, while avoiding trite stereotypes; ultimately characterising them as representing a heroic form of Irishness. The difficulties of producing ad campaigns for both organisations which are necessarily similar and yet tonally and aesthetically distinct was mentioned by the IRFU official interviewed for this work. He described the scenario of both national sports teams having the same primary sponsor as 'unusual' and asserted 'You probably wouldn't plan, if you were either, in a market like Ireland to say that it's a good thing for kit sales that you have the same brand.' Indeed, the official explicitly identified 'the challenge' of this dual sponsorship scenario as 'creating a point of difference between the soccer team and the rugby team' (25 July 2016). The nature of this 'point of difference' – and how successful Three were in creating it – will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

5:2. Textual Analysis

Assessing the main televised ads of both campaigns together highlights some notable thematic parallels and aesthetic contrasts between them. As was detailed in the preceding section of this chapter, the chief difficulty for Three (and Boys and Girls, who they employed for both campaigns) was creating a 'point of difference' in the manner in which they celebrated both teams as redolent of valorised Irish identity. For Boys and Girls, this difference was rooted in the assertion that 'the way we support them [rugby and football] is quite different.' The advertising

strategist went on to explain how fans felt less alienated from the rugby players because they were based in Ireland and were perceived as not being paid the exorbitant wages associated with international footballers (sentiments also expressed by the official from the IRFU interviewed). He felt that this facilitated attempts to celebrate the players without alienating supporters, because ‘they feel like they’re much more closer [sic] to us.’ On the other hand, he noted that the success of the Ireland football team is a uniquely vortextual event, galvanising nationwide support to a unique degree: ‘Rugby isn’t played in every school around the country, but pretty much every school has a soccer ball and anytime Ireland qualify for a major tournament it feels like the whole world stops and the whole nation gets behind it’ (27 April 2016). Assertions of the Ireland football team’s potential to command the attention and support of Irish people of all geographical, class, gender and age demographics were also made by the officials from Three and the FAI.

The most direct manifestation of this difference in the manner both teams are supported by the Irish public in ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ is the decision to focus on supporters in the former and players in the latter. Again, of course, this is also driven by business practicalities and the on-field fortunes of the respective teams – as has been detailed in Chapter 3, the Ireland football team was coming off the back of a disappointing European Championship performance in 2013, and its players are not (unlike their rugby counterparts) directly contracted to the sport’s governing body. However, the decision indicates some interesting points about the socio-cultural connotations of both teams (and sports in general) in Ireland, particularly in light of the further aesthetic divergences between both campaigns.

‘Ode’ is not merely notable for focusing on supporters rather than players, but for how it markedly emphasises, and celebrates, the ordinariness of these supporters. The fans depicted in the ad were, as Three were eager to point out, drawn from an actual supporters group and not chosen for their telegenic qualities or conventional glamour. Indeed, the opposite would seem to be the case as the camera lingers on the more pronouncedly average-looking fans throughout the ad (such as the chubby man in the opening shot and the gawky young man in the closing one). The settings too, particularly the homes of the fans, are depicted in notably dull tones. Furthermore, as was discussed in Chapter 3, the act of travelling abroad in support of the team is portrayed as a hardship rather than a holiday, with shots of fans eating unappealing airline meals,

sleeping in airports and enduring biting cold conditions at matches. However, this eulogising tone is undercut by a sense of light-heartedness. Deliberately over-the-top visual puns (such as the shot of penguins in the arctic illustrating the bitterly cold conditions travelling fans must endure) imbue 'Ode' with an air of self-deprecation which neatly compliments its more sentimental celebratory elements. Ireland's international reputation for exhibiting a sort of mischievous underdog charm and the role of football in furthering that reputation has been discussed elsewhere, not least in its potential to obscure some of the more complex aspects of Irish identity (O'Boyle and Kearns 2017b). This ability to evoke emotion while sidestepping complexity is, of course, particularly valuable to sponsor brands and advertisers and will be addressed in greater depth in section 5:4.1.

Conversely, 'All it Takes' not only follows on from recent Irish rugby ads in focussing on the players, but makes use of special effects to deliberately exaggerate their prowess and dedication to superhuman levels. It should be noted that while the decision to focus on the players may well be largely dictated by the practical benefit of IRFU sponsorship arrangements making them readily available for advertisers, the decision to depict them in such a straightforwardly heroic manner is a decision with interesting socio-cultural overtones. Anne White (2000) notes the tendency for footballers to be depicted self-deprecatingly as 'fools' in her study of British advertising surrounding the 1998 FIFA World Cup. White uses 'fools' here to denote playfulness rather than idiocy – players are presented as figures of fun in the ads she examines, but not of contempt. She writes that while their sporting skills are on display, they are 'presented in unconventional contexts that bring a humorous dimension to the commercial' (132). In 'All it Takes' the contexts for the demonstrations of the players' prowess may be unconventional, but it could hardly be considered humorous. Interestingly, though it was the FAI officials interviewed who recalled having to strive to ensure advertisers did not use players in an embarrassingly humorous light (whereas the IRFU official was more concerned that the players do not come across as 'cocky' or 'alien' in ads). With White's observations in mind, in addition to the effective way in which humour served to compliment the self-aggrandising romance of 'Ode,' it is all the more notable that 'All it Takes' celebration of the prowess and dedication of Irish rugby players is not leavened by any humorous touches. As was outlined in Chapter 4, the advertising strategy behind the campaign's overall direction was to emphasise the hard work and sacrifice required by players to reach the elite level of international rugby, therefore facilitating a narrative

which can, theoretically, laud players without alienating fans. Ultimately, the approach is in noted contrast to ‘Ode.’ While both celebrate their respective subjects (and by proxy, their respective sports) and, in doing so, celebrate an idealised conception of Irish identity, they do so in markedly different ways.

The narration of both ads varies significantly. ‘Ode’ is narrated by actor – and Ireland fan – Emmet Kirwan, who recites a poem lauding the dedication of Ireland supporters, while ‘All it Takes’ is narrated by Ireland head coach, Joe Schmidt who describes the effort required by Ireland rugby players in the manner of a press conference, or even a team talk. There is also a marked contrast with regard to the settings of both ads. ‘Ode’ roots itself in mundane reality, depicting homes, pubs, airports, cities and stadia. Although these images are intercut with surreal shots (such as the comic strip or the penguin populated arctic), the fans themselves are not present in these stranger settings, and they effectively serve as visual metaphors for the ‘reality’ of the depiction of the fans. ‘All it Takes’ on the other hand is set entirely in a dreamscape which acts as a visual metaphor for the real-life dedication of the players featured in the ad. The weights room and the pitch depicted are borderless, shrouded in darkness with no discernible ‘outside world,’ while the locker room is starkly white and utterly empty (other than Sexton).

Furthermore, the players themselves are integrated into the surreal visual metaphors in a markedly more direct manner than the fans in ‘Ode’: the shot of penguins in the arctic follows that of fans at a snowy match to illustrate the conditions they endure, but Henshaw’s strength is illustrated by him appearing to burst into flames rather than by a parallel shot not featuring the player himself. Perhaps the most direct difference between the two is the aesthetic contrast of the gaudy bright colours of ‘Ode’ and the stark tones of ‘All it Takes.’ Given that green would inevitably feature prominently in both ads, the tonal contrasts are all the more interesting. The bright colours of ‘Ode’ speak to a more light-hearted and cartoonish outlook. The occasional dull tones of the homes, airports and cafes depicted stand in vivid contrast to the cornucopia of bright colours used when depicting fan experience. Essentially the ad employs this contrast to implicitly demonstrate how the mundane individual fan is joyfully subsumed into a carnivalesque collective when he or she supports Ireland. The darker tones of ‘All it Takes,’ meanwhile, underline the seriousness of the ad’s intent. It may utilise special effects to act as visual metaphors, but it is ultimately promising to ‘uncover the mystery of the Irish rugby team’ and ‘to

reveal the dedication and commitment’ of the players. As White (2000) notes in her study of British football ads, regardless of the level of humour on display (or lack thereof): ‘The pretence that they [the players] are ultimately dedicated to the sport must be maintained by some means and above all dual or ambiguous status should not be flaunted or openly celebrated’ (135). The darker tones of the ad ground it to a sense of realism and seriousness which fend off any intrusion of humour or suspicion that the sport is not being treated with the reverence it deserves, while also ensuring it is clearly distinguished from the lighter and more humorous tone and aesthetic of ‘Ode.’

Ultimately, these various aesthetic contrasts can be read together as illustrating a central parallel between the two ads, which might be termed ‘superman vs every fan.’ The term parallel is most appropriate here, as while there are evident differences in the themes of the two ads, and while those differences demonstrate much about the socio-cultural connotations of both teams and sports in contemporary Ireland, they share a deep running similarity of intent. Both ads, as was outlined above, attempt to celebrate a version of idealised Irish identity through sport, and this leads to underlying narrative and thematic similarities. The notion of man overcoming nature runs through both campaigns. In the main ad of ‘All it Takes,’ the players overcome their inner limitations, while also battling against the elements in the supplementary bio videos. ‘Ode’ dwells on the latter, lauding fans whose support remains undimmed despite adverse weather conditions. Another similarity, seemingly obvious though nonetheless significant, is the use of the jersey (and the colour green more broadly) to act as a unifying symbol between players/fans, brand and viewers. In ‘All it Takes’ the three featured players are depicted separately, but are united by the Ireland jersey they all wear, whereas ‘Ode’ depicts dozens of fans in a variety of locations who are all united by their identity as Ireland fans by the replica jerseys and other Ireland paraphernalia (invariably green). Notably too, both campaigns demonstrate an eagerness to contextualise their celebration of Ireland within an international context which adds weight to this celebration. The caption on the YouTube video of ‘All it Takes’ describes playing for Ireland as being ‘the highest level’ of rugby, while Three CCO Elaine Carey lauds the players as being ‘among the best in the world’ in the campaign’s press release. Similarly, the YouTube post for ‘Ode’ on Three Ireland’s official account is entitled ‘To the Best Fans in the World #SupportWorks,’ a sentiment echoed by Kirwan in the ad’s narration. In both the press release and ‘making of’ video, Three creative director Rory Hamilton describes the Ireland fans’ singing

in the face of defeat at Euro 2012 as a ‘spine tingling moment in *world* football’ (emphasis mine). While the campaigns were circulated within the Irish domestic market, it is evident that Irishness can only be sold to the Irish within a suggested international context which lends the identity a perceived uniqueness and legitimacy when implicitly set against international peers.

These underlying similarities, however, underpin a significant thematic parallel in the ads’ narratives. ‘Ode’ portrays Ireland football fans as resolutely ordinary people, foregrounding their lack of glamour and apparent relatability. It has been noted elsewhere (Klein 2000; Smith 2005) that advertisers are increasingly aware of the potential of the medium’s conventional idealised consumerist lifestyle fantasies becoming alienating to consumers, and an effective response to this possibility is a pivot toward the celebration of perceived normality. But even ads which strive for relatability must retain some aspirational aspect in order to foster desire within the consumer. In ‘Ode,’ while the fans are depicted as ‘everymen,’ the act of supporting Ireland is portrayed as a transformative experience which allows them to transcend their ordinary lives and become part of a temporary carnivalesque community of football supporters. Conversely, ‘All it Takes’ depicts Ireland rugby players as superhuman figures. While there is notable emphasis on their relatable qualities of hard work and dedication, these are set in the context of having earned them the status of elite players. In this ad, the notion of being subsumed into the collective identity of Ireland (in this case, playing for the team rather than supporting it) is not positioned as something which elevates individuals, but something individuals aspire to – a symbol of their status as sporting titans. In both ads Irishness, in a form more defined and vivid than the mere mundane fact of nationality experienced on an everyday level, is a commodity consumers can purchase through their support of the team, and, in doing so, briefly become part of an internationally renowned community.

This parallel is, of course, driven by the commercial necessity of providing distinct brand narratives for such ostensibly similar properties, but it also reveals much about the socio-cultural significance of both sports in contemporary Ireland. The Ireland football fans interviewed for this work expressed feelings of alienation over the increasingly financially driven world of club football. For them, a significant part of international football’s appeal was that they perceived it as transcending this tawdry commercialism through its foundation of national identity and associated feelings of pride and passion: ‘they [the Ireland players] all want to push together in

the name of Ireland. It means the world to them to play. They're not getting paid much. I think they get paid 400 quid a match to travel over and travel back. They're there simply because they want to represent Ireland' (February 3rd 2017). Such sentiments of disillusion chime with earlier speculations by Williams (1994) who (commenting specifically on the development of the English Premiership, but with wider application to the international commercialisation of club football) writes that 'working-class fans wonder what their own future might be in a revamped popular sport that has aspirations toward becoming what English FA marketing advisers describe as an 'integrated leisure experience' for affluent consumers' (392). Section 3.5 detailed how Ireland football fandom is uniquely positioned to represent positive collective working class identity in Ireland, but it could also be argued that international football in general has a similarly unique position within commercial representations of popular sport. Minority sports with smaller followings cannot be used by advertisers to tap into a sense of vortextual experience and nationwide collective identity to the same degree, while advertising centred on other popular sports can be used to celebrate the ordinariness of fans, it is often reduced to doing so in a trite and shallow fashion. Journalist Alexander Shea (2015) writes that in an effort to commodify their identity brand, many football clubs 'are sanitising their self-images, removing emphasis from the political narratives that previously gave their teams meaning.' While these clubs remain hugely successful commercial entities, they could be argued to be tapping into a different commercial seam than that of 'Ode,' selling football fandom as a leisure activity rather than as a laudable national identity and duty. In an effort to prioritise the former over the latter, they de-emphasise the links to their history and sense of place. 'Ode' is able to walk a finer line, presenting Ireland fandom as both dutiful and enjoyable by implicitly tying itself to deeper connotations its audience may hold about Irish national identity (which will be further expounded on in section 5:4.1). 'Ode' therefore deftly manages to depict Ireland football fandom as a carnivalesque community which unites and elevates the experiences of ordinary people, and as a selfless expression and celebration of national identity. Hence, it can be at once ordinary and desirable.

The portrayal of the Ireland rugby team as supermen, albeit ones which have worked hard to earn this status, conversely, indicates a neo-liberal attitude towards national heroism in 21st century Ireland. Free (2013; 2018) discusses the markedly neo-liberal manner in which rugby players are celebrated in the Irish media, noting that Ireland's 2009 Six Nations triumph was discussed in the

manner of a morality tale in light of the previous year's financial crash. There was repeated emphasis placed on the need to make sacrifices and work harder to overcome previous hubristic excess. Notably too, he asserts that the media portrayal of Leinster and Ireland player, Sean O'Brien was particularly indicative, as it shifted from emphasising his rural, farming background to discussing him as a disciplined, self-sacrificing professional (2018, 224). This shift is interesting in light of 'All it Takes' supplementary bio videos which ground the players within notions of traditional community while also emphasising their hard work and professional outlook. These two features are portrayed as complimenting one another rather than being mutually exclusive. Just as 'Ode' manages to reconcile carnivalesque abandon with national loyalty, 'All it Takes' combines elements of traditional Irish identity with modern neo-liberal perceptions of heroism.

Ultimately, the 'superman vs every fan' parallel illustrates both the flexibility and the boundaries of rugby and football as vehicles for commercial celebrations of Irish identity. Both sports can be depicted in a manner which promises resolution for some of the more prominent cultural contradictions of modern Irish identity, but their potential to do so is limited by the wider perception of the sports and their socio-cultural connotations. Despite its burgeoning popularity, rugby is still dogged by associations with the Anglo-Irish bourgeois and therefore cannot yet be convincingly portrayed as arousing moments of vortextual nationwide community in the manner that football can. However, the success of the team and the apparently relatability of the players allows it to be used to celebrate elements of Celtic Tiger era confidence that might otherwise be seen as alienating. Similarly, 'Ode' can create a sense of shared experience and nationwide community, but is limited to characterising this community in traditional, underdog terms. Football in Ireland can certainly stand for a more modern form of national identity than the De Valerian monoculture that dominated the bulk of the 20th century, but it is nevertheless bound up with certain traditional tropes of Irishness such as 'smallness' and 'happy-go-luckyness' (O'Boyle & Kearns 2017b). In many ways, the parallel versions of Irishness represented in both campaigns echo Debbie Ging's assertions about the relatively limited range of Irish identities portrayed on-screen despite an increasingly complex and pluralistic reality. She writes that Irish people 'tend to be [portrayed as] simple, fun-loving yokels [...] or breezy, prosperous urbanites [...] while locations are divided between the rural idyll of the west and the hip cultural capital that is Dublin' (2002, 186). The versions of Irish identity presented in 'Ode' and 'All it Takes'

may be parallel and somewhat fluid, but they could still be seen as drawing from a familiar – and limited – stock.

5:3. Reception

Synthesising the results of the reception analysis of both campaigns again underlines that the parallels between them. Their differences are largely shaped by the differences in the socio-cultural connotations of both sports, but their similarities point to the unique commercial appeal of international sport in modern Ireland, and perhaps, in the wider world as well. As has been addressed in the reception sections of the previous two chapters, both campaigns could largely be considered to be commercial successes for Three, and, in as much as can be surmised with the information available, the IRFU's decision to end their sponsorship arrangement with Three and partner with Vodafone seemed more to do with financial incentive from the latter than any significant dissatisfaction with the former. Therefore this section will not focus in detail on rethreading over analysis of both campaigns' commercial consequences in depth, but will rather examine fan and consumer reactions to shed further light on their parallel significances.

A notable feature to emerge from discussions with fans and officials associated with both sports is how frequently the two were compared and contrasted. One rugby fan brought up GAA as a point of comparison when discussing the organisation of grassroots rugby, but this was a rare exception across a range of discussions in which rugby and football appeared to be natural peers in the eyes of both fans and officials. While the frequency of comparisons were likely influenced by the various interviewees' knowledge that this project was examining both sports, they can hardly be wholly ascribed to this influence, but rather speak to a wider perception of the two sports as occupying a unique place in the Irish cultural and sporting landscape. The ability to manifest the imagined community of the nation as an Ireland team, with the identity of the nation framed against – and defined by – international peers and opponents gives these sports potential to galvanise a nationwide sense of shared identity (Cronin 1999). Given that both sports share this unique potential to manifest Ireland's identity on the international stage,³¹ it is interesting to

³¹ Again, it should be restated that these manifestations are inherently divergent as the rugby team represents the entire island of Ireland, while the football team represents the 26 county Republic of Ireland. Preceding chapters

note not merely how often they were compared to one another by officials and fans, but how they were differentiated. In effect, both sports function as the ‘other’ to one another, defining their unique and positive qualities through contrast.

One such notable act of ‘othering’ occurred through the manner in which the football fans interviewed used rugby to attest to the vortextual popularity of football in Ireland: “the Rugby World Cup, I couldn’t even tell you who, what, where it was. But I just know that driving round the streets, you didn’t know the Rugby World Cup was on.” [...] “Nothing captures the public imagination like the football team. Rugby World Cups, things come and go, it will never bring everyone together like the football does” (3 February 2017). These sentiments echo not only those made by the FAI in interviews, but also by, ostensibly neutral officials from Three and Boys and Girls, and therefore can be read as supporting the decision of these parties to focus on the fans and try to ‘tap into that moment[of] football-mania’ (26 February 2016). Similarly, rugby fans attested to the relatability and character of Ireland’s top players through contrast with footballers: ‘you know how in soccer, you have diving and these sort of things? There’s no tolerance for that. There’s no tolerance for... eh, thuggery’ (6 February 2018). Again, this opinion echoed interviews with IRFU and Boys and Girls officials – though they drew less damning, dwelling less on perceived thuggery, and more on the notion that rugby players are more relatable to the public than their football counterparts.

These contrasts, arising organically from fan opinion, support the respective directions taken by both campaigns, but there were others which point to wider undercurrents of opinion about both sports and the form of Irishness they represent. The football fans interviewed, for instance, argued for the appeal of international’s perceived purity by not only contrasting it with the more commercialised club game, but also with international rugby. The ‘residency rule’ (which allows rugby players to play for a particular international side if they have resided in that country for a certain number of years and not already been capped by any other senior international team) was mocked: ‘that Mickey Mouse rugby where you can live in a country for 3 years and play for it!’ (3 February 2017). As of 2020, the residency rule will be amended to extend the length of time a player must spend in a country before becoming eligible for its international team from 3 to 5

have addressed how this divergence has affected public perception of the teams and their relationship to wider Irish identity, but it bears repeating that despite this divergence, in their potential to manifest Irish identity in vortextual sporting events on an international scale, they remain very much peers.

years, but the criticism is notable in light of how of how negatively the Ireland football team became associated with ‘plastic paddies’ and the ‘granny cap’ (Arrowsmith 2004, Free 2013). This assertion can be read as an attempt to emphasise the authenticity of international football, its players and its fans. Elsewhere in the interview the football fans expressed annoyance with the prohibitions against drinking alcohol at matches,³² less out of any desire to drink (‘Now, I don’t agree with fellas bringing their drink out to the game’) and more out of a sense that they were being discriminated against: “”Why, in Lansdowne Road as we call it, why are the rugby people allowed drink inside the ground and the soccer crowd aren’t allowed?” “Because they feel they’re catering to different social classes, simple as that.” “Big time.” “You’re dead right.””

This, of course, underlines the associations with private school education and ‘posh’ society which still dogs rugby’s ability to be unilaterally regarded as representative of authentic Irish identity, but it also highlights another side to the working class associations of football fandom which ‘Ode’ and ‘#MakeHistory’ play upon so positively and effectively. The feelings of discrimination expressed by these fans highlight a potential complication in the use of Ireland football fandom as a signifier which can convey the impression to consumers ‘that they are still morally in the working class’ (Negra 2001, 234). The entwined identities of working class and Ireland football fan may carry many superficially positive qualities (from the point of view of an advertiser) but they are also bound up with social and political struggles. To leverage the commercially appealing qualities of these identities, while eschewing the more complicated ones, Three and Boys and Girls must essentially transform Ireland football fandom into an ‘empty signifier,’ the significance of which will be further outlined in the following section of this chapter.

An analysis of the audience survey reaction to both ads seems to point to ‘Ode’ being the more accessible of the two for a general audience, regardless of their interest in particular sports (or lack thereof). As was noted in 4:4, Schmidt’s narration is an attractive feature for rugby fans, but somewhat confusing for non-fans who merely identify the voiceover as not sounding Irish. While Kirwan’s bona fides as an actor and an Ireland fan are championed in Three’s press release, audience members who do not recognise his voice will still be able to identify it as a working

³² Technically, the rule prohibits alcohol within view of the pitch, leading to the faintly ridiculous situation of fans who have bought a drink within the stadium having to finish it behind the stands while watching the match through the windows or television screens.

class Dublin accent, carrying connotations of authenticity and underdog anti-glamour. Furthermore, a number of respondents cited the football ad's 'diversity' as a point in its favour. Without knowledge of the careers and media personalities of the three players featured in 'All it Takes,' they could come across as a somewhat homogenous group, all three being young white men of largely similar build. 'Ode' on the other hand, features fans of both genders and a wide range of ages and appearances. Arguably, this allows 'Ode' to more effectively leverage national sport into standing for, and speaking to, the nation.

There was a clear, though not unilateral, correlation between respondents who identified as fans of football expressing a preference for 'Ode,' and those who identified as fans of rugby expressing a preference for 'All it Takes.' Interestingly, most did not admit, or perhaps were not even aware, that their identity and experience as a football or rugby fan influenced their preference with regard to the ads. These findings certainly chime with Madrigal's (2000) observations concerning how sponsors can leverage fans' psychological bond with their team into engagement with advertising and affection for the brand, but they also point to interesting applications of Gray's concept of paratexts (2010). As was outlined in section 5:1, Gray's outline of the concept points towards a relatively clearly defined (though nonetheless mellifluous) relationship between a central text (a film or television programme) and its paratexts (trailers, commentary tracks, merchandise, etc.). At first glance it would appear that audiences view the likes of 'Ode' and 'All it Takes' as paratexts for their respective sports and, to some extent, Irish identity in a wider sense.

However, there is a sense of shared purpose in the conventional paratexts described by Gray which is quite different from the sports sponsorship campaigns examined here. The editors of a film trailer is ultimately aiming to increase the film's chances of success, but the editors of 'Ode' and 'All it Takes' are ultimately tasked with increasing Three's success rather than that of the Ireland rugby team. The mutual success and satisfaction of the parties at the heart of sport sponsorship arrangements are certainly interwoven but they are ultimately independent of one another. Three are hoping to gain increased recognition and affection for their brand, while the FAI or IRFU prioritise the financial support the arrangement gives them while also value the arrangement's potential to maintain or improve the public image of the team, and to some extent, the sport. In other words, sport sponsorship is an acknowledgement that, in terms of public

perception, brands are, like Gray writes of texts, are ‘contingent entit[ies], either in the process of forming and transforming or vulnerable to further formation or transformation’ (7). From Three’s point of view, the ad is the central text of the campaign, and its paratexts are not only the supplementary materials but also independent events concerning the sponsored material which shape audience opinion, such as matches featuring the sponsored teams. Gray describes paratexts as forming the ‘threshold’ of the central text, shaping audience expectations for it and motivating them to invest in it. From Three’s point of view, this is the function of Ireland rugby and football international matches, as the findings of the audience survey indicate audience experience of these paratextual events strongly influences their interpretation of the central text of the ad.

Corporate sponsorship and nation branding (of which the performances and reputations of prominent national sports teams can be considered an indirect though significant element) both seek to close off potential interpretations in favour of official narratives, but they can never be wholly successful in doing so (O’Boyle and Kearns 2017a, 14). The unpredictability and indefinite nature of sporting competition (in which public perception of a team can never be permanently closed off and can potentially change with every match) threatens to continually destabilise branding efforts and ensure that the audience reception of the central text of the sponsorship campaign is volatile rather than fixed. Three (and other sports sponsors) accept this complication in the hope that they can leverage audience members’ loyalty to their team (and to some extent, their country) successfully enough to compensate for the potential of their commercial narrative being unsettled by the unpredictable nature of the paratextual sporting events.

Both ads were criticised by a small number of respondents for the apparently tenuous link between the sponsor brand and the content of the commercial. Again, this can be seen as a trade-off implicit in sport sponsorship. Since Three must appear to be an ‘official fan’ rather than a ‘commercial partner’ of the sponsored teams, it is against their interests to produce a commercial which leverages the sponsored team to overtly champion their brand. This perceived commercial exploitation of a loyally supported team would likely arouse discontent from fans (who are, of course, potential brand consumers). The complaints of the respondents are inevitable but unavoidable for Three in their efforts to effectively tap into the bond between the teams and their fans. However, it is worth observing that these responses can be read as indicative of the

importance of the relatedness heuristic to sponsorship arrangements. As Wakefield et al argue, ‘the natural association that consumers perceive between the event and the sponsor’ influences consumer recall (2007, 62), and could furthermore be argued to influence consumer acceptance of the arrangement. The ‘natural’ pairing between an energy drink and a sports team that Wakefield et al describe is less likely to be questioned by audiences than the seemingly more tenuous link between a telecommunications brand and a sports team. Interestingly, in interviews with officials from Three and Boys and Girls, the connections between the feelings of nationwide community fostered by the Ireland football team and the ability of Three to facilitate easy and efficient communication were raised, but the creative forces behind ‘Ode’ nonetheless opted against depicting the experience of Ireland fans being improved or facilitated by Three’s mobile services.

The underlying disconnect between Three’s brand identity and their commercial celebrations of Irish sport was also a commonality between the social media reception of both ads. While, as covered in 3:4 and 4:4, the analysis of social media feedback yielded chiefly positive responses, but a few notable complaints were raised in both cases with regard to what was a perceived irreconcilability between the ads’ narrative and the reality of Three’s service. The efforts to celebrate Irish identity through sport were perceived as a fig leaf to disguise sub-par mobile service. Largely, however, the positive social media reactions to both ads further illustrate the benefit of sports sponsorship. By celebrating Irish sport in a seemingly uncommercial way (ie. in a manner which does not overtly champion their brand) Three opens the door for fans to become consumers, leveraging their identification with the team into affection for the brand. This strategy will never be unilaterally successful as demonstrated by the afore-mentioned complaints, but ultimately it seems that while the somewhat tenuous relatedness heuristic of sponsor and sport in these cases may leave Three’s official narratives more exposed to unsettling, they are largely successful presenting themselves as a worthy ‘official fan’ rather than a mere ‘commercial partner.’

5:4. Sport, Advertising and National Identity in the Modern World

The wider international significance represented by the manner in which both campaigns function as commercialised celebrations of national identity becomes apparent with an examination of the shifting attitudes toward national identity in the contemporary cultural climate. Of course, national identity – as the previous chapters of this work have demonstrated – is subject to specific historical and cultural influences in each country and any broad overview of the concept on a wider international level must necessarily come with the caveat that it must detail global similarities while leaving local specificities relatively unexplored. However, despite those differing specificities, the overall shared cultural context with regard to national identity remains significant enough to illustrate how the success of ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ can be related to cultures and markets beyond Ireland.

Previous chapters of this thesis have outlined how traditional concepts of national identity in Ireland were subject to various shifts and questionings over the course of the past century and a half, but such interrogations of Irishness largely limit themselves to questioning the form of Irishness, tacitly assuming the unquestionability of its existence. Indeed, Gellner (1983) identifies the power of modern nationalism as emerging from its seemingly unimpeachable sense of naturalness. National identity, he argues, retains a unique cachet, even as other traditional communities and identity categories begin to fragment:

‘when general social conditions make for standardized, homogenous, culturally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities, a situation arises in which well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify. The cultures now seem to be the natural repositories of political legitimacy’ (54).

Other commentators have asserted that traditional conceptions of stable national identities have been declining since the conclusion of the Second World War, simultaneously facilitating and being shaped by, increasing technological, economic and cultural globalisation. Mann (1997) writes of the increasing opinion that the nation-state is growing weaker, both politically and ideologically, as a consequence of post-War globalisation and the rise of identity politics. Notably, however, he cautions against reading this decline as a homogenous trend, questioning the validity of ignoring national variations in favour of imposing a universal narrative across

Europe, or indeed, the world. It is important to keep this in mind throughout this project when considering the significance of the two campaigns examined in an Irish context and attempting to extrapolate any conclusions drawn onto an international context. Yet while Mann ultimately aims to halt the march of some of the more enthusiastic exponents of the theory of the decline of the nation-state, his arguments largely run along political-economic lines rather than socio-cultural ones. Without wishing to discount the political realities of the future of the nation-state, there remains an underlying anxiety in many countries concerning a perceived erosion national identity and traditions (Smith 1998, 123-124³³). Indeed, the potentially declining political relevance of the nation-state and the resurgence of national identity can be viewed as coexisting in the wider cultural sphere. Castello (2009) discusses how commercial televised representations of national identity carry implicit political undertones, despite not being ‘guided by governments,’ which dovetail with the commercial imperative (309). Ironically, such anxieties concerning diminishing or destabilised national identity often result in an increased consciousness of this very identity and a fervent interest in preserving it in the face of globalising modernity. Indeed, as has been alluded in earlier sections, many scholars and media figures have noted that in the early 21st century this consciousness has led to a politically resurgent nationalism (Scuira 2017; Gusterson 2017; Mounk 2018). Ariely (2012) describes how national identity can become a ‘resistance identity,’ with individuals and organisations making use of ostensibly globalising media to further local and national identities (464).³⁴ National identity is often most fervently expressed when it is perceived as being under threat – this has long been evident in the case of direct external threats (during wartime, for instance) but it can be argued

³³ Writing on ‘the demise of nationalism,’ Smith asserts that ‘Massive economic transformations on a global scale, together with huge population movements, disorientate and frighten many people.’ He goes on to cite Hobsbawm (1983) in arguing that while nationalism ‘is simply irrelevant to most contemporary economic and social developments,’ it has retained its cultural cachet as “a substitute of lost dreams,” a reaction to the disappointment of larger hopes and aspirations.’

³⁴ It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the decline (or lack thereof) of the nation-state as a political and economic entity and the perceived decline of distinct or traditional national identity. The two often overlap in public and media discourse, acting in somewhat of a symbiotic relationship, but the former is a political matter outside of the scope of this project, while the latter is a cultural matter, shaped and promulgated in the nebulous but significant realm of art, media and everyday practises. It is the latter which will, of course, be focussed on here, but the impact of the former cannot be entirely disentangled from it. Examining ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ as media responses to shifts in Irish identity is ultimately implicitly tied to how political and economic events (both recent and historical) have shaped public perception of that identity.

that the definition can now be stretched to include less tangible perceived threats centring on the impact of mass migration and globalisation.

Therefore, Gellner is far from alone in asserting that in this era of globalisation, though national identity may have been problematised, it continues to command a strong, albeit subtle, hold on public consciousness. Michael Billig (1995) elaborates on this with his concept of ‘banal nationalism’ which describes how nationhood and its subsequent discourses are ‘not something remote in contemporary life, but [...] present in “our” little words, in homely discourses which we take for granted’ (126). Billig describes how concepts of national identity have weathered the post-War death of traditional nationalism and encroaching globalisation through subtle but continual reinforcing of its links with functioning modern society. He notes that the quintessential symbol of nationalism is no longer ‘a flag which is being waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on a public building’ (8).

Indeed, as alluded to above, it is arguable that national identity’s appeal has grown all the more potent because it has become problematised; a ‘resistance identity’ which derives the strength of the identity on the activity of resistance, and vice versa. While banal national consciousness may be sustained by flags hanging in public buildings, the rare occasions which allow for flags ‘waved with fervent passion’ without censure or controversy command all the more hold on public consciousness. Sport, of course, is foremost among such occasions, and has therefore achieved a distinct position in modern culture as a channel for celebrating national identity. Section 1:4.2 detailed how football, and later rugby, came to perform this function in Irish culture, but while Ireland’s relationship to national identity may be distinctly complicated by partition, other nations and cultures have seen sport play a broadly similar role in shaping and sustaining their conceptions of national identity (Maguire 1994; Bairner 2001). It could be further argued that, not only does sport play a key role in constructions and expressions of national identity, but that it is a uniquely potent vehicle for doing so. Section 1:2 outlined sport’s relationship with national identity, detailing how it provides a platform for shared emotional experiences which imbue national identity with a sense of significance and feeling without risking fundamentally undermining the concept in the manner that war (perhaps the only other comparable form of national collective experience) might.

Billig argues that ‘In the communications industries, “narrow-casting” is replacing “broadcasting.” Television programmes are not aimed at a general national audience, but at specialized segments, whose particular patterns of consumption are targeted by advertisers [...] In consequence, the nationally imagined identity is diminishing in importance as compared with imagined ‘life-style’ groups of consumers’ (132). Subsequent developments in internet technologies have exacerbated this trend, further fragmenting the televisual media market through increased content choice and fewer limitations with regard to how time and place affect the accessing of content. However, sport, or, at least, vortextual sporting events, remain a notable exception to this trend toward ‘narrow-casting.’ To return to the case of modern Ireland, in 2014 8 of the top twenty most viewed television programmes of the year were sporting events. The following year the number rose to 11 and to 12 the year after that, before returning to 11 in 2017 (see Appendix 6). Vortextual sport thrives in the age of narrow-casting, offering media spectacles rooted in a defined sense of time and place, and thus facilitating a sense of imagined community among viewers. Modern national identity may be underpinned by the mundane daily reassertions that Billig documents, but sport’s unique potential is to bring the contentious concept of national identity to the foreground without arousing discontent, to seemingly temporarily unite an increasingly fragmented identity in a manner which the public accepts as credible and desirable.

Dunning (1999) describes sport as one of the most powerful galvanisers for collective identification along with war and religion (221). However the modern developed world has seen a broad (though by no means unilateral) shift towards more secular forms of society and government, and war is now (when it occurs at all) more often the cause of public discontent and division rather than acting as a unifying cause. The socio-cultural importance of sport to function as a form of collective identity is therefore all the greater. With regard to sport’s relationship with national identity specifically, the rarer and more intangible national identity seems (reduced to the banal signifiers described by Billig) the more potent events that seem to manifest it substantially seem. Holton writes that the ‘the local is not vanquished by the global but awakens within it,’ (qtd in O’Boyle 2011) but if we assess the national as ‘local’ within an international context, where can it awaken? International sport is a uniquely ripe destination, with its clear visual signifiers (team colours, jerseys, banners, flags, etc.), and coherent structures on which to project mythmaking narratives and around which to arrange media scheduling and coverage to

foster vortextual interest. But vortextual sporting events by their very nature cannot be indefinitely sustained to continually galvanise national consciousness. Each sport's calendar is organised in such a way that the most important and most anticipated games occur at select specific moments throughout the year. Indeed, part of these events vortextual appeal is rooted in their relative rarity. Sports sponsors must remain conscious of this in leveraging the appeal of their sponsored teams throughout the year to tacitly assure their partners that they are upholding their part of the arrangement in acting as enthusiastic promoters of the sport, while strategically planning their biggest television campaigns around the biggest vortextual events in the sport's calendar (such as the Six Nations or World Cup in rugby, and crucial World Cup or European Championship qualifying matches in football). Interestingly, this parallels Billig's account of how nationalism functions in most modern nation-states. While he asserts that it is maintained by the mundane minutiae of everyday life for most of each year, he writes that this is underpinned by 'occasions when ordinary routines are suspended, as the state celebrates itself.' On such occasions 'sentiments of patriotic emotion, which the rest of the year have to be kept far from the business of ordinary life, can surge forth' (44-45). Overt nationalism, for Billig, like vortextual events, draws its appeal from its perceived rarity.

The success of both 'Ode' and 'All it Takes' can therefore be broadly ascribed to their achievement in tapping into the socio-cultural cachet and vortextual mediatization of the sport-nation nexus. However, the nuances of this success are based on the ability of the campaigns to achieve this while avoiding any complicated or negative associations with such potentially sensitive and contentious concepts. While sections 3.4 and 4.4 detailed latent and potential fan dissent regarding the sponsor's dealings with, and depiction of, the team(s), it is evident that the campaigns avoided incurring any wider controversy for their commercial leveraging of national identity. They are hardly unique in avoiding this, but that other sports sponsorship campaigns have achieved a similarly neat balance between arousing national fervour while avoiding controversy does not detract from the significance of both campaigns examined in this work. After all, moments and texts in which underlying banal nationalism give way for brief and vivid expressions of more openly nationalist sentiments can trigger debates and anxieties about the contentious nature of national identity (particularly in a country such as Ireland where 'Expressions of patriotism hold a dubious currency in a country dominated for so long by that unpopular Catholic nationalism and then, since the 1960s, by the spectre of the nationalisms of

Northern Ireland' [Arrowsmith 2004, 466]). Furthermore an exploration of their success can be seen as a springboard for unpacking the nuances of national sports sponsorship in an increasingly international age.

5:4.1. *The Transformation of National Identity into an Empty Signifier*

As was alluded to in section 1:5, Ernesto Laclau's concept of the 'empty signifier' is a useful lens through which to examine the leverage of national identity in sport sponsorship campaigns. Through application of this concept, it becomes evident how advertisers can leverage identity categories such as national identity in a manner which takes advantage of their emotive potency while avoiding being weighed down by their historical complexity. Writing on the use of the empty signifier, Van Groddeck and Schwarz (2013) outline how abstract, emotive concepts such as 'freedom' and 'democracy' can be emptied of their more historically loaded and ideologically contentious complexities in order to render them more commercially palatable. National identity, as has been detailed above, is a concept likewise ripe with cultural cachet and complexities. Billig describes the 'unwaved flag' hanging unnoticed replacing the more contentious sight of the flag waved in battle, but through judicious use of national identity as an empty signifier, advertisers can depict all the vivid fervour of the waved flag while eliciting the passive acceptance that characterises the general public reaction to the unwaved flag.

In a similar fashion, the use of Irish identity in 'Ode' and 'All it Takes' can be read as an empty signifier which evokes feeling from the audience, locates the brand within a potent set of cultural associations, but remains open ended enough to avoid addressing any complex questions of Irish identity. When describing the post-prohibition era brewing industry's 'emptying' of the concept of 'freedom,' Corzine (2010) describes their dilemma as the difficulty of trying to 'gauge the best way to appeal to the broadest market while not alienating key segments' (846). National identity in 21st century Ireland may not be as volatily contested as arguments over alcohol consumption in post-prohibition America, but the assertion neatly sums up the appeal of the empty signifier to advertisers. These broad discursive nodal points draw from a rich history of intangible associations to play upon consumer emotions and create a sense of depth, while avoiding the need to explore beneath the surface of the brand's narrative. Empty signifiers can be

so broad as to blur the borders of the discourse they are applied in to the extent that it lacks coherence and communicative force. For advertisers attempting to play upon the appeal of these broad concepts, they must ground the discursive power of the empty signifier within a compelling discourse of their own.

In both ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’, the sport functions to give shape to the powerful but open ended discourse evoked by the empty signifier of Irishness. By locating the discourse within the eminently recognisable realm of sport, a realm perceived as an international meritocracy, both campaigns imbue the Irishness evoked with a sense of direction and consequence. The players of ‘All it Takes’ and the fans of ‘Ode’ are positioned as uniquely Irish, but also as exemplary participants in wider international sporting structures. This facilitates a celebration of Irish identity which avoids appearing vapid or overly clichéd. The audience is not asked to celebrate the fans or the players for merely ‘being Irish,’ but rather, they are invited to share pride in the achievements of Ireland in the competitive, international realm of sport and sports fandom.

The term digital cultural nationalism was coined in section 1:5 to describe the current climate surrounding expressions of cultural nationalism, in which a yearning to reassert the national in the face of the encroaching global sits alongside an uneasy uncertainty of how to do this in a credible, coherent and inclusive manner. In an Irish context, this has seen, among other developments, an upsurge in internet content (both professionally produced and otherwise) which semi-ironically celebrates the mundane minutiae of Irish identity. This content is often derided as ‘clickbait,’ consisting chiefly of ‘listicles,’ articles structured as hierarchies of some perceived subsection of Irish culture (see Appendix 3 for examples). The prominence of such content ultimately illustrates the paradox of contemporary consciousness of national identity: there is an eagerness to assert the local-national in the face of the encroaching global and yet an underlying anxiety about achieving this in an acceptable manner. Indeed, as the examples in Appendix 3:4 demonstrate, there has been a notable but tacit awareness of this paradox in ads commissioned for the Irish market by international brands such as KFC and McDonalds, as well as domestic brands such as Brady’s Family Ham, which attempt to appeal to a sense of Irishness by mocking the very idea of celebrating it through such cultural ephemera. In much of the developed world (particularly western Europe) the emergence of a ‘resistance identity’ with regard to national culture is dogged by an awareness of the potential for nationalism to veer into

jingoism and xenophobia – an awareness shaped by 20th century history and 21st century politics. In much of this digital cultural nationalist internet content, we see the empty signifier of national identity at work, fixing a variety of mundane socio-cultural minutiae within the apparently significant unified discourse of shared national culture. Thus, in the examples in Appendix 3:1 demonstrate how individual Twitter comments pertaining to a general election are grouped together as a collection which evidences a distinctly Irish wit, a shared national sense of irreverence to purportedly serious political matters. Similarly, Appendix 3:2 displays how a seemingly unrelated list of micro-social rituals and local brands become more than the sum of their parts, forming a discourse of shared national identity precisely by being discursively positioned there through the use of the empty signifier of ‘Irishness.’ The evocation of this signifier interpolates the reader as recognising and sharing the sentiments or experiences expressing in these texts and therefore creates a temporary but reassuring sense of in-groupness about Irish identity, a sense that is all the more reassuring because of a cultural context in which Irish identity is generally distressingly diffuse and questionable.

The tongue-in-cheek tone of this cultural nationalist clickbait is coloured by this implicit awareness. Self-evident irony acts as a shield against any latent insularly negative nationalist sentiment, while the content of such texts still offers tacit reassurance of a sense of local-national distinctiveness. Sport offers an alternative form of nationalist expression that can flourish beyond self-imposed irony and attain a sense of cultural significance in the media and the wider public consciousness. While sporting expressions of national identity can overlap with, and overflow into, overtly negative displays of nationalist sentiment, this is by no means inevitable. In many ways, sport remains one of the few prominent platforms for defiantly unironic celebrations of national identity. The ‘significance’ of sporting events may be imagined, a tacit collective agreement to invest emotion in events with little direct impact on the lives of the individual audience members, but national identity itself is, after all, an ‘imagined community.’ As Anderson points out ‘the “political” power of nationalisms’ is not hindered by their ‘philosophical poverty and even incoherence’ (5).

Indeed, the relationship of the moments of perceived national togetherness provided by vortextual national sporting events and the everyday ephemera of digital cultural nationalism echoes Billig’s assessment of how the occasional spectacle of ‘national days’ (independence day

celebrations, royal events, etc.) underpins the banal nationalism circulated throughout societies during the rest of the year. He argues of ‘national days’ that ‘these occasions are sufficient to flag nationhood, so that it is remembered during the rest of the year, when the banal routines of private life predominate’ (45). Similarly, vortextual sporting events which offer sources of ‘legitimate’ and shared national feeling could be argued to indirectly underpin the ironic attempts to celebrate national identity through cultural minutiae. However, what both ads centred on vortextual sporting events and digital cultural nationalist ephemera share is that they derive their significance and sense of unity from their evocation of the empty signifier of national identity. Through the unarticulated use of the label ‘Ireland’ and broad national symbols, they attach the text to a sense of cultural weight without having to address the complexities that have traditionally come with of such a sense.

However, while the empty signifier acts as a useful theoretical lens through which to explore how national identity can be utilised for commercial purposes in ways that are simultaneously vague and evocative, there still remains the question to be further explored of how such an intangible and apparently naturally conferred concept can be effectively commercialised in the first place. Preceding sections of this work expounded on the cultural context which has seen the traditional concept national identity in much of the Western world destabilised, but there remains much to be explored about how this wider cultural context takes shape within individual commercial texts.

5:4.2. *National Identity – An Ideological New Scarcity?*

If Irish identity is used in ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ as a potent empty signifier which can galvanise the commercial narratives of both campaigns, it bears examining how an intangible quality which is seemingly abundant within the market both campaigns operated in could be used in such a manner. Advertising is, after all, a medium and industry fundamentally founded on fostering desire. For an advertiser to construct desire around a quality that the vast majority of its audience already possess (or perhaps, more accurately when dealing with an intangible quality, *believe* they possess) could seem counterintuitive. Both of the campaigns explored in this project employ the concept of Irish identity (through sport) to arouse powerful sentiments in the widest

possible national audience, a decision which chimes with Falcous' observation of the increasing 'tendency for corporations to seek to capitalize on the sport-nation nexus as a way of resonating with national markets in their promotional media' (2005, 377). It is precisely because of the increasing popularity of such tactics that it is necessary to examine the ideological underpinnings of this strategy of selling the consumer what they already believe they have.

Here, as alluded to in section 1:5, Henri Lefebvre's writings on 'new scarcities' prove an illuminating lens through which to examine advertising's use of the sport-nation nexus. Lefebvre coined the concept to refer to how naturally occurring abundant qualities (such as light and space) could be commodified. It is possible to extend his ideas to intangible ideological qualities such as national identity. Though culturally constructed, part of the appeal of national identity derives from the perception that is freely available, indeed, intrinsic to, anyone who fulfils such elementary qualifications as being born in a particular country or possessing relatives and ancestors who were. Thus, advertisers must manufacture a sense of scarcity around national identity in order to imbue a brand with a sense of value through association with it. National identity can only be sold if it is viewed as rare, and therefore, valuable.

When contrasted with attempts to manufacture a sense of unease around masculinity in order to commodify it (Ewen et al 2002; Smith 2005; Bagno et al 2006; Tuncay Zayer 2010) sponsors seeking to leverage national identity through their advertising partners rarely resort to such pointedness, since part of its appeal is its purported all-encompassing sense of community. Indeed, Wright (2003) articulates arguments which seem to indicate just the opposite; namely, that advertisers present national identity as more freely available than it actually is: 'The problem is not simply the obvious fact that the market cannot deliver on the ad-created promises—i.e., Indians will not all be unified by their interest in cricket—but also that these promises are based on the fallacy in the message of unity itself: Everyone is not included in the vision of unified India that is being produced.' Wright points to cricket sponsors in India during the 1999 Cricket World Cup as creating a version of a nationally shared sense of community and culture which obscured the real inequalities at play in Indian culture (which again points to the potency of national identity as an empty signifier within the discourses of sports ads). When discussing national identity as an ideological new scarcity then, it is important to maintain the distinction

between the wider ‘socio-economic phenomen[a]’ that foster the impression of its rarity and the strategies employed (or not) by advertisers leveraging this impression.

As Wright’s work points to, national identity is often framed as something available to all, but contingent on their engagement with particular activities and rituals. This logic is implicit in the clickbait, characteristic of digital cultural nationalism, discussed in this work, their appeal is founded on both the confidence that the intended audience will recognise the content as part of their experience of their national identity, and that they will seek to affirm that identity through consuming the content. Considering national identity as an ideological new scarcity helps unpack the appeal of events and mediums which render it briefly tangible, coalescing the everyday minutia of banal nationalism into a vivid and coherent experience. Sport, of course, is foremost among these. The leveraging of national identity as an ideological new scarcity relies on implicit anxieties about contemporary national identity while presenting audiences with an opportunity to temporarily renew their claims to that identity through participating in a sponsor-related cultural activity, such as supporting the national team. Sport is depicted in many ads as promising a temporary restoration of all-encompassing and reassuringly solid national identity, and therefore the ‘scarcity’ of national identity relates to this temporariness rather than any explicit attempts at exacerbating anxiety over who can claim it.

Indeed, Lefebvre is well aware of the cultural power of sport. He locates sport in the realm of leisure, which he argues may be the only area of modern human life which ‘escapes the technical environment, escapes necessity, in other words, escapes depersonalization’ (1991, 37). Lefebvre writes about sport in terms of capitalist alienation, but notes that it is ‘a curious kind of alienation [...] sport is an activity which is apparently incompatible with illusion, and yet in fact it confronts us with a reverse image, a compensation for everyday life’ (36). If traditional outlets for nationalistic spirit have declined in recent decades leaving it to be sustained on the meagre (but by no means insubstantial) sustenance of ‘banal nationalism,’ then sport’s ability to offer a ‘compensation for everyday life’ is all the more potent. Sport not only offers a sense of structure for the intangible and mellifluous concept of national identity, but also provides it with a platform to flourish within a globalised world. ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ do not merely celebrate Irishness for its own sake, but build their narratives around celebrating Irish fans and players as thriving within an international hierarchy of merit: ‘the best fans in the world,’ ‘reach the top of

international rugby,' etc. Crucially, as Lefebvre asserts, sport is not 'depersonalized.' Individual identities can be subsumed within the comforting hierarchical structures of international competition while still maintaining a sense of self. Indeed, the capacity of sport to reconcile individual identity with wider collective identity is much discussed in popular media circles as well as in academia. Writing in reference to Sunderland FC's unlikely run to the 2014 League Cup final, journalist (and Sunderland fan) George Caulkin (2014) neatly summed up the powerful feelings evoked by sport as 'all those feelings like love and loss [...] being part of something both greater than and intrinsically you.' Rowe, of course, identifies sport as a particularly useful narrative tool for advertisers looking to trade upon the 'values vacuum,' but additionally, he elsewhere points to another advantage sport offers advertisers: the relative paucity of critical questioning from large swathes of its news media. There are many critically engaged sports journalists who are more than willing to question, as well as praise, the conduct of athletes and officials, but in analysing data from the International Sports Press Survey 2005, Rowe (2007) notes that the study's conclusions 'were largely unfavourable to sports editors and journalists, describing the sports press as the "world's best advertising agency"' (387).

Sport also has the benefit of allowing for a celebration of national identity that is grounded in the modern reality of the nation. Sport's past is frequently mythologised by fans and figures in the media and it is often employed to provide a contrast with the present. Such contrasts may be positive (praising a team's development in light of historic defeats) or negative (construing recent defeats as evidence of a decline from past glories) but ultimately they construct a sense of continuity between the past and present: a sense that the Ireland team of 2018 is the same team as that of 1974, it is merely the players and coaching staff that has changed; the identity remains. Skey (2014) comments on the power of this sense of continuity with regard to the media's role in constructing a national narrative, noting that it 'not only locates individuals in relation to a cherished past but also offer some degree of certainty in facing an unknown, and potentially hazardous, future.' (12). This sense of continuity may not be unique to sport, but sport is a particularly potent platform for constructing it; David Slattery (2003), for instance, asserts that Irish pubs' foregrounding of the past through their use of traditional décor and design fosters a sense that authentic Irishness is incompatible with the present, which 'promote[s] an anxiety about the present in the form of constant engagement with the past.' This creates a sense of nostalgia, but also an anxiety, as it acts of a tacit reminder of the difficulty of how to 'coherently

embrace postmodernity and live comfortably in the inalienable midst of globalization' (140). Sport bridges this gap, reconciling past, present and future (Rowe 1999, 73) and providing the platform for moments of national triumph and togetherness that are as authentic as those of preceding years. The anxiety surrounding the perceived decline of national identity is founded on a myth of a golden age in which the nation's culture was pure and unchallenged. Efforts to return to such a supposed epoch are fraught with political tensions, so sport's ability to foster a temporary revival of a sense of national identity within modernity is valuable to advertisers keen to avoid controversy while arousing passions.

The 'scarcity' of a tangible sense of Irish identity is not directly referenced in any of the digital cultural nationalist texts detailed in Appendix 3. Indeed, they purport to affirm the abundance of 'Irishness' in everyday life, but their popularity speaks to a public appetite for a concentrated sense of national identity that consumers evidently desire (Power 2018). Extending Lefebvre's concept of new scarcities to ideological qualities illuminates how national identity's commercial appeal is rendered all the more potent in the seemingly uncertain cultural climate of digital cultural nationalism.

5:5. Conclusion

The use of sport to leverage national identity as a culturally resonant, commercially viable, but ultimately shallow advertising narrative points to further areas of exploration in the relationship between sport, advertising and national identity in the 21st century. Skey (2010; 2013), for instance, notes the preponderance of academic literature discussing national identity with a specific view toward exploring those who have been denied this intangible quality in some way, compared with the relative dearth of material that focuses on those whose place within the national narrative is widely accepted. Through examining how the likes of 'Ode' and 'All it Takes' generate a feeling of Irishness for their audiences there is much to be gleaned about 'the value of being classified as part of the in-group' (Skey 2013, 92). It may be that the lack of research into the nature of being part of the national-cultural 'in-group' lies in the diffuseness of that identity. The above-detailed socio-economic factors that have seen national identity rendered a 'resistance identity,' perceived to be declining and thus pointedly resurgent, could be argued to

make it more complicated to locate and analyse the everyday lived experience of those ‘accepted as belonging’ (Skey 2013, 92). Sports advertising provides a readily analysable field for exploring contemporary national identity and the manner in which it can be convincingly and appealingly portrayed.

Billig reminds us that ‘Nationhood is not something remote in contemporary life, but it is present in ‘our’ little words [...] we, too, inhabit this world of nations’ (126) and it is in moments of vortextual national sporting events that this assertion becomes most clear. The time, energy and finance invested such events gives lie to any notion that national identity’s cultural resonance is in any state of terminal decline. It would be unwise to conflate the anxieties surrounding the sustainability of traditional national identity with any significantly increasing intellectual antipathy to the very concept itself. Indeed, as has been detailed, the former has ensured against the latter, transforming national identity into a ‘resistance identity.’ However this term is notable for having been largely applied to migrant identities fighting against the tide of globalism and assimilation. The case of national identities attempting a similar struggle has largely been limited to analyses of right wing nationalist movements and political attempts to re-impose traditional national narratives, leaving the everyday banal nationalism experience of most citizens unexamined. Again, sport provides an intriguing example of this experience, and through advertising’s attempts to tap into the sport-nation nexus, not only the economic value of this nexus becomes evident, but also the specific forms of its cultural appeal – the manifestations of specific sports (or sporting figures) relationship with particular elements of national history and culture. Sports advertising, in other words, offers a window into how national identity continues to function in the era of digital cultural nationalism, between the extremes of belligerent political machinations of disgruntled nationalist movements and the vapid ephemera of ironic internet localism, in a form which is both engaging and unthreatening (and thus, eminently commercial).

Conclusion

Studies of national identity or advertising are almost invariably complicated by the prevailing perception that both exist in a state of continual flux. The former has been discussed as being in a state of decline (with consequent efforts to reassert it) since the end of the Second World War, while the latter's increasing multimedia proliferation and narrative diffusion has likewise been long documented. Thus any attempt to assess their interaction and its subsequent cultural impact risks reiterating well-documented points or being swiftly rendered obsolescent by placing undue emphasis on the current context as uniquely significant. Sport, the third central pillar of this research project, carries a danger of its own; namely, that of unilaterally projecting the socio-cultural impact of a particular sport (or team, athlete, sporting event, etc.) onto a wide international context, and, therefore, neglecting cultural and regional specificities. Thus, in attempting to summarise the findings of this project and assess their significance, there must be a balance between overstating their applicability and being constrained by their peculiarity. While the scenario of Three Ireland concurrently holding sponsorships for two major international sports teams in the one country is unique and curious, ultimately its significance lies in being totemic of the shifts in sport sponsorship and the marketing of national identity, rather than representing a sea-change in and of itself.

Through examining 'Ode' and 'All it Takes' in detail, certain key features of commercial leveraging of the sport-nation nexus have become apparent. The first is the intertwined complications and benefits of attempting to tap into a market segment with a strong, pre-existing sense of organisation and identity. Pre-scheduled, vortextual events such as important matches facilitate the efficient planning of ad campaigns, and the level of emotional investment fans place in their team (and, by extension, the country they represent) allow for a ready store of potent images and narratives to draw from in such campaigns. Conversely, many fans of both teams identify with the team to the point of assuming a sense of ownership (or at least, stewardship) over the 'spirit' of the team, and may regard the sponsor as an illegitimate interloper whose financial motivations sully the 'pure' bond between fans and team. This is further complicated by the national element, since nationalism functions to instil a sense of sacrifice of, and transcendence from, material and individual concerns. Sponsors must therefore present themselves as an 'official fan' of the team, rather than a commercial partner of the sport's

governing body. Consequently they must craft their campaigns as ostensibly magnanimous acts of support which enhance the bond between fans and team, rather than overtly leverage the team's popularity to directly champion their brand.

For all these complications, however, sport remains the most commercially viable vehicle for national identity, a quality, that – as this thesis has detailed – that has become increasingly illusive and valuable in recent decades. A cottage industry of semi-ironic national cultural ephemera has sprung up in the digital age, emerging from a desire to gain a sense of ‘order from the chaos and uncertainty in the world’ (Kinnvall qtd in Skey 2013, 83) which exists alongside an underlying discomfort with traditional forms and tropes of national identity. Many advertisers have attempted to straddle this thin line by providing narratives which ironically celebrate national culture, mocking the very idea of celebrating it, while tacitly doing just that (see Appendix 3, particularly 3:4). Such strategies have undoubtedly been effective, but they lack a certain ‘libidinal value’ (Skey 2013, 87). They arouse amusement, but not pride, excitement or passion. As Skey describes, the appeal of national identity lies not only in its potential to provide a sense of order and solidity but also in its ability to create moments of shared enjoyment and emotion. Sport provides a ready platform for the creation or evocation of such moments. In the case of ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes,’ the feelings of national ‘in-groupness’ they aim to generate in viewers are not merely based on shared consciousness of what it is to be Irish, but rather on arousing feelings of what viewers wish Irishness is and hope it can be. Irony may be a potent tool for advertisers, but it is essentially used out of a necessity, a concession to an inconveniently savvy (or at least, experienced) audience. Stevenson et al (2000) describe the use of irony in advertising ‘as an ideological defence against external attack’ (381), whereas the un-ironic idealisation of national identity through sport, while hardly precluding external attacks from cynical audiences, focuses on arousing positive reactions rather than implicitly fending off negative ones.

It would seem that, as far as advertisers are concerned, these benefits offset any complications inherent in trying to leverage the loyalty of a passionate and organised fan base. Sport retains a rare power to make audiences ‘feel part of a community again [...] feel part of something again’ (27 April 2017). Cova and Cova (2002) claim that the decline of traditional communities has seen people engage ‘an active quest for alternative social arrangements and new communities,’ a

quest which advertisers can take advantage of through engaging in what they describe as ‘tribal marketing’ (596). Sport not only offers this feeling of community, but also a pre-existing tribe, with its own rituals, symbols and perception of authenticity. For advertisers hoping to solve cultural contradictions in pursuit of commercial appeal, such features are invaluable, offering a more convenient and, potentially, culturally resonant alternative to construction their own brand tribes ex nihilo.

Reading the success of ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’ in terms of the wider international context then, provides a template for the further exploration of the commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus in the globalised, digital age. It would be prudent, however, to refrain from the temptation to map its pattern too closely onto other cultures and sports. The contrast between the two campaigns examined in this work demonstrates that to effectively tap into the sport-nation nexus, advertisers must play upon the specific relationship between the featured sport and the national identity that is being tapped into. While much sports-nation advertising makes use of broad tropes centred on heroism, community, passion and sacrifice; the forms in which these tropes are articulated is telling with regard to the cultural cachet of the sport. They provide a platform for further questions on how the specific relationship between the featured sport and national identity is shaped and the wider socio-cultural significance this relationship may have. Exploring ‘Ode’ in this fashion yields interesting insights with regard to the cultural cachet of the urban working classes and football fandom, in addition to illuminating Ireland’s embrace of its ‘underdog’ status within the international community and how this embrace has involved updating Arnoldian tropes for the 21st century. ‘All it Takes,’ when examined in detail, illustrates how post-Celtic Tiger Ireland struggles to reconcile the somewhat tainted but largely still enticing values of the boom period with traditional perceptions of Irish identity. The theoretical concepts employed in the previous chapter provide an overall structure for analysing the commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus, but the cultural context of individual advertising texts means that each one could yield intriguingly distinct results.

To understand the significance of sport sponsorship, it must be organised within what might be termed a spectrum of modern nationalism. One of the criticisms levelled at Billig (whose work has been eminently useful in this project) is that his approach creates a binary between hot and banal nationalism, with little room for flexibility with regard to how the level of nationalist

consciousness surrounding a ritual or object may change in a given context (Skey 2018). Thus, the proposed understanding of the manner and degree of national consciousness aroused by the sport sponsorship campaigns discussed in this project is a flexible spectrum which allows for nuance, flexibility and context. This spectrum should be understood as tracing the intertwining significance and contention of different forms of cultural nationalist expression in an era (described here as digital cultural nationalism), when, as has been previously outlined, many overt forms of such expressions are fraught with underlying complexities and anxieties. On one end of this spectrum, we might place examples of what was earlier described as the most direct consequences of digital cultural nationalism: local-identity inflected ‘listicles’ and other internet content centred on semi-ironic celebrations of cultural minutiae. These texts are unlikely to arouse controversy (though, as has been discussed, they have proven popular enough to arouse a similarly semi-ironic backlash) but nor do they arouse significant emotional reaction – their cultural significance and commercial value lies in their ability to evoke feelings of amusement through familiarity and vice versa. They are a national cultural in-joke. On the other end of the spectrum we can place inflammatory political rhetoric characteristic of the nationalist resurgence of the 2010s. Despite, and in part because of, fears of the decline of traditional nationalism, the most last decade has seen the rise of populist political movements in many countries fermenting a divisive, but ultimately relatively successful, form of nationalism. The two ends of this spectrum could be viewed in light of Billig’s contrast between the unwaved flag hanging in a public building and the flag waved fervently during wartime.

Sport, of course, falls neatly in the middle of this spectrum. It offers a form of national expression that feels significant enough to trigger strong public emotion (and warrant widespread media coverage) but also one which is perceived as a broad enough canvass for interpretation to preclude serious risk of widespread alienation. This positions it ideally for advertisers looking to tap into public emotion without arousing significant controversy (which is not to ignore the occasions when sport sponsorship campaigns do nevertheless become the cause of contention in the media and wider public sphere), but the commercial leveraging of sport has a significance which extends beyond the financial benefits it can bring to savvy advertisers and sponsors. Sport sponsorship campaigns represent a defined version of a very open concept. A sporting event itself provides the broad narrative building blocks (victory, defeat, luck, hard work, etc.) but it is the media reaction to the event that shapes it into a popular narrative (or narratives). This may

occur simultaneously with the event, through commentary, punditry or even through what the camera focuses on. It may also occur in the days or weeks following an event through subsequent journalistic reactions which impose retroactive narratives on the event, formed from perceptions of the personalities of the athletes and management involved, the wider cultural tropes they are seen to represent, prior events involving them and the anticipation of those to come. However, this process is often diffuse, with conflicting narratives perpetuated within the same publication or website. Furthermore, news media narratives crafted in reaction to sporting events are limited by an expectation to be ostensibly objectively reflective about recent events. As such they are limited from availing of the full range of narrative flexibility that sport offers. Conversely, less diffuse examples of mediated sport (such as films or video games centred on sport) are less bound by any obligation to immediacy and recent results – and therefore freer in the narratives they can construct around sport. Consequently, however, these narratives lack the sense of relevance which emerges from immediacy and reality. They are limited to addressing the sport from a broad perspective or focusing on bygone (and even fictional) events rather than current issues or upcoming anticipated events.

Sport advertising is therefore distinct among mediated sports content in its ability to avail of greater flexibility in its narrative crafting while also retaining a sense of immediacy. As such it is a particularly potent vehicle for tapping into a sport's (or a sports team or individual athlete's) socio-cultural significance. Sport advertising offers a ready object for analysis through its succinct and direct leveraging of powerful but narratively diffuse concepts such as sport and national identity. Analysis of the narrative strategies used to present these concepts in an idealised and engaging manner can reveal much about what is deemed acceptable and compelling in public conceptions of national identity.

Indeed, while this thesis has focused on how advertising leverages national identity through sport, sports sponsorship can provide an equally fruitful object of analysis for studies into other contentious, diffuse but ultimately powerful identity concepts. This study touched on masculinity at points, as the links between idealised national identity and idealised masculine identity are numerous and intertwined, but ultimately emphasised exploring the latter over in order to conduct a thorough analysis of one concept rather than a less detailed examination of two. However, there is no doubt that there is further room for exploration of sports ads' presentations

of national-masculine heroes, particularly in light of socio-political developments which have seen movements based on extreme reinterpretations traditional masculinity and nationalism at once resurgent and reviled. The class issues with regard to the connotations of rugby and football in Ireland also point to avenues for further exploration of how the links between sport and social class and how they are leveraged, or obscured, in advertising.


Ultimately, however, this work serves as a roadmap for further explorations of the commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus. Academic approaches to modern cultural nationalism and sport's role in shaping it have tended to largely operate within Orwellian (or Billig-ian) parameters, viewing cultural nationalist texts as carrying on the war minus the shooting, as stoking the fires of political nationalism with banal nationalism. However, this study has demonstrated the flexibility within the cultural nationalism associated with, and represented through, sport (or rather, specific sports, teams and figures). Furthermore, it points to a less centralised approach to examine how such cultural nationalist texts such as sports events and sports advertising shape the wider public perception of national identity, taking into account the commercial interests and specific socio-cultural cachet of a particular sport that shape such texts, rather than ascribing them to a single, official vision of national identity. Skey (2014) describes how 'ferocious, debates over particular policies or between political groups over who counts as national (surface structure) rarely challenge the legitimacy of a national framework' (6) and the intersecting plurality of Irish national identities provided by 'Ode' and 'All it Takes' (in addition to other texts drawing on specific associations with both sports) illustrates this.

What distinguishes digital cultural nationalism from these earlier 'manageable' debates is the underlying consciousness that the 'legitimacy of a national framework' is challenged by encroaching globalisation. In this context, the commercial leverage of the sport-nation nexus becomes particularly significant, illuminating the desire for a meaningful but unthreatening channel for national identity and the commercial imperatives and historical associations which shape these channels. Investigations into other national sport sponsorship campaigns in other countries, paying due attention to the particularities of the relationship between sport and national identity in each case, could shed light on how national identity continues to function commercially and socially in disparate cultural contexts.


Appendices


Appendix 1: Social Media Reaction to Three Sport Sponsorship Campaigns

1:1.1



Search





Three Ireland
Published on Mar 12, 2013


SUBSCRIBE 3.5K


The new Three Mobile ad for the 2014 World Cup.

Category **Sports**


License **Standard YouTube License**

39 Comments

 SORT BY






Commenting publicly as **Colm Kearns**



Padraig Stack 4 years ago



Sorry lads but your talking shite thats how clubs make there money they promote there clubs abroad eg america Ireland asia


REPLY  



DAV L 4 years ago



What about home games dickhead? They only go to away games for a weekend piss up and to fuck some different whores. Avivais never near full.....clown.


REPLY  



dkb 4 years ago



ya what? do you know anyone is this ad? sorta fans who go to Torshavn, Moscow, Belgrade, Astana for a game, would know as was at most them myself and know them well, clown


REPLY  



ggg 4 years ago



I have Irish heritage,I really can't see how you think you're the same as me,I go every week where as you just watch the match from your house,How can you say you properly support a team that you've seen play live about 10 times probably less.Like i said in my other comment,I like Milan and i've been to the San Siro more times then you've been to Anfield would you say i'm a Milan supporter or would you say I like Milan?It's the same support your own league and say you like ours,You're not a fan.
Show less


REPLY  





ggg 4 years ago

I'm really hoping you're not having the audacity to be talking about me.If you are you're an idiot to even think you're in the same boat as me when it comes to supporting Liverpool.


REPLY  




1:1.2






Search








Michael Hokgri · 4 years ago
And what about shane long, mcclean, kevin doyle and wes hoolahan who have all played in the LOI or should we all buy a season ticket to wembley . Tell me, if u go to man u or an arsenal game and meet a out and out londoner or a mancunian do u honestly think he feels you're a true supporter. to him u just buy merchandise and a sky subscription. We need to develop our own league and thus better international players!

REPLY  






killian mahon · 4 years ago
go on the irish i fuckin love u

REPLY  






thegame6929 · 4 years ago
I have no local team so why would i support a scumbag club from Dublin? LOI fans are a joke and so is the LOI. Scottish first division at best!

REPLY  






Karen Flynn Ahern · 4 years ago
Is Emmet Kirwan the voice for this?

REPLY  






BootNice22 · 4 years ago
"everyone in Ireland" Nope.

REPLY  






BootNice22 · 4 years ago
No1 gives a shit, fuckin moaners the whole lot of ye

REPLY  






BootNice22 · 4 years ago
What about them

REPLY  





ggg · 4 years ago
That's bollocks mate,I've support Liverpool I live two minutes down the road I can see my house from Anfield.What are you?A customer.You're not a fan and we will NEVER see you as one,Liverpool is my local team and I like to watch Milan i'd say i've been to the San Siro more times then you've been to Anfield,It annoys me that you wrote "Justice for the 96"On another video,You know nothing and we don't want you here.You're a customer not a fan just like when i watch Milan,You're not one of us.
Show less


REPLY  






John Mallow · 4 years ago


1:1.3






three ireland best fans in the world



**John Molloy** 4 years ago
Great video.
some of negative comments are ridiculous...club and county is totally different.


REPLY  



**DAV L** 4 years ago
Worst fans in the world,turn up for the big ones but are not seen any other time. Wankers.


REPLY  



**Dylan Murphy** 4 years ago
No not every country are bandwagoners do people from glasgow follow manu liverpool? No its celtic or rangers but for some reason in dublin 90% of ppl follow the epl teams. Also look at the 20,000 or so that went over to poland, how many turned up at the aviva when we played them fuck all they outnumbered us


REPLY  



**Michael Hoggri** 4 years ago
In fairness Pdraig we are, everyone in Irl supports the top 6 clubs in Eng, I wish that wasn't the case, i just dont understand how bar stoolers love teams like Liverpool when they've no affinity with the city in the slightest be it family,work,etc and probably never stepped foot in England.


REPLY  



**Pdraig Stack** 4 years ago
Fuck u ya prick theres about 50 games in thr season if u want a ticket then get onr there not that hard to get irish fans arent ban waggons every fuckn nation is then


REPLY  



**Dylan Murphy** 4 years ago
@OI189998819991197253 yea completely agree, it must be frustrating for real liverpool fans who cant afford to see their team play because irish people who come over once a year take all the tickets


REPLY  

**Dylan Murphy** 4 years ago
Joke of a video irish fans are notorious bandwagoners claim to hate england but all "support" man utd etc



REPLY  

**greenandred123** 4 years ago
Really really cheesy. All fans of every country who follow their team are the best in the world, not just us. This video is embarrassing.


REPLY  


**senzers69** 4 years ago



1:1.4






three ireland best fans in the world









senzers69 4 years ago
Fuck off with your multiculturalism, you anti-irish prick!!
REPLY  






celluloidLUK3 4 years ago
If you say that you dont know shit about the airtricity leauge i go to all the home games of shamrock rovers and have been since 2009 and the english fans are the worst
REPLY  






Michael Hokgri 4 years ago
Best fans in the world my arse, the country couldn't care less if the league of Irl was burnt to the ground.
REPLY  






ggg 4 years ago
I often wondered why Irish fans call themselves the best in the world right enough,I'm from Liverpool and there's nearly more of them here every week then us! I've massive massive respect for people like you who fallow their own league,Tbh I don't mean this in a racist way but we don't even like having a gaggle of Irish people flooding our stands.People like you who support your local team are the real best fans in the world.
REPLY  






Aidan Maguire 4 years ago
theres me on the floor at @0:06
REPLY  






Hope Brown 4 years ago
Beautiful. Still, a slight slap in the face for all the Irish of foreign descent. We love our boys in green too! Someday hopefully a fearless representation of our countries multiculturalism will be recognized. For now, Imagine WiMax will do.
REPLY  



Chimpanzeethat 4 years ago
Where are the Dortmund fans in the ad ?
REPLY  






Aron Fitzpatrick 4 years ago
It's always a Dublin townie accent whenever there's something like this. Do only that particular demographic represent soccer in this country?
REPLY  









Fawkes 4 years ago
I'd just prefer that they had adds about the product not about other adds.




1:1.5









three ireland best fans in the world




**Fawkes** 4 years ago
I'd just prefer that they had adds about the product not about other adds.
REPLY  




**Eugene Mitchell** 4 years ago
as opposed to any other national team sponsor in the world?
REPLY  




**carl478** 4 years ago
nice ad an all but good luck to us getting to the world cup!
REPLY  




**Fawkes** 4 years ago
Yeah but the video told me nothing about what 3 actually do, apart from buy advertising.
REPLY  




**Ross Cannon** 4 years ago
'Best Fans in the world' my arse, the fans only turn up for the big occassions. It was like an away game when we played Poland at Lansdowne.
REPLY  

**Ross Cannon** 4 years ago
Have a look at the jersey
REPLY  

**Fawkes** 4 years ago
What did this have to do with 3 ?
REPLY  


**Oisin Deignan** 4 years ago
Emmet Kirwan?
REPLY  

**dkb** 4 years ago
looking well lads!
REPLY  

**Conor Donovan** 4 years ago
Good ad
REPLY  

1:2.1

#AllItTakes is Everything TV Ad feat. O'Connell, Sexton & Henshaw

**Three Ireland**

Follow

about 3 years ago · 🌐

Behind all rugby internationals is a story of immense physical and emotional sacrifice. Johnny Sexton, Paul O'Connell, Robbie Henshaw and Joe Schmidt demonstrate this in our new "#AllItTakes is Everything" full-length TV commercial.

👍 2.2K

543 Shares 158K Views

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share


👤 ▼

Comments

Up next


Comments (95)

Most recent ▼


**Cormac White** Ciara Kelly

👍 1


Like · Reply · 3y

**Denis Mullan** Brilliant


Like · Reply · 3y

**Graham Madden** Jack Madden


Like · Reply · 3y

**Ronan Doyle** Apenisa Jnr Seru


Like · Reply · 3y

**David McDonagh** Connor Elliott


Like · Reply · 3y

**John Lambe** Excellent advertisement.

Like · Reply · 3y

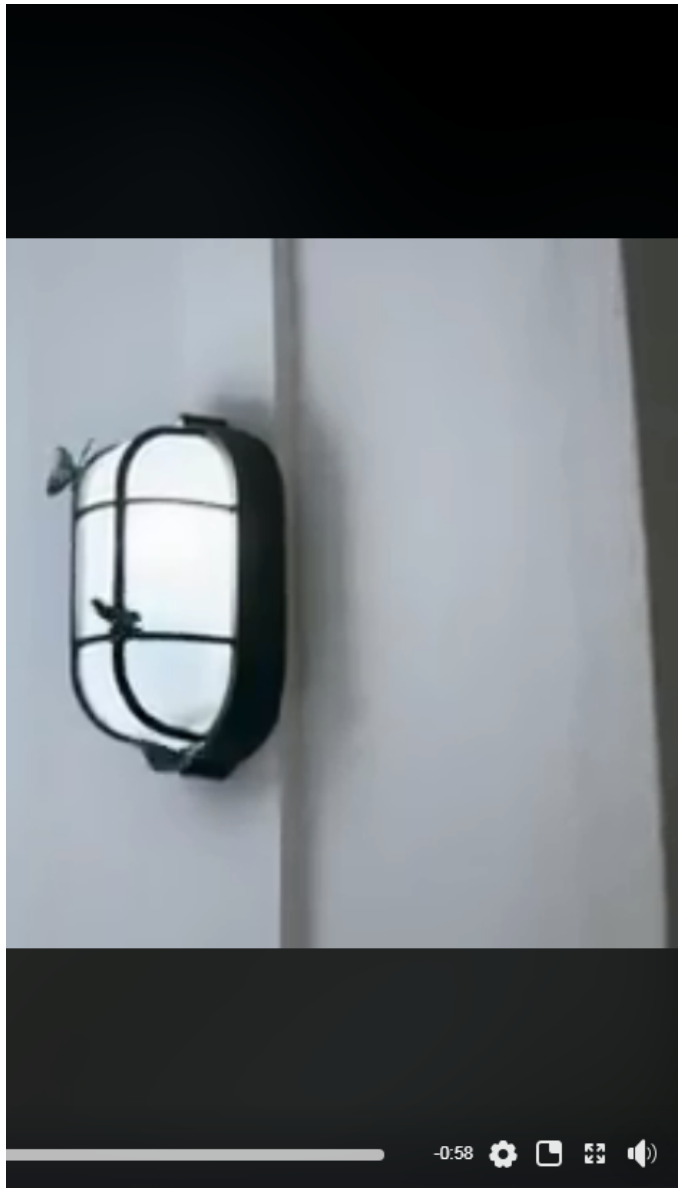
**Jacqueline McNulty** Andrew Evans

Like · Reply · 3y

**Jack Pierce** Class 🍷 Theresa Pierce

Like · Reply · 3y

1:2.2



Theresa Pierce Jack Pierce
Like · Reply · 3y

Barry O Meara Hope ireland have better luck with three support them than I had they just don't care about the people who are using their network 😞😞😞
Like · Reply · 3y 5

Three Ireland Hi Barry, please let me know if there's anything I can help with here. Rach
Like · Reply · 3y

Barry O Meara Can you please tell me why I am having so much trouble trying to get a broadband upgrade absolutely diabolical service from three.ie this is going on for more than two weeks willing to take out another 12month contract with three but can I get a upgrade modem sent to me I think not time for a change?? 😞😞😞
Like · Reply · 3y

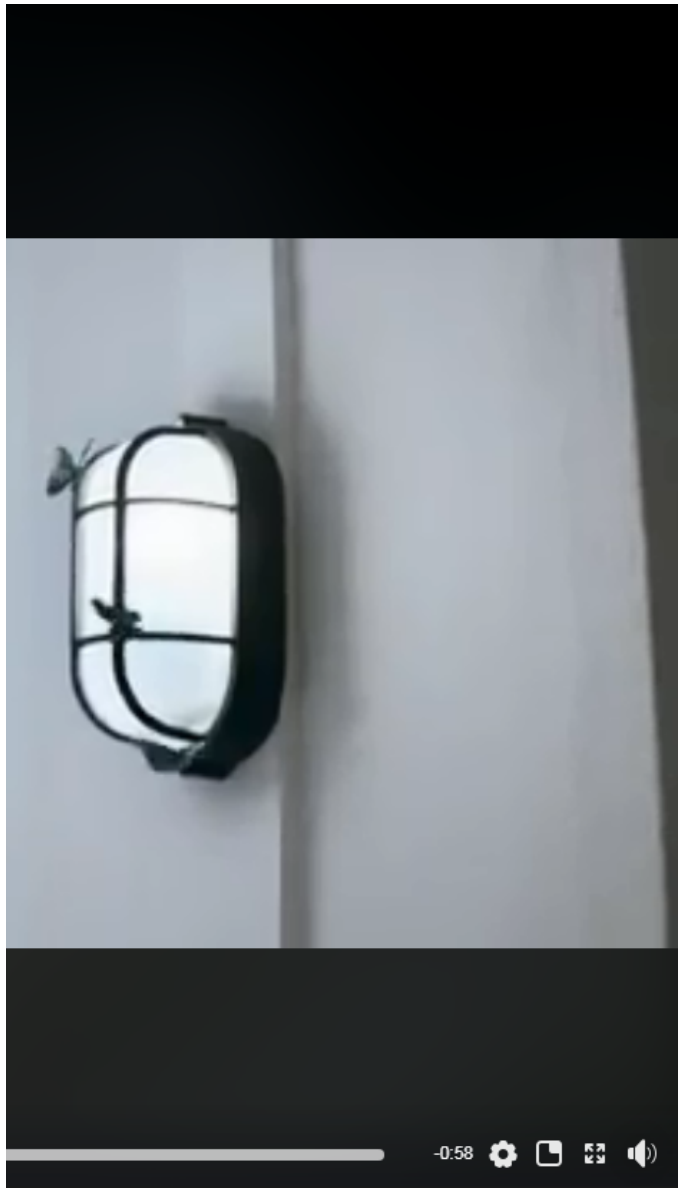
Three Ireland You would be due an upgrade three months before the end of your contract Barry. I'm happy to double check these dates for you if you email your details to talkto3@three.ie.
Like · Reply · 3y

Sean Goggin Wrong forum Barry O'Meara
Like · Reply · 3y

Barry O Meara Will keep this in mind Sean Gorggin when airing my grievances next time on the wrong forum hope this hasn't spoilt your day
Like · Reply · 3y

Tara Rose Kelly That is the only thing any of these networks take note of good luck with the new one
Like · Reply · 3y · Edited

1:2.3



Theresa Pierce Jack Pierce
Like · Reply · 3y

Barry O Meara Hope ireland have better luck with three support them than I had they just don't care about the people who are using their network 😞😞😞
Like · Reply · 3y 5

Three Ireland Hi Barry, please let me know if there's anything I can help with here. Rach
Like · Reply · 3y

Barry O Meara Can you please tell me why I am having so much trouble trying to get a broadband upgrade absolutely diabolical service from three.ie this is going on for more than two weeks willing to take out another 12month contract with three but can I get a upgrade modem sent to me I think not time for a change?? 😞😞😞
Like · Reply · 3y


Three Ireland You would be due an upgrade three months before the end of your contract Barry. I'm happy to double check these dates for you if you email your details to talkto3@three.ie.
Like · Reply · 3y

Sean Goggin Wrong forum Barry O'Meara
Like · Reply · 3y

Barry O Meara Will keep this in mind Sean Gorggin when airing my grievances next time on the wrong forum hope this hasn't spoilt your day
Like · Reply · 3y

Tara Rose Kelly That is the only thing any of these networks take note of good luck with the new one
Like · Reply · 3y · Edited

1:2.4



A Facebook video player interface. The video shows a close-up of a white, oval-shaped wall-mounted light fixture with a black frame. A small spider is visible on the top left of the fixture. The video is at 0:58. The right side of the player shows a list of comments from various users.

Like · Reply · 3y

Linda Mooney Great video...

Like · Reply · 3y

Claire Ralph Vmce why do you like "3"

Like · Reply · 3y

Naeem Iqbal
<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=337212896489356>

Like · Reply · 3y

Aoife Madden Tricia this is what I was talking about 😊

Like · Reply · 3y

Joe Bloggs Great player shite network #3Ireland is awful

Like · Reply · 3y

Ivan Dolan Sean David

Like · Reply · 3y

Mark John Travers Adam Scott Craig Norman Gerald McDonnell

Like · Reply · 3y

Sarah Staunton Mary Mc Manus 🤔 1

Like · Reply · 3y

Diane McKenna Keogh Great Team! 1

Like · Reply · 3y

Marian Kennedy Brilliant ad and brilliant players.

Like · Reply · 3y


Cian Cullen Sean Kelly

Like · Reply · 3y

Reece Gavin Dylan Reeves

Like · Reply · 3y

1:2.5



Like · Reply · 3y

Des Burke-Kennedy Brilliant 😊

Like · Reply · 3y

Stephen Carroll Jack Johnson

Like · Reply · 3y

Padraig Eoin O Curraoin Conor Kyne watch o connel

Like · Reply · 3y

Padhric Gray John Phelan

Like · Reply · 3y

Frank Neary Different people the ruger crowd never Boosed the little BOLLOCKS when he came on the pitch

Like · Reply · 3y

Rachel Mccarthy Victoria Antoniadis

Like · Reply · 3y

Jamie Pearson Evans Sean Ballance even Henshaw knows it's all about squats

Like · Reply · 3y

John O'Neill Very creative

Like · Reply · 3y

Timmy Culloty Wayne Dowling

Like · Reply · 3y

Alan Mc Kenna It's a bit cringeworthy and over the top. I thought when I read the heading it would be a back to basics type ad. Instead it's awful.

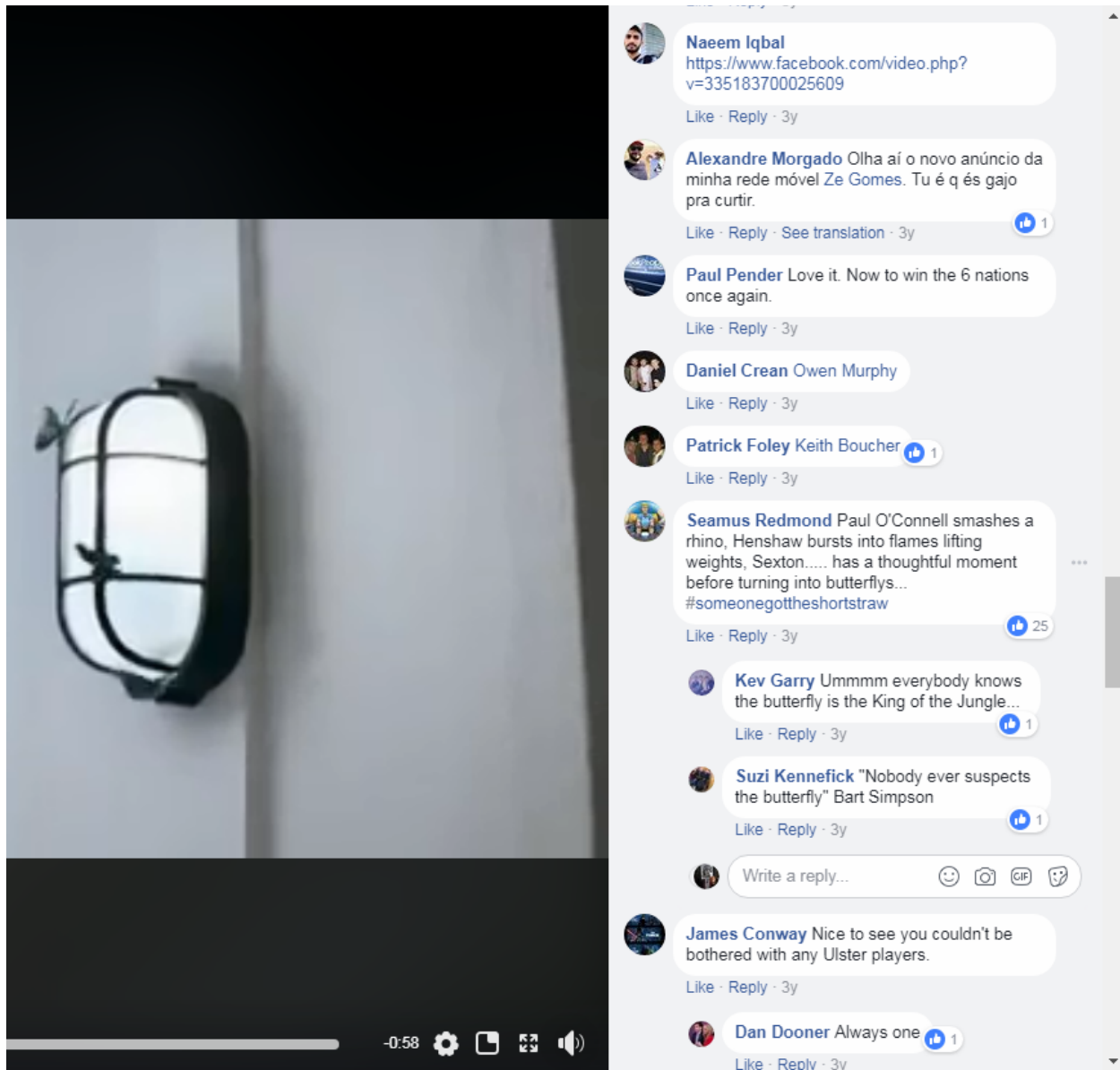
Like · Reply · 3y

Trevor Donegan Best ad ever!

Like · Reply · 3y

Naeem Iqbal
<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?325423722225600>

1:2.6



Naeem Iqbal
<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=335183700025609>
Like · Reply · 3y

Alexandre Morgado Olha aí o novo anúncio da minha rede móvel Ze Gomes. Tu é q és gajo pra curtir.
Like · Reply · See translation · 3y

Paul Pender Love it. Now to win the 6 nations once again.
Like · Reply · 3y

Daniel Crean Owen Murphy
Like · Reply · 3y

Patrick Foley Keith Boucher
Like · Reply · 3y

Seamus Redmond Paul O'Connell smashes a rhino, Henshaw bursts into flames lifting weights, Sexton..... has a thoughtful moment before turning into butterflys...
#someonegottheshortstraw
Like · Reply · 3y

Kev Garry Ummmm everybody knows the butterfly is the King of the Jungle...
Like · Reply · 3y

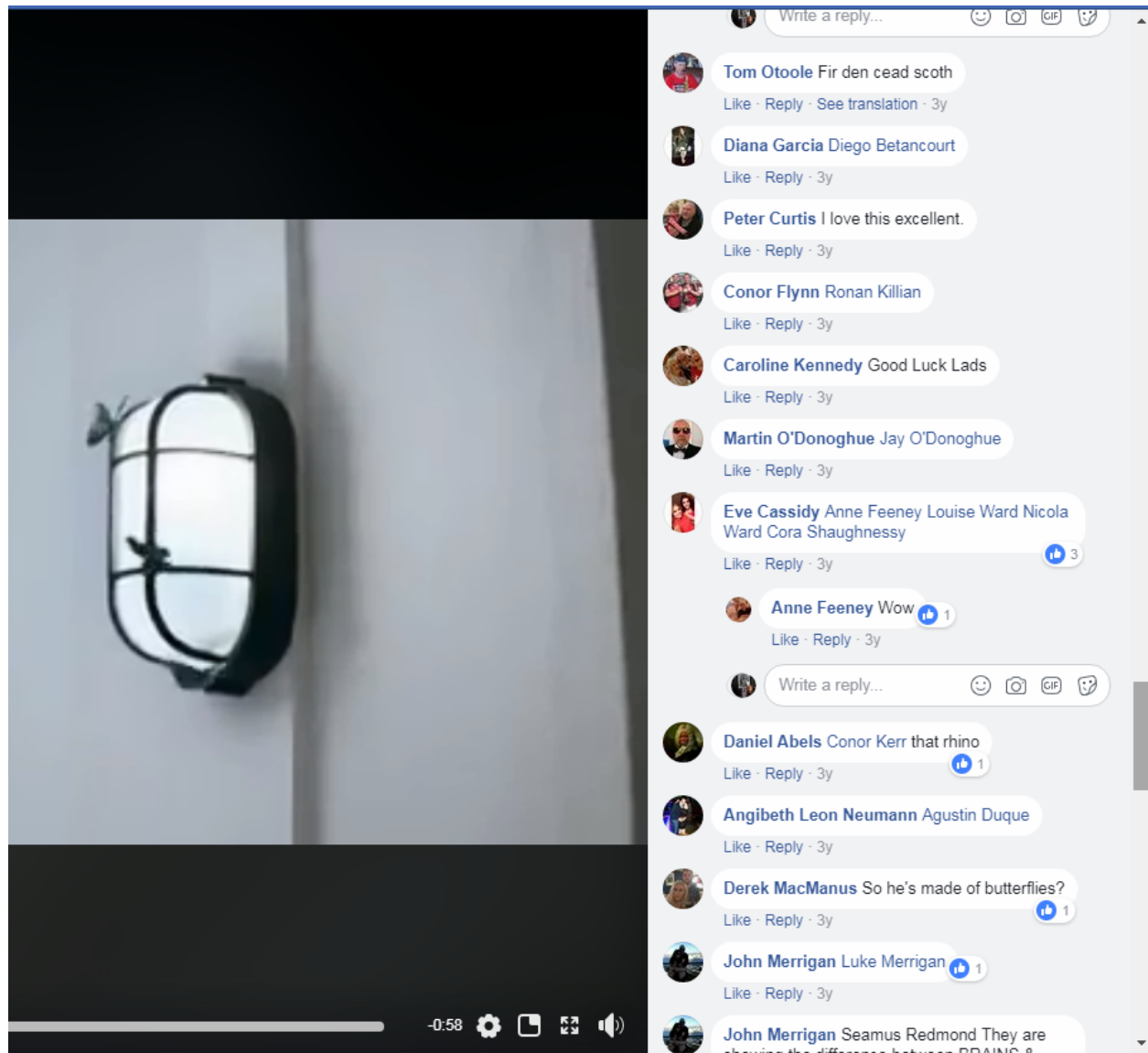
Suzi Kennefick "Nobody ever suspects the butterfly" Bart Simpson
Like · Reply · 3y

Write a reply...

James Conway Nice to see you couldn't be bothered with any Ulster players.
Like · Reply · 3y

Dan Dooner Always one
Like · Reply · 3y

1:2.7



Write a reply...

Tom Otoole Fir den cead scoth
Like · Reply · See translation · 3y

Diana Garcia Diego Betancourt
Like · Reply · 3y

Peter Curtis I love this excellent.
Like · Reply · 3y

Conor Flynn Ronan Killian
Like · Reply · 3y

Caroline Kennedy Good Luck Lads
Like · Reply · 3y

Martin O'Donoghue Jay O'Donoghue
Like · Reply · 3y

Eve Cassidy Anne Feeney Louise Ward Nicola Ward Cora Shaughnessy
Like · Reply · 3y 3

Anne Feeney Wow 1
Like · Reply · 3y

Write a reply...

Daniel Abels Conor Kerr that rhino 1
Like · Reply · 3y

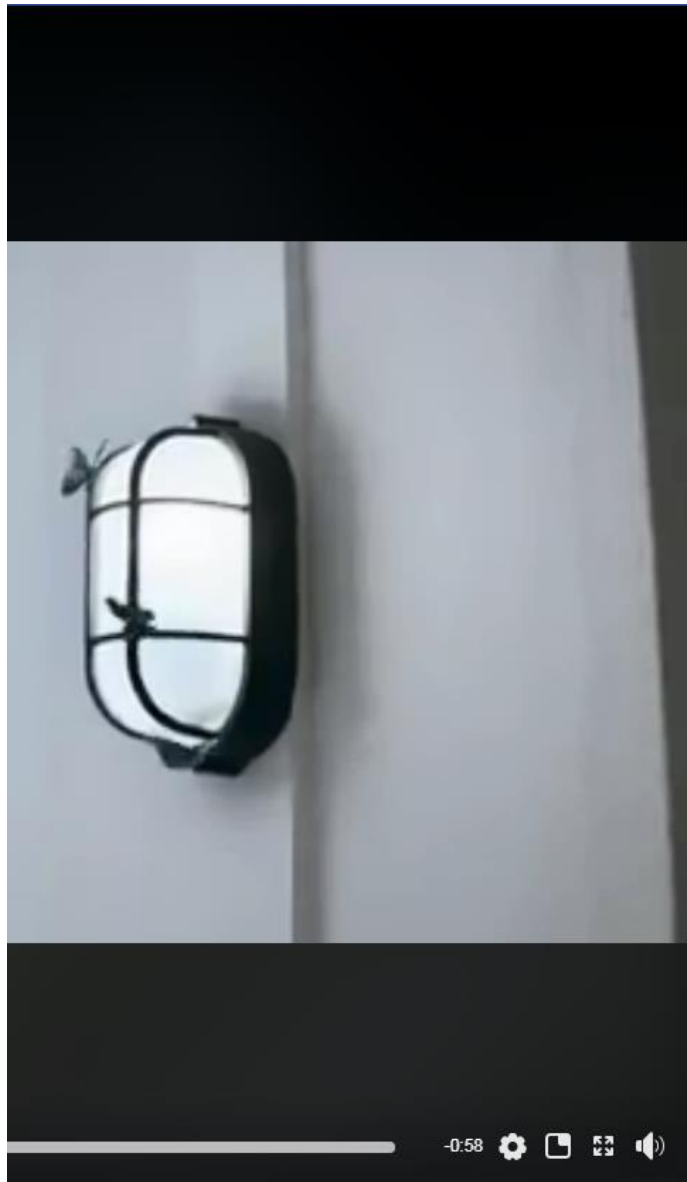
Angibeth Leon Neumann Agustin Duque
Like · Reply · 3y

Derek MacManus So he's made of butterflies? 1
Like · Reply · 3y

John Merrigan Luke Merrigan 1
Like · Reply · 3y

John Merrigan Seamus Redmond They are showing the difference between BRAINS &

1:2.8




John Merrigan Seamus Redmond They are showing the difference between BRAINS & BRAUN.....

Like · Reply · 3y

Faith Omorodion Good luck to you all in Jesus name anem

Like · Reply · 3y

Sean Mc Keon Keith Crossan see how he holds onto the ball??

Like · Reply · 3y  1

Adam Varian Paul O' Connell Makes it that much better 3-)

Like · Reply · 3y

Michael Newell Likes all messages from Joe S it is very simple but it demands everything

Like · Reply · 3y

Linda Ennis Go IRELAND 🇮🇪

Like · Reply · 3y


James McGuinness I'm going on 3 network,holy moley!


Like · Reply · 3y

Maria Power Marc De Paor 🍀🍀

Like · Reply · 3y


Marie Kampes Just fabulous Green shirt Men that give their all

Like · Reply · 3y  1

Vincent Ward Conor Wall  1

Like · Reply · 3y


Shirley Bagnall Don't u just love joe Schmidt's voice, I could listen to it all day 😊,

Like · Reply · 3y  2


John Doyle Gavin Kavanagh

Like · Reply · 3y


1:2.9




Like · Reply · 3y

Vincent Carden Love the last bit Pete Pete Phillips Marc Murphy  1


Like · Reply · 3y

Sheila Long Go on paulie  1


Like · Reply · 3y

Audrey King Love it  1


Like · Reply · 3y

Fiona Rice Goosebumps Michelle Rice  1

Like · Reply · 3y

Simon Glennon Andrew Brady Michael Murphy Odhran Lawless Quinn Cormac McCooley Fred Morris Bunmi Oyateru lads.... This 🤔👍  5

Like · Reply · 3y

Marc Poole If that doesnt get you up for the match nothing will !!, i can see people in pubs nowGo on Paulie !!!!  1

Like · Reply · 3y

Catherine Fitzgerald Hall Brilliant

Like · Reply · 3y


Jen Prior 😍

Like · Reply · 3y


Laura Whitney Daniel O'Toole

Like · Reply · 3y

Donna Malone Good luck lads ...



1:2.10



Fiona Rice Goosebumps Michelle Rice
Like · Reply · 3y 1

Simon Glennon Andrew Brady Michael Murphy Odhran Lawless Quinn Cormac McCooley Fred Morris Bunmi Oyateru lads.... This 🤔👍
Like · Reply · 3y 5


Marc Poole If that doesnt get you up for the match nothing will !!, i can see people in pubs nowGo on Paulie !!!!
Like · Reply · 3y 1

Catherine Fitzgerald Hall Brilliant
Like · Reply · 3y

Jen Prior 😍
Like · Reply · 3y

Laura Whitney Daniel O'Toole
Like · Reply · 3y

Donna Malone Good luck lads ***



Like · Reply · 3y 42


Raphael Busillet Chantal Busillet
Like · Reply · 3y

Aoibhin Kenny Excellent!!!!!!
Like · Reply · 3y

Appendix 2: Supplementary Materials to Three Sport Sponsorship Campaigns

2:1.1

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Home. Press Releases. 12 Mar 2013 Real Football Fans Star In Threes New Tv Ad



YBIG fans in Three's new advert 'An Ode to fans'.

Three, Ireland's largest high speed network, and primary sponsor of the Irish football team pays tribute to real Irish football fans in its newest TV commercial which airs on television this Friday. Instead of looking to agencies to find suitable actors, Three instead looked to Ireland's largest football supporters club 'You Boys in Green' to find genuine fans to be the stars of the ad.

The new 40 second advert which will air on RTE, TV3, 3e, Sky and E4 from this Friday, just in time for two important World Cup qualifying matches against Sweden and Austria on the 22nd and 26th of March, was officially premiered on Facebook today giving Ireland fans the opportunity to view it first before launching on TV later this week.

Speaking about the new advert and the decision to cast members of 'You Boys in Green', Elaine Carey, CCO of Three said: "We recruited You Boys in Green because they are the fans that travel all over the world to support their team. Their reactions were amazing on the day. They didn't need to act. They just showed what they do every time they go to a match, every time they watch a match, every time they travel away to a match. Their emotion is what the true Irish fan is about and Three wanted to demonstrate that. Our ad captures the raw emotion that each and every Irish fan displays when showing support for their country."

Rory Hamilton, Creative Director at Three's new ad agency Boys and Girls said: "The idea for "An Ode to fans" came from watching footage of the European Championships, when Ireland were 4-0 down to Spain and suddenly the stadium was engulfed in an amazing rendition of "The Fields of Athenry". It was a spine tingling moment in world football. Being an Irish fan in Poland can't have been easy, yet there they were, putting their full support behind a beleaguered team. It encapsulated what support is about. It isn't about winning or losing, it runs much deeper than that. Support is a positive act, regardless of the circumstances. "An Ode to fans" is meant as a quiet celebration of Irish football fans, their trials and tribulations – the great moments and the bad."

Three's new TV commercial was created by Dublin-based advertising agency Boys and Girls and was shot in location at Ardmore Studios in Bray, County Wicklow with a media investment figure worth close to €1million. The Director Zak Emerson has worked on some of the biggest brands around the world, from Adidas and Heineken to Jameson and Nikon. Producers used many different techniques to illustrate the emotion, tension, despair and delight that fans go through. Sections of the ad were shot on a Phantom Camera which shoots at incredibly high speeds (1000 frames per second), allowing you to slow the images right down, while others were animated in stop frame animation, or illustrated comic book style adding a touch of nostalgia.

Viewers may also recognise a familiar voice throughout the new commercial. The ad is narrated by Irish actor Emmet Kirwan, who is best known for co-writing and starring in RTE's old comedy series 'Sarah and Steve'. Emmet, who graduated from the acting training programme at the Samuel Beckett Centre in Trinity College in 2001 also starred in comedy-drama film 'Inside I'm Dancing' which starred James McAvoy and Brenda Fricker. Emmet was specially chosen not just because he's a great actor but more importantly because he's a huge football fan. Three wanted that genuine voice to cut through and carry real emotion representing every Irish fan.

[Click here to see a sneak preview](#) of Three's 'An Ode to Fans' which will launch across a number of stations this Friday.

Ends

For more information please contact:

Sharon McHugh

Communications Manager

083 1095 291

Sharon.mchugh@three.ie

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Irish rugby star Robbie Henshaw shows 'All it Takes is Everything' in Three's fiery new TV commercial

To celebrate the start of the RBS Six Nations, proud sponsor of the Irish rugby team, Three is launching a ground-breaking campaign entitled 'All It Takes is Everything'. The campaign, which features Robbie Henshaw, Johnny Sexton and Paul O'Connell, promises to impact rugby fans' senses and emotions, showing exactly what it takes to play for Ireland through four TV commercials and three mini documentaries.

First up, starring in Three's 20-second TV commercials series, is a relative newcomer to the Ireland squad, but one touted by many as the natural successor to Brian O'Driscoll. In this teaser, we witness Robbie Henshaw pushing himself to the limit, giving every ounce of energy he has in order to be fit enough to play for Ireland.



Championing the 'All it Takes is Everything' message, the teaser is the first of three 20 second commercials to be released on Irish television before and during the 2015 RBS Six Nations; with a full, 60 second ad to be aired during the tournament. This exciting new campaign from Three will focus on Robbie Henshaw, Johnny Sexton and Paul O'Connell, showcasing how it takes 100% effort to play elite rugby at the highest level. Making huge sacrifices along the way, it's not just skills that players require; they have to be mentally tough to keep on going, and physically strong to play for Ireland.

Speaking about the campaign, **Elaine Carey, CCO of Three, said,** "Every year we see our rugby heroes giving everything on the rugby pitch. The unforgettable memories they have created for people across the country are immeasurable. Three wants to bring fans closer to the team, showing them the mental and physical barriers Irish rugby internationals constantly overcome in order to deliver the world-class performances on the rugby pitch. We want Irish rugby fans to be inspired by the level of commitment shown by our rugby heroes and stimulated to show the same passion when supporting the team. Three knows "All it Takes is Everything."

Complementing the TVC will be an "#AllItTakes" film series, featuring exclusive, never before seen footage highlighting the sacrifices and commitment of members of the Irish squad. Each are told from the perspective of the players' friends, families, teammates and of course, the rugby heroes themselves. The "#AllItTakes" film series will bring fans closer to the team than ever before as fans gain access to what, who and where made them who they are today.

The first **#AllItTakes** mini-documentary featuring rising star Robbie Henshaw will be released on Friday, February 6th, in advance of Ireland's much anticipated RBS Six Nations match against Italy in Rome. The second and third instalments featuring O'Connell and Sexton will be released over the course of the Championship.

The "All It Takes is Everything" campaign launches on February 4th, kicking off with the Robbie Henshaw teaser and can be viewed on three.ie, [@3_News](https://twitter.com/3_News) or by using the following link – <http://bit.ly/1zTqAj7>.
#AllItTakes

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Appendix 3: Recent Examples of Digital Cultural Nationalism


3:1

THE DAILY EDGE

thejournal.ie FORA THE 42

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Celebs Ireland TV Skin Deep Chats

Trending: #GOING OUT #RUTH NEGGA

Tags: #ELECTION POSTERS #FÁILDEMORT #GE16 #GE2016


9 brilliant Irish responses to the scourge of election posters

The cable ties that bind...

Feb 11th 2016, 1:11 PM 12,624 Views 2 Comments



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1. This astute observation



Peter
@POBHerty

Ok but is Christy Burke the human embodiment of the Shurrup Yew Ye Tick chihuahua?



Read Next:

Nicki Minaj is donating \$25,000 to former Cosby Show star Geoffrey Owens... it's The Dredge

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3:1.2

3. This to-the-point retort

👤 D4 election poster vandalism @RossOCK
pic.twitter.com/dr5lB2g5WQ
— Stephen Curtis (@StephenCur) February 6, 2016

Source: *Stephen Curtis/Twitter*

4. This pointed dig



Source: *contents_checked on Reddit Ireland*

3:1.3

7. This vocabulary lesson



Source: [Nuala Woulfe/Twitter](#)


8. Are you alright there Sharon?



Source: [Lynne/Twitter](#)

3:2.1


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The 24 Most Irish Things Ever

And not a potato in sight.

Posted on July 31, 2013, at 7:38 a.m.

**Ailbhe Malone**
BuzzFeed Staff, UK

3:2.2

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17. Jedward, wearing Irish flags, running in a race sponsored by Spar.



danelyzed.com

 Share  Pin

18. This pair, standing next to a statue of Funghi. In the rain.



3:2.3



10. This shop's reaction to the heat.



11. This community service.



3:2.4

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12. This cow getting a lift.



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13. This Corkonian who got stuck in a Mc Donald's high chair.



3:3.1

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Irish People Try Things


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Facts.

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Irish People Try Different American Accents

Facts.

3:25

2




Irish People Taste Test American Chocolate Bars

Facts.

4:29

3




Irish People Try American Christmas Treats

Facts.

3:57

4




Irish People Taste Test Savoury American Foods

Facts.

4:25

5




Irish People Try Stereotypical Irish Foods

Facts.

3:53

6




Irish People Watch 90s Nick Toons Shows

Facts.

5:24

7




Irish Biscuits vs American Cookies

Facts.

3:41

8




Irish People Watch Baseball For The First Time

Facts.

3:33

9




Irish People Taste American Snacks

Facts.

3:16

10



Irish People Watch 90's Teen Sitcoms

Facts.

3:16

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0ZL4aT6V4M&index=3&list=PL-L-...>

3:3.2

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Irish People Watch 90's Teen Sitcoms

Facts.


11



Irish People Guess Southern American Slang

Facts.


12



Irish People Watch American Football For The First Time

Facts.


13



Irish People Try To Explain Irish Myths and Legends

Facts.


14



Irish Elderly Women Talk About the Men in their Lives

Facts.


15



Irish people Attempt To Explain American History

Facts.


16



Irish People Try American Sodas

Facts.


17



Irish People Rate Valentines Gifts

Facts.


18



Irish Seniors Talk About Love

Facts.

19



Irish People Watch The Superbowl Halftime Show For The First Time

247

3:4.1. Still from KFC 'O'Sanders Burger' commercial



3:4.2. Still from McDonalds' 'McMor' Commercial



3:4.3. Still from Brady's Family Ham Commercial



Appendix 4: Supplementary Materials Relating to Other Relevant Irish Sports Sponsorship Campaigns

4:1

Want to star in a commercial with the Irish Football Team?



Antidote Productions will be shooting an advertisement in the last week of March, which will showcase the support for the Irish team going to the Euro's in 2016.

We are looking for FOOTBALL FANS and SUPER-FANS of all ages, shapes and sizes to get in contact and tell us how big (or small) a fan you are.

The commercial will feature some of the Irish team and a few old legends!!

Let's show the BOYS IN GREEN some support!

Please get in contact as soon as possible and tell us your name, your contact details (email and telephone number), your age and where you're from.

Then tell us your answers to the following questions:

1. Who is your favourite Irish footballer?
2. Are you excited for the Euros?
3. Where will you be watching the Euros?
4. How have you shown your support for the team in the past?

****Please video horizontally, NOT VERTICALLY**

Phone: 01 5351675

Email: boysingreen@antidote.ie

Appendix 5: Survey & Interview Material

5:1 Informed Consent Form

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY Informed Consent Form

Superman Vs Everyman: An Investigation of Idealised Irish Identity in Rugby Union and Football Advertisements

DCU School of Communications

Supervisor: Dr. Neil O'Boyle

This project aims to examine recent advertising campaigns which focused on the Irish international rugby union and soccer teams and/or fans of the team(s), with a view to gaining a more nuanced understanding of how idealized Irishness is depicted in advertising, and the significances of employing the concept of national identity in the globalized, digital marketing age.

Participant

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

<i>I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>I understand the information provided</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<i>I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>

Participation in research is completely voluntary. I am free to decline to take part in the project. I can decline to answer any questions and am free to stop taking part in the project at any time.

I am aware that the study data of my interview will be handled as confidentially as possible. I have been assured that if results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

I have been assured that to minimize the risks to confidentiality, access to the data will be restricted to those directly involved in the project.

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY
Plain Language Statement

I. Introduction to the Research Study

Research Title: Superman Vs Everyman: An Investigation of Idealised Irish Identity in Rugby Union and Football Advertisements

This project aims to examine recent advertising campaigns which focused on the Irish international rugby union and soccer teams and/or fans of the team(s), with a view to gaining a more nuanced understanding of how idealized Irishness is depicted in advertising, and the significances of employing the concept of national identity in the globalized, digital marketing age.

Department: School of Communications

Supervisor: Dr. Neil O'Boyle - neil.oboyle@dcu.ie

II. Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require

Involvement in this research study will consist of audio-recorded interviews with adult subjects concerning their position and opinions with regard to certain ad campaigns, and the Irish advertising industry as a whole. It is likely that the interviews will last a maximum of 30 minutes.

III. Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life)

It is unlikely, but if you feel uncomfortable or upset by any of the research questions, you are free to decline to answer them, or to stop the interview at any time. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, we are taking precautions to minimize this risk.

IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study, but it is hoped that the research will contribute to a greater and more nuanced understanding of Irish advertising in the digital age.

V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, we will restrict access to the data to those directly involved in the project.

VI. Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period

When the research is completed, I may save the tapes and notes for use in future research, but they will only be used by researchers directly involved in this project (myself and my supervisor, Dr. Neil O'Boyle). I will retain these records for up to 36 months after the study is over. The same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality of this study data.

VII. Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research and whether or not you choose to answer a question or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

The finished research project will be available in the DCU Library in 2019.

5:3 Audience Survey on ‘Ode’ and ‘All it Takes’

COMMERCIAL 1: “AN ODE TO FANS” [FOOTBALL]

1. Do you like this commercial? [Please explain why/why not]

2. What do you think is the core message of this commercial?

3. Does this commercial suggest anything to you about Irish identity? [Please explain]

COMMERCIAL 2: “ALL IT TAKES” [RUGBY]

1. Do you like this commercial? [Please explain why/why not]

2. What do you think is the core message of this commercial?

3. Does this commercial suggest anything to you about Irish identity? [Please explain]

.....

1. Are you a sports fan? YES ☐ NO ☐
 [If Yes, please tick the sports you like (you can tick more than one)]
- Soccer ☐
- Rugby ☐
- GAA ☐
- MMA ☐
- Other ☐ Please list_____

2. Which of these two commercials do you prefer? [Please explain why]

3. Both of these commercials were sponsored by *Three*. Which one do you think does a better job for the sponsor? [Please explain]

Gender	Please tick
Male	
Female	
Other	
Age	Please list
How would you describe your socio-economic class	Please list

How would you describe your ethnicity	Please tick
White Irish	
White other	
Black Irish	
Black other	
Asian Irish	
Asian other	
Other, including mixed background	

5:4.1 Fan Focus Group Demographics Questionnaire

Name: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Occupation: _____

Ethnic Background:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| White Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| White other | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Black Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Black other | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Asian Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Asian other | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Which of the following most accurately describes the way in which you follow Ireland?

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Attend every home match, watch every away match on TV. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attend every match in person, home and away. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Watch every match on TV | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mainly watch on TV, but don't watch the less important matches. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Keep an interest, but only watch during tournaments or big matches. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Do you follow any other sports? (if yes, please specify which):

5:4.2 Football Fan Focus Group Interview Prompts

- How and when did you begin following Ireland?
- Would you describe the team (and the fans, Irish football in general) as one of the best things/things you are most proud of about the country?
- It's definitely one of the things that gets us a lot of international attention. How do you feel about the team as representing Ireland to the world? Do you feel like you're representing the country when you travel for away matches?
- Does it bother you when you see the team getting discussed in the media in a way which you seriously disagree with?
- What do you think makes Irish football attractive to advertisers?
- How do you feel about the ads made about the Irish team and fans? Are there any ones you particularly like? Are there any you particularly dislike?
- Many recent ads focus on the Irish football fans? Do you feel they're accurate?
- Irish football fans tend to get more media attention than fans of other sports in this country, why do you think that is?
- How do you feel about advertisers using your passion for profit?
- To what extent do you think the FAI and its commercial partners should take fan discontent seriously? Can a certain amount of it just be written off as coming with the territory?

5:4.3 Rugby Fan Focus Group Interview Prompts

- How and when did you begin following Ireland?
- Would you describe the team (and the fans, Irish rugby in general) as one of the best things/things you are most proud of about the country? Do you feel you're representing the country in some way when you travel abroad to support the team?
- Does it bother you when you see the team getting discussed in the media in a way which you seriously disagree with?
- What is it about Irish rugby that you think is attractive to advertisers?
- It's only relatively recently that rugby grew nationally popular in Ireland, because of this do you feel that there are inaccuracies and stereotypes in how it's advertised and discussed in the media?
- When I spoke to a group of fans of the Irish soccer team, they said part of the appeal was that the international game felt less commercialised than the club game – do you feel similarly?
- Do you think the Irish rugby team should be advertised in a way that's different than other national sides? (*mention it representing both the Republic and the North*)
- What do you think makes Irish rugby so attractive to advertisers?
- Can you think of any Irish sports ads that you particularly liked or disliked? (*Ask specifically about All it Takes*)
- Speaking quite generally, a lot of recent Irish football advertising has focused on the fans, while Irish rugby advertising has focused on the players. How do you feel about this? Do you feel rugby fan culture is neglected in the media?
- To what extent do you think the IRFU and its commercial partners should take fan discontent seriously? Can a certain amount of it just be written off as coming with the territory?
- How do you feel about advertisers using your passion for profit?

5:5 FAI Officials Interview Prompts

- How much of a say does the FAI have in how sponsors depict the team (or Irish football in general) in advertisements?
 - o Is there any proposal by sponsors, with regard to the portrayal of Irish football, that has been opposed or disapproved of within the FAI?
- What do you think makes an association with the Irish football team appealing to sponsor brands?
- Obviously the team will appeal more to sponsors during a successful period, but how significant is the difference in measurable appeal between a successful Irish team and an unsuccessful one? Is there always a significant dedicated fan base that attracts sponsors regardless of the team's current fortunes?
- Did you see Three's *An Ode to Fans*? What did you think of it?
 - o What do you think of the decision to focus on the fans, rather than on the players?
- Can you think of any Irish sports ads (ideally Irish ones, but any you can think of) that particularly struck you? If so, what was it about them that stood out?
 - o Conversely, have there been any examples of past sports ads you've been disappointed with?
- The Irish football team probably does a more effective job of bringing the nation together than anything else. They represent the country in a very real sense. When they're represented in advertising, what quintessentially Irish qualities do you like to see emphasized through the team?
 - o Do you see a difference between how Irish football represents the country and how, say, GAA or rugby does?
- Fans can be very sensitive about how sport interacts with business; do you take fan backlash over their sport/team being commodified into consideration when dealing with sponsors?
- (Mention how Three recently won 'Best Sponsorship Team' at the sponsorship awards – Were the FAI satisfied with their team?)
- How close is your relationship to the sponsor? Are you in contact regularly?

5:6 IRFU Official Interview Prompts

- How close was your relationship with Three? Are you in contact regularly?
 - o Three became your sponsors as a consequence of their takeover of 02 rather than seeking out an arrangement with you, do you think that had had a bearing on your relationship with them?
- How much of a say does the IRFU have in how sponsors depict the team (or Irish rugby in general) in advertisements?
 - o Is there any proposal by sponsors, with regard to the portrayal of Irish rugby, that has been opposed or disapproved of within the IRFU?
- How did you feel about the 'All it Takes' ad and campaign?
- What qualities do you think make Irish rugby attractive to sponsors? (mention how FAI emphasised flexibility)
- There have been a number of Irish rugby advertisements in recent years commissioned by Guinness who have a reputation for innovative, interesting advertisements. Does the association with such prestige raise your (or Irish rugby fans') expectations of the ad campaigns your sponsors make?
- Obviously the team will appeal more to sponsors during a successful period, but how significant is the difference in measurable appeal between a successful Irish team and an unsuccessful one?
 - o Do you think there are any particular qualities associated with the team that attracts sponsors? (beyond its nationwide fan base)
- Big sporting events probably bring the country together more than any other event and many sports ads usually draw on traditional ideas of national pride, is this complicated in your case because the team represents both the North and the Republic?
- Fans can be very sensitive about how sport interacts with business; do you take fan backlash over their sport or team being seen as commodified into consideration when dealing with sponsors?
- Given recent findings about the dangers of concussion in rugby, do you think that you have to tread more carefully when celebrating rugby in sponsorship campaigns?

5:7 Three Ireland Sponsorship Executive Interview Prompts

(i) relationships (with governing bodies and ad agency etc.)

- What is your relationship with the FAI and IRFU?
 - o [Is one harder to deal with than the other?] [If so, why?]
 - o How regularly do you interact?
- For you as sponsor, what are the things that make for a good relationship with a sports governing body and what are the things that cause tensions?
- What are the biggest advantages/what most appealed to you about sponsoring the Irish team(s)?
- What about the ad agency Boys & Girls... is it helpful to have one agency handling both rugby and soccer, or does it make things very complicated?
- Do the same people in Boys & Girls make the ads for rugby and soccer or do different teams work on different sports?
- For you as sponsor, what are the things that make for a good relationship with an ad agency and what are the things that cause tensions?

(ii) discussions of the ads themselves

- As you know Siobhan, I'm interested in comparing Irish rugby and Irish soccer. Take the ads 'An Ode to Fans' and 'All it Takes'... can you take me through the process of how those ads were made?
- Do you first talk to the IRFU and the FAI about what they'd like to see in the ads, and then mix this with your own ideas, and THEN "brief" Boys & Girls... or is the ad agency let loose to come up with their own ideas from the very start?

- Did Boys & Girls come to you with several ideas - some of which you rejected before going with Ode to Fans and All it take?
- Why did you approve those particular ads?
- Do you like them? [Why?]
- The team(s) probably unify the country more so than anything else, in depicting them for campaigns, what unifying Irish qualities do you think it's important to focus on?
- For me, they are quite different in terms of their look and feel - and how they depict the different sports - is that intentional on your part?
- Do you think of Irish rugby and Irish soccer as very different?
 - o [Can you please explain the differences]
- To me, they seem to portray different kinds of Irishness - would you go along with that? [Please elaborate]
- Just taking this suggestion further, do you think of either soccer or rugby as more "authentically" Irish?
 - o [Or do you think that others feel strongly about this?]
- It's normal for companies with lots of brands on their books to prioritize the leading brand - for example, Diageo prioritizes Guinness over Smithwick's - but how does it work for a sponsor... as a sponsor of two sports teams, do you value/prioritize one above the other?

(iii) responses of fans/viewers

- Have you received any feedback from fans/viewers on the ads we've discussed... has this been generally positive or negative?
- Fans can be very sensitive about how sport interacts with business; how big a factor is potential fan backlash when conceptualizing an ad campaign for your sponsorship of the team(s)?
- How much does the on-field success of the teams matter to you? Do you feel it has a serious impact (positively or negatively) on your brand?
- Can I ask a very broad question Siobhan... people overseas come to know Ireland through tourism and movies and books and Bord Failte campaigns and so forth... but how important is sports in shaping wider perceptions of Ireland?
- For the last decade or more - and right up to the present - Irish governments have been pushing Ireland as a high-tech, modern, professional destination... do you think this image is reflected in Irish sport... is it reflected equally well in Irish rugby and Irish soccer?

(iv) Others

- Possibility of accessing creative briefs given to ad agency
- You won 'Best Sponsorship Team' at last year's Sponsorship Awards; what is it that you feel separates you from other sponsors? (particularly other sports sponsors)

5:8 Boys and Girls Advertising Strategist Interview Prompts

- What level of input to *Three* and the FAI and/or IRFU have into your idea for the campaign? How regularly do you interact?
- For you as ad agency, what are the things that make for a good relationship with the sponsor – and likewise with a sport’s governing body, if appropriate – and what are the things that cause tensions?
- Do you think you’ve developed a good *feel* for what *Three* wants? [Do you think you’ve got a good *feel* for what IRFU/FAI want?]
 - o Do you think you’ve got a good *feel* for what *fans* want?
 - o Is it difficult for you handling *both* rugby and soccer?
- Both ads focus on celebrating Ireland through sport, was it difficult to find distinctive ways of conveying such a similar message?
- What was the purpose behind the ‘making of’ videos? How much do you feel they add to the overall campaign?
- Do you look to other foreign campaigns (using other national teams) for inspiration?
- Are you a fan of the sport?
 - o How did that affect your approach?
- B&G produces advertising for a lot of products and services, what’s different about advertising a sport?
- What values do you think the brand were hoping to be associated with by sponsoring the team? Were there specific qualities they wanted you to emphasise in the ads?
- A sponsor brand is in an odd position: everyone is aware of the commercial arrangement and financial benefits involved in their deal with the FAI/IRFU, but to earn fan support, they have to hide that – to an extent – and put more emphasis on the idea that they’re a supporter of the team, like any other. Is that something you or they discuss when planning campaigns?
- Irish rugby and Irish soccer are often seen as very different ... do you think of them as very different?
 - o To me, they sometimes seem to portray different *kinds of Irishness* - would you go along with that? [Please elaborate]

- Have you received any feedback from fans/viewers on the ads we've discussed...? [Has this been generally positive or negative?]
- People overseas come to know Ireland through tourism and movies and books and Bord Failte campaigns and so forth ... but how important is sports in shaping wider perceptions of Ireland?

Specific to 'All it Takes'

- Was it difficult to get hold of the three players for the ad? Why these players? Does your research suggest they are perceived in a certain way by fans? Do they embody a certain 'kind of Irishness' do you think?
- Was it a priority to use Ireland internationals for the ad? (previous sponsors, Guinness, hadn't)
- You depict the players as superhuman in a way that grabs the attention, but you also foregrounded how relatable they are in the behind-the-scenes mini bios; were you conscious of this balanced approach?
- To me the ad really emphasizes the professionalism of the players ... it's not overtly "Irish" as it were ... but the mini bios really emphasise traditional Irish culture. Were you consciously trying to "dial up" and "dial down" the Irish aspects between the main ad and the bios?

Specific to 'Ode'

- What's your opinion on the ad's distinctive tone?
- How did they choose the fan the camera dwelt on after the rapid montage?
- They had previously used Ireland internationals for (previous Three ads) 'Greens' and 'First Dinner Date,' did they consider using them again? Why did they opt not to?
- One thing that occurs to me watching Ode to Fans is that everybody looks kind of stereotypically Irish. Was that intentional – or did anyone say "we really ought to have some black or Asian faces in there?!"
- Do they think the kind of fandom celebrated in the ad is particular to the Irish?

5:9 Audience Survey on Euro 2016 Viral Fan Footage

VIDEO 1: “Irish Fans Sing Lullabies”

4. What does this video suggest to you about Irish football fans? [Please explain]

5. Does this video suggest anything to you about Irishness / Irish identity? [Please explain]

VIDEO 2: “Irish Fans Serenade French Girl”

1. What does this video suggest to you about Irish football fans? [Please explain]

2. Does this video suggest anything to you about Irishness / Irish identity? [Please explain]

VIDEO 3: “Clean up for the Boys in Green”

1. What does this video suggest to you about Irish football fans? [Please explain]

2. Does this video suggest anything to you about Irishness / Irish identity? [Please explain]

.....

Are you a sports fan? YES ☐ NO ☐

[If Yes, please tick the sports you like (you can tick more than one)]

Soccer ☐

Rugby ☐

GAA ☐

MMA ☐

Other ☐ Please list _____

Gender	Please tick
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age	Please list
How would you describe your socio-economic class	Please list

How would you describe your ethnicity	Please tick
White Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
White other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asian Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asian other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, including mixed background	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 6: Recent Irish Television Yearly Audience Figures

6.1 2014

Position	Programme	Notes	Date	Channel	Share	000's
1	The Late Late Toy Show		28/11/2014	RTÉ One	71.9	1594
2	Love/Hate	Episode 6	09/11/2014	RTÉ One	57.1	1150
3	RBS Six Nations (France v Ireland)		15/03/2014	RTÉ2	60.1	891
4	Amber	Episode 4	22/01/2014	RTÉ One	46.6	865
5	2014 FIFA World Cup (Final)		13/07/2014	RTÉ2	54.9	859
6	Mrs Brown's Boys: Mammy's Gamble		31/12/2014	RTÉ One	49.7	838
7	The Sunday Game Live (Football Final)		21/09/2014	RTÉ2	65.4	831
8	The Sunday Game Live (Hurling Final)		07/09/2014	RTÉ One	65.7	796
9	Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special: Mammy's Tickle		25/12/2014	RTÉ One	39.7	788
10	RTE News: Nine O'clock		02/03/2014	RTÉ One	40.2	728
11	RBS Six Nations (England v Ireland)		22/02/2014	RTÉ2	51.9	717
12	The Voice Of Ireland		02/02/2014	RTÉ One	41.2	702
13	The Late Late Show		28/02/2014	RTÉ One	47.8	700
14	2014 FIFA World Cup (Semi-Final)		09/07/2014	RTÉ2	48.1	698
15	Rose Of Tralee	Day 2, Part 2 at 21:30	19/08/2014	RTÉ One	47.3	697
16	The Saturday Game Live (Football Semi-Finals: Mayo v Kerry replay)		30/08/2014	RTÉ2	53.1	675
17	Fair City		04/02/2014	RTÉ One	40.7	673
18	Prime Time (Inside Bungalow 3)		09/12/2014	RTÉ One	41.0	671
19	The Sunday Game Live (Football Semi-Finals: Dublin v Donegal)		31/08/2014	RTÉ2	59.8	670
20	RTE News: Six One		06/01/2014	RTÉ One	48.5	670

6.2 2015

	Programme	Channel	000's	Share
1	Late Late Toy Show, The	RTÉ One	1,556.4	72.11
2	RWC Live France v Ireland	TV3	1,155.2	71.73
3	RWC Live Ireland v Argentina	TV3	1,095.3	73.41
4	RWC Live Ireland v Italy	TV3	958.5	62.73
5	Sunday Game Live - Dublin v Kerry: All Ireland Football Final	RTÉ2	881.6	60.21
6	Charlie	RTÉ One	851.7	46.61
7	Euro 2016 Qualifier Playoff: Ireland v Bosnia	RTÉ2	793.4	40.21
8	Euro 2016 Qualifier: Poland v Ireland	RTÉ2	772.1	41.03
9	Mrs Brown's Boys: Mammy's Widow's Memories	RTÉ One	766.5	47.13
10	RWC Live Ireland V Romania	TV3	760.7	58.53
11	RBS 6 Nations: Ireland v England	RTÉ2	760.3	53.33
12	Mrs Brown's Boys: Mammy's Christmas Punch	RTÉ One	749.4	42.61
13	Sunday Game Live - Kilkenny v Galway: All Ireland Hurling Final	RTÉ2	741.9	60.41
14	RTE News: Nine O'clock	RTÉ One	729.3	39.71
15	Late Late Show, The	RTÉ One	719.4	49.81
16	RWC Live England V Australia	TV3	688.3	42.61
17	Voice Of Ireland, The	RTÉ One	688.1	40.53
18	Sunday Game Live - Dublin v Mayo Football Semi Final	RTÉ2	682.6	61.11
19	Saturday Game Live - Dublin v Mayo Football Semi Final Replay	RTÉ2	679.1	60.71
20	Room To Improve	RTÉ One	653.4	39.91

6.3 2016

Rank	Description	Channel	000's	Share %
1	The Late Late Toy Show	RTÉ One	1571.6	76.18
2	UEFA EURO 2016 Live - Live Play - 26/06/2016 - France v Rep of Ireland	RTÉ2	1262.4	82.46
3	UEFA EURO 2016 Live - Live Play - Italy v Rep Of Ireland	RTÉ2	1231.3	71.88
4	UEFA EURO 2016 Live - Live Play - Rep Of Ireland v Sweden	RTÉ2	1082.8	70.72
5	The Sunday Game Live (All-Ireland Football Final)	RTÉ One	927.8	68.77
6	UEFA EURO 2016 Live - Live Play - Belgium v Rep Of Ireland	RTÉ2	925.1	77.94
7	The Saturday Game Live (All-Ireland Football Final Replay)	RTÉ2	843.5	62.57
8	The Sunday Game Live (All-Ireland Hurling Final)	RTÉ One	785.5	65.44
9	UEFA EURO 2016 Live - Live Play - 10/07/2016 - Portugal v France (Final)	RTÉ2	782.8	45.03
10	UEFA EURO 2016 Live - Live Play - 06/07/2016 - Portugal v Wales (Semi-Final)	RTÉ2	725.0	47.93
11	RTÉ News: Nine O'Clock	RTÉ One	721.4	45.69
12	Rebellion	RTÉ One	713.0	42.29
13	Mrs Brown's Boys: Mammy's Forest	RTÉ One	706.6	38.84
14	Guinness Series Live - Ireland v New Zealand	RTÉ2	683.0	48.38
15	Mrs Brown's Boys: Chez Mammy	RTÉ One	680.3	42.87
16	Room To Improve	RTÉ One	679.1	44.11
17	The Late Late Show	RTÉ One	678.8	47.35
18	RBS 6 Nations - Live - France v Ireland	RTÉ2	672.5	58.92
19	RBS 6 Nations - Live - England v Ireland	RTÉ2	630.8	47.36
20	Mrs Brown's Boys Live	RTÉ One	630.6	45.81

6.4 2017

Rank	Programme	Channel	000s	Share
1	The Late Late ToyShow	RTÉ One	1,345.7	70.22
2	The SundayGame Live (All-Ireland Senior Football Final) - Dublin v Mayo	RTÉ2	1,141.2	79.88
3	European Qualifiers: Play-Off for FIFA World Cup (second leg) - Republic of Ireland v Denmark	RTÉ2	1,038.8	57.55
4	The SundayGame Live (All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final) - Galway v Waterford	RTÉ2	918.5	72.85
5	World Cup Qualifier 2018 - Live - Wales v Republic of Ireland	RTÉ2	888.1	49.05
6	RTE News: Nine O'clock	RTÉ One	845.7	47.00
7	RBS 6 Nations - Live Play - Ireland v France	RTÉ2	828.4	82.40
8	RBS 6 Nations - Live Play - Wales v Ireland	RTÉ2	818.3	48.28
9	RBS 6 Nations - Live Play - Ireland v England	RTÉ2	753.2	58.38
10	Mrs Brown's Boys CSI: Mammy	RTÉ One	753.2	45.81
11	Mrs Brown's Boys: Mammy's Mummy	RTÉ One	731.7	41.17
12	The SundayGame Live (All-Ireland Senior Football Semi-Final) - Kerry v Mayo	RTÉ2	729.8	81.08
13	RTE News: Six One	RTÉ One	717.4	45.80
14	Room To Improve	RTÉ One	702.5	48.59
15	RTE News: One O'clock	RTÉ One	698.0	59.72
16	The Late Late Show	RTÉ One	690.4	50.31
17	Dancing With The Stars	RTÉ One	683.9	43.35
18	The SundayGame Live (All-Ireland Senior Football Semi-Final) - Dublin v Tyrone	RTÉ2	663.4	59.27
19	World Cup Qualifier 2018 - Live - Republic of Ireland v Serbia	RTÉ2	661.8	41.78
20	RBS 6 Nations - Live Play - Scotland v Ireland	RTÉ2	650.2	61.35

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