

The Extent of Sectarianism Online

Project Report produced for Nil by Mouth

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Please note: Since this report deals with analysis of sectarian language from Internet message boards, it may contain words and phrases that some readers may find offensive. No editing of messages has taken place and all have been included as they were originally written.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction	7
2. Methodology and challenges faced in investigation	9
2.1 <i>Defining sectarian language: ‘they’re just words’</i>	9
2.2 <i>Classification of content</i>	9
2.3 <i>Reasons for chosen analysis methods</i>	11
2.4 <i>‘Control’ football message boards</i>	11
2.5 <i>Popularity of Footymad and Rivals.net websites</i>	14
2.6 <i>Extent and limitations of analysis</i>	15
2.9 <i>Possible control methods for identified online sectarian content</i>	16
2.10 <i>Summary</i>	17
3. Literature review: CMC theory	18
3.1 <i>Introduction</i>	18
3.2 <i>CMC Modes</i>	18
3.2.1 <i>Technologies</i>	19
3.2.2 <i>Contexts of use</i>	20
3.3 <i>Reasons for CMC use: online communities</i>	22
3.4 <i>Netiquette, rules and online conduct</i>	24
3.6 <i>Summary</i>	28
4. Literature review: Sectarianism in Scotland	30
4.1 <i>The roots of sectarianism: Irish immigration</i>	30
4.2 <i>The Old Firm</i>	32
4.2.1 <i>National allegiances: the Old Firm and the rest of Scotland</i>	33
4.2.2 <i>Football violence: class based perceptions of football fans</i>	35
4.2.3 <i>Football fan power: fanzines and the Internet</i>	36
4.3 <i>Sectarianism: does it exist?</i>	36
4.3.1 <i>Popular perceptions of sectarianism</i>	37
4.3.2 <i>Sectarian violence</i>	38
4.4 <i>Legislation</i>	38
4.4.1 <i>‘Real life’ legislation</i>	38
4.4.2 <i>Online legislation</i>	39

4.5	<i>Anti sectarian initiatives</i>	41
4.5.1.	<i>'Social inclusion for all': government, church, education and charities</i>	41
4.5.2	<i>Football initiatives: Pride Over Prejudice and Bhoys Against Bigotry</i>	42
4.6	<i>Summary</i>	44
5.	Data analysis and discussion	46
5.1.	<i>Introduction and raw data</i>	46
5.2	<i>Football-related threads</i>	48
5.2.1.	<i>Football related threads and off-topic threads</i>	48
5.2.2	<i>Key findings</i>	51
5.3.	<i>Off-topic chat</i>	52
5.3.1	<i>Do message board users mind off-topic conversation?</i>	54
5.3.2	<i>Community and group feeling: advice and support</i>	55
5.3.3	<i>Contextualising threads</i>	57
5.3.4	<i>Off-topic conflict</i>	58
5.3.5	<i>Group hierarchies</i>	60
5.3.6.	<i>'Cyber warriors' and 'keyboard hardmen'</i>	61
5.3.7	<i>Key findings</i>	62
5.4	<i>Online sectarianism: off-topic sectarian threads</i>	63
5.4.1	<i>Sectarianism on the control boards</i>	63
5.4.2.	<i>Sectarian related material on the Old Firm boards</i>	65
5.4.3	<i>Conflict within sectarian threads</i>	67
5.4.4	<i>'Casual' sectarianism</i>	72
5.5.	<i>Main themes of sectarian threads</i>	74
5.6	<i>Possible control methods</i>	85
5.6.1.	<i>Effectiveness of possible control methods</i>	85
5.6.2.		87
	<i>Engaging in argument: message boards as a forum for dissent</i>	87
5.6.2.1	<i>Arguing with the intruders</i>	88
5.6.2.2	<i>Internal debate</i>	93
6.	Repeated Methodology – Analysis of Old-Firm Day 2 Threads	96
6.1	<i>Popularity of Footymad websites and numbers of message board threads</i>	96
6.2.	<i>Context of football related threads</i>	98
6.3.	<i>Off-topic chat</i>	98
6.3.1.	<i>Do message board users mind off-topic chat?</i>	98

6.3.2	<i>Levels of off-topic chat</i>	98
6.4.	<i>Online sectarianism: off-topic sectarian-related threads</i>	100
6.4.1	<i>Conflict and intrusion within sectarian-related threads</i>	103
6.4.2	<i>Main themes of sectarian-related threads</i>	106
6.5	<i>Effectiveness of possible control methods</i>	118
6.5.1	<i>Internal debate</i>	118
6.5.2.	<i>Arguing with the intruders</i>	121
6.6	<i>Non Old-Firm intrusion: identification with the Old Firm</i>	121
6.7.	<i>Casual sectarianism</i>	123
6.8.	<i>Sectarian posters: levels of involvement and intrusion</i>	124
6.8.1	<i>Multiple posting on own team's message board</i>	124
6.8.2		129
	<i>High levels of intrusion to the rival team message board</i>	129
6.9.	<i>Conclusions for Day 2</i>	130
7.	Day 3 Analysis – Extent of Sectarianism Across All Threads	133
7.1.	<i>Day 3 Context and Background</i>	133
7.2.	<i>Extent of Sectarian Threads on Boards on Day 3</i>	135
7.3.	<i>Types of Sectarian Threads on Boards on Day 3</i>	138
7.4.	<i>Obsession with the “Other”</i>	141
7.5	<i>Summarising the issues found in Day 3</i>	143
8.	Conclusions	145
8.1	<i>Discussing the findings</i>	145
8.2	<i>Issues for the Clubs themselves to consider</i>	147
8.4.	<i>Companies Hosting Sites Containing Sectarianism</i>	151
8.4.	<i>Further Issues of Concern</i>	153
8.5.	<i>Areas of Potential Further Research</i>	154
9.	Bibliography	156
	APPENDIX: The Old Firm on the Internet	161

Executive Summary

1. Work performed

1.1. The report initially investigated content on unofficial football message boards for six clubs: Celtic, Rangers, Liverpool, Everton, Dundee and Dundee United. The message boards chosen all had high popularity and usage, as measured by Alexa (<http://www.alexa.com>). Also studied were the background to sectarianism in Scotland, how people behave when online, and control methods for online behaviour.

1.2. The unofficial Old Firm message boards were studied on two separate days and were found to contain sectarian content in off-topic messages (i.e. not about football in any way) - 27% for Celtic and 8% for Rangers. Only off-topic messages were scanned to remove any justification for the material as being standard 'football banter'. A second day studied confirmed the findings of day one, with 15% of off-topic threads being classified as sectarian for both the Rangers and Celtic boards.

1.3. The unofficial Old Firm message boards were studied on a third day and this time all messages were studied. Proportions of content with sectarian elements were 41% for Celtic and 39% for Rangers.

1.4. A thorough, structured, search was also done to find all sites and forums pertaining to, or potentially containing, Old Firm content.

1.5. It took an enormous amount of time and effort to read and carefully analyse the volume of material created during the periods the message boards were studied. The amount of potential material that could be looked through was too much to be properly monitored.

2. Conclusions

2.1. Sectarian content was only found in the message boards for Celtic and Rangers and was entirely absent from boards for Liverpool, Everton, Dundee and Dundee United in the Day One search.

2.2. The sectarian content found included offensive stereotypes, accusations of bigotry, threats of violence and references to Northern Ireland. Many online names adopted by posters contained sectarian terms. Some fans though were certainly prepared to argue that such material had no relevance to either the clubs or to football in general. Some threats of violence were made against those opposing sectarianism both on the boards and 'offline'. There was no evidence that anyone from the clubs themselves was aware of the sectarian content on message boards.

2.3. A significant amount of sectarian content was produced by 'interlopers' – opposing fans. The proportion of baiting on the Rangers message board studied was negligible, because of strict moderation removing sectarian messages from Celtic fans.

2.4. The boards were found to be immensely popular for fans of both clubs, a popularity that is perhaps underestimated by the clubs themselves. The company hosting the boards needs to be brought into the wider debate on sectarianism, since being an English-based company they may be fully unaware of the issues relating to sectarianism in Scotland.

3. Recommendations

3.1. Celtic and Rangers as football clubs need to address the issue of sectarian content online in message boards which use their names. They should do this by:

- Requiring message boards using their names to register with the appropriate club, giving a contact person responsible for the proper operation of the message board
- Requiring that all registered message boards enforce a strict moderation policy blocking out interlopers and that moderators respond to any sectarian content posted with a standard message stating that such content is condemned by the club, is nothing to do with football and is potentially liable for legal penalties.
- Requiring that moderators report to the police any threats of violence against either posters or other named individuals.

3.2. Funding be made available to research:

- software tools for monitoring the activity of message boards, to offset the requirement on a person to have to read everything. Software tools could also help monitor Internet facilities not studied here (e.g. websites, chat channels) for sectarian content.
- the geographical locations of those that post sectarian content (discoverable by the IP number of the computer they post their message from). While this study has revealed sectarian content and attitudes online, studies in Glasgow itself have not been so clear cut about sectarianism in the 'real' world. It may be that 'outsiders' are responsible for a large proportion of sectarian content online, but this needs to be investigated more fully.

1. Introduction

This study will focus on two popular **unofficial** Celtic and Rangers football Internet message boards and gauge the level of sectarian content, if any, that is present. Celtic and Rangers have been used by many to represent the two sides of the sectarian divide in Scotland as supporters of the former team tend to come from Catholic communities and the latter from Protestant communities. While many studies have been undertaken into the nature of sectarianism in Scotland, there has of yet been no study into sectarianism on the Internet. As a tool of almost ubiquitous nature, and increasing importance to society, it is a medium that needs to be more clearly investigated across many areas.

Recent research into Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has revealed that the online environment can influence communication. One of the most important findings is that the relative anonymity of the online environment influences communication in two ways: the user experiences freedom from constraint but also freedom from responsibility (Thurlow et al., 2004). The absence of status markers such as gender, age, occupation and physical appearance may lead to a more uninhibited style of communication than in conventional face-to-face conversation and may result in the development of online communities of users with shared interests. However, the anonymity of the medium means that there is lower social accountability and a greater disregard for consequence and responsibility. This combined with the disinhibition of the online environment may also lead to a greater occurrence of flaming i.e. deliberately provocative, insulting or inflammatory posts. This lack of responsibility may result in the propagation of views that may be extreme in content.

This report acknowledges the point that sectarianism remains a salient issue in Scottish society, and as such has the potential to find its way into football-related Internet message boards. However, it is important to differentiate between the football 'banter' of normal and expected sporting rivalry and potentially damaging sectarian content. This is problematic as there is a lack of agreement on the exact definition of sectarianism from both outside and within the two communities. 'Real life' tensions are expressed in a number of ways and, depending on one's viewpoint these expressions may or may not be seen as sectarian:

... gestures include Celtic fans ostentatiously making the "sign of the cross" at the Rangers fans. The sign of the cross in itself is an expression of the Roman Catholic faith; however, using it to alarm, upset or provoke others might be a breach of the peace at common law. Similarly, the singing of loyalist songs like "The Sash" or "Derry's Walls" which celebrate the triumph of William of Orange, could be viewed as an expression of cultural solidarity, or as an attempt to insult and intimidate the opposition.

Cross Party Working Group on Religious Hatred (CPWGRH), 2003

For the purposes of this project, postings to the Celtic FC and Rangers FC Footymad message boards were examined. Four teams were chosen for comparison and control: the Dundee FC and Dundee United FC Footymad message boards (<http://www.Footymad.net>) and the Liverpool FC and Everton FC Rivals.net message boards (<http://www.rivals.net>). Footymad and Rivals.net host UK football team websites, all of which have their own message boards on which fans can discuss their chosen team. Football websites and message boards are ubiquitous online but separate URLs mean that fans are likely only to go to the sites related to their own team. Footymad and Rivals.net were chosen because they allow the user to alternate easily between his or her own team message boards and those of rival teams. As a result, interaction between both fellow fans and between rival fans can be observed. The message boards are the most popular feature of the both sites with, in August 2004, approximately 89% of Footymad users and 77% of Rivals.net users visiting the sites to use the boards (Alexa, 2004).

The potentially sensitive nature of sectarianism made necessary a strong and scientifically grounded methodology in order to eliminate researcher bias and prevent value judgements regarding what is and is not sectarian. Message board threads were analysed in an attempt to assess the extent of sectarianism online and the ways in which sectarian content is affected by the online environment. This was done via a process of categorisation and elimination. It was reasonable to assume that conversation on a football message board would revolve around the topic of football. Therefore, any non-football related threads were placed in an off-topic category for further analysis. Extracted from the off-topic category were threads which contained statements or conflict with religious, political or historical bases. It was hypothesised that the anonymity of the online environment would increase the likelihood of online conflict and sectarian content within the OF Footymad message boards. A full description of the methodology can be found in section 2 of the report.

2. Methodology and challenges faced in investigation

2.1 Defining sectarian language: ‘they’re just words’

It is unlikely that there will ever be one authoritative definition of sectarianism and sectarian language. Therefore, the main difficulty in designing a solid methodology for the analysis of message board content was in defining sectarian material – what is and is not sectarian? What is football ‘banter’ and what is harmful and divisive language? These ambiguities impact upon the perceptions of both those outside and within the communities.

In 1999, Rangers vice-chairman and QC Donald Findlay resigned after being caught on camera singing Loyalist sectarian songs. The secretary of the UK Loyal Rangers Supporters Club defended Findlay’s use of the words ‘Fuck the Pope’ by stating ‘They’re just words, he didn’t mean anything by them.’ (Brown, 1999). A 2003 Glasgow City Council commissioned report into sectarianism investigated the acceptability and offensiveness of terms such as ‘hun’, ‘fenian’, ‘paddy’, ‘paki’, ‘nigger’ and ‘poof’ amongst respondents (NFO Social Research, 2003). The report argued that it was the *context* and *intent* of language use which largely determined its meaning.

2.2 Classification of content

In order to identify different themes in the message board threads, a list of categories was generated. These categories were intended to reflect all areas of expected football conversation and debate along with the potential for off-topic (i.e. non football) discussion.

- 1.1 **Matches**
Past games, match results, future fixtures, tickets.
- 1.2 **Team**
Team performance and standing.
- 1.3 **Players**
Player performance; incidents involving specific players; signings, possible or hoped for signings.

- 1.4 **General**
Stadium seating; merchandise; sponsorship; club finances; fantasy leagues.
- 1.5 **Managers and club board**
Managers and managerial strategy; board decisions.
- 1.6 **Officials**
Referee decisions e.g. sending off, penalties; SFA (Scottish Football Association) and UEFA decisions e.g. bans, fines.
- 1.7 **Media**
Media portrayal of team; journalists; sports television programmes; club television channels.
- 1.8 **Fan behaviour**
Attendance at games; behaviour.
- 2.1 – 2.8 **Same category titles: derby rival**
- 3.1 – 3.8 **Same category titles: non-derby rival**
- 4 **Off-topic**
Any thread which did not fit into the above football-related categories. Threads in this category were then analysed for sectarian content.

Discussion on football message boards should be about football. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, threads which had no mention at all of football were extracted and placed in the off-topic category. Following this, the off-topic threads were examined for threads which referred to (i) religion, or (ii) politics or history (with reference to Northern Ireland). It was hypothesised that sectarian conflict, if it existed, would be what remained after ‘normal’ conflict is recognised and eliminated.

Message board threads were automatically harvested using a script designed by the computer technician in the Department of Computer and Information Sciences in the University of Strathclyde. Harvested threads from the OF boards and from the four control boards (see section 2.4) were deposited onto a secure server for analysis. This removed the need to enter the Footymad and Rivals.net sites and alternate between the boards. The boards would understandably be quieter out of season, at least in terms of football related discussion. Therefore, the timing of the study was fortunate in that the

football season began shortly before the threads began to be harvested and the 2004/5 transfer window was open, therefore generating discussion regarding possible signings.

2.3 Reasons for chosen analysis methods

... the researcher's self plays a significant role in the production and interpretation of qualitative data. The researcher's identity, values and beliefs cannot be entirely eliminated from the process.

Denscombe, 2003, p.268

Sectarianism is an emotive and sensitive topic. The potential for researcher involvement and bias was recognised in the initial research stages as something to be avoided. The freestyle analysis of message board content would elicit value judgements and prejudices in any person no matter how greatly he or she attempted to avoid this; it was therefore imperative to establish a solid and scientific analysis method such as classification and elimination. This method provided quantitative data for analysis: 'Quantitative research is based on the collection of "observable events and facts that can be measured"' (Gorman & Clayton 1997, p.23)

The classification approach avoided having to poll fans about what is and what is not sectarian, as opinions vary by individual and community. Classification was likely to produce more natural and objective results; the known presence of the researcher in a poll is likely to skew the results towards what the respondents think is appropriate.

2.4 'Control' football message boards

It is important to differentiate between expected and 'normal' sporting conflict between football fans and the use of online message boards to advocate and promote sectarian thought. If sectarian content existed on the Rangers and Celtic message boards studied, the boards would contain qualitatively different content to the boards of other football teams. In order to prove or disprove this hypothesis comparison 'control' boards were necessary to highlight differences or similarities in content. The boards selected for analysis were as follows:

Football Club	Website	Message board
Rangers Football Club	FollowFollow.com http://www.rangers-mad.co.uk	The Bear Pit
Celtic Football Club	Come on the Hoops http://www.celtic-mad.co.uk	Talkin Tic
Dundee United Football Club	Shed-Online http://www.dundeeunited-mad.co.uk	Shed Online
Dundee Football Club	Dundee-Mad http://www.dundee-mad.co.uk	Dees Banter
Everton Football Club	Whenskiesaregrey.com http://www.everton.rivals.net	Get on the pitch
Liverpool Football Club	Shanklygates.co.uk http://www.liverpool.rivals.net	The Boot Room

Table 2.1 Selected team websites and message boards

The ease with which users can switch between their own club message board and that of their rivals allowed inter-board activity.



Drop down menu allowing users to switch between team message boards

Figure 2.1 Celtic message board

Both the Dundee and Liverpoolian teams were chosen due to the nature of their city rivalries. In both cases they are historically close rivals, with passionate derby matches played regularly. The inclusion of both derby rivals from Scotland and England would hopefully lead to a solid control set in terms of Internet host, geography, history and fan-base against which to compare the Old Firm message boards. Further rationale for choosing the control teams are discussed below:

Dundee and Dundee United

- The Dundee and Dundee United boards were also hosted by Footymad.
- ‘Scottishness’ and geographical proximity: the Dundee teams play less than sixty miles away from the Old Firm and it would be reasonable to assume, to a certain extent, that the majority of fans of all four teams would be Scottish with similar backgrounds and upbringings.
- The Dundee teams currently play alongside the Old Firm in the Scottish Premier League; discussion regarding football on the boards was likely to be similar.
- Although the Dundee teams have no explicit religious rivalry at present, Dundee, founded in 1893, and Dundee United, founded in 1909, were originally Protestant and Catholic teams, respectively. Dundee United was originally known as Dundee Hibernian. These parallel religious undertones offered interesting grounds for comparison as, theoretically, sectarian material could be present on the Dundee and Dundee United boards due to this old link.

Everton and Liverpool

- Rather than focusing solely on Footymad sites and message boards, another host was selected for comparison. Footymad has message boards dedicated to the Liverpoolian teams but these are seldom used, most fans preferring to use these busier boards on Rivals.net.
- ‘Englishness’ and geographical distance: Liverpool and Everton play in the English Premier League over two hundred miles from Glasgow and therefore

their football discussions and fan-base would possibly differ to those of the OF and the Dundee teams.

- There are, however, similarities between the OF and the Liverpool teams. Glasgow and Liverpool have similar backgrounds in heavy industry and nineteenth century Irish immigration. Although this is no longer a point of conflict in the city, there has been religious conflict in the past. Therefore, theoretically, sectarian content could be found on these boards.

2.5 Popularity of Footymad and Rivals.net websites

Alexa is a search engine which monitors and records the volume of traffic on websites (<http://www.alexa.com>). Alexa retrieves relevant websites for the user in order of popularity - i.e. sites which have been visited most often – and specifies which areas of the website are most popular. The lower the traffic ranking the more popular the site – for example, the highly successful site Amazon has a ranking of 22, whereas the successful but lesser known bookselling site Advanced Book Exchange has a ranking of 3,237. Shown below are the average rankings recorded for the four selected Footymad sites over three months (search carried out on 20th August 2004).

Websites	Site Popularity	Average Traffic Ranking
Rivals.net	1 st	3,962
Footymad	2 nd	23,723
FollowFollow (Rangers)	3 rd	145,633
Come On The Hoops (Celtic)	4 th	790,510
Dundee-Mad (Dundee)	5 th	1,842,120
Shed-Online (Dundee United)	6 th	3,015,977
Whenskiesaregrey.com (Everton)	---	---
Shanklygates.co.uk (Liverpool)	---	---

Table 2.2 Average traffic ranking over three months for selected websites

No traffic rankings were retrieved for the Rivals.net Everton and Liverpool websites as, rather than having independent URLs like the Footymad sites (e.g. Follow Follow at <http://www.followfollow.com>), they are components of Rivals.net as a whole (e.g.

Whenskiesaregrey.com at <http://www.everton.rivals.net>). As a result, the only traffic ranking which can be retrieved for the English clubs' sites is the umbrella Rivals.net ranking. However, the popularity of the two English message boards can be surmised by looking at table 2.3 below.

2.6 Extent and limitations of analysis

The threads selected for initial classification and analysis were posted between 18:09 on the 16th August 2004 and 18:09 on 17th August 2004, i.e. over a 24-hour period. It was initially intended that postings would be examined over a one or two week period to allow for a fuller analysis. It soon became clear that this would be unmanageable given the volume of traffic on each of the message boards. The table below depicts the number of threads on each message board over a one-week period.

Message Boards	Number of threads over a one week period 16-23 August 2004
Rangers	4877
Everton	2392
Celtic	2107
Liverpool	558
Dundee United	249
Dundee	244

Table 2.3 Number of threads over a one-week period in descending order of popularity 16-23 August 2004

Clearly, the volume of traffic justified the decision. It would have been impossible to analyse 10,427 threads, each containing multiple posts, within the allotted time period. Any in depth study at a later date would require a computer system designed to automatically index and extract key terms of interest. For the purposes of this study breadth was favoured over depth: rather than analyse, for example, four boards over a longer period of time, it was thought more useful from a comparison and control position to analyse six boards over a shorter period of time. Given the circumstances, the analysis of board activity over one day would be sufficient to provide a preliminary snapshot of online football culture.

2.7 Ensuring Anonymity of Posters

It is not the purpose of this research to identify or highlight individual posters to message boards. The purpose of the study is to highlight the extent of sectarianism online, and as such the only content of interest is the thread content, not identifying the individuals who posted them.

To this end, a system of anonymising posters will be adopted in the later discussion of the thread content. Each Poster will be identified in the order in which their thread is discussed using the following system:

Poster 001, Poster 002, Poster 003, etc.

The researchers can identify each poster from a master file of IDs that will not be made public, but this report will not identify any individuals by username.

2.8 Follow-up Methodology

If sectarian content was found in the Day 1 message board analysis, two follow up stages would be undertaken:

- **Stage Two:** A Day 2 study of a random date, analysing again all message boards where sectarian content is found in the Day 1 analysis, using the same classification criteria.
- **Stage Three:** If sectarian material is found again on Day 2, a Day 3 study will be undertaken analysing all posts in the message boards, including those on football issues, for sectarian content, to give a fuller picture of the extent of sectarianism on the boards.

2.9 Possible control methods for identified online sectarian content

Following the analysis of sectarian message board activity, the possible success of the following control methods will be discussed.

- Removing sectarian posts
- Shutting down services and boards which contain sectarian content
- Banning those who post sectarian content
- Prosecuting those who post sectarian content
- Engaging in argument with those who post sectarian content.

2.10 Summary

It was hypothesised that this process of classification and elimination would provide an objective account of the nature and extent of sectarian content on the selected football message boards. The inclusion of the four control boards serves as a comparison to the OF boards. Although the initial analysis period was limited in terms of time, there is a great deal of significant content from which to draw conclusions, and follow-up studies in stages two and three would seek to prove or disprove any findings in the Day 1 analysis.

3. Literature review: CMC theory

3.1. Introduction

The following summary of the key features of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) theory is included in order to provide a context with which to understand the data analysis and discussion later in the report. It is difficult to understand the nature of online message boards without understanding CMC theory more clearly.

Computer Mediated Communication is human communication made possible by computers and has become, in recent years, largely web-based. Researchers have approached CMC from a variety of perspectives; it is a multidisciplinary area which can be explored via semantics, culture, sociology, information science and psychology. CMC theory is associated especially with Internet theory, as it is dependent on this relatively new technology and the advent of the World Wide Web (WWW). CMC is about far more than technology. Rather, 'communication mediated by the Internet is all about social life: people, interactions, relationships, identities and communities.' (Thurlow et al., 2004, p.29). It is the human element of CMC which makes it a multi-disciplinary area of research; CMC research is simply the study of 'how human behaviors are maintained or altered by exchange of information through the computer rather than in 'real life' (Wood and Smith, 2001).

3.2 CMC Modes

Online communication does not mirror real life communication and the majority of CMC research focuses on the differences between the two rather than their similarities. A CMC mode provides 'a cultural context within which observations about online communication can be interpreted.' (Herring, 2002, p.113). Herring claims that the most important finding of Internet research over the last fifteen years is that CMC varies according to

- The technologies on which it is based;
- Contexts of use.

3.2.1 Technologies

Synchronous CMC - e.g. chat - differs from asynchronous CMC - e.g. email - in terms of length, complexity, formality, and interactivity (Herring, 2002, p.112). The purpose and subject of the intended communication will also determine the tone of the communication. There follows a brief summary of the main types of CMC technologies and their key features (Herring, 2002). This summary excludes CMC modes such as Multi User Dimensions (MUDs), and Virtual Reality (VR) environments as not pertinent to and outwith the scope of this study. All summarised modes are text based. Emphasis lies on their asynchronicity or synchronicity, the number of recipients, the formality or informality of the mode and whether there is a moderator present in the proceedings. All of these factors are likely to have an effect on the nature of the conversation.

Email

- Text based
- Asynchronous
- Individual or multiple recipients
- Formal or informal

Listserv Discussion Lists/ Mailing Lists

- Text based
- Asynchronous
- Multiple recipients (list of subscribers) with shared interests
- Formal or informal
- Presence of moderator

Newsgroups / Message Boards

- Text based
- Asynchronous
- Multiple recipients (publicly available)
- Formal or informal
- Moderated or unmoderated

Chat

- Text based
- Synchronous
- Multiple recipients (whoever is in the chatroom)
- Informal
- Moderated or unmoderated

- Consists of *threads* of conversation each containing a number of *posts*.
- Overlapping exchanges

Private Chat

(e.g. MSN Messenger)

- Text based
- Synchronous
- Individual or multiple recipients
(one on one or small group of - generally known - contacts)
- Formal or informal
- Unmoderated

3.2.2 Contexts of use

(a) Cuelessness and identity play

Early CMC research relied on the ‘cues-filtered-out’ theory which focused on the absence of contextualising facial expressions, gestures and eye contact in online interaction. Status indicators such as age, gender, ethnic origin, occupation, income and physical appearance are also absent in the most immediate sense. This relative anonymity has been seen by some to lead to an egalitarian and liberating form of communication in which inhibitions are removed and each participant enters into communication without the prejudices and presumptions which colour face to face interaction (Turkle, 1996; Stone, 1995 in Whitley, 1997, p.147). As a result of the absence of physical cues, identity is open to reconstruction in a way that it not possible in ‘real life’. According to this theory a CMC user can play with a variety of identities: an overweight person becomes thin simply because he or she says so; a wheelchair bound person is able-bodied simply because they type it. More likely than not those receiving the messages are not looking out for identity play and these fictions will be taken as fact. Although the media tend to seize upon negative stories of child grooming and paedophile identity fraud, it is clear that identity play could be fun and liberating in certain more innocent situations. However to wholeheartedly accept this approach is perhaps overly technologically deterministic: the

means of communication – the computer – cannot be the only influence on communication and communicative outcomes (Baym, 1995). Rather, communication styles and norms are learned through socialisation and without this process the best that can be achieved in alternative identity construction is mimicry. In the long term inconsistencies in persona are bound to emerge (Whitley, 1997).

(b) Flaming, anonymity and online conflict

The polar consequences of online anonymity are freedom from constraint but also freedom from responsibility (Thurlow et al. 2004). Although the cuelessness and social anonymity of the CMC environment can lead to egalitarian communication, the loss of inhibitions and alternative identity construction may also generate a greater likelihood of conflict. Flaming involves the posting of deliberately provocative and inflammatory messages. This does not mean, however, that the online world consists of nothing but conflict:

It is not uncommon during such episodes to see voices of calm emerge as well as sharper reproaches to flame throwers. Just as the technology encourages flaming, so too does it encourage calls for restraint. (McLaughlin et al, 1995)

(c) Cue substitutions and gendered communication

Contextualising cues are substituted in various ways. In the relative anonymity of the CMC environment, real names are replaced by nicknames which often reflect something about the user's personality, attitudes, interests or beliefs. In a setting in which conventional status indicators are removed these nicknames, along with the words which the user writes, are the only clues to identity. Acronyms such as LOL (Laughing Out Loud), BTW (By The Way) and IMHO (In My Humble Opinion) are commonly used. By speaking in a code – even a well-known code - a certain sense of intimacy and connection with the individual or group is implied. Emoticons or 'smilies' such as ☺ and ☹ are used to emphasise a point or to clarify the tone of a message. Witmer and Katzman (1997) found that these emoticons were used chiefly by women as a result of gender differences in online language. Clearly, differences such as age, gender, ethnic origin and level of education cannot fail to result in different communication styles and content. Herring refutes claims that the anonymous and decontextualised online

environment is gender free and democratic. Rather, gender differences remain in the online environment and are evident in distinctive online styles of writing: ‘the male style is characterized by adversariality: put-downs, strong, often contentious assertions, lengthy and/or frequent postings, self-promotion, and sarcasm’, whereas ‘the female-gendered style, in contrast, has two aspects which typically co-occur: supportiveness and attenuation.’ (Herring, 1994). Furthermore, she found that men are more likely to flame – although women have the freedom to flame they are likely to be uninterested in doing so, resorting to the communicative style quoted above.

Interestingly, the men on the lists which Herring examines defend their flaming, placing high value on ‘freedom from censorship, forthright and open expression, and agonistic debate as a means to advance the pursuit of knowledge’ (Herring, 1994). The tension between free speech and the potential for hate speech is a key issue when studying online conflict. Undoubtedly freedom from constraint in the online environment may lead to unfettered debate, the formation of social networks, greater ease of communication and a whole host of other beneficial outcomes. However the flipside is freedom from responsibility and it is this feature which allows hate speech and offensive and harmful material to be disseminated and discussed on the Internet. This is discussed to a greater extent in sections 3.5 and 4.4.2.

3.3. Reasons for CMC use: online communities

The World Wide Web provides a forum for all those with access to the required technologies to share their interests. CMC supports the formation of groups whose members have shared interests in areas ranging from music, film, sport and health to astronomy, support groups, travelling, pets and literature. Users may become part of online communities for reasons of status and self-esteem, comradeship, idea swapping, confidence or to receive and give advice and support (Palme 2000 in Thurlow et al. 2004). Online communities are not communities in the traditional sense of geographical closeness and ‘inhabitation’. Rather than simply interacting in the same physical space as others, online community members become a part of that place, ‘as if one is part of the landscape’ (Jones, 1997).

People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge,

share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. (Rheingold, 1993 in Fernback and Thompson, 1995)

Popular and academic opinion regarding Internet use is often divided into two camps: some see the growth of online communication and communities as a positive affair through which people with common interests are united worldwide. Others however, believe that those who participate in online groups and the like will substitute the (inferior) online world for the (superior) 'real world' and face-to-face interaction. However, CMC is not used only as compensation for real life social communication by shy or isolated people. Rather, it is those with pre-existing social networks and regular social communication habits who are more likely to use CMC for social purposes. These people 'adapt new technologies to extend and expand their traditional forms of social interactions.' (Birnie and Horvath, 2002). Of course, CMC is used for a variety of reasons. Socially isolated or housebound users may find companionship online and this is an extremely positive feature of the technology, creating social networks where there were previously none. Equally, the technology may be utilised by those who, as Birnie and Horvath suggest, simply wish to communicate in a different way. It is unhelpful - and in fact, impossible - to generalise about the ways in which people use the Internet and CMC. What is clear however is that the reasons for use and the consequences of this use are neither simplistically 'good' or 'bad':

Contrary to media sensationalism, the Internet is neither a utopia, liberating people to form a global egalitarian community, nor a dystopia producing armies of disembodied, lonely individuals. Like any form of communication, it is as helpful or harmful as those who use it.

(Thurlow et al, 2004)

Can communication in online communities act as an adequate substitute for face-to-face interaction? Early research compared 'rich' media such as face-to-face communication with text based CMC and found the latter to be information 'lean', low in social presence and unsuitable for intimate, emotional or complex interaction and negotiation. Cuelessness and reduced social presence made it an inadequate form of communication. However, there is the suggestion that CMC is just as intimate and sociable a method of communication as face-to-face contact. Certainly, the feelings of friendliness and spontaneity which might be felt by participants in a 'real life' group can be mirrored in the online environment. Korenman and Wyatt examined the Women's Studies email

forum (WMST-L) for teachers, researchers, librarians and course administrators (Korenman and Wyatt, 1996). These researchers believed that the forum felt like a group and they were interested to see whether this feeling of 'groupness' was shared by other participants. Questionnaire results showed that factors such as discussion of personal experience and sense of community were valued highly by forum members. One WMST-L rule was that when responding to a previous message, members should include a synopsis of the previous message to help readers interpret the reply. However, this rule was often overlooked with messages demonstrating an 'adherence to an oral, face-to-face style of interaction characterized by spontaneity and an assumption that people who are reading the words will be able to put them in the appropriate context.' (1996, p. 237). This, along with frequent use of first names and the familiar user-ids and discourse of regular participants gave the list a feeling of 'group-ness'. Korenman and Wyatt concluded that interactions within WMST-L were similar to face-to-face interactions in a small group despite the academic content and purpose of the forum. Herring, who states that 'academic discussion lists contain more opinions and emotional debate than facts', corroborates these findings (2002, p.134).

3.4 Netiquette, rules and online conduct

(a) Rules

Although there is perhaps a greater potential likelihood of flaming and poor conduct online, chat rooms and message boards are not lawless environments. Just as in 'real life', behavioural norms are established and sanctions apply to those who step outside the boundaries. There are a number of potentially frowned upon activities which are summarised below (adapted from McLaughlin et al. 1995 in Smith, 1997).

- (i) 'Incorrect/novice use of technology** : e.g., editing and formatting errors, multiple postings or signatures
- (ii) Bandwidth Piggery** : e.g., excessively long article or signature, quoted material longer than comment, indiscriminate cross-posting, asking a frequently answered question

- (iii) **Violation of Usenet Conventions** : e.g., incorrect or missing subject headers, failing to encrypt offensive material, posting to an inappropriate newsgroup or otherwise demonstrating lack of regular reading
- (iv) **Violation of Newsgroup Conventions** : e.g., lack of familiarity with and failure to use appropriate subject headers or abbreviations, failing to conform to group spirit or style and group traditions regarding appropriate topics
- (v) **Ethical Violations** : e.g., posting private email or personal information about others without permission, misattributions or misquoting of sources, harassment of individual posters
- (vi) **Inappropriate Language** : e.g., flaming (personal attacks, ridicule), hostile or coarse language, linguistic affectations which distract or detract from message content
- (vii) **Factual Errors** : e.g., spelling and grammatical errors, mistakes with respect to names, dates, places, and events, errors in summarizing others' posts'

These behaviours are not uniformly frowned upon; what one group condemns another might tolerate or even advocate (in, for example, newsgroups such as alt.arguments or alt.flame). McLaughlin (1995) proposes that sanctions for inappropriate behaviour such as off-topic threads (topics which have nothing to do with the main interest of the group) exist in 'an attempt to preserve the integrity of that community's *raison d'être*'. The online community is bound together primarily by shared interests and it is from this starting point that a form of 'community spirit' can grow. Established behavioural norms and an understanding of the possible penalties for transgression are necessary for confident use of online fora: users must know the rules in order to follow them or to know how to break them.

(b) Sanctions

Sanctions vary from the mild to the extreme. A simple mistake made by a 'newbie' unaccustomed to the technology or norms of the group may result in a mild reproach or a sarcastic correction. It is generally the case that only deliberate and repeated rule breaking or flaming will result in more severe sanctions. Occasionally those who deliberately flame will incite a flame war in which all group members become involved. Baker (2001) cites the resolution strategies used in one Usenet flame war which he

observed. Some or all of these reactions may be utilised in an attempt to resolve the unwelcome situation, eject the offender and return the group to its status quo.

- **Advocate sympathy and understanding**

Group members pity the offender's stupidity in a superior and patronising manner.

- **Laissez-faire approach**

This approach assumes that the offender is flaming to get a reaction from the other members and will become bored and cease to post if there is no response.

- **Flame**

Group members fan the flame war by responding to the offender in the same offensive fashion.

- **Threats of physical violence**

As communication is online, it is fairly unlikely that the offender and a group member will meet face-to-face and engage in physical combat. However, this response is interesting as it illustrates the level of anger which text on a screen can incite and challenges the theory of emotionally inadequate and 'lean' CMC.

- **Censorship**

Censorship is a controversial approach which violates the civil libertarian values of free speech which lie at the heart of the Internet. Following the suggestion of censorship, the offender in Baker's study quite justifiably wrote: 'if you muzzle me because you don't like what *I* say, who's next on your list? Catholics? Freemasons? Veterinarians?' The main problem in any type of censorship is that the censoring individual or group act as judge and jury, effectively deciding what is 'right' and what is 'wrong', silencing the offender and removing his or her right to free speech. However, if the group is being damaged by the offender's actions, what are the alternatives? This quandary will be examined in greater depth at a later point with reference to sectarian content and possible control methods on the OF message boards.

- **Exposure**

In Baker's study, the offender's true identity was exposed by a group member who located his Usenet profile, publicly stored on Dejanews (<http://www.dejanews.com>). Again, this is a controversial strategy as it infringes on the privacy of the individual. Importantly, the ease with which this occurred shows that the online environment is not as anonymous as some users might believe. Even when facilities such as Usenet profiles are not available, identifying IP addresses are generally logged when registering with a chat room or message board and all online activity can be traced back to the perpetrator.

3.5 Extremism on the Internet

The taxonomy of inappropriate behaviour listed above is mild in comparison with other online material. The Internet is potentially a rich breeding ground for extremist views which are usually shunned and silenced within the mass media. On the Internet any person with access to the required technologies is, in theory, able to disseminate their views to a mass audience (Brophy et al., 1999). One is fairly unlikely to come across extremist material while simply browsing on a popular search engine such as Google. However, if a user is purposefully looking for material such as this it is easily located. The top two results retrieved with a quick search on Google using the search terms 'nigger' and 'hate' were:

- 'I hate nigger kids – TeenOutReach.com Discussion Forum' (www.teenoutreach.com/entertainment/wwwboard/ubbhtml/Forum28/HTML/001238.html) and
- 'd2jsp forums -> I Hate Niggers and Asians' (forums.d2jsp.org/index.php?showtopic=190628&st=10).

Google Groups (<http://www.groups.google.com>) include groups such as alt.fuck.niggers, alt.flame.fucking.faggots, alt.flame.chinese and alt.flame.pakis, all of which contain racist or bigoted material. Threads on these groups range from the obnoxious and inane to worryingly polished 'academic' pieces advocating white separatism and other extremist policies (for example, pw1.netcom.com/~owensva/separatist.html, a link found on alt.flame.hispanics). The existence of views such as these in online fora does not necessarily mean that the message will be disseminated to a wide audience; they may be

seldom read or may even provide the basis for debate with those who disagree. Equally, views such as these were just as prolific before the growth of the Internet: there is no evidence to prove that access to online extremist material has increased the number of extremists in the world. However, the fact remains that material such as this is now available at the click of a mouse for those who wish to view it:

...with the emergence of electronic mail and the WWW, subversives are now discovering the means of propagating their message beyond the narrow confines of pre-established alliances. (Zickmund, 1997)

Robust methods of control are not yet in place to control extremist material on the Internet; this is discussed at greater length in section 4.4.2 of this report. Zickmund suggests that interaction with outsiders might act as an alternative to censorship: 'The openness of the internet and its interactive options may make it less likely for supremacists to break away from society and to form isolated cultures completely outside the reach of moderating influences.' (1997, p.203). Therefore, although the Internet provides a forum for the possible dissemination of extremist views, it also challenges the isolation of these closed communities and forces extremists to engage with other dissenting members of society. 'In doing so it could become an ally in the struggle against bigotry and racism.' (1997, p. 204).

3.6 Summary

- CMC is a relatively new area of research and is multidisciplinary in nature. It is about more than technology, it is also about people, relationships, identities and communities.
- Although the type of CMC mode has an effect on the type of communication, so too does context.
- The anonymous nature of the online environment and the absence of contextualising cues means that users can indulge in identity reconstruction.
- CMC technologies foster the growth of online communities which challenge the idea that CMC is an 'information lean' form of communication. Contextualising emoticons and abbreviations convey emotion. Users participate in these communities for a number of reasons and experience a feeling of 'group-ness'.

- Within these communities, just as in 'real life', there are rules and social norms which must be adhered to, and a number of sanctions used against those group members who do not comply.
- The anonymity of the consequence free online environment may lead to a greater likelihood of flaming and offensive behaviour.
- CMC technologies may breed extremism and provide an audience for extremist thought. However, they also provide a platform for dissent and ensure that the dangers of extremism are visible to all.

4. Literature review: Sectarianism in Scotland

4.1 The roots of sectarianism: Irish immigration

Sectarianism is about more than religious difference. Religion is the major distinction between Protestant and Catholic communities and, as such, is the difference which labels each one. However, rather than being a source of conflict in its own right, it is a social marker through which conflict is articulated. Sectarianism itself involves historical, cultural, economic, national and territorial issues and it is perpetuated through ideas, individual actions and social structures. Religion, more often than not, is invoked in order to draw boundaries (Brewer, 1991).

Sectarianism is not just a matter of economic, social or political consideration; nor is it simply a question of personal attitude or behaviour. It is an historical and cultural phenomenon arising out of religious and political differences and perpetuated by group and self-interests. (Community Relations Council, 2004)

The sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland has significant influence over football related sectarianism in Scotland as support for both OF teams is strong in Northern Ireland and some Scottish OF supporters have sympathy for the Loyalist or Republican movements. Scotland has no deep-seated history of political or nationalistic internal conflict and OF-related sectarianism is a far less extreme version of the Northern Irish situation. Therefore, sectarianism occupies a peculiar place in Scottish society in which some claim that it does not exist at all yet others believe that it affects them on a daily basis.

Depending on your sources, the prejudice against Scots of Irish-Catholic origins is a living scar, a figment of paranoid imagination, or a relic of Scotland's past. For some it is a 90-minute prejudice, alive and screaming for the duration of an Old Firm game, forgotten as soon as it is over... But there are others, mainly Catholics who have been the victims of prejudice, who believe that prejudice has never ceased to exist and that it has manifested itself in venues other than football. (Murray, 1998, p.102)

The roots of sectarian lie with the Union of Crowns in 1603, when James VI of Scotland became James I of England to ensure a Protestant succession following the death of Elizabeth I. Catholicism declined in Scotland until it was forcibly suppressed after the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobites at Culloden in 1745. Sectarianism was rekindled in the nineteenth century following an influx of Irish immigrant workers to the country as a result of the Great Famine. These migrants settled in Glasgow and its

surrounding regions chiefly because of opportunities for employment in shipbuilding and allied heavy industries. Although there was a greater level of migration to Scotland, migrants gathered in all industrial areas throughout the UK; in fact, Lancashire was witness to the most violent conflicts between Irish immigrants and British workers (Gallagher, 1987, p.23). By 1850 there were already around a quarter of a million Irish-born in Scotland and this large-scale immigration continued until the 1920s (Devine, 1999, p.487).

Irish migrant workers were seen as alien invading savages and were blamed for overcrowding and disease. This antipathy was largely because of the idea that the Irish were taking jobs from native Scots and driving wages down (Edwards, 1993, p.48). Although circumstances were gruelling for all of the Irish migrants, 1 in 5 immigrants were Ulster Protestants and this group was assimilated more easily into Scottish society as they shared the majority population's religion and a common hatred of Catholicism's bond with Rome and 'Popery' (Devine, 1999, p.482). These Irish Protestants brought Orangeism with them to Scotland. In immigration-era Scotland the Catholic religion was racialised:

Racism refers to those negative beliefs held by one group which identify and set apart another by attributing significance to some biological or 'inherent' characteristic(s) which it is said to possess, and which deterministically associates that characteristic(s) with some other (negatively evaluated) feature(s) or action(s). The possession of these supposed characteristic(s) may be used to justify the denial of the group equal access to material and other resources and/or political rights. (Miles, 1982, p. 78-9)

Invalidation myths and ideologies are designed to dehumanise target minorities and legitimise the violation of their human rights (Kallen, 1998). Claims regarding the Irish Catholics were racial in nature as the criticisms – lazy, dirty, stupid, savage – were considered to be biologically inherent in Catholics and were designed to dehumanise individuals and the community as a whole. The Scottish people were free to violate the human rights of Irish Catholic immigrants in all areas of society.

The aims of the Scottish and Irish Catholic communities were, in fact, somewhat similar. The Irish Catholic community which had been forced to migrate because of poverty, unemployment and famine did not *want* to unreservedly integrate and assimilate with the host society, just as their hosts did not want them to. Catholic schools were established

to protect Catholic youth from the threat of Protestant education. When compulsory education was introduced in Scotland by Act of Parliament, the Catholic Church refused state funding and continued to govern and pay for their own schools. In 1918 Catholic schools joined others already in the state system but reserved the right to maintain religious instruction and select only Catholic teachers (Edwards, 1993, p.58). Today, Glasgow has 11 Catholic and 18 non-denominational secondary schools and Catholic schooling continue to be a bone of contention for those who believe that separate schooling sustains sectarianism (GCC, 2004c).

4.2 The Old Firm

Rangers FC and Celtic FC have always been strongly allied with the Protestant and Catholic communities from which they emerged. Celtic Football Club was founded in the east end of Glasgow in 1888 by an Irish Marist brother in an attempt to keep young Catholics away from the dangers and temptations of Protestant society. Certainly, the club's success was a source of pride in its early days to those Catholics who felt rejected by Scottish society. The transformation of Celtic into a commercial success meant that links to the church were weakened over time and Celtic's inclusive signing policy meant that the club became, to some extent, a source of integration between Catholics and Protestants (Murray, 1998, p.255). Rangers, founded prior to Celtic in 1873, were tipped to be the team which would challenge Celtic's unwelcome success and both teams soon attracted large numbers of supporters divided by religion and attracted by the religious basis of these footballing confrontations. The commercial awareness of the two teams lent them the nickname the Old Firm and the two teams existed – and still do – commercially and culturally in a strange symbiosis: despite their intense rivalry it is arguable that neither team would be as successful without the other.

Rangers, in the Scottish Protestant tradition, have always been seen as the more wholeheartedly sectarian side, popular perceptions being of the poor Catholic underdogs victimised by Protestant Rangers. In turn, Protestant Rangers paint a picture of a paranoid Celtic team and Catholic community. Rangers did not publicly sign Catholic players until 1989 when Graham Souness broke with tradition and signed Catholic striker Maurice Johnston. Although some Rangers fans were happy with the signing, on the following day the *Daily Record* showed pictures of fans burning their scarves and a wreath

placed outside Ibrox stadium mourning the loss of '116 years of tradition' (Murray, 1998, p.44). Although Souness claims that he signed Johnston purely because he was the best player for Rangers, the signing was an important development for Rangers as Celtic could no longer claim the moral high ground in the sectarian affair.

OF football has always been intrinsically linked with religion and with sectarianism. Gallagher (1987, p.2-3) suggests that, in the past, OF football rivalry acted as 'a useful tension releasing valve' for a city divided by religion. Footballing rivalry stopped Glasgow 'from being engulfed in sectarian warfare'. However, Kubar believes that this is no longer the case.

I once believed football was a pressure valve for society's frustrations, but in Glasgow the inequalities that gave rise to those frustrations are no longer there. Nearly half of Scottish Catholics marry non-Catholics, Scottish Catholics have the same economic prospects as Protestants and a very small percentage of people still go to church. Football is no longer that pressure valve, it's actually the problem: without the Old Firm there would be no flashpoint. The Old Firm is now the means by which this hatred is perpetuated; religion is simply a pretext. (Quoted in Bath, 2004)

Kubar believes that the majority of OF fans borrow religious language to place the rivalry in a historical perspective. This heightens the atmosphere of the match and provides a rationale for their hatred which, in reality, has little more substance than basic football rivalry and hatred of the opposition. However, whether religion is the pretext for hatred or its cause, football is undoubtedly connected with sectarian beliefs and behaviour.

For some, the role of football was so significant that it actually replaced religion as the source and focus of sectarian attitudes and behaviours "If we're talking just about Glasgow, it isn't a religious thing... It's a football team thing" (NFO Social Research, 2003)

4.2.1 National allegiances: the Old Firm and the rest of Scotland

Sectarianism is seen by many in Scotland as a peculiarly West Coast phenomenon and one from which many football fans elsewhere seek to distance themselves. In Aberdeen, for example, the sectarian goings on of the OF are derided and despised - especially those of Rangers, Aberdeen FC's sworn enemy. This is partly because the religious conflict which causes or is used as a pretext for sectarian violence is alien to Aberdonians, and, to a large extent, the rest of Scotland. In Aberdeen, there are no

religiously based 'ghettos' and no sectarian-related crimes (Styles, 2000, p.119). Viewed from a distance, Glasgow and the OF rivalry seems very odd indeed.

For the majority of Scottish international fans, identity is more likely to be formed and expressed in Scottish national terms. The tendency for Celtic fans to brandish Irish flags and sing Republican songs such as *The Boys of the Old Brigade*, and Rangers fans to wave Union Jacks and sing Loyalist songs such as *The Sash* is scorned; one non-OF supporter during the 1996 European Championships stated 'its Scotland they live in. If they don't like it then get them to fuck.' (Bradley, 2002). The non-OF Tartan Army abroad are resolute in their 'Scottishness' and this remains the case at their own team's games. Styles recalls the 'surreal' sight of Rangers fans taunting Aberdeen fans during a match by singing 'Rule Britannia': unable to attack the religious identity of their derby rivals by singing anti-Catholic songs, they resorted to attacking their non-derby rivals' national identity (2000, p.118). Giulianotti suggests that, pre 1980, Scottish fans were seen as drunken and violent football hooligans. Post 1980, Scottish fans changed their approach and accordingly their image in a nationalistic bid to distance themselves from the tag of 'British' hooligan. Heavy drinking was transformed from a dangerous stimulant into a friendly and sociable pastime for a good-hearted nation of Scottish football fans.

Spurred on by the popular stereotypification of the antithetical English fan as instrumental soccer hooligan, and the international debate on subsequently penalizing English soccer which tended to conflate English and British fans, Scottish fans coated themselves, with the brush of the authorities and the media, in a friendly and internationalist patina. (Giulianotti, 1995, in Marsh et al., 1996)

It seems then, that football fandom revolves around national allegiance and setting ones own team and individual identity in opposition to the Other i.e. the rival team. Many non-OF fans develop their identity in Scottish nationalistic terms, directly in opposition to Britain and 'Britishness'. Many Rangers fans maintain a British loyalist identity, directly in opposition to Ireland and 'Irishness' and often, bizarrely, in opposition to Scotland and 'Scottishness'. Many Celtic fans have allegiances and identity with Ireland and place this in direct opposition to the 'Britishness' of Rangers. Viewed in this way, it is clear that there is more to sectarian actions and behaviour than religion: national allegiance and rivalry also plays a significant role and this serves to alienate the OF and its fans from the rest of Scotland.

4.2.2 Football violence: class based perceptions of football fans

Sport involves competition and conflict. Regardless of the sport, supporters have a shared emotional investment in proceedings and, to some extent, a shared opposition to the Other. However, the ways in which competitive feelings are expressed differ according to the sport played and the fans which are involved. For example, the differences between a Wimbledon final and an OF derby are patently obvious. This in part stems from the perceived class differences between the two sets of fans and the association which football has always had with working class hooliganism. Football has always been the preserve of the working class and Murray refers to a newspaper which in the aftermath of the Bradford and Brussels disasters dismissed football as 'a slum sport played by slum people in slum conditions.' (1998, p.15) In the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, 96 people were crushed to death and countless others injured as a result of an unprepared and incompetent Police force allowing too many supporters into the grounds. Blame was promptly turned on the fans themselves with both the media and the police force attributing the disaster to drunken, ticketless hooligans pushing their way into the pens and heedlessly crushing fellow supporters to death. Fans were later accused in the media of pick-pocketing the dead and urinating on police officers who were trying to save lives. Jacques George, president of UEFA, said 'One had the impression that they were beasts waiting to charge into the arena.' (Hillsborough Justice Campaign, 2004). Football supporters have always been an easy target for the tabloid media and their treatment is undoubtedly connected to the working class origins of the sport. Stuart Hall suggests that an amplification spiral is at work in press coverage of football violence. Sensationalised accounts of violence in the press convince the moral majority that there is a dangerous threat which needs to be dealt with; this atmosphere of confrontation results in more people than were originally involved in the violence being drawn into it: 'Next week's confrontation will then be bigger, more staged, so will the coverage, so will the public outcry, the pressure for yet more control.' (Hall, 1978 in Marsh et al., 1996). Although the press does not cause football violence, damning reports of supporter behaviour in newspapers may serve to exacerbate existing problems of football violence and hooliganism.

4.2.3 Football fan power: fanzines and the Internet

Fanzines are an integral part of UK football culture. Fanzines are produced by fans, bought by fans and exist to promote the views of fans. They are amateur publications which are created with an outsider, alternative ethos in mind. Music fanzines originally grew out of the punk movement of the late 1970s and the first football fanzine arrived in 1986 with the English *When Saturday Comes*. In recent years, paper fanzines have been frequently either replaced or supplemented by online versions: ‘they are superb mouthpieces for fan power, and as such have transferred effortlessly to cyberspace.’ (Auty, 2002).

Fans often believe that the mass media is biased in favour of particular clubs, overly uncritical and does not offer a forum for supporters’ opinions. In addition, there is the perception that fans are not kept informed of the inside workings of the clubs and that there is too close a relationship between the media and the football clubs (Giulianotti, 1997). In comparison, fanzines exist solely to provide a voice for supporter’s views and opinions and often define themselves against the official club publications and corporate concerns – for example, the official Celtic publication is called *The View* and the longest running, most successful Celtic fanzine calls itself *Not The View*. Another newer Celtic fanzine, *Alternative View*, states on its website:

The biggest surprise is that it has taken so long for a challenge to emerge to the bland official Club publication, the AV promises to tackle all the issues and give it to you straight, written by Celtic fans, for Celtic fans free of corporate censure [sic].
(Celtic Supporters Association, 2004)

The CPWGRH (2003) acknowledges that supporter fanzines and websites may be a potential source of sectarian material. However, fanzines such as the Manchester United fanzine ‘Red Action’, or the Hibs fanzine ‘The Proclaimer’ were inspired by their founders’ desire to combat the problem of racist chants amongst supporters. Giulianotti (1997) believes that although the fanzines are explicitly anti-racist their representations of other teams and supporters create a form of ‘neo-racism’.

4.3 Sectarianism: does it exist?

In 1999, composer James McMillan presented a lecture on ‘Scotland’s Shame’ at the Edinburgh International Festival which caused an unprecedented stir and reawakened the

popular and academic debate regarding sectarianism, an issue which had long been swept under the carpet. It could be argued that the anti-sectarian initiatives outlined in section 4.5.1 are an indirect result of the controversy. McMillan claimed that

In many walks of life – in the workplace, in the professions, in academia, in politics and in sport – anti-Catholicism, even when it is not particularly malign, is as endemic as it is second nature. (Devine, ed. 2000, p.15)

Conversely, Bruce et al. (2004) argue that statistics regarding sectarian incidents and murders are greatly exaggerated, socio-economic differences between Protestants and Catholics are negligible and that inter-marriage is now a common occurrence. They state that ‘anecdotal’ evidence of attacks cannot be taken to be representative of a widespread problem: ‘Scotland is not sectarian, but there’s a lot of casual acceptance of stereotypes which leads people to hysterically inaccurate conclusions’ (Johnston, 2004).

4.3.1 Popular perceptions of sectarianism

Do members of the Glaswegian public share Bruce’s opinion? In February 2001 Glasgow City Council formally recognised that sectarianism was a problem for the city and commissioned a study into its scale, nature and impact, utilising focus groups, telephone interviews and surveys amongst a 1000 person sample of the population. The study revealed that the majority of respondents believe sectarianism to be a current and prevalent problem in Glasgow and one which shows no signs of improving. Disturbingly, 65% believed sectarian violence to be very or quite common and 58% believed sectarian threats and harassment to be common (NFO Social Research, 2003). The majority of respondents felt that sectarianism was more common on an individual basis rather than as an institutional feature, but 25% still felt that it was common in the workplace. This may, in fact, be the case, as suggested in a qualitative investigation into employment discrimination against those of Irish origins (Walls and Williams, 2003). This study revealed an abundance of evidence pointing to continuing discrimination in the workplace on the basis of surname and secondary schooling and concluded that ‘Academic assertions that Catholics are no longer discriminated against are both premature and unfounded, and run counter to non-academic perceptions’. However, perceptions of individual or institutional sectarianism need not correlate with reality and lived experience as an extremely small proportion of respondents in the Glasgow City Council commissioned study had actually experienced crime, physical violence or

discrimination in the workplace as a result of their religion. This contrasts with their former assertions that sectarian discrimination and violence were rife in Glasgow (NFO Social Research, 2003), and could be argued as verifying Bruce's claims.

4.3.2 Sectarian violence

Currently, there exists a great deal of anecdotal opinion surrounding the issue of sectarian violence. While media attention focuses on the exploits of football hooligans during major games and championships, more 'everyday' football violence in Scotland goes unreported to the police and is therefore unpublicised in the national media. This silence strengthens the position of those who claim that football related violence is in decline in the West of Scotland. Martin Watt is a consultant in the Accident and Emergency unit at Monklands Hospital in North Lanarkshire, on the border of historically Protestant Airdrie and Catholic Coatbridge. He states that

What is usually reported is the number of arrests at the match. If there are 20 arrests the police will say it's quiet. But what we get are the people who have been attacked on the street or gone into the wrong pub. Six to 12 assaults and a couple of serious stabbings is normal for an Old Firm match. (Curtis, 2004)

Although doctors remain uncertain about how much of the violence is specifically sectarian rather than 'just' football related, it undoubtedly accounts for a proportion of incidents. Allegedly, between 2000 and 2001, there were four attempted murders, five stabbings and more than 130 arrests potentially linked to sectarianism although this data was not systematically recorded by Strathclyde police force (Curtis, 2004). The perceptions of ordinary Glaswegians, the unofficial claims of doctors such as Martin Watt and the unrecorded estimations of the police force remove sectarianism from academic discourse and position it firmly in a landscape of anxiety, assault and murder.

4.4 Legislation

4.4.1. 'Real life' legislation

The Cross Party Working Group on Religious Hatred (CPWGRH) explored whether legislation in Scotland was necessary and whether it would be enforceable and likely to lead to a decline in sectarianism and other religious hatreds. The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act states that an offence is aggravated by religious prejudice if it is carried out

with 'malice and ill-will based on the victim's membership [or presumed membership] of a religious group' (Scottish Parliament, 2003). In such cases, the court must take this religious motivation into account when sentencing is passed. However, it is not always possible to measure the extent of these motivations as it is difficult to define an explicitly religious attack.

Political and cultural differences may have been historically based on religious differences but it can still be hard to identify an informed religious perspective in a so-called "sectarian" attack. Focusing on religious differences can be a way of expressing cultural intolerance or racist attitudes. It may even be difficult to disentangle whether religious, racist or cultural beliefs are an impetus to harmful or violent behaviour, or simply a cloak. In many cases, religious difference might be the pretext for, rather than the cause of, an assault. The situation can become further complicated when intense rivalry between supporters of certain football clubs becomes a factor in behaviour associated with sectarianism. (CPWGRH, 2003, 2.04)

Therefore, using a sectarian term of abuse to provoke violence may be, in actuality, the same as using a non-sectarian term of abuse: the former term may have added religious and historical significance but both are designed to create the same reaction. However, whatever the semantic difficulties some effort must be made to measure the extent and nature of the problem. Data regarding religious hatred as a factor in criminal incidents was not collected in the past and therefore no clear picture yet exists of levels of sectarian motivation in football-related incidents. However, Strathclyde Police force have recently begun to record and reveal religious stimulus behind offences; 22 arrests for sectarian-related offences at the OF derby were recorded on August 29th 2004 (Wilson, 2004). This new development will hopefully, in the future, lead to the establishment of a solid base of evidence regarding levels of sectarian motivation in football related violence.

4.4.2 Online legislation

The CPWGRH (2003) pays only passing mention to online religious hatred: 'supporter fanzines and websites may be a potential source of sectarian material'. However, as shown previously, Internet technologies can provide a forum for the dissemination of many forms of hate speech. Furthermore, although nation states can legislate against 'real life' criminal offences, cyberspace is at present a relatively unregulated environment.

Online hate speech is not seen to be the same as 'real life' hate crimes. Legislation regarding racist and sectarian speech is an awkward matter as laws which challenge hate

speech also challenge traditional and valued notions of freedom of speech. Those who oppose legislation argue that the dangers of censoring hate speech are far greater than the actual harm caused by online hate speech. However, Nemes disagrees:

Restricting freedoms in a liberal democracy should be subject to strict standards of justification. Freedom of expression is such an important value in a democratic society that it should not be lightly undermined... [however] the harm posed by hate speech, if left unchecked, may cause a civil society to lose its civility, and reduce the very value it was trying to preserve. (2002, p. 197)

The UK is a signatory to the Council of Europe's (COE) 2001 Convention on Cybercrime, an international treaty designed to combat infringements of copyright, computer-related fraud, child pornography and violations of network security (COE, 2001). The main aim of the Convention was to overcome the contradictory laws of separate nation states by pursuing an internationally consistent criminal policy against cybercrime. The UK signed an additional protocol in 2003 concerning the criminalisation of racist or xenophobic acts committed through computer networks. This protocol criminalises the intentional distribution of racist or xenophobic material and the exchange of racist or xenophobic messages in chat rooms, message boards or newsgroups. However, the treaty applies only to those countries which are members of the COE; the transnational nature of the Internet means that sites can easily relocate to the United States where they are protected under the First Amendment of the US constitution. Indeed, the COE admits that its legislation may be ineffectual as, during its deliberations, it cited a report which stated that 2,500 out of 4,000 racist sites were located in the United States. Although Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights recognises the right to freedom of expression, including speech which offends the state, the European Court of Human Rights has stated that the state has the right to restrict this freedom of expression if it violates the rights of others. In contrast, US courts strongly support the First Amendment in cyberspace and maintain that they have no duty to enforce European law (Ramasastry, 2003).

It is clear that legislation regarding online hate speech is murky territory. Firstly, it is debatable whether legislation should be imposed in the first place, and secondly, any legislation which is passed is likely to be futile due to the ease of relocation. From a sectarian perspective, the ubiquity of nationalistic Americans of Irish or Scottish descent may mean that there are many in the US who are willing to host sectarian material.

4.5 Anti sectarian initiatives

The problem of sectarianism has been given special attention in recent years and several anti-sectarian initiatives are now in place. These initiatives involve charitable organisations, local government, churches, police and the football clubs themselves. While some may argue that sectarianism is no longer an issue in the West of Scotland, the existence of ground level initiatives suggests otherwise.

4.5.1. 'Social inclusion for all': government, church, education and charities

Nil By Mouth is the Scottish anti-sectarian charity founded by Cara Henderson following the unprovoked murder of her friend Mark Scott in 1995 in the Bridgeton area of Glasgow. Nil By Mouth wants Scotland to admit that sectarian thinking and a deep-seated bigotry run deep in the Scottish consciousness. Nil By Mouth works in partnership with a multitude of agencies including Rangers and Celtic Football Clubs and Glasgow City Council Education Services and aims to promote its message to schools, employers, politicians, and youth clubs. In particular, the charity attempts to emphasise the danger of flippant sectarian language and challenges those who sing sectarian songs or tell bigoted jokes in the spirit of harmless 'banter'. The Scottish Executive has shown its support for Nil By Mouth's objectives by providing funding of £25,000 for each of three years beginning in 2002. The money is to be put in place to raise awareness amongst children and young people of the problems of sectarianism and bigotry within Scottish society. (CPWGRH, 2003, 4.15)

The most recent local government initiative with which to combat sectarianism is Sense over Sectarianism (SOS). This is a partnership between Glasgow City Council, Nil By Mouth, Celtic FC, Rangers FC, the Glasgow Presbytery of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. Church leaders lend their support to initiatives such as Sense Over Sectarianism. In 2002, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland passed a motion stating that it 'regrets any part played in sectarianism by our church in the past and affirm our support for future moves towards a more tolerant society' (NFO Social Research, 2003). SOS is funded by the Millennium Commission and awards grants to projects or programmes that challenge sectarianism and bigotry in the wider Glasgow area. SOS aims to:

... focus on existing sectarian tensions and bigotry in general which create social and other barriers between people of different faiths. It will make individuals aware of their role through language, actions and behaviour in determining the shape their society takes. It will empower individuals to bring down these barriers within their own lives and community, working towards social inclusion for all. (GCC, 2004a)

The fashionable rhetoric of ‘social inclusion’ is simply a new way of tackling historically rooted problems but is, at least, highlighting the problem. Similarly, the six-week Glasgow City Council anti-discrimination campaign ‘Glasgow: We’re Every Kind of People’ was launched in September 2004 as a response to the Sectarianism in Glasgow report outlined in sections 2.1 and 4.3.1. (NFO Social Research, 2003). The campaign aims to challenge sectarianism and other types of discrimination in Glasgow by featuring real Glaswegians from a variety of different backgrounds in promotional posters and advertisements throughout the city (GCC, 2004b).

The 5-14 Curriculum in Scotland has been adapted to raise awareness among young people of the problems of sectarianism and bigotry. Religious and Moral Education guidelines now encourage children to learn about and respect people of other faiths and Personal and Social Development raises awareness about anti-sectarianism, citizenship and respect for others in the community (CPWGRH, 2003, 4.07-4.08). These guidelines may prove futile in the face of overwhelming sectarian thought in the child’s home and peer group. However, their inclusion in the 5-14 Curriculum displays an explicit commitment to confronting the problem in Scotland and attempting to address the problem of sectarianism at its earliest stages.

4.5.2 Football initiatives: Pride Over Prejudice and Bhoys Against Bigotry

In this climate of confrontation and social inclusion, football teams and sporting bodies cannot be seen to be anything less than proactively supportive of anti-sectarian initiatives. The SFA now requires clubs, under the National Club Licensing Scheme, to provide evidence of their policy and practices against sectarianism and racism and for this to be included in supporters’ charters. The SFA believes that the club anti-sectarian initiatives are leading to a steady improvement in supporter attitudes and actions (CPWGRH, 2003, 4.17-4.18)

Having regained some of the moral high ground since abandoning their pre-1989 anti-Catholic signing policy, Rangers have now started to involve themselves in anti-sectarian activities. The Blue Guide, sent to all season ticket holders, is part of the Pride Over Prejudice campaign. The Guide presents the clubs expectations of supporters and states that 'True Blue supporters' are ready to welcome players of all ethnic and religious origins to Ibrox, oppose 'bigotry, racism and inappropriate behaviour arising from all forms of prejudice' and reject all sectarian songs and emblems. The first Rangers supporter was banned from Ibrox in April 2004 under these new rules for singing songs about a terrorist organisation. This man was charged under the 'aggravated by religious prejudice' section of the Criminal Justice Act, 2003. Laurence McIntyre, Head of Safety at Ibrox, said following the ban:

Our aim is social inclusion, so no one feels uncomfortable in Ibrox stadium. We have Catholic supporters, Catholic players and a cross section of the community following Rangers. Times are changing.
(Macdermid, 2004)

The Celtic initiative Bhoys Against Bigotry was spearheaded by the Celtic chairman Fergus McCann who believed that ostensibly sectarian Celtic fans have little connection with Ireland and even less interest in Republican organisations such as the IRA:

'Maybe a hundred years ago or so, I would have a connection with Ireland, but, as you well know, the direct Irish connection [for Scottish people] of the past two or three generations is negligible. It's a fertile ground - these headbangers who drink in the pub all day and then go off to away games at places like Aberdeen - if you've got an IRA sympathiser to wind people up and sing these provocative songs. You can see, it's just them reacting against the Scottish establishment, and annoying the other team. It's not because they believe it, or even have any terribly great interest in the IRA.' (O'Hagan, 1999)

This is a common opinion among those fans who believe that sectarianism is a far smaller problem than the media likes to portray. Indeed 'annoying the other team' is a pivotal part of all sporting activity and it is this rivalry which makes it exciting. Donald Findlay claims that the intense rivalry lasts only for 90 minutes and that Celtic and Rangers fans often go to games together. However, he also claims that 'the Orange walks are a great spectacle, even for Catholics' and refuses to celebrate his birthday as it falls on St Patrick's Day so perhaps cannot claim to have the most profound understanding of the situation. (Findlay, 2002)

Rangers have been involved in several controversial sectarian incidents in recent years. The most infamous include Donald Findlay's sectarian songs, Paul Gascoigne's parody of an Apprentice boy flute player and former goalkeeper Andy Goram's alleged sympathy with the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and his black armband worn days after the murder of Loyalist terrorist Billy Wright. Celtic midfielder Neil Lennon, who quit the Northern Ireland national side after sectarian death threats, was subjected to the same bigotry in Glasgow when he was attacked in the street. 'You're a Dead Man Lennon' was also daubed on a road near his house. Similarly controversial Celtic related incidents are far fewer but there are undeniably Republican influences and sympathies exhibited at matches. In October 2002, the Chief Executive of Celtic wrote to fans asking them to desist from singing songs at games that were seen by many observers to promote the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Although many fans backed the stance, others vehemently opposed what they saw as an attack on their culture (McNee, 2002).

Clearly, neither side is blameless. Although these official initiatives represent a step forward in admitting a problem and attempting to deal with it, sectarianism is deep seated and multi-layered. It will take more than official rhetoric to strike at the heart of the problem.

4.6 Summary

The online environment is seen only as an extension of or another means of expression for 'real-life' sectarian behaviour, rather than a location in which the nature and extent of the conflict may be altered and potentially amplified. However, all of the features of the CMC environment discussed in section 3 of the literature review cannot fail to have some effect on the form, nature and severity of OF rivalry. Recent academic and government research has paid no attention to the existence of online sectarianism or to its possible ramifications.

Academic and popular opinion varies as to whether sectarianism actually exists in Scotland. Statistics regarding sectarian violence and discrimination are debatable and ever changing depending on their source; it seems that anecdotal evidence and popular perceptions may be all that is currently available to measure the problem. However, this does not mean that sectarianism does not exist. The furore caused by McMillan's speech

proved that sectarianism remains a sensitive and emotionally charged topic: although its nature and scale are uncertain it is clear that *something* is going on.

As described in section 2 of the report, the remainder of this study will examine selected OF and other team message board postings in an attempt to quantify, analyse and understand the extent and nature of online sectarianism.

5. Data analysis and discussion

5.1. Introduction and raw data

Threads posted on Footymad (Celtic, Rangers, Dundee United and Dundee) and Rivals.net (Everton and Liverpool) between 18:09 on the 16th and 18:09 on the 17th August 2004 were classified by topic using the categories listed in the methodology. The raw data is presented by both number and percentage in table 5.1 on the following page.

The separate categories of match, players, team, general, management and board, officials, media and fans have been collated to obtain an overall percentage of threads about (i) one's own team, (ii) derby team and (iii) non-derby team. Results in the football related categories chiefly depend on the context i.e. whether a game has just been played, a new player signed or a controversial decision or incident has taken place. Therefore, key topics of conversation are summarised in section 5.2.1 which discusses football related threads.

Data analysis and discussion will initially revolve around all six teams and a general overview of football related chat, off-topic threads and other key points of interest. Discussion will then proceed to the quantity and nature of sectarian content retrieved from the message boards. The presence of the control methods listed in section 2.8 of the methodology will be noted: how is sectarian content dealt with and to what extent are the board communities policing themselves? Finally, there is an overview of the findings and recommendations for future research. Illustrative threads are included from all of the boards and are reproduced verbatim.

	Rangers	%	Celtic	%	Dundee Utd.	%	Dundee	%	Everton	%	Liverpool	%
Own team												
1.1 Match	23	2.82	9	3.13	9	14.52	9	15.25	20	5.47	1	1.01
1.2 Team	7	0.86	4	1.39	1	1.61	0	0	10	2.73	8	8.08
1.3 Players	60	7.36	18	6.27	5	8.08	3	5.08	23	6.3	18	18.18
1.4 General	53	6.5	20	6.97	1	1.61	6	10.17	20	5.47	4	4.04
1.5 Management and board	23	2.82	1	0.35	0	0	0	0	9	2.46	0	0
1.6 Officials	36	4.42	1	0.35	5	8.06	4	6.77	1	0.28	0	0
1.7 Media	132	16.2	16	5.57	8	12.9	6	10.17	9	2.5	1	1.01
1.8 Fans	1	0.12	3	1.05	1	1.61	3	5.08	5	1.37	0	0
Derby team												
2.1 Match	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.2 Team	1	0.12	2	0.7	0	0	3	5.08	1	0.27	0	0
2.3 Players	3	0.37	36	12.54	0	0	4	6.78	3	0.82	0	0
2.4 General	7	0.86	2	0.69	0	0	0	0	2	0.55	1	1.01
2.5 Management and board	0	0	1	0.35	0	0	6	10.17	0	0	0	0
2.6 Officials	0	0	2	0.69	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.7 Media	2	0.25	16	5.57	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.8 Fans	7	0.85	4	1.39	1	1.62	1	1.69	1	0.27	0	0
Non-derby team												
3.1 Match	13	1.6	7	2.45	7	11.29	6	10.2	1	0.27	0	0
3.2 Team	6	0.74	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1.1	4	4.04
3.3 Players	14	1.72	3	1.06	1	1.61	0	0	7	1.91	2	2.02
3.4 General	1	0.12	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.83	0	0
3.5 Management and board	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3.6 Officials	1	0.12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3.7 Media	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3.8 Fans	3	0.37	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
All teams												
4 Off-topic	422	51.78	142	49.48	23	37.09	8	13.56	246	67.4	60	60.61
Total threads (number and %)	815	100	287	100	62	100	59	100	365	100	99	100

Table

5.1

Classification

of

content

5.2 Football-related threads

Although this study focuses on off-topic and potentially sectarian content, football-related threads must be also analysed as the supposedly main source of conversation on the message boards.

5.2.1. Football related threads and off-topic threads

Dundee and Dundee United

A controversial penalty decision led to Dundee's victory over Dundee United in the 15th August derby. This led to a high quantity of own team match, official decisions and media coverage entries for both Dundee teams. In discussing their defeat, Dundee United focus on their own team performance and the official decision which went against them; therefore, threads about the Dundee derby team are extremely low (1.62%). Although own team threads on the Dundee board are most frequent they do make more reference to their rival derby team than Dundee United (23.72% to Dundee United's 1.62%). Football related discussion is more frequent on the Dundee board as a whole (86.44% to Dundee United's 62.91%).

**Football related threads Dundee United and Dundee
16-17 August 2004**

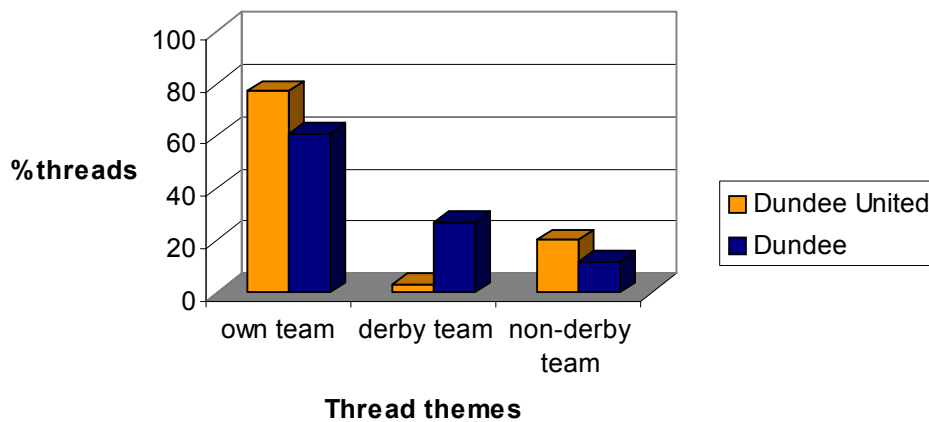


Figure 5.1 Football related threads Dundee United and Dundee 16-17 August 2004

The Dundee teams have the highest number of football related threads and the lowest level of off-topic activity; as such, they are the two most football focused message boards. The graph below illustrates the ratio of football related to off-topic threads.

Football related and off-topic threads Dundee United and Dundee 16-17 August 2004

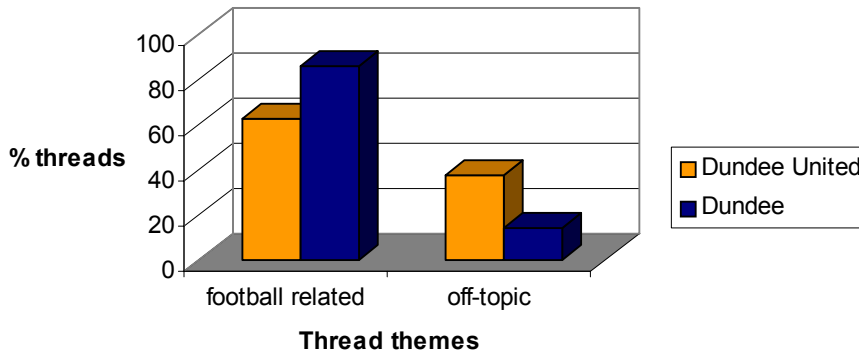


Figure 5.2 Football related and off-topic threads Dundee United and Dundee 16-17 August 2004

Liverpool and Everton

There was no dominant conversation point on these boards as there had been no controversial decisions, events or matches in the days preceding the data analysis. The majority of both teams' football-related threads were related to their own team (81.51% Everton; 82.05% Liverpool), each barely discussed their derby rival.

Football related threads Everton and Liverpool 16-17 August 2004

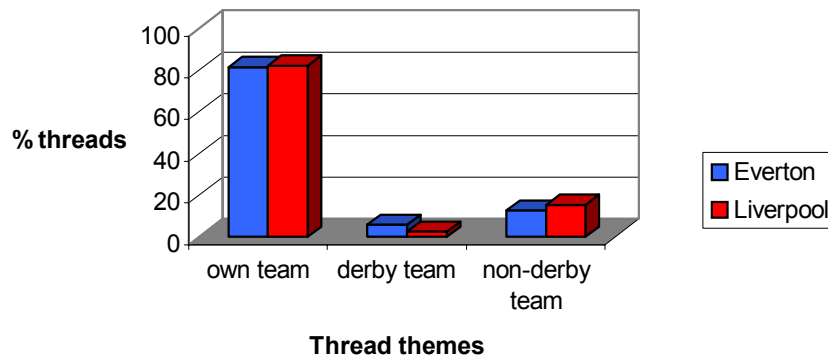


Figure 5.3 Football related threads Everton and Liverpool 16-17 August 2004

In contrast with the Dundee teams, the Liverpool and Everton boards have a greater number of off-topic threads than football-related threads, as shown below. Although football is still discussed on these boards, users appear to be far more interested in general off-topic chat.

Football related and off-topic threads Everton and Liverpool 16-17 August 2004

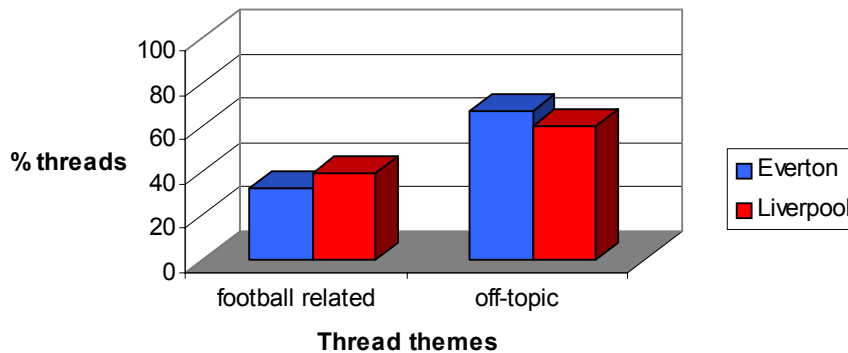


Figure 5.4 Football related and off topic threads Everton and Liverpool 16-17 August 2004

Celtic and Rangers

The Rangers player Alex Rae had recently been charged with gross unsporting conduct and banned for five European games following a tackle against CSKA Moscow player Serghei Dadu in which Rae kicked Dadu's head. This was a controversial decision and the ban and likelihood of a Rangers appeal was discussed at length on both the Celtic and Rangers boards. Accusations of slander, poor journalism and media bias towards Celtic were rife on the Rangers board, largely as a result of the Rae incident. There was also a high level of derby player and media discussion on the Celtic board in response to Rangers' outrage.

Rumours were also rife on the Celtic board as to whether the Brazilian midfielder Juninho would make the move from Middlesborough FC to Parkhead. This contributed to the majority of Celtic's own team player category threads.

Football related threads Rangers and Celtic 16-17 August 2004

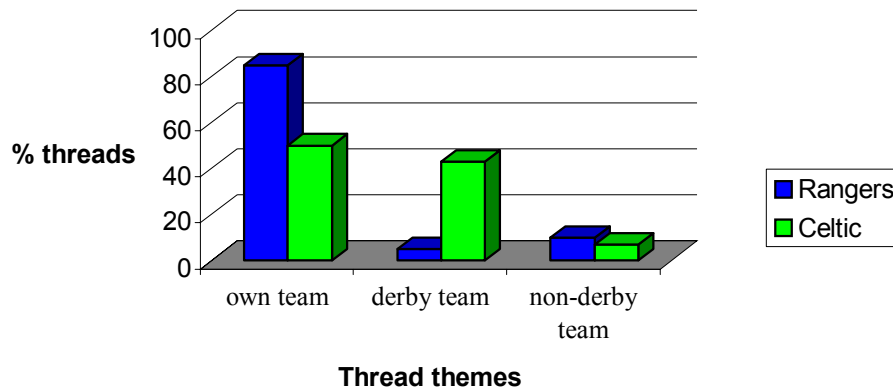


Figure 5.5 Football related threads Rangers and Celtic 16-17 August 2004

As shown in the graph below, the Old Firm boards lie somewhere in between the football focused Dundee boards and the off-topic centred Liverpoolian boards. Celtic and Rangers posters are equally interested in football and in off-topic chat.

Football related and off-topic threads Rangers and Celtic 16-17 August 2004

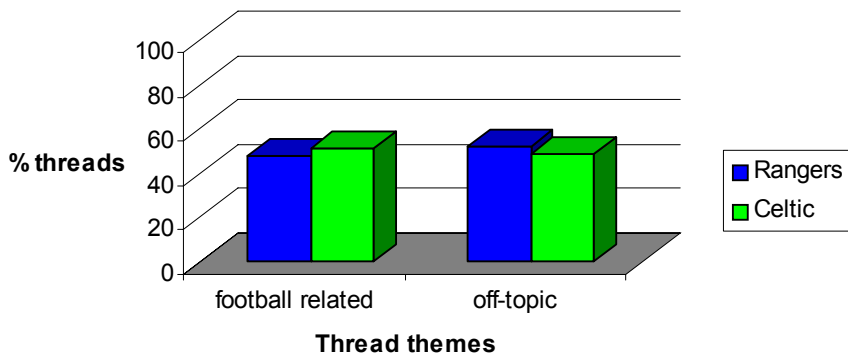


Figure 5.6 Football related and off-topic threads Rangers and Celtic 16-17 August 2004

5.2.2 Key findings

- The football message boards are by no means all about football. For example, over two thirds of Everton threads were entirely off-topic.

- It may have been possible, looking at the Dundee teams results, to surmise that the quieter the board the greater the adherence to topic. However, the Liverpool board undermines this hypothesis as although it is relatively quiet it is also extremely off-topic. The reasons for 'off-topic-ness' must be connected to something other than traffic volume on the message boards.
- It was assumed that discussion regarding derby rivals would be numerous. However, this was disproved for all of the teams apart from Celtic. Football related discussion centred chiefly on posters own teams, and in the case of Liverpool, Everton, Rangers and Dundee United, threads regarding the non-derby teams were actually more frequent.
- Types of postings are dependent on context and timing. Celtic's fixation on its derby rival, Rangers, can be explained through reference to the Rae incident; the incidence of derby conversation may have been higher for the other teams if there had been a similar event. Similarly, the high level of posting in the Rangers own team media category is because of the media controversy related to the Rae incident, and the Dundee teams' frequent posting in their own team match category is a result of the previous days derby match.
- All of the boards contained football related conflict but this was to be expected from sporting rivals. These ranged from the tame: 'SOOOOOOOOOOOOOO EEEEEAAAAAASSSSSSYYYYYYY' (scott1962, 16/08, 22:11) to the outright aggressive but were all part of expected football rivalry.

5.3. Off-topic chat

In order to identify sectarian content in Old Firm message boards it is first necessary to dwell on the extent and nature of off-topic threads on each of the boards. Levels of off-topic chat for each team are summarised in the graph below.

Off-topic content 16-17 August 2004

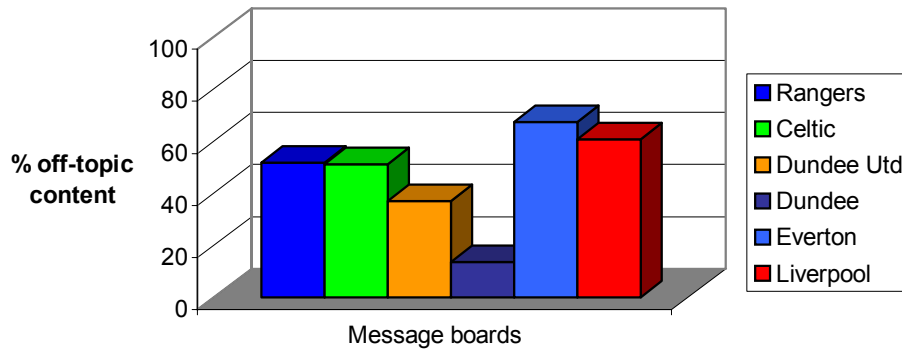


Figure 5.7 Percentage of off-topic content on all message boards 16-17 August 2004

Data analysis for the 16th to the 17th August 2004 revealed a high occurrence of off-topic content on the message boards. As previously stated, football is not the only topic discussed on these boards. The Everton Rivals.net board had the highest level of off-topic activity with over two thirds of threads pertaining to non-football related topics. Everton was closely followed by Liverpool, on which well over half of the threads were off-topic. Interestingly, Celtic and Rangers had almost an equal amount of off-topic discussion with just over half of the threads relating to non-football discussion. Over a third of Dundee United threads were non-football related. Dundee had the lowest level of off-topic activity.

Within the context of this study, off-topic describes the discussion of any subject apart from football. Topics include:

- **Personal chat**
e.g. work, partners, children, University and college, birthdays, sex.
- **Jokes and stories**
- **Popular culture**
e.g. television programmes, news stories, music, film, other sports
- **Assistance and support**
e.g. PC help, Internet guidance, message boards, file sharing software, advice on purchases.
- **Other**

e.g. the weather, food, hangovers.

The existence of these off-topic categories transform the message boards into something greater than a virtual place in which members can discuss the latest match or signing. It is the inclusion of personal stories, in-jokes, ongoing narratives and offhand thoughts and remarks which makes the boards feel like groups.

5.3.1 Do message board users mind off-topic conversation?

It would be reasonable to assume that some posters may object to the intrusion of personal chat on a football message board. In one thread, a Liverpool fan makes the point that off-topic conversation has no place on a football message board and then tries to start a football related discussion.

[Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [New Topic](#) | [Top of Board](#)

Poster 001 Posted on 17/8 [Email this Message](#) | [Reply](#)

And what has...

Swindon Magic Roundabout, Was My Post About The Rain Washed Away, Irish Roads and It's Absolutely Fuggin Chucking It Down Here got to do with Liverpool Football Club, besides, such topics are yawn topics having the effect of curing insomnia.

By the way one noticed Carragher's forward contribution during the Spurs game. Is this a one off or is there a possibility of continuation? One wonders.

IP: Logged

Contributors to this thread then refuse to engage in football discussion with him and the thread ends. Another poster replies a few minutes later and claims that indulging in off-topic chat is the mark of a 'hardcore' football supporter.

[Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [New Topic](#) | [Top of Board](#)

Poster 002 Posted on 17/8 [Email this Message](#) | [Reply](#)

Football Only

When you go the match do you all have your colours on, YNWA ring tone on your Nokia, read footy mags on your way up from Devon and talk footy non stop from 6am til midnight?

Most week in week out footy lads I know and have known for years talk footy, sex, drinking, telly, all manner of shoite. Not pin badge man professional fans but hard core week in week out Liverpool fans.

If you have a problem with daft posts then don't get involved. If you want to raise a point then do it and if it's

worthy, a thread will open up.

Up to you kids.

Although the appropriateness or otherwise of off-topic conversation is not mentioned on the other boards it would be reasonable to surmise that Poster 001's opinion would be shared by other posters. Although the six boards vary in off-topic activity and the analysis may have been different at another time or over a longer period of time, it is still clear that a great deal of the discussion had nothing to do with the reason for the board: football. As mentioned previously (McLaughlin, 1995), this could be a potential source of conflict. Yet the boards are still extremely popular; if the prevalence of off-topic conversation was overly disturbing, those who were offended by it would simply go to another of the many message boards in existence. It seems that the opinions of Poster 002 are implicitly accepted by the majority of posters on all of the message boards who wholeheartedly participate in conversation about anything and everything.

5.3.2 Community and group feeling: advice and support

The high levels of off-topic activity on all of the boards foster a feeling of closeness and 'groupness'. Some threads are extremely supportive. One Rangers poster mentioned that he had recently split from his girlfriend and was finding it hard to deal with; he had been to see a hypnotherapist but felt that it was not working. Several members replied in the following manner:

Posted by [Poster 003](#) on 16 Aug

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

A while ago I was on about seeing a hypnotherapist. *update* ...

If you're still seeking support and don't feel you can discuss matters with your GP, then perhaps you could try calling this number?: 0131 467 3050 - It's the Scottish headquarters of 'Depression Alliance'.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 004](#) on 16 Aug

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

A while ago I was on about seeing a hypnotherapist. *update* ...

Thats a real shame mate - hope you get "back on the horse" soon. Dont let this problem get any worse. As mentioned above, see your GP if it persists. All the best.

[IP address logged]

The boards contain other examples of supportiveness and guidance: advice on whether a poster should break up with his girlfriend, in depth directions and advice about holidaying in New

York, consolation for a man whose wife has just left him and so on. There is the sense that the regular posters on the boards really do know each other. Certainly, some of the members may actually live in the same area and play football or go to the pub together. However, the majority of posters have never met and often live far away from the hometowns of their football clubs. Although the following Everton fan appears never to have met the people he mentions in his post, he still has an idea of their particular personalities and talents and uses their user-ids as if they were their real names – as, of course, they are online.

[Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [New Topic](#) | [Top of Board](#)

Poster 005 Posted on 17/8 [Email this Message](#) | [Edit](#) | [Reply](#)

Depressing

All this fussball talk..

I prefer to side with a certain David Moyes on matter concerning football

Milton on all nerd related issues
Smirn on history
Stabilo on food
tete on death metal
blaghaus on canada

gaz on gypsies
jmcd on money
AB99 on filth
Yellmic on food outlets
Moonmonkey on any music related topics
revolver on acerbic comments
andyno and benj on whats down wit da kids
dobster on pussy
ste50 on everything else

IP: Logged

As well as personal support, posters offer advice about netiquette and appropriate posting techniques:

Posted by [Poster 124](#) on 17 Aug 13:04 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

DOWNLOADING CD's/DVD ...

JUST A ROOKIE WITH COMPUTER WANTING TO DOWNLOAD CD's/DVD SOMEONE GIVING ME NERO HOW GOOD IS IT? SHOULD I NEED TO KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT IT

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 125](#) on 17 Aug 13:07 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

Re: DOWNLOADING CD's/DVD ...

See the button at the left of the keyboard, says caps lock? press it. Capitals are shouting! Nero is the software to burn CDs, you will need to download P2P software like bittorrent or winmx to actually donload songs or vids

[IP address logged]

Of course, mistakes such as these can also be used against posters, as shown by these amused Celtic board reactions to a Rangers fan writing 'Mothing' instead of 'Nothing':

Posted by [Poster 006](#) on 16 Aug

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Rangers Will Win Mothing This Year ...

bew, you fcuked up big time...

let the people sing!!!

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 007](#) on 16 Aug

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: Rangers Will Win Mothing This Year ...

think mothing of it.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 008](#) on 16 Aug

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: Rangers Will Win Mothing This Year ...

he'll be mothing at the frouth over this

[IP address logged]

5.3.3 Contextualising threads

During the one-day period of analysis there were a great number of question-type threads in the off-topic category. These were similar in type to pub conversation with high value placed on trivia, sex, nostalgia and popular culture. Examples include what size of breasts male posters preferred females to have (Celtic, 17/08, 13:14), whether female posters preferred males to be clean-shaven or 'sporting the ruff look' (Celtic, 17/08, 12:13), suitable movie star roles for sports personalities (Celtic, 17/08, 14:33), what posters would have been called if they were born the opposite gender (Rangers, 17/08, 16:54), what posters would like to be reincarnated as (Rangers,

16/08, 20:19), sexiest female names (Rangers, 16/08: 20:51) and favourite movie scenes (Everton, 16/08, 21:00).

Posters are aware that CMC is a qualitatively different experience than ‘real life’ face-to-face interaction, as illustrated by this discussion about text dating on the Celtic board.

Posted by [Poster 009](#) on 17 Aug [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: Text dating ...

dont know i've never thought about it really.

when i came on this board its the first time i've spoke to people and not know what they look like or who they are.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 010](#) on 17 Aug [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: re: Text dating ...

I've had a few funny experiences meeting people off the internet

[IP address logged]

This knowledge encourages users to gain the incidental information contained above but also to ask more personal questions. ‘Real life’ friends know a multitude of incidental facts about each other; question type posts and polls on the boards represent the effort to know the same things about those people who posters are interacting with, often on a daily basis.

5.3.4 Off-topic conflict

The fact that the boards display a great deal of supportiveness, friendship and group feeling does not mean that conflict is lacking. An interesting case study which also impacts upon online gender issues is that of a fifteen year old girl on the Rangers board, Poster 013. She reacts well to a lengthy and fairly explicit thread entitled ‘New poll... would Poster 013 get it?’ and even appears to be flattered:

Posted by [Poster 012](#) on 16 Aug 20:21 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: New Poll..... Would Poster 013 get it? ...

Print this off Poster 013 and show your mates how many admirers you have!! They will all be dead jealous!!

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 013](#) on 16 Aug 20:22 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: New Poll..... Would Poster 013 get it? ...

aww thnx chicks...im scared! Lol

A later thread complains about Poster 013's use of text language and abbreviations: 'stop the friggin text typing and type proper english' (Poster 015, 16/08, 19:27). Some are in agreement but others defend her, saying that 'it's just the younger generation' (Poster 016, 16/08, 19:40). Although she says she should be allowed to write however she likes, she reacts in a submissive manner 'sorry..i didnt know i had caused this much trouble' (16/08, 19:47). The thread becomes aggressive when another female poster steps in.

Posted by [Poster 014](#) on 16 Aug 20:27

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: gonna someone deal with this Poster 013 character ...

Poster 013, going by your posts, it looks as though you've either already started on the buckie or maybe you just never grasped the concept of the English language.

I think your website sort of parallels with Peter's current form and if you're sixteen, some literary lessons at the local adult learning centre wouldn't go amiss.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 013](#) on 16 Aug 20:33

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: gonna someone deal with this Poster 013 character ...

Poster 014 no, i havent started on the buckfast and i dont intend to either! just because i type short hand doesnt mean that i am a ned! you dont even know me so why are you so fast to criticise me and jump tp conclusions!

Posted by [Poster 014](#) on 16 Aug 20:50

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: gonna someone deal with this Poster 013 character ...

Poster 013, let's get this straight. You certainly don't type shorthand and your grammar leaves a lot to be desired.

If you haven't been on the buckie or some other lubricant, please accept my apologies, however, after reading your pigeon English posts, you sound like a thick teenager who spent her last school years somewhere else. Get my drift.

Let the lads talk about football.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 013](#) on 16 Aug 20:53

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: gonna someone deal with this Poster 013 character ...

well..i do accept your apology..because i dont drink alcohol..and i havent dropped out of scholl or anything like that..im going on to do 5 highers! i suppose you can call it lazyness the way i type but its the way all teenagers type...bk to football

[IP address logged]

The male posters patronise Poster 013 even while supporting her: 'theres a good girl now run along I'm only stopping you getting hassled!' (Poster 015, 16/08, 19:40). However, Poster 014 is clearly irritated by her style of language, the attention that she attracts and her little-girl pandering to the male posters who are patronising and sexually harassing her. As a result, she reacts in a far more hostile tone than any of the male posters. Women posters are few and far between on both Footymad and Rivals.net and those who are accepted as part of the group (Celtic: Poster 010, Poster 017, Rangers: Poster 018, Poster 019) will feel proud of their status as women who know about football and can join in on the 'boys' football talk. Poster 013's teenage crushes and childish language were threatening the status which women such as Poster 014 had worked to achieve and she was therefore firmly put in her place.

5.3.5 Group hierarchies

All of the message boards are moderated but moderation is applied in an inconsistent fashion. Certain types of automatic censorship are in place on the OF boards. If a poster writes 'hun' he or she will not be banned but it will appear as '*n'. This type of automatic censorship means that all manner of innocent words are foolishly edited. For example, 'hundreds' becomes '**ndreds'; the word 'pape' is censored, meaning that 'papers' becomes '****rs'. This crude form of censorship is easily surmountable through the insertion of punctuation and numbering: 'h.un', 'fen1an' and so on.

Similarly, swearing will also be censored. However, posters are able to swear using 'fcuk' or 'f.uck' for 'fuck', 'chunt' or 'c.unt' for 'cunt' and so on. There are, however, ways of avoiding even these rudimentary moderation tactics. Rangers posters boast of being able to swear freely and write that it is only the elite of the board community who knows how to do this. Although they are joking with another poster who does not know how to do this, their words unwittingly highlight the hierarchies which are present in online communities just as in 'real life' communities:

Posted by [Poster 020](#) on 17 Aug 17:36 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: Same old Footymad ...

At least you're allowed to ****ing swear
 [IP address logged]

Posted by [POSTER 021](#) on 17 Aug 17:36 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: Same old Footymad ...

Im not allowed i just get around it!!
 [IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 022](#) on 17 Aug 17:37 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: Same old Footymad ...

Inside info Loyal Wee Ted
 [IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 020](#) on 17 Aug 17:41 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: Same old Footymad ...

Have I not been on here long enough to be part of the 'elite'?
 [IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 023](#) on 17 Aug 17:41 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: re: Same old Footymad ...

Have you fuck!
 [IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 022](#) on 17 Aug 17:44 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: re: re: Same old Footymad ...

Sorry Poster 020!

Fucking fuck Loyal.
 [IP address logged]

5.3.6. 'Cyber warriors' and 'keyboard hardmen'

As mentioned in section 3 of the literature review, it is clear that online communication is far more like 'real life' communication than was first thought by CMC researchers. However, it also cannot be denied that online communication is qualitatively different in a number of ways to 'real life' communication, a fact which is recognised by posters. This remains true when we examine online conflict, sectarian or otherwise. The conflict witnessed on the message boards

could not occur face-to-face without violence erupting. Poster 024 fully appreciates this when referring to a West Bromwich Albion intruder.

POSTER 024 Posted on 16/8 21:40 [Email this Message](#) | [Reply](#)
re: looks like your in for a season of this

... You have to remember sad cases have access to the internet were they get to act out how they'd like to be in real life, if it weren't for the severe beatings they'd receive.

IP: Logged

In this Liverpool thread, a non-virtual fight appears to have been arranged.

Poster 025 Posted on 16/8 21:27 [Email this Message](#) | [Reply](#)
Hard man Poster 026

The cyber warrior bottled it again! Reckoned he'd be late for his shift at macdonalds!

IP: Logged

The accusatory phrase 'cyber warrior' is common, along with 'armchair warrior' (Poster 027, Celtic, 17/08, 03:42), 'keyboard hardman' (Poster 028, Celtic, 17/08, 12:33) and 'internet warriors' (Poster 029, Rangers, 16/08, 21:14). Physically threatening posts such as these exemplify the ease of identity play and the consequence-free nature of the online environment. Posters are able to tell rival fans exactly what they think of them and exactly what they would like to do to them without future ramifications. In the following Celtic thread, a Northern Irish poster is mocked for his consequence free threats to a poster in Scotland:

Posted by [Poster 030](#) on 17 Aug 15:16 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: I want to fight ...

Yip, not arranging to fight people (across the sea) on the internet makes me very yellow....

Silly, silly person.

5.3.7 Key findings

- It is the high level of off-topic activity which fosters a feeling of 'group-ness' on the boards; this is common to all six boards but especially the OF and Liverpoolian ones.

The volume of traffic for each board suggests that there is an implicit acceptance of off-topic discussion; some posters may in fact rarely post about football

- Examples of support, guidance and friendship in a number of areas is evident.
- Anonymity and the absence of contextualising cues lead to frequent contextualising questions. This would suggest that many posters are eager to learn more about the group members with whom they are interacting.
- Anonymity and reduced online accountability can lead to the threats of ‘cyber warriors’. Many posters seem aware of the ridiculousness of these statements.
- Hierarchies based on longevity of posting, knowledge of past topics and censorship evasion are evident. The online environment clearly creates and maintains hierarchies.

5.4 Online sectarianism: off-topic sectarian threads

5.4.1 Sectarianism on the control boards

The Dundee United, Dundee, Everton and Liverpool message boards contained no sectarian threads. The only one with any mention of the criteria for inclusion was a Liverpool thread in which someone jokingly objects to Poster 002 using the phrase ‘throwing a paddy’ and he replies ‘hehehehe Don't go all Murphy on me. I'm Liverpool Irish and don't forget it, we're the elite of the celtic race’ (17/08, 12:28). Poster 031 points out that ‘Liverpool Irish' is an oxymoron because every bloody one of you has some Irish blood’ (17/08, 12:30) and the conversation then returns to football.

The absence of sectarian threads in the non-Old Firm message boards does not mean that they did not contain any offensive or bigoted material. For example, casual homophobia was present on a large number of threads, including this one from the Everton board.

Poster 032 Posted on 17/8 1:02

[Email this Message](#) | [Reply](#)

re: FAO Poster 032

your living it !
unless you're a fcuking raging turd chaser like all the other quegs on here ? who needs to talk to himself to make yourself feel wanted ?
erm ?

IP: Logged

Poster 033 Posted on 17/8 1:04

[Email this Message](#) | [Reply](#)

re: FAO Poster 032

Tell me where does all this rampant homophobia stem from ??? Repressing something are we ???.....it OK you know, you can come out, its quite fashionable now.

IP: Logged

Poster 032 Posted on 17/8 1:07

[Email this Message](#) | [Reply](#)

re: FAO Poster 032

it stems from your disgusting lifechoice ! you piece of shi_ting eating filth.

IP: Logged

No boards contained overtly racist remarks although there was debate on the Liverpool board about whether a poster was racist or not: 'the fact that you included a 'stupid' comment like 'I don't like the Welsh' made the post seem a tad racist... the fact that you openly state that you dislike a group of people on the basis of their geographical position does not cast a good light upon yourself, it makes you a racist, and an unabashed one at that' (Poster 034, 16/08, 18:55).

Facetious sexist comments are so common on the boards that the reader becomes immune after a while. The following is an example of one of the more offensive comments, written about the Scotsport presenter Sarah O'Flaherty.

Posted by **Poster 035** on 16 Aug 23:18

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: That Sarah O bint. She's got a coupon like Charlie's cat! ...

would still muff her donner kebab all night

[IP address logged]

Posted by **Poster 036** on 16 Aug 23:20

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: That Sarah O bint. She's got a coupon like Charlie's cat! ...

She'd be feckin gettin it though - dead rough, fanny, ar\$e, mooth - the lot! I bet she's a right duurrrttty cow!

W A T P

sbb

[IP address logged]

5.4.2. Sectarian related material on the Old Firm boards

As planned, the off-topic category was examined for threads which revolved around (i) religious, and (ii) political and historical (with reference to Northern Irish politics and history) matters. The table below displays the percentage of sectarian threads in the off-topic category for each of the six message boards.

Message board	Number and percentage of sectarian threads in off-topic category		Number and percentage of sectarian threads on the board as a whole	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Rangers	35	8%	35	4%
Celtic	38	27%	38	13%
Dundee United	0	0%	0	0%
Dundee	0	0%	0	0%
Everton	0	0%	0	0%
Liverpool	0	0%	0	0%

Table 5.2 Sectarian threads in off-topic category and board for all teams

The pie charts below help to illustrate the incidence of sectarian activity on the Rangers and Celtic message boards.

Sectarian related threads in the Celtic off-topic category 16-17 August 2004

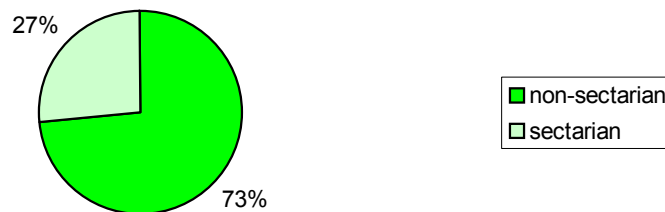


Figure 5.8 Sectarian related threads in Celtic off-topic category 16-17 August 2004

Sectarian related threads in the Rangers off-topic category 16-17 August 2004

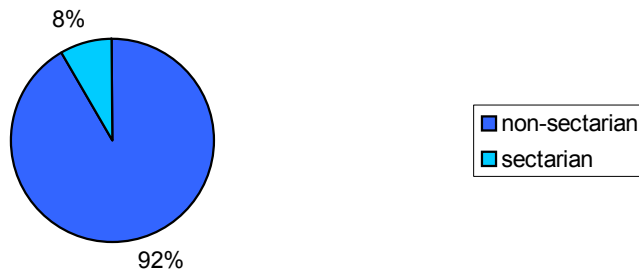


Figure 5.9 Sectarian related threads in the Rangers off-topic category 16-17 August 2004

Total percentage of sectarian related threads on the Celtic message board 16-17 August 2004

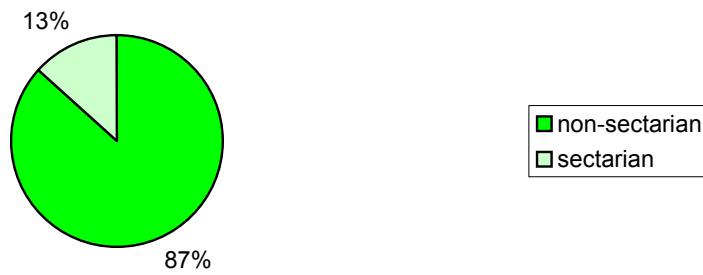


Figure 5.10 Total percentage of sectarian related threads on the Celtic message board 16-17 August 2004

Total percentage of sectarian related threads on the Rangers message board 16-17 August 2004

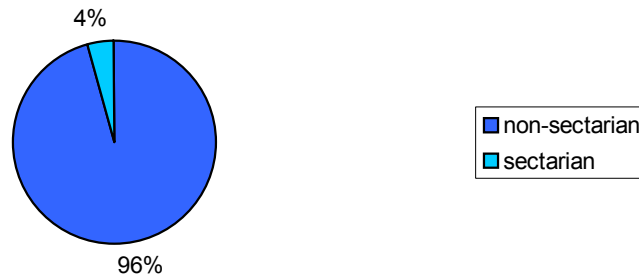


Figure 5.11 Total percentage of sectarian related threads on the Rangers message board 16-17 August 2004

At first glance, the Celtic board appears to contain more sectarian related threads than the Rangers board; it would therefore be reasonable to conclude that Celtic board users constitute the more sectarian minded community. However, this is not the case. Both sets of data are skewed by the fact that there are high levels of inter-board activity, the majority of which is typified by provocation and flaming. It is impossible therefore to gain an accurate picture of purely Celtic or solely Rangers board activity. Would there be such a significant amount of sectarian related chat without the presence of intruders?

5.4.3 Conflict within sectarian threads

Conflict is present in two ways on the boards:

- Internal conflict
- Conflict as a result of flames from intruders from other boards

Sectarian content is expressed in either one or both of these two ways:

- Internal: by the community about the community.
- Outward: about and against the rival community.

As mentioned previously, intruders abound on all of the message boards and cause the majority of conflict. It is reasonable to suggest that it is this conflict which draws some posters to use

message boards. It is no coincidence that a great number of the posts classified as sectarian and involving conflict on the OF boards involve the influence of an intruder/s from the rival board.

Celtic message board

- 38 threads featuring sectarian content
- 18 of these threads (47%) involving Rangers intruders

Rangers message board

- 35 threads featuring sectarian content
- 5 of these threads (14%) involving Celtic intruders

A thread on the Celtic board which includes a sectarian comment by a Rangers fan will still be classified as part of the Celtic board, even if none of the Celtic posters participate. Although Celtic ostensibly have a greater number of sectarian related threads on their message board it is more helpful to conclude that this board is the *main locus* of OF sectarian activity, rather than its main source. This is a conclusion drawn directly from the data rather than a Celtic-centred apologist spin: to apportion blame or to defend either team is not the intention of this study. If the two boards operated in isolation they may contain less sectarian comment; currently, however, each side continues to fuel the fire. The message boards mirror the symbiotic relationship experienced by the OF football teams. This is recognised by Poster 037 who gleefully writes ‘You have to admit that life would be pretty dull without the Huns.’ (16/08, 19:28).

Each team is also convinced that the other is obsessed with them. This does appear to be true but context must be taken into account. Celtic football-related threads regarding the derby team were unusually high compared to the other teams (22% of threads compared to 2% for Rangers, 2% for Dundee United, 2% for Everton and 1% for Liverpool; Dundee was the only team which had a similar percentage of derby-related football threads at 24%). However, as previously stated, this was at the height of the Alex Rae scandal and a rival team is bound to laugh at the other when something goes wrong. This is not sectarianism, just normal sporting rivalry. However, sporting rivalry can be expressed in an extremely aggressive fashion.

The tables on the following two pages specify the main themes of the sectarian threads. These are:

- (i) Northern Irish religion, history and politics

e.g. references to Republican and Loyalist incidents and organisations in Northern Ireland, historical battles, Irish immigration and the Great Famine.

- (ii) Stereotypes used in an abusive fashion.
- (iii) Accusations of bigotry
- (iv) Accusations of paranoia
- (v) Threats of violence (i.e. physical threats)
- (vi) General

e.g. Orange marches in Scotland, traditional songs, books and paraphernalia regarding Northern Ireland.

Identified threads were examined with reference to the previous suggestion that sectarianism is *inward* looking (by and about the community itself) or *outward* looking (about and against the rival community). Inward looking threads are those which refer to the customs and practices of one's own community; key examples on the Rangers board are the frequent threads regarding loyalist songs and Orange Lodges. These are internal discussions of Protestant culture with no reference to Catholicism. Although even this internal celebration could be seen to be inflammatory by some, the real problem lies with posts which place this culture in opposition to Catholicism; for example, pejoratively comparing Ancient Order of Hibernians marches to Orange Lodge marches (17/08, 08:33), or complaining that the 'rhebel media' allows the singing of Republican songs and the brandishing of Irish tricolour flags but condemns Loyalist chants and British flags: 'seems the media just have a problem with british protestant rangers fans!' (Rangers, 17/08, 12:37). It is in outward looking sectarianism that real conflict lies.

	Internal: by and about Rangers/Protestantism		Outward: about and against Celtic/ Catholicism		About Rangers by Celtic intruders	
	Number of references	As % of Rangers sectarian threads (total 35)	Number of references	As % of Rangers sectarian threads (total 35)	Number of references	As % of Rangers sectarian threads (total 35)
Northern Ireland: religion, history, politics	3	9%	10	29%	-	-
Stereotypes used in an abusive fashion	-	-	9	26%	-	-
Accusations of bigotry	-	-	8	23%	1	3%
Accusations of paranoia	-	-	-	-	1	3%
Threats of violence	-	-	1	3%	-	-
General: songs, books, Marches etc.	11	31%	-	-	-	-
Total references (number and %)	14	40%	28	80%	2	6%

Table 5.3 Main themes of identified sectarian threads on Rangers message board 16-17 August 2004

	Internal: by and about Celtic/ Catholicism		Outward: about and against Rangers/ Protestantism		About Celtic by Rangers intruders	
	Number of references	As % of Celtic sectarian threads (total 38)	Number of references	As % of Celtic sectarian threads (total 38)	Number of references	As % of Celtic sectarian threads (total 38)
Northern Ireland: religion, history, politics	4	11%	4	11%	6	16%
Stereotypes used in an abusive fashion	-	-	-	-	8	21%
Accusations of bigotry	-	-	19	50%	4	11%
Accusations of paranoia	1	3%	6	16%	1	3%
Threats of violence	-	-	1	3%	-	-
General: songs, books, marches etc	1	3%	2	6%	-	-
Total references (number and %)	6	17%	32	86%	19	51%

Table 5.4 Main themes of identified sectarian threads on Celtic message board 16-17 August

Religion and football are conflated (i.e. Celtic/ Catholic and Rangers/ Protestant) as the majority of the posts make no distinction between the two. More in depth discussion of the data contained in the previous tables will be interspersed throughout the remainder of the report.

5.4.4 'Casual' sectarianism

Nil By Mouth focuses its attentions on the more subtle expressions of sectarianism in Scottish society and argues that the belief that religious jokes and songs are harmless makes sectarianism everyday and 'just part of life' (NBM, 2004). What was striking about several of the threads analysed (outwith the identified sectarian threads) was the ease with which sectarian comments were made despite the thread having nothing at all to do with religion, politics or history.

Posted by Poster 038 on 17 Aug 11:45

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: Anyone going to the 2/3 of Ulster FF night ? ...

Hating sellick is not bigotted. Just the done thing.

WATP

[IP address logged]

In the following Rangers thread, Poster 039 writes about his oldest boy starting school. Several other proud fathers write about having lumps in their throats, feeling old and packing their children off to school carrying Rangers lunchboxes. Poster 040 then offhandedly refers to Celtic fans going to Catholic schools and the fact that he disliked having to put his own child to a Catholic nursery school.

Posted by Poster 040 on 17 Aug 12:27

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: Proud day for the <name removed>.. ...

My youngest starts next week. She tried on the uniform last night I had a tear in my eye.I think its worse with the youngest.I still look on her as a baby

"Daddy,Is Our Lady of Loretto school just for Celtic supporters?"

Glad to get her away from StMarys nursery loyal.

[IP address logged]

On the Celtic board, Poster 041 writes that he is going to bed and Poster 042 bids him a Republican farewell.

Posted by [Poster 041](#) on 16 Aug 22:05

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Right im away to my bed... ...

something for supper first though.

scotsport on at 11pm (cannae wait)

back to work tomorrow (boooooo!!!!)

night guys and galls.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 042](#) on 16 Aug 22:06

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: right im away to my bed... ...

Up the RA and Hail Hail

[IP address logged]

Neither of these threads could be classified as sectarian but they, and several others in each category, contain material which could be construed as such. Poster 040's comment about Catholic schooling did not spark a debate about the matter or encourage another poster to take to the streets and burn down a Catholic school. Poster 042's comment was not noted and he probably did not intend it to be; the next post was from somebody telling Poster 041 that he was off to watch Starsky and Hutch. However, this does not mean that they are any less significant: both examples illustrate an incidental and offhand approach to divisive language.

5.5. Main themes of sectarian threads

(a) Northern Ireland

There are a significant number of references on both boards to the conflict in Northern Ireland. These outwardly sectarian looking posts are accusatory in nature, as illustrated by this Rangers intruder on the Celtic board:

Posted by [Poster 043](#) on 16 Aug 19:06 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: re: Poster 043... ..

Call them what you like freedom fighters, terrorists, gangsters, criminals, drug dealers, mother killers, kid killers etc etc

The orgainsations and republicans I mentioned all fall into at least 6 of the above

Fighting for freedom that they never achieved.....bunch of amatuers

[IP address logged]

There is an equal amount of internal discussion regarding Northern Ireland on the Celtic board as there is discussion about and against the Protestant community in Northern Ireland. The main conflict regarding Northern Irish politics, history and religion is caused by the high level of intrusion on the Celtic board, as illustrated by the pie chart below.

Northern Ireland threads on the Celtic message board 16-17 August 2004

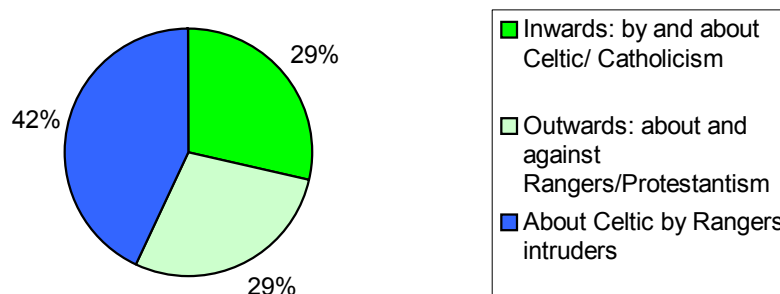


Figure 5.12 Northern Ireland threads on the Celtic message board 16-17 August 2004

Conversely, in the Northern Irish threads there was no intrusion to the Rangers board from Celtic fans and therefore no conflict-causing activities. Rather, the majority of Northern Irish content on the Rangers board was similar to Poster 043's comments above in that they were about and against Catholicism in Northern Ireland i.e. outwardly sectarian in nature.

Northern Ireland threads on the Rangers message board 16-17 August 2004



Figure 5.13 Northern Ireland threads on the Rangers message board 16-17 August 2004

(b) Stereotypes used in an abusive fashion

It is worth repeating here that no blame is being apportioned in this study. However, it is important to examine the pejorative stereotypes used on the boards and, unfortunately, the majority of these stereotypes are aimed at the Celtic board by Rangers posters and intruders. The fact that no Rangers/ Protestant stereotypes spring immediately to mind is connected to the fact that most Celtic/ Catholic stereotypes (dirty, stupid and so on) have historical bases in the Irish immigration era during which, as mentioned in the literature review, Irish Protestants were far less maligned than Irish Catholics. These eighteenth and nineteenth century stereotypes are still used on twenty-first century methods of communication.

There is no need for a pie chart to illustrate the use of stereotypes on the Rangers board as 100% of threads which make use of stereotypes are by Rangers fans about and against Celtic/ Catholicism. Examples of these stereotypes follow below:

Posted by [Poster 044](#) on 17 Aug 02:33

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: huns don't have anything ...

your a mhanky pr1ck, nearly every thread on this board has the word hun or refers to Rangers in the title
GET A JOB AND STOP ROBBING GRANNIES YA STINKIN JUNKED UP SCURGE
TRY AND KEEP OFF THE SMACK, AND FOR FUK SAKE HAVE A WASH SOAPDODGING
SCUM

WATP

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 045](#) on 17 Aug 00:07

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Yahoo who won the Larsson top ...

Fukk, talk about your stereotypical beadrattler!

One eyebrow, HUGE ring that you could eat your dinner off - not that you'd want to seeing as no sane person wuold eat anything that's been near a tarrier's grubby mits - cross eyes and a daft accent.

HTHTGR

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 046](#) on 17 Aug 17:18

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Sudden floods in Londonderry ...

All the places flooded are Tim areas

All they need now is soap!

WATP

[IP address logged]

Unfortunately, the same pattern is repeated on the Celtic board where there are no stereotypes used in an abusive fashion about or against Protestants. It is important to note that Celtic fans are not saints, there is a huge amount of abuse levelled at Rangers fans on other types of threads, and terms such as 'Hun' are frequently used. However, when it comes to the perpetuation of stereotypes Rangers are by far the worst offenders. Therefore, on the Celtic board, 100% of abusive stereotypes are committed by Rangers intruders. An example of this follows below.

Posted by [Poster 065](#) on 17 Aug 05:48

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: FAO Poster 066 ...

celtic are a bunch of nobodys.and their support one of the most un cleansed in the whole of BRITISH football.whats your reply to that potato picker.

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 065 on 17 Aug 05:51

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: FAO Poster 066 ...

cant answer that one cause its all true.eh dirty one

[IP address logged]

(c) Accusations of bigotry and protestations of innocence

Both sets of fans are eager to see their own clubs as non-sectarian and their derby rivals as sad and unredeemable models of bigotry. In the following thread, Poster 021 mockingly asks Celtic poster Poster 119 whether he is missing the two former players who make up his user-id, Henrik Larsson and Lubomir Moravcik. Poster 119 unjustifiably accuses the posters and Rangers itself of being bigoted.

Posted by Poster 119 on 16 Aug 22:06

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: Poster 119 on the board ...

Nope, got far to many great memories of them both. But thanks for asking.

Bears agianst Bigotry indeed.

[IP address logged]

Posted by POSTER 021 on 16 Aug 22:07

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: <name removed> on the board ...

"Nope, got far to many great memories of them both. But thanks for asking.
Bears agianst Bigotry indeed"

Bwahahahahahahahahahahaha

Fanny!!!!

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 023 on 16 Aug 22:08

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: <name removed> on the board ...

Two errors, fucknut.

It was random abuse, not bigotry, and your spelling's shite.

[IP address logged]

The Celtic board is packed with accusations of Ranger's bigotry: these claims are mentioned in 50% of all threads. Although Rangers intruders are a regular feature on the board, retaliatory claims of bigotry are far fewer, as can be seen from the chart below

Accusations of bigotry on the Celtic message board 16-17 August 2004



Figure 5.14 Accusations of bigotry on the Celtic message board 16-17 August 2004

Despite the recent efforts of Rangers FC to cast aside its sectarian past, Celtic fans remain smugly convinced of their inherent moral superiority. Celtic fans see the team, the fans, the Rangers Supporters Trust and the Follow Follow message board as being united in bigotry. A number of posters greeted Follow Follow's Bears Against Bigotry banner displayed at a match the week before with incredulity.

Posted by [Poster 047](#) on 17 Aug 13:09 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: The Blue Order's new banner - shocking ...

thats that bears against bigotry kicking in
 UP TO OUR KNEES IN ***** [*fenian, a reference to the sectarian song We Are The Billy Boys*] BLOOD
 BEARS AGAINST BIGOTRY
 [IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 048](#) on 17 Aug 13:15 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: The Blue Order's new banner - shocking ...

"Bears against Brains"
 [IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 049](#) on 17 Aug 13:16 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: The Blue Order's new banner - shocking ...

Bears Against Bigotry?
 Membership: must be, whoooo...at least two or three...
 [IP address logged]

Accusations of bigotry made by Rangers fans towards Celtic fans are far less frequent with references made in only 26% of threads. As Celtic intrusion on the Rangers board is fairly infrequent there is only one mention of it by a Celtic intruder.

Accusations of bigotry on the Rangers message board 16-17 August 2004



Figure 5.15 Accusations of bigotry on the Rangers message board 16-17 August 2004

One Rangers thread accuses Glasgow City Council of institutional bigotry and discrimination. On hearing that there was a job vacancy in the Sense Over Sectarianism initiative, posters assume that a Catholic will get the job.

Posted by [Poster 050](#) on 17 Aug 14:38 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: Sence of sectarianism job going ! ...

Its on the jobs section of GCC, i reckon Seamus or Patrick will already have the job !
 [IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 051](#) on 17 Aug 14:38 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: re: re: re: Sence of sectarianism job going ! ...

Just left school,4 of us applied for apprenticeships with GDC,loads of vacancies so naturally thought we'd all get a start. Me,the only Prod and guy with some building experience,no interview required. My mates all told to come down on the same day for brief introduction then start. When I complained they said they had lost my application,even though they had written back to me to say NO-ONE would be getting took on that year.My mates all got in though.! Lying F.enian *****s!
 [IP address logged]

Statements such as these are of the 'anecdotal' type criticised by Bruce et al. (2004). However, their existence and the venom with which they are cited are crucial: whether

true or not, they are truly believed. There follows below a similar example of unsubstantiated discrimination from the Celtic board.

Posted by [Poster 052](#) on 17 Aug 13:19 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: For Alex Rae: Altogether now..... ..

"ever fought against adversity"
Are you kidding???? I'm ONE of about 750,000 catholics who live in a country with a population of about 5 million protestants."ever fought against adversity"???

You bet.
[IP address logged]

(d) Accusations of paranoia

Celtic posters enjoy laughing at the perceived paranoia of Rangers fans in a reversal of past times when they were seen to be the paranoid team: 'Why are all the huns foaming at the mouth? i mean i thought we were meant to be the paranoid ones?' (Poster 053, 17/08, 12:02). References to Rangers' paranoia appear in 16% of all Celtic threads, with only one retaliatory accusation from a Rangers intruder. On the Rangers board, there are no accusations of Celtic/ Catholic paranoia. The only mention is a single post by a Celtic intruder.

Rangers fans do not help to alleviate these accusations of paranoia with posts regarding the Catholic conspiracy in the Firefighters Union (Rangers, The Catholic Firefighters Union, 17/08, 11:15). Celtic fans find this hilarious.

Posted by [Poster 054](#) on 17 Aug 10:53 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)
The FF "all firemen are feenyins thread" ...

Oh they're losing it completely. I suppose if fires break out in Larkhall [*Protestant area in North Lanarkshire, near Glasgow*], they'll let the place burn down?

Who's next? The Police Force are kafflicks!!!

[IP address logged] Link:
<http://boards.footymad.net/mboard/load.php?tno=247&fid=123&sty=1&act=1&mid=2144049798>

Posted by [Poster 055](#) on 17 Aug 10:56 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: The FF ...

Well the media are infested, Glasgow council, the ferry guys, most of the judiciary, the Parades Commission, the BBC, Russia, Phoenix Honda and large swathes of Eastern Europe so I think so.

All of this whilst we struggle about on the buroo [*the brew = benefits office*] and bemoan the lack of a Presbyterian

education and that. We seem to be doing allright doon the San Giro..

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 056](#) on 17 Aug 10:58

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: The FF ...

so if their house is burning down, they won't call the fire brigade? LOL.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 048](#) on 17 Aug 11:31

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: The FF ...

It's slowly sinking in that no one likes them, they do care, and the collective idiocy on FF regarding the Rae incident shows them up for what they: a very paranoid, ignorant subsection of the people.

[IP address logged]

The Alex Rae ban generated 132 media-related threads in the Rangers own team football category. This was extremely high, constituting 34% of all Rangers football related threads. Many of these threads focused on the *Glasgow Herald* sports writer Graham Spiers' defence of the Rae ban. Many threads threatened actual physical violence.

Posted by [Poster 057](#) on 17 Aug 09:59

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: Don't blame Spiers – blame our Custodian ...

Spiers apparently 'got some verbals' on Saturday...he ain't seen nothing yet!!! I do not condone such actions but sooner or later he's going to get his just desserts and he can't say it won't be deserved. He has passed up the opportunity to be fair-minded and a fist will sadly end his trips to Ibrox if the club won't. So sad that it should come to this...but the fans cannot and will no longer make him welcome.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 058](#) on 17 Aug 10:11

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: Don't blame Spiers - blame our Custodian ...

If an orderly queue is being formed any chance of me being at the front ?
We need to have the specimen surrounded by people "looking the other way" and who knows what might happen, his poisoned pen might get shoved somewhere it is not designed to go.

[IP address logged]

In the 'officials' category, many posters seemed to blame Catholics and a Catholic-biased media for the ban by UEFA (a sporting body located in Europe which is unlikely to read the *Daily Record* every day, as sensibly pointed out by a Rangers fan in the media category).

Posted by [Poster 059](#) on 16 Aug 22:57

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

What a fückin disgrace ...

I don't normally get riled, but I've just come back in from a wee night with my mates, and see that Alex Rae has been barred from playing the next 5 European games.

Let me just say:

Thank you Mr. (lets back all Scottish teams in Europe, as long as they are called selik) Keevins.

Thank you Mr. (I hate all that's to do with Rangers since David Murray wouldn't kiss me) Spiers.

Thank you Mr. (I talk like a nasal ned, but that's just because I'm a real good fenyan)McNee.

Thank you Mr. (Well ehm ehmehm, I was told ehm that this ehm is only ehm a selik ehm issue by my ehm ehm masters) Hately (you have never been better named)

Thank you all for your outrage that brought this thing up, and made such an issue of it across Europe, that the sportsman Alex Rae will live with this till the end of his career.

If this had been hensprick [*Henrik Larsson, celebrated Celtic striker*], or any of the others from Voodoo Land, then it would have disappeared in the press, but your mock outrage has cost a Scotsman 5 European games at the end of his career.

I hope you are all happy, ya bunch of Irish fenyan bāstards.

The Rangers Forever

[IP address logged]

The undeniable paranoia and bitterness displayed by Rangers posters was no doubt generated by recent ban and analysis at another point in time may result in fewer instances. However, at this point, Rangers were indeed displaying extreme paranoia and Celtic fans revelled in it.

(e) Threats of violence

Threats of physical violence were seldom made on either board. The Rangers board contained one example which was actually a story about a Celtic fan trying to start a fight with a Rangers fan (We welcome the chase, Rangers, 16/08, 21:11). The Celtic board also contained only one instance and this was a case of inter board rivalry.

Posted by [Poster 060](#) on 17 Aug 14:22

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

I want to fight ...

Poster 046. He always seems to be slagging off the good fe.nians in Doire.

Name your place ass.hole

[IP address logged]

The absence of physical threats of violence within the sectarian threads may be connected to the understanding that the threats of 'cyber warriors' are, frankly, quite silly. Poster 061 replies:

Posted by [Poster 061](#) on 17 Aug 14:24

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: I want to fight ...

keyboard hardmen

[X][X]

[IP address logged]

(f) General

On the Rangers board, inward looking references to Protestant/ Loyalist culture constitute 100% of the General category and 31% of all sectarian-related threads and cover areas such as trips to Ulster nights, Northern Ireland games and Orange marches in Belfast, joining Orange Lodges or the Black Institution and loyalist songs on mp3. On the Celtic board, there is only 1 inward looking reference to Catholic/ Republican affairs in a thread which recommends good books about the Northern Irish Republican conflict. There is also 1 outward looking thread which says that Catholics would not be welcome at the Follow Follow Ulster night.

The decision as to whether internal references (by and about the community) to religion or Northern Irish history or politics is entirely in the eye of the beholder as some may argue that internal celebration is not necessarily a negation of the Other. However, it cannot be denied that, from the perspective of the rival community, Loyalist or Republican discussion is often perceived to be incendiary, offensive and allied with terrorism and persecution.

Both sides are eager to seize upon perceived sectarianism from the other. In the following thread, Celtic fans deny that talking about Northern Ireland is sectarian. The posters seem to share no consensus on what is and is not sectarian, labelling threads from the other side as such merely to score points.

Posted by [Poster 028](#) on 17 Aug 11:57

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Celtic and the troubles ? ...

can't help but notice some of the posts on here about sectarianism and violence in the 6 counties, whats the connection ? celtic are a scottish football club.

why does this type of thing intrest celtic fans?

bigotry perhaps ?

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 062](#) on 17 Aug 12:00

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: Celtic and the troubles ? ...

I tend not to post on the subject myself, however, if some do, can you explain why this is an example of bigotry?

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 063](#) on 17 Aug 12:02

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: Celtic and the troubles ? ...

There's also threads on here about music, films, cooking, yahoo Pool, slug infestation (you should maybe pay special attention to that particular thread)

There's also been many threads on world politics, the war in Iraq, Afghanistan, is that bigotry too ?

[IP address logged]

The most noticeable resolution strategy is similar to the first of Baker's (2001) categories ('advocate sympathy and understanding'. This is chiefly centred on the Celtic board and is far less pleasant than it sounds. Celtic fans, delighted by Rangers reversal of fortunes (both in financial and team performance terms and in the paranoia displayed on both OF boards) prefer to sit back and watch the mayhem while passing judgement at the bigotry of their rivals. As such, the vast majority of Celtic posters adopt a stance of non-retaliation, reasoned argument and an attitude of pitying superiority.

Posted by [Poster 064](#) on 17 Aug 10:05

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: If you need cheering up.... ...

2 Rules to remember when dealing with them

1/ You will always be better than them, they have to keep announcing to the world that they are the people which shows insecurity and a belief that someone else might actually just be better than them

2/ They want to lower you to their level by hurling religious, sectarian and bigoted insults. When one of our fellow Tims starts the "feck off Hun" p1sh then the Hun has won.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 065](#) on 17 Aug 06:11

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

This is a control method already in place on Footymad and Rivals.net but many users complain that it is applied inconsistently; we return again to the question of what is and is not sectarian and who has the right to decide that a user should be banned. Banning, in any case, is futile as individuals can return using different email addresses and user-ids. This is illustrated by the following off-topic thread in which a Celtic fan boasts about being banned from the Rangers board:

Posted by [Poster 067](#) on 17 Aug 12:48 | [Reply](#)
re: re: I'm about to banned from ff.... ...

Just to confirm, I am indeed banned under the moniker of <name removed>. Ah well, need to think up of a new name to get banned. That was my 4th.
[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 052](#) on 17 Aug 12:54 | [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: I'm about to banned from ff.... ...

How do you change your moniker????
[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 067](#) on 17 Aug 13:30 | [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: re: I'm about to banned from ff.... ...

Yahoo gives you about 5 free e-mail addresses, I just use a different one to register on ff. It has worked OK, but I am running out of addresses now
[IP address logged]

The availability of free email addresses and the anonymity of ever-changing monikers makes it easy for fans to register with rival message boards and cause trouble. In fact, Footymad itself is partially to blame for any trouble on its message boards. The introduction to the Footymad message boards suggests that the boards are anarchic and unmoderated; flaming is condoned and positively encouraged:

We don't care what you rabbit on about as long as you do it on our messageboard. Ranters of the world unite we are having a rave on our board tonight. Want to insult the fans of rival sides, well go to it, slag 'em off to your hearts content it matters not a jot to us. (Footymad, 2004)

These anarchic tendencies are clearly a showpiece as many fans write of having been thrown off of other boards and the boards are in fact moderated. However, the rhetoric may appeal to those users who are more likely to indulge in flaming than discussion

about football and Footymad itself may be to blame for this. It also seems monumentally naïve for an English-based company to promote such use of their site without understanding the social milieu of Scottish football and its inherent conflicts.

- **Prosecuting those who post sectarian content**

Taking legal action against those who post sectarian content would involve identifying users via their IP addresses which are logged on both Footymad and Rivals.net. Even if this was done, the discussion of legislation in the online world in section 4.3.2 shows that there is a lack of dependable and enforceable legislation with which to prosecute posters.

- **Engaging in argument with those who post sectarian content**

It is hypothesised that counter argument would be the most successful means of control. This is similar to Zickmund's assertion (1997) that the accessible nature of the online environment means that those with dangerous views are more likely to be challenged by those who disagree. The vast majority of board users have no interest in sectarianism and there are numerous examples of challenges and counter-argument on both the Rangers and Celtic boards. If online communities were to visibly support and encourage individuals such as these, a self-imposed - and therefore infinitely more effective - control method could be established within the communities. Examples of fruitful debate are cited in the following section.

5.6.2. Engaging in argument: message boards as a forum for dissent

It will be, in all likelihood, very seldom that an online argument or debate will lead to a life-changing and epiphanic shift in attitude or beliefs. However, a large enough quantity of reasoned argument might mean that the extremist poster is aware that there are those who disagree with him or her and are able to do so without resorting to abuse and vitriol as in this thread from the Rangers board involving a Celtic intruder:

Posted by [Poster 068](#) on 17 Aug 11:48

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: A thought on Graham Spiers ...

My My Poster 069. is intelligent debate beyond you? As i put in a previous post that no-one has yet answered the points posed, only offered abuse and expletives.

I thought this was a forum for football DEBATE?

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 069](#) on 17 Aug 11:54

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: A thought on Graham Spiers ...

Yes this is indeed a football forum, for football fans, not paedophiles.
So take yourself and your Jakey [how appropriate]buddy with you.
Watch the door doesn't hit your erse on the way out?
It's probably still a bit tender.

5.6.2.1 Arguing with the intruders

The following thread is a fairly crude illustration of the value of engaging in argument with those who post sectarian content but it nonetheless conveys the point. Poster 065, who was an early morning intruder to the Celtic board, flamed posters through his or her user-id which suggests a sectarian mindset towards Catholicism ('TTS NOT MY NAME ITS THE WAY I FEEL' 17/08, 03:24) and through antiquated Irish Catholic labels such as 'leprachorns', potato thieves, beadrattlers (i.e. rosary beads) and drunkards. During one thread entitled 'Gloryhunters...⊗' Poster 027 becomes tired of Poster 065's abuse and writes 'Look, we know your drunk, sitting typing in your pysh stained y fronts. Go to bed, kick your dug on the way, call it a catholic. You have won the agument. Lets all bow the most hated man.' (17/08, 04:04).

Posted by [Poster 065](#) on 17 Aug 04:30

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

FISH ON A FRIDAY ...

NO THANKS STEAK PIE FOR ME.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 065](#) on 17 Aug 04:34

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: **FISH ON A FRIDAY ...**

nothing to say potato thieves.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 027](#) on 17 Aug 04:37

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: **FISH ON A FRIDAY ...**

Pop quiz.....what century are you in????

Laughing at you.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 065](#) on 17 Aug 04:39 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: FISH ON A FRIDAY ...

doesnt matter. what do you eat on a friday?

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Chicago](#) on 17 Aug 04:44 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: FISH ON A FRIDAY ...

Whatever I want.
My kids like Deep dish sausage pizza on Fridays.

I do not go to any church.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 065](#) on 17 Aug 04:47 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: FISH ON A FRIDAY ...

YOU SOUND ALRIGHT MA MAN.IM GOING FOR MY TEA THE NOW .WE WILL SPEAK
WHEN I RETURN.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 027](#) on 17 Aug 04:51 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: FISH ON A FRIDAY ...

You see, little less hate and you feel better.

[IP address logged]

There is of course the possibility, as there is with all those who flame, that Poster 065 did not mean what he said and merely wanted to cause a stir. However, as with all flames, it is the way in which the flame is perceived by its recipients which is important. Poster 027, although he was perplexed and amused by Poster 065's words, believed that he meant what he said and felt it necessary to defend himself to an extent. He therefore argued his point in a reasoned manner and Poster 065 was shown to be ridiculous and aggressive with no real point to make:

Posted by [Poster 065](#) on 17 Aug 03:33 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: FAO Poster 070 ...

WELL READ THIS WHATEVER YOUR TTTS IS .I COULDN'T GIVE A TOSS WHAT SOMEBODY
WHOS ANCESTORS USED TO STEAL TOTTYS FOR A LIVING GET A JOB YOU DMF.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 070](#) on 17 Aug 03:39 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: FAO Poster 070 ...

lol

I find it funny that you lot make fun of a famine like it's some big joke. I mean to me that is a tragedy but not to you lot - says it all really.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 065](#) on 17 Aug 03:41

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: FAO Poster 070 ...

OH YEAH PULL THE OLD FAMINE ONE. I ASKED WHY YOU WERE ROBBING THEM FROM LOYALIST FIELDS.

[IP address logged]

Poster 065 was a frequent and venomous poster during 16-17 August 2004. Poster 065's many posts made multiple references to stereotypes and Northern Ireland; without his input within this 24 hour period sectarian data may not have weighed so heavily against Rangers. To use the example of Poster 065 is not entirely fair; he appears to be a remarkably brainless example of potato-obsessed bigotry. However, the point must be made that his 'thoughts' would have no such visible public platform without the message board; CMC technologies are enabling his particular form of ill thought-out extremism to be transmitted to his rivals.

The following thread is an example of political debate which does not sink to abuse and stereotype for effect. Poster 038 is a Rangers intruder on the Celtic board. Although they are positioned at opposing ends of the political spectrum Poster 064 and Poster 038 both oppose extremist Loyalism and Republicanism

Posted by [Poster 064](#) on 17 Aug 09:34

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: GAA jersey sparks sectarian attack in Derry ...

The bottom line here is that these numbskulls think they are the only people worthy of living in the 6 counties. Was reading earlier of more racial attacks in South Belfast and Dungannon. Its time everyone woke up to the fact that the extreme right wing are alive and well and living under the "No Surrender" banner.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 038](#) on 17 Aug 10:28

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: GAA jersey sparks sectarian attack in Derry ...

Yeh because Loyalists are the only big bad racists.

Open your eyes Poster 064. I work with plenty of racist republicans.

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 064 on 17 Aug 10:34

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: GAA jersey sparks sectarian attack in Derry ...

I have no doubts that there are racist Republicans, all I am saying is that it seems to be only in Loyalist strongholds that people are getting attacked. Many Loyalists will be disgusted with these actions and I mentioned that the racists are finding sanctuary within the Loyalist movement. Don't kid yourself, Loyalism has a very nasty right wing element lurking inside it, well organised and willing to take action to protect the White Prods of the 6 counties.

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 038 on 17 Aug 10:37

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: GAA jersey sparks sectarian attack in Derry ...

I know there are extreme right wing elements on our side. Anyone who thinks there isn't are foolish. All i'm saying is that republicans arrent so clean cut as some would make out.

By the way, extreme right wing can GTF!

[IP address logged]

Another good example of non-aggressive and reasoned conflict comes from a thread entitled 'Bears Against Bigotry...' (Celtic, 17/08) The thread begins with Celtic fans mocking the Bears Against Bigotry supporters initiative, condemning Ulster nights and pointing at Rangers user-ids which incorporate '1690', 'King Billy' and 'Orange' as examples of their continuing bigotry: 'A HUNS A BIGOT A BIGOT IS A HUN' (Poster 071, 01:13). Two intruders, Poster 072 and Poster 073, ask the previous posters to explain themselves: why are Ulster nights and depictions of the Red Hand of Ulster bigoted? Poster 074 highlights the difficulties apparent in defining what exactly a celebration of one's own culture is, and what is sectarian:

Posted by Poster 074 on 17 Aug 13:35

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: Bears Against Bigotry..... ..

On the surface, the red hand isn't bigoted, neither is usernames like 1690, kingbilly etc. etc. etc.

However, once these 'gatherings' take place, anyone who thinks they won't be another Loyalist hate-fest is kidding themselves on.

So yes, while the advert/usernames might not be bigoted, the events sure are. That is why the "Bears Against Bigotry" is so laughable it's untrue.

There you go.

[IP address logged]

Poster 073 good-naturedly disagrees with Poster 074.

Posted by Poster 073 on 17 Aug 13:43

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: Bears Against Bigotry..... ..

Fair enough, just bear in mind that this isn't an Ulster-themed night in Scotland, it's an FF event in Northern Ireland which seems completely reasonable considering that outside Scotland most FF posters come from Northern Ireland, and they can't always make events in Scotland. I take your point I just reject the clear insinuation made by the original post that the very concept of such a night is inherently bigoted and anybody who attends is clearly a bigot.

[IP address logged]

When it is suggested that nights with flute bands and Loyalist DJs would attract bigots, he or she replies that the same could be said about Celtic nights in Northern Ireland.

Posted by Poster 073 on 17 Aug 13:52

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: Bears Against Bigotry..... ..

Well it might, I don't know if it would ever happen but I'm sure if yourselves or the huddleboard ever held a night in Northern Ireland there would be Celtic/Republican/Rebel tunes or whatever. Doesn't mean that every one of you who went would be a bigot, just that most of you I'm assuming would be republicans. Most ppl at the FF night will be Loyalists.

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 123 on 17 Aug 13:56

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: Bears Against Bigotry..... ..

aye well Poster 073, guess we're back to what it means to be a republican and what it means to be a loyalist. your loyalism is like your team, seen all its best days already. tatty-bye.

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 073 on 17 Aug 13:59

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: Bears Against Bigotry..... ..

I'm not a loyalist mate. Cya.

[IP address logged]

The ease with which fans are able to swap between sites and engage in inter-board activity can be a negative feature when thoughtless flames and abuse are launched at rival fans. However, it also means that sectarian thought cannot fester in isolation within the board community as comments and opinions are challenged at every opportunity. Poster 073 gently refutes accusations of Loyalist bigotry, both personally and on behalf of Rangers fans, and reminds the posters that sectarianism is practiced on both sides of the divide. It is doubtful whether he or she has changed the minds of the Celtic participants and it is impossible to know Poster 073's political persuasions or activities outside of the board. However, in this thread, he or she has disproved the opinion that 'A HUNS A BIGOT A BIGOT IS A HUN' and has made the Celtic posters explain and consider

their opinions. This illustrates the sort of online behaviour which may be conducive to change.

5.6.2.2 Internal debate

Internal conflict is rarely as venomous as inter-board conflict but it is frequent. In the following thread, Poster 075 is belittled for daring to suggest that Colin Glass, chairman of the Rangers Supporters Trust, is anything less than evil.

Posted by [Poster 076](#) on 17 Aug 15:24 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: RST Question ...

"Colin Glass is a decent man "

Thats why he tries to hide the fact he has board members on the RST calling for a return to the old signing policy.

He also called Celtic fans bigots during a time i posted ot him on ff, i was asking him about this member he then spat the dummy called us bigots and i got banned.

Decent man aye right, take your tongue out of ff for one day c_)

[IP address logged]

Poster 075 points out that Celtic fans can also be bigoted. His opinions are ignored and he is called a 'bluenose' but he, at least, makes the point that Rangers fans can be 'decent people' despite their differences.

Posted by [Poster 075](#) on 17 Aug 15:25 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: RST Question ...

Here speaks the voice of reason.. Because there are NO celtic fans that are bigots of course

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 075](#) on 17 Aug 15:33 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: re: RST Question ...

There are plenty on FF who I would criticise and they are reason I don't post on there.

By same token there are a few decent guys on there, a couple of whom I know and have been known to have a drink with. They have different football teams, religion, politics etc. but are decent people.

What is the problem with that?

[IP address logged]

In the following thread, Rangers fans complain that the media allows Celtic fans to sing IRA songs and wave the tricolour yet label Rangers fans bigots for indulging in Loyalist songs and imagery. Poster 077 highlights some historical inaccuracies.

Posted by [Poster 078](#) on 17 Aug 11:50

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: rhebel media ...

the scottish media are as two faced as they come.

we are bigots for waving our countrys flag and singing songs about a past british king.

WATP

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 077](#) on 17 Aug 12:07

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: rhebel media ...

A British King, who was Dutch. Appointed by the English Parliament, and who didn't really want to be here (and mostly wasn't leaving Mary to rule). But fair enough.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 079](#) on 17 Aug 12:09

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: rhebel media ...

And a man we have to thank for saving us from Popery and laying the foundations of the civil and religious liberty that we all, you included, enjoy.

[IP address logged]

Poster 079's historical points of reference and language (the word 'Popery' has roots in nineteenth century anti-Irish Catholic persecution and is suspiciously similar to a Rangers user-id Poster 028) are archaic and surprisingly serious. Poster 077 genially states that he does not agree with religion or nationalism in football.

Posted by [Poster 077](#) on 17 Aug 12:12

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: rhebel media ...

I honestly, honestly couldn't care less. I was just taking part in the banter.

My own view, as stated yesterday, is that the only flags that should be flown are the club's flags. Anything else has nothing to do with football.

The same with songs. If it's not directly related to the team, it shouldn't be sung.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 078](#) on 17 Aug 12:15

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: rhebel media ...

MR "Poster 077" if it was not for king billy we would all be living under the rule of the pope.

i for one give thanks everyday for what william done for us!

NO SURRENDER

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 077](#) on 17 Aug 12:21

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: rhebel media ...

Fair enough. I wouldn't want to live in a state ruled by any religious organisation. I don't believe in organised religion full stop.

[IP address logged]

This is an example of fairly tame conflict; rather than shouting the odds at Poster 077, Poster 079 and Poster 078 give the impression of being maniacal and senile history teachers. Poster 077's voice of reason is extremely unlikely to change the attitudes of the other participants but his voice has been heard and his opinions have been made public. Furthermore, the opinions of Poster 079 and Poster 078 have not changed Poster 077's attitudes: the dissemination of the other participant's sectarian views has not caused him to abandon his non-sectarian beliefs. This is an important point. Although CMC technologies provide a forum for extremist content it does not mean that this extremism will unquestioningly be accepted by others. It is this which makes the online environment conducive to debate.

6. Repeated Methodology – Analysis of Old-Firm Day 2 Threads

With the fact that sectarian content does exist on message boards proven, one further day of postings (1st November 2004 00:00 to 00:00) was selected at random from the archived selection of Rangers (FollowFollow.com) and Celtic (Celticmad.com) message board threads. This will be referred to as Day 2, and, where appropriate, will be compared with data and findings from Day 1 (16th August 2004 18:09 to 17th August 2004 18:09).

On Day 1, it was hypothesised that the Old Firm (OF) message boards would contain qualitatively different content to the boards of other football teams. In order to prove or disprove the hypothesis, the ‘control’ boards of Dundee, Dundee United, Liverpool or Everton were also analysed to highlight differences or similarities in content. The need to use control team threads for comparison on Day 2 had effectively been removed as it was proven on Day 1 that there was no evidence of sectarian content on the control boards and the content on OF message boards was indeed qualitatively different.

It is hypothesised that this difference – i.e. the presence of sectarian-related discussion – will be a constant feature on the OF boards. As explained previously, the popularity and volume of traffic on both message boards makes any long-term manual analysis impossible. Therefore, an analysis of one additional day of Old Firm off-topic postings (Day 2) was thought sufficient to support the hypothesis and prove that the findings on Day 1 were not out of the ordinary.

6.1 Popularity of Footymad websites and numbers of message board threads

Shown below are the average rankings over three months recorded for host site Footymad.net and the Rangers and Celtic websites. Since the first day’s analysis, the Celtic-Mad website has changed its name to Comeonthehoops.com:

Websites	<i>Average Traffic Ranking</i> Day 1 (August 2004)	<i>Average Traffic Ranking</i> Day 2 (November 2004)
Footymad	23,723	17,246 (+ 6,477)
Follow Follow (Rangers)	145,633	95,751 (+ 49,882)
Come on the Hoops (Celtic)	790,510	4,943,115 (- 4,152,605)

Table 6.1 Average traffic ranking over three months on Day 1 and Day 2

Footymad has gained in popularity since the first day's analysis and the Rangers website Follow Follow has also considerably increased in traffic. Conversely, the Come on the Hoops website has dramatically decreased in terms of visitor numbers, but this may be due simply to the change in URL and the fact that Alexa's tracking has not had enough data on the new address to record yet. However, even if visitors are bypassing the main website, the Celtic Mad message board remains as popular as on Day 1, as shown by the table below:

Message Boards	Number of threads Day 1	Number of threads Day 2
Rangers message board (Followfollow.com)	815	684
Celtic message board (Celticmad.com)	287	277

Table 6.2 Number of Celtic and Rangers message board threads, Day 1 and Day 2

The number of Celtic board threads on Day 2 is almost identical to those on Day 1 but the number of Rangers board threads is lower. As both days fell within the 2004/2005 football season, factors such as out of season quietness cannot be taken into account. Therefore, it can be surmised that the higher number of Rangers threads on Day 1 was

connected to the controversial Alex Rae ban which generated a large number of football-related threads.

6.2. Context of football related threads

A recent home game for Rangers had resulted in a 5-0 victory against Aberdeen. Follow Follow posters claimed that the Aberdeen fans had been singing songs celebrating the 1971 Ibrox Disaster in which 66 Rangers fans were crushed to death and the controversial tackle by Aberdeen player Neil Simpson on Ian Durrant, which had a significant impact on the Rangers player's career. Many Follow Follow posts therefore condemn the behaviour of the Aberdeen support. *Herald* journalist Graham Spiers is also once again maligned, this time for claiming that the Aberdeen support were 'magnificent' and that they sang 'Nice one Jimmy' rather than 'Nice one Simmy' (i.e. Neil Simpson).

A great deal of football related discussion on the Celtic board was connected to the upcoming Champions League match against Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk and its likely outcome. For both sides, a key topic of conversation was the resignation of Scotland manager Berti Vogts. Verdicts on the resignation and discussion as to his potential successor were therefore common, with ex-Rangers manager Walter Smith in the frame.

6.3. Off-topic chat

6.3.1. Do message board users mind off-topic chat?

It was suggested during the Day 1 analysis that message board users accept and enjoy off-topic conversation. This was because of the volume of traffic on the boards, the high level of participation in off-topic chat (52% of all Rangers and 49% of all Celtic threads) and the absence of any serious complaints about the off-topic chat on both boards.

6.3.2 Levels of off-topic chat

Day 2 showed similarly high levels of off-topic chat on both the Rangers and the Celtic boards. This is illustrated by the table and charts below.

	Rangers message board (Followfollow.com)	Celtic message board (Celticmad.com)
Number of football related threads on allotted day	293 (43% of total threads)	105 (38% of total threads)
Number of off-topic threads on allotted day	391 (57% of total threads)	172 (62% of total threads)
Total number of threads on allotted day	684	277

Table 6.3.1 Celtic and Rangers football related and off-topic chat, Day 1 and Day 2

Football related and off-topic threads Rangers (Day 2)

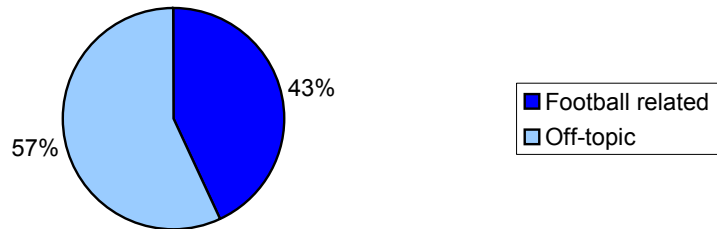


Figure 6.3.1 Football related and off-topic threads, Rangers (Day 2)

Football related and off-topic threads Celtic (Day 2)

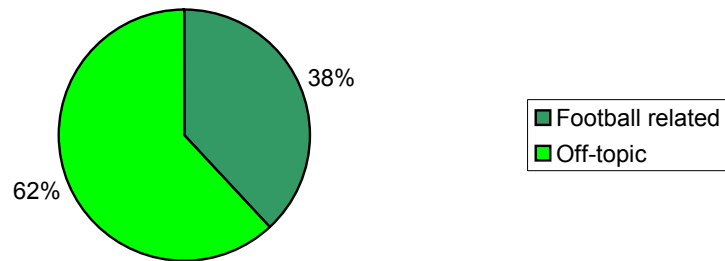


Figure 6.3.2 Football related and off-topic threads, Celtic (Day 2)

Therefore, levels of off-topic chat were even higher for both boards on Day 2 than on Day 1, with well over half of all threads revolving around something other than football. Topics included, amongst others, personal lives, computer games, music, sex, drinking, the upcoming US elections, films and television. As on Day 1, the existence of this off-topic chat

- (a) Fosters a feeling of 'group-ness' and community on the boards.
- (b) Helps to contextualise the anonymising experience of online communication
- (c) Maintains hierarchies amongst the posters
- (d) Can lead to online conflict unconnected to football.

6.4. Online sectarianism: off-topic sectarian-related threads

As on Day 1, all threads in the off-topic category were analysed for references to (i) religion, and (ii) politics and history (connected to Northern Ireland). The table below displays the number percentage of sectarian threads in the off-topic categories and on the message boards as a whole on Day 1 and Day 2.

Message board	Number and percentage of sectarian-related threads in off-topic category				Number and percentage of sectarian-related threads on the board as a whole			
	Day 1		Day 2		Day 1		Day 2	
Rangers (Followfollow.com)	35	8%	46	15%	35	4%	46	7%
Celtic (CelticMad.com)	38	24%	25	15%	38	12%	25	9%

Table 6.4.1 Sectarian-related threads in off-topic category and on boards as a whole (Day 1 and 2)

On the boards as a whole, there is a slightly higher percentage of sectarian-related Rangers threads on day 2 and a slightly lower percentage of Celtic threads. The pie charts below help to illustrate the incidence of sectarian-related content on the Rangers and Celtic message boards on Day 2.

Sectarian related threads in the Celtic off-topic category (Day 2)

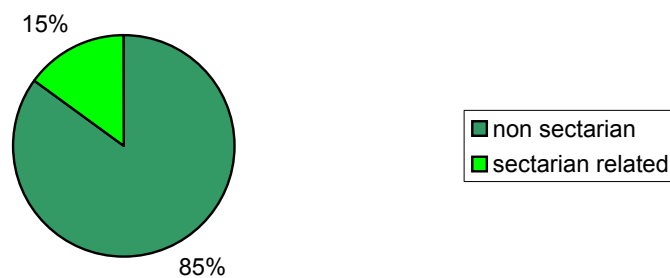


Figure 6.4.1 Sectarian-related threads in Celtic off-topic category Day 2

Sectarian related threads in the Rangers off-topic category (Day 2)

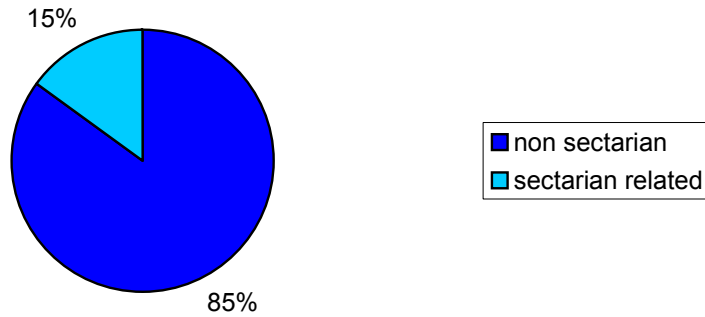


Figure 6.4.2 Sectarian-related threads in Rangers off-topic category Day 2

However, sectarian related threads as a proportion of the total threads on the message boards were slightly higher on the Celtic board, as shown below.

Total percentage of sectarian related threads on the Celtic message board (Day 2)

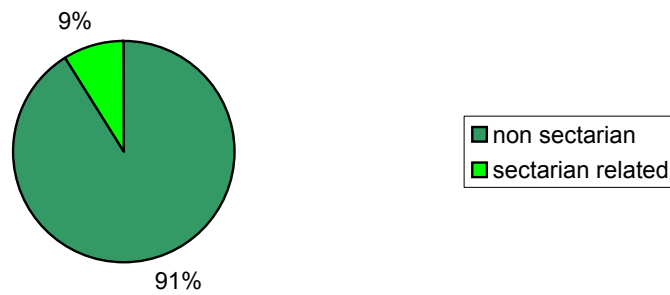


Figure 6.4.3 Percentage of sectarian-related threads on Celtic message board (Day 2)

Total percentage of sectarian related threads on the Rangers message board (Day 2)

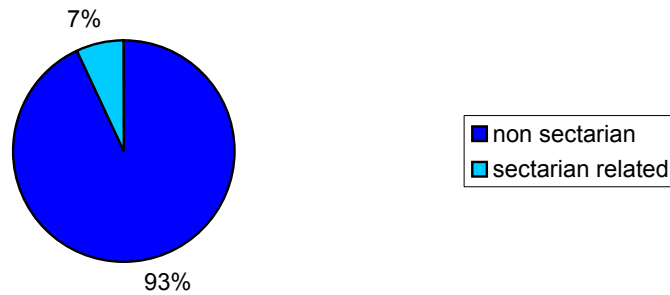


Figure 6.4.4 Percentage of sectarian-related threads on Rangers message board (Day 2)

6.4.1 Conflict and intrusion within sectarian-related threads

Conflict is present on two ways on the boards

- Internal conflict between posters on the same board
- Conflict generated by intrusion by posters from other boards

As before, sectarian content appears to be expressed in one or both of these two ways

- Internal: by the community and about the community
- Outward: about and against the rival community

On Day 1, intrusion levels were high on the Celtic board, with 47% of sectarian-related threads involving a Rangers intruder. In comparison, only 14% of threads on the Rangers board were affected by Celtic intrusion. This pattern was repeated and intensified on Day 2, on which over half of all threads on the Celtic board were influenced by Rangers intruders yet only 4% of Rangers threads involved Celtic intrusion.

Celtic message board

- 25 threads featuring sectarian content
- 13 (52%) of these threads involving Rangers intruders

Rangers message board

- 46 threads featuring sectarian content
- 2 (4%) of these threads Involving Celtic intruders

The main source of sectarian-related content can be found on the Rangers board. Moreover, the sectarian-related content on the Celtic board is heavily influenced and perhaps generated by Rangers intrusion. This is on comparison with day 1, where the main locus of sectarian activity was to be found on the Celtic board. As stated previously, if the two boards operated in isolation they may contain less sectarian comment; however, on both days, both sides continue to fuel the fire.

An interesting new feature for Day 2 is intrusion from fans outwith the Old Firm. This was most visible on the Celtic board and generated two of the longest, most involved threads. A recent Celtic game versus Motherwell and the controversy surrounding the Rangers v. Aberdeen game brought Motherwell and Aberdeen supporters over to the Celtic board.

Celtic message board

- 25 threads featuring sectarian content
- 2 (8%) of these threads involving Motherwell intruders
- 1 (4%) of these threads involving Aberdeen intruders

Rangers message board

- 46 threads featuring sectarian content
- 1 (2%) of these threads involving an Aberdeen intruder

This non-Old Firm intrusion will be briefly discussed in section 7 of the Day 2 report. However, it is worth noting here that Aberdeen fans were posting on the Celtic board but not on Follow Follow about a Rangers issue (offensive songs during the Rangers vs. Aberdeen match) suggests that the Rangers admin were swiftly banning Aberdeen fans. This also shows that intrusion is such an accepted part of the Footymad culture that Aberdeen fans also expected to be able to converse with Rangers fans on the Celtic board.

Posted by [SmugBluenose](#) on 01 Nov 21:25 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: ABERDEEN FANS WERE BRILLIANT!!!! ...

Interesting that you didn't post this on FF, where it would have been relevant.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [PositiveEducation](#) on 01 Nov 21:27 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: ABERDEEN FANS WERE BRILLIANT!!!! ...

here is 20p, away and tell some cunt that cares

[IP address logged]

Indeed, the Follow Follow admin appear to be strict about any kind of intrusion.

Posted by [Poster 071](#) on 01 Nov 02:11 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: Why Rangers fans come here rather than F ...

Dont entertain him SC hes a hun that is allowed to get his say in here ?but we cant do the same on ff???

[IP address logged]

During the Day 1 analysis it was noted that the attitude of host site Footymad was instrumental in encouraging the behaviour of fans: 'Want to insult the fans of rival sides, well go to it, slag 'em off to your hearts content, it matters not a jot to us.' (Footymad, 2004). By Day 2, the site had been redesigned and this notice had been taken down but the general tone and structure of threads on both boards remained largely the same. However, interestingly, one month after the Day 2 analysis, the following sticky message appeared on Follow Follow. This message, posted by admin, outlawed 'personal chit-chat', advised posters to ignore or complain about intrusive Celtic fans and asked posters to make clear the intention of their posts:

Posted by [Poster 080](#) on 05 Dec 16:20 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Sticky: The 10 commandments of FollowFollow.com ...

- 1) If your thread is not related to Rangers or football, please put "OT:" at the start of the subject.
- 2) Make the subject relevant to the content of the thread.
- 3) Please do not create a new thread for a subject that is already being covered.
- 4) No personal chit-chat on the board. You can use the chat room, MSN or E-mail instead.
- 5) Keep the caps lock off in the subject (does not include acronyms) and don't fill the subject with excessive punctuation.
- 6) If you are linking to posts on other boards or sites, copy and paste the content as well as providing a

link.

- 7) Take time to check your posts before submitting. Unreadable posts with text-speak in them will be chopped.
- 8) Don't clutter the board with questions for admin. You can mail us from the front page of the site.
- 9) Do not post personal details such as phone numbers or E-mail addresses. This is a banning offence.
- 10) Ignore timposters and troublemakers. Click on the complain button and admin will remove any idiots.
[IP address logged]

As mentioned, this sticky was posted after the Day 2 analysis so cannot have had any impact on Celtic intrusion or Rangers moderation on that day. However, it is worth noting this recent change of attitude and it would be interesting to examine whether the new rules are enforceable and whether they have thus far made any significant difference to themes of conversation and intrusion levels.

For the purposes of Day 2 analysis, however, the rules and moderation on both message boards remain the same as on Day 1.

6.4.2 Main themes of sectarian-related threads

On Day 1, the main themes of the sectarian-related threads were as follows:

- (i) Northern Irish religion, history and politics
e.g. references to Republican and loyalist incidents and organisations in Northern Ireland, historical battles, Irish immigration and the Great Famine.
- (ii) Stereotypes used in an abusive fashion
- (iii) Accusations of bigotry
- (iv) Accusations of paranoia
- (v) Threats of violence (i.e. physical threats)
- (vi) General
e.g. Orange marches in Scotland, traditional songs, books and paraphernalia regarding Northern Ireland

Therefore, these themes were also selected for the Day 2 analysis of sectarian-related threads. As stated previously, sectarianism can manifest itself either *inwardly* (by and about the community itself) or *outwardly* (about and against the rival community). Inward

looking threads are those which refer to the customs and practices of one's own community and contain discussion of Protestant or Catholic culture without reference to the rival religion or community. Although some could see even this internal discussion as inflammatory, the main problem remains with posts which pejoratively place this culture in opposition to the rival community. It is in this outward looking sectarianism that real conflict lies. As before, religion and football are conflated (Celtic/Catholicism and Rangers/Protestantism) as the majority of the posts make no distinction between the two.

The main themes are displayed by number and percentage of references in the tables at the end of the report.

(a) Northern Ireland

On Day 2, discussion regarding Northern Ireland was far less frequent on both boards than on Day 1. On Day 1, 9% of all sectarian-related Rangers threads made internal reference to Northern Irish affairs but this was not repeated on Day 2. Celtic intrusion remained at 0% for both days. On Day 2, Northern Ireland related discussion on the Rangers boards was aimed outwardly only, but stood at 14% less than on Day 1. As before, several of these threads were accusatory in nature.

Posted by [Poster 081](#) on 01 Nov 00:53

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

[Do you think if the British Public ...](#)

had seen uncensored pictures of IRA atrocities, that Sien Fein would have the degree of respectability they have now.

I fucking don't

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 082](#) on 01 Nov 13:04

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

[So this is how the peace process works? ...](#)

A DISTRAUGHT Ulsterwoman has been forced to flee her home - after enduring a two-year campaign of terror.

Devastated Linda McKeown is to leave Antrim's Rathenraw estate, after thugs smashed the windows of her home early on Thursday. Bricks were also hurled at her home two weeks ago. They are just the latest acts of intimidation which Mrs McKeown's family has had to endure in the past two years.

The mum-of-three said the abuse started after she refused to hand over cash to a man who was collecting for a renegade republican flute band. She insists the yobs are masquerading as dissident republicans - and has branded them "pathetic".

community. A selection of these includes unwashed, beadrattlers, bogtrotters, on the dole, Plastic Paddys and ‘Nazi-supporting scum’. Paedophilia in the Catholic Church is mentioned alongside potato eating, Gerry Adams is described as having ‘beady feni@n eyes’ and one poster’s University lecturer is described as being ‘very Catholic’.

Posted by [Poster 083](#) on 01 Nov 11:15

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

[Aiden McGeady ...](#)

if ever there was an example of what a stereotypical tim looks like then this is your man

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 083](#) on 01 Nov 11:17

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

[re: re: Aiden McGeady ...](#)

eyes too close together, massive massive freckles, really pale skin, and loads of crusty **** around his mouth

[IP address logged]

Internal stereotyping is absent from the Rangers board; fans are understandably unlikely to insult and stereotype themselves or their own community. However, it is interesting to note that, as on Day 1, there are no examples of stereotyping insults coming from Celtic board intruders.

Internal stereotyping is also absent on the Celtic board. On Day 1 there were no stereotypes on the Celtic board aimed at Rangers fans. However, on Day 2, 16% of threads made use of Protestant stereotypes, the majority of which accuse all Rangers fans of being Masons or part of the Orange Lodge.

Posted by [Poster 108](#) on 01 Nov 00:24

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

[R all huns bigots ...](#)

or just most of them?

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 126](#) on 01 Nov 00:28

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

[re: R all huns bigots ...](#)

No, that would be a generalization, stereotyping really. Ugly and unwashed well thats another story.

[IP address logged]

12% of all threads by Rangers intruders used abusive stereotypes against Celtic fans, a 9% reduction from Day 1. On one thread Rangers and Celtic posters talk about the nature of stereotyping while flinging abusive stereotypes back and forth. Poster 089 asks Poster 121 to justify the comment 'do you pick potatoes paranoid one??'

Posted by [Poster 121](#) on 01 Nov 13:32

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

[re: re: re: re: re: re: re: when in danger call brither dallas ...](#)

The potato jibe was to retort to your, yer aw masons doon the ludge [Orange lodge] an that, pysh, you see stereotyping folk can get somewhat tiresome and tedious, as you have become, repeatedly using the same language (such as billyboy) shows a distinct lack of knowledge and a failed understanding of the English language.

Giver or taker, see what I mean!!

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 089](#) on 01 Nov 13:36

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

[re: re: re: re: re: re: re: when in danger call brither dallas ...](#)

the potatoe jibe was showing the true colours of you!!! you bigoted sectarian bigot who follows a club STEEPED full of sectarian bigots..

whether it be masons orangemen apprentice boys black chapter or any other organisationn to me they are ALL INBRED... you see it runs in the billyboys family...

[IP address logged]

(c) Accusations of bigotry and protestations of innocence

This is undoubtedly the category which the majority of threads contain reference to. All of the posts across both boards are filled with point scoring and bickering as to which set of fans is the more bigoted.

There was an increase of 7% for the Rangers board and 14% for Celtic in outwardly directed sectarian threads. On the Celtic board, Entries in this category are compounded by the high level of Rangers intrusion. While on Day 1 this stood at only 11% of all Celtic sectarian-related threads, on day 2 it has increased to 32% of all sectarian-related threads.

Accusations of bigotry on the Celtic message board Day 2 (total 25)

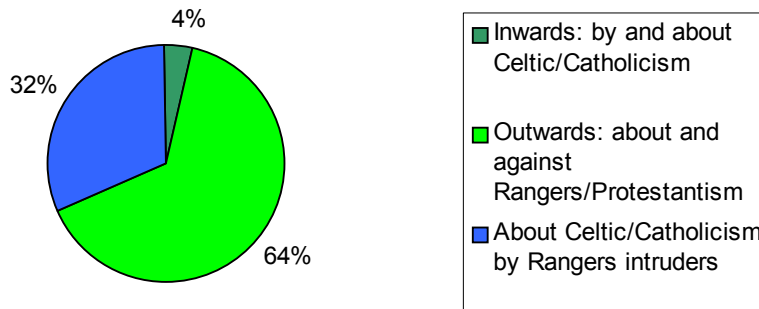


Figure 6.4.6 Accusations of bigotry on the Celtic board (Day 2)

Some of the outwardly directed threads regard Rangers bigotry are expressed as a simple statement of fact. This can be seen in the thread entitled ‘R all huns bigots’ and also in the following posts:

Posted by [Poster 064](#) on 01 Nov 18:59 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: Big Jock Wallace Knew..... ..

Rangers Football Club must be responsible for a greater part of the sectarian divide in Scotland.
 [IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 084](#) on 01 Nov 20:29 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: Big Jock Wallace Knew..... ..

Rangers were never a Protestant club. They were an anti - Catholic organization and are a blight on the Scots nation.
 Not my words, but the feelings of the late Cliff Hanley in the 1970's.
 Just about sums it up.
 [IP address logged]

As mentioned previously, a large number of threads are connected to the offensive songs sung by Aberdeen fans at a recent game against Rangers. A number of Celtic fans believed Rangers supporters’ outrage was hypocritical given the sectarian nature of songs regularly sung at Ibrox:

Posted by [Poster 122](#) on 01 Nov 11:18 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)
Fao Poster 058 ...

So it is ok to sing about being up to your knees in Fenian blood every week in Ibrox ? Exact same thing as Ibrox disaster i am afraid, both very tasteless, look after your own house first huh ?

double standards loyal

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 085](#) on 01 Nov 11:23

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: fao Poster 058 ...

eh throwing spuds on the park???? i really hate those bastards

[IP address logged]

Posted by [POSTER 086](#) on 01 Nov 11:28

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: fao Poster 058 ...

people in glass houses should ring a bell for them hun feckers

[IP address logged]

This, in turn, is seen as hypocritical by many Rangers intruders who accuse Celtic fans of the very same thing and are 'Fed up with all this celtic fans are whiter than white pish.' (Poster 087, re: taste of thier own medicine ..., 15:54)

Posted by [Poster 088](#) on 01 Nov 21:14

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: Aberdeen fans are truly the scum of the eart ...

Celtic fans are calling Rangers fans hypocrites, you have to make me laugh. What about the booing of the minute silence for the Queen Mother? Or fans singing about the Omagh bombing, or singing terrorist songs during a 1 minute silence for September 11th.

Oh and btw "up to our knees" doesnt actually mention any actual killing and is more hypothetical. And a fenian is a member of the ira, a terrorist group who killed innocent people.

[IP address logged]

Accusations of bigotry unconnected to the Aberdeen issue and directed towards Rangers supporters are frequent on the Celtic board. Accusations can be vitriolic.

Posted by [Poster 089](#) on 01 Nov 11:07

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: when in danger call brither dallas ...

what a bunch of illiterate ****s

Is that why you want our RC education system stopped billyboy..

you support a bigoted team you are part of a bigoted support you smell you are inbred and last but not least i hope you catch cancer as that is one disease that suit you and your crowd to a T...

btw- European Champions 1967...

Seven In A Row soon to be NINE enjoy it gimp billyboy as much as we are...

And while many Celtic fans agree that chants about the Ibrox Disaster are inexcusable, most feel that Aberdeen fans are nowhere near as bad as the Rangers supporters on Follow Follow.

Posted by [Poster 090](#) on 01 Nov 18:08

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: Aberdeen fans are truly the scum of the earth ...

"Rangers fans have every right to complain about the disaster chants"

I agree. This is a Celtic board though, and if you add up the obsession with child abuse, mocking the irish famine, racist abuse of Celtic players, Anti-Catholic anthems and (on FF at least) a paranoid fixation with catholic education, local politics, the catholic church allied to bizarre, laughable historical revisionism then quite clearly Aberdeen fans don't come anywhere near the Hun mentality in terms of human revulsion.

[IP address logged]

On the Rangers board, outward accusations of bigotry are fewer, with 30% of all Rangers sectarian-related threads falling into this category. This is only slightly greater than Day 1, which stands at 23%. Celtic intrusion is low, as on Day 1, at 2%.

Accusations of bigotry on the Rangers message board Day 2 (total 16)

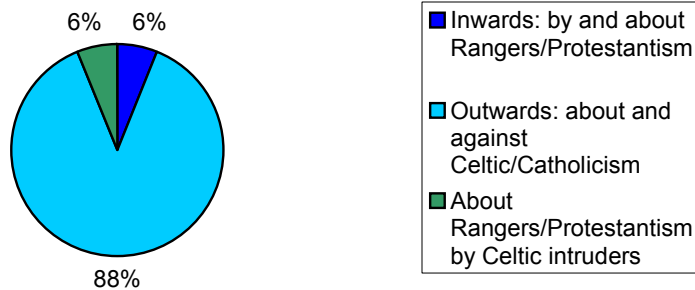


Figure 6.4.7 Accusations of bigotry on the Rangers board (Day 2)

Themes of conversation include the ‘apartheid’ of Catholic schooling, *The Herald’s* bias towards the Roman Catholic ‘minority’ and the Nil By Mouth Catholic conspiracy: ‘a noble but rather naive concept hijacked by self-serving Roman Catholic bigots’. A survey reported in the *Sun* which claims that football fans are eager to get rid of bigotry and racism is mocked because one of the researchers involved is on the Celtic Board and has alleged Republican sympathies ‘just another excuse for them to print lies and attack the bears with!’. The Celtic player Jackie McNamara’s decision to play the Republic of Ireland for his testimonial match is condemned as Ireland-centred bigotry.

Posted by [Poster 091](#) on 01 Nov 14:16 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)
[McNamara lines up ROI testimonial ...](#)

If ever a club were actively promoting bigotry it's the mhankies.

Makes me sick to my Protestant stomach.

[IP address logged]

A Rangers supporter complains that her account at work has been closed down by a bigoted ‘tim’ because of the password gersftp1690 (Gers Fuck the Pope 1690). This is followed by support from fellow posters who claim that this is a breach of privacy and entirely inoffensive. She says ‘thankfully my manager is a a prod so i didnt get into trouble.’ A poster replies:

Posted by [Poster 092](#) on 01 Nov 13:35 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
[re: Tim at my work ...](#)

Confess.

Admit you are a rangers supporter hence gers.

Admit you have serious problems with the head of state for the Vatican's policy on homosexuality, AIDS in Africa and the covering up of child abuse amongst it's employees, hence your file transfer protocol.

Admit that you support the right of a democratically elected parliment to govern the united kingdom and not an autocratic monarchy hence 1690 as this was one of the date of one of the battles which established this.

[IP address logged]

Although the vast majority of threads in this category are targeted outwardly at the rival supporters, there are instances of internal conflict regarding the bigotry of one’s own

community. There is one inward looking accusation of bigotry on the Rangers board, in which a Rangers fan accuses his own supporters of singing racist chants at black Celtic player Bobo Balde. On the Celtic board, when one poster questions Celtic player Craig Beattie's Protestant background and his father's alleged Loyalist tattoos, a number of Celtic fans rush to Beattie's defence and point out religion and background have nothing to do with his footballing skills. Although this viewpoint is laudable it is worth noting that it is still expressed in terms of opposition with Rangers; in other words, 'let's not be as bad as them'.

Posted by [Poster 093](#) on 31 Oct 22:15

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: Beattie History ...

i couldn,t care less what he is/was
if he can do the buissness for celtic
hes a goodun end of story.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 094](#) on 01 Nov 00:29

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: Beattie History ...

If he does the business who cares ,do we not try to pride ourselves in the fact that we dont care who supports /plays for us as long as they"re committed .Celtic have had a long history of Protestants plying for us as well as having a very large amount of Protestant supporters which is complete contrast to our"friends"from the southside.Leave the bigoted ****e to the Orcs

[IP address logged]

(d) - (e) Accusations of paranoia and threats of physical violence

Several threads on Day 1 made reference to these two themes and the categories were therefore included in the Day 2 analysis. However, on day 2 no posters referred to the paranoia of other team or made any threat of physical violence.

These differences show that context is crucial in determining the content of online message boards. Although message boards are not truly synchronous in the same way as, for example, chat rooms or Instant Messenger, posters are able to converse in near real time with each other. They will therefore write about the issues which are most prominent at that time; on Day 1, paranoia was a popular topic because of the media's condemnation of the Alex Rae incident and the outrage of Rangers supporters.

(f) General

Again, it is entirely subjective as to whether internal references to religion or Northern Irish history and politics are sectarian, as some may argue that internal celebration is not necessarily a negation of the rival community. However, it cannot be denied that this internal celebration can be perceived as incendiary and offensive by members of this rival community.

On the Rangers board, 100% of General threads were directed inwardly, as on Day 1. Posts included mention of a 'Sash bash', uniforms for regimental bands and a link to a Loyalist flute band website. There is also a thread which complains about the band at Ibrox not playing 'The Billy Boys - 'We're up to ours knees in Fenian blood, surrender or you'll die' - because the club has decided that it is sectarian. One thread, also about Loyalist songs, illustrates the uncertainties present within the community in deciding what is sectarian and what is not. Poster 095 likes to hear 'The Sash' but thinks that others believe it to be sectarian. He is happy to be reassured otherwise.

Posted by [Poster 095](#) on 01 Nov 10:31

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

[re: re: Nice to hear the Sash Yesterday ...](#)

...but someone on here post asges ago a quote from a spokesperson at ibrox who said "no matter what the ****rs say the sash will always be a sectrian song at ibrox"

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 021](#) on 01 Nov 10:34

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

[re: re: re: Nice to hear the Sash Yesterday ...](#)

Poster 095 Rangers have had the Sash looked at and found there to be not secterian words in it what so ever!

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 095](#) on 01 Nov 10:37

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

[re: re: re: re: Nice to hear the Sash Yesterday ...](#)

in that case lets sing it loud and proud

[IP address logged]

Interestingly, The Sash, possibly the most famous Loyalist song, was found to be non-sectarian by Scottish courts in October 2004. Hamilton teenager Barry Longmire was acquitted of breaking section 74 of the Criminal Justice Scotland Act 2003, after singing Loyalist songs outside a police station. Section 74 gives police the powers to arrest people for offences aggravated by religious prejudice. His solicitor told the court: 'The Sash is a folk song of family bonds in the Orange tradition. Its words are not offensive to anyone. The Sash - in itself - is not sectarian. If it was being sung outside a Celtic club to wind people up, then the legislation would come into play.' (Breen, 2004). Clearly, it is the context and intent of the words spoken or sung which remain the key issue. The Sash may not contain overtly sectarian words in the same vein as The Billy Boys but would still be considered sectarian if it were used to aggravate members of the rival community. The Sash, in this context, would simply be the vehicle through which hatred is expressed.

On the Rangers board, there were several general posts related to Rangers' British identity and pride and this could have, conceivably, been a separate category: 'we have always been a "Queen and Country" club, proud of our traditions and heritage.' (jimbo55 Day 2, 09:51, re: What's with the Jacobite infestation?) Several of these threads came as a response to Graham Spiers' piece in the Herald in which he claimed that Ibrox is 'forever a corner of England in a foreign field'. An old Rangers pub in Govan has been ruined by 'tarrier' scum and the whole area has become difficult to march in. One poster advises that they must not give in to the scum and the thread has the clear implication that they, as Protestants, have the right to march and parade their identity in any place that they choose

(Review of Parades and Marches 24th January 2005)

Posted by [Poster 096](#) on 22 Oct 21:12
(*thread continues until Day 2*)

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

[Re: The Old Govan Arms Pub ...](#)

Tarrier infested. There's not a blue nose shop in Govan now.

Funny that seeing it's still 60/40 Protestant. It's another case of the scum taking over and bringing everything down.

The Bluenoses in Govan pick their drinking holes carefully. Mostly on the PRW and the Bowling clubs

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 015](#) on 22 Oct 21:13

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

[re: re: The Old Govan Arms Pub ...](#)

govan cross is a disgrace,always tense when we march down there these days.

eyes on the back of your head loyal.

[IP address logged]

6.5 Effectiveness of possible control methods

As mentioned in the Day 1 report, control methods such as removing sectarian posts, shutting down services and boards which contain sectarian content and banning or prosecuting those who post sectarian content are unlikely to have any long term constructive effects. This is due to a lack of coherent and enforceable legislation, the availability of alternate monikers and email addresses, the ambiguous nature of censorship versus free speech and the fact that many posters do not engage in sectarian discussion and prefer to talk only about football or other off-topic chat.

It was proposed that the most effective control method for message boards such as Follow Follow and Celtic Mad would be counter-argument. On Day 2, as on Day 1, there are countless examples of challenge and conflict in response to sectarian opinion. As stated previously, if online communities were to visibly support and encourage argument such as this, a self-imposed – and therefore, infinitely more effective – control method could be established within the communities. Message boards, alongside other forms of CMC technologies such as chat rooms, have traditionally been virtual places for like-minded people to meet; in situations such as these they could also become a forum for dissent.

6.5.1 Internal debate

Those who participate in sectarian-related threads do not necessarily hold sectarian views; they may in fact wish to combat these opinions. Many posters see sectarianism as a mindless minority activity on both sides of the Old Firm.

Posted by [Poster 097](#) on 01 Nov 16:11

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: taste of thier own medicine ...

Your points are well made but it is going over old ground. No real supporters of any club would stoop so low as to make light of child abuse, fatalities or even serious injury to players. The people you are aiming your comments to are, however, lower than the low. They don't give a monkey's about decency or tolerance. Brain dead's who think it makes them look, somehow, important or popular amongst their brain

dead friend's.

Your points are absolutely correct and will be applauded by the majority of supporters. Sadly, however, it will mean nothing to the halfwits who infest both, these boards and our ground's.

Well said though!

[IP address logged]

The thread which discusses the Protestant background of Celtic player Craig Beattie (mentioned in section 6.4.2) is a fine illustration of the value of internal debate. Poster 098 starts the thread by asking if anyone knows anything about Beattie playing for an Orange band and whether he is 'a full blown hun'. This is a 55-post thread frequented by 22 participants (one of whom is a Rangers intruder who only says 'oh dear, oh dear' about the argument, obviously seeing it as a sign of bigotry). Of these 22 participants, only 3 criticise Beattie and his family. The other 19 posters strongly disagree with posts such as those below.

Posted by [Poster 099](#) on 31 Oct 19:20

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: [Beattie History ...](#)

As long as he puts the ball in the back of the net I couldn't care less whether he walks on to the pitch wearing his Sash, very sad to bring his background up, that shouldn't matter at all.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 100](#) on 31 Oct 19:22

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: [Beattie History ...](#)

Poster 098,he would not be the first,or hopefully the last Rangers fan to play for us,why don't you just try supporting the kid,he has done nothing but try his best in every game he has played,could you say the same of every Celtic fan on our books?

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 101](#) on 31 Oct 21:52

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: [Beattie History ...](#)

this is a shocking post, why should it matter the history with this player. bottom line is he is a celtic player who has given his all in any game ive seen him play. his history, religion, tattoos should not be brought up. leave that sort of debate to those from the darkside.

[IP address logged]

The post moves on from Beattie to a more general discussion about the value of mixing with those of different - i.e. Protestant - backgrounds. However, Poster 085 refuses to change his mind about the 'sectarian b.astards':

Posted by [Poster 085](#) on 01 Nov 13:45

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: [Beattie History ...](#)

i mix with protestants, just not of the "practising orange" variety, i also find it hard to believe that someone could mix with people that essentially hate him/her in some shape or form, bit like a black fella associating with the KKK

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 085](#) on 01 Nov 13:54 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: [Beattie History ...](#)

you dont exactly get many orange order minded people where i from so its not like im livin in a den of them & refuse to talk!!! if people find their behaviour & views acceptable enough to associate with these people then thats up to the individual, but not for me, to be honest i fuckin hate them for their sectarianism

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 037](#) on 01 Nov 13:56 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: [Beattie History ...](#)

Your reply just reiterates your ignorance on the subject. If you "hate" someone you don't mix with them, do you?

The Orange Order hold views on the Catholic church which differ from mine. I have views on the OO that differ from theirs. There is no need for hate. It's a matter of opinion. Maybe if you mixed a bit more you wouldn't be so wide of the mark.

[IP address logged]

Posted by [Poster 085](#) on 01 Nov 14:01 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: [Beattie History ...](#)

i understand what your getting at but i couldnt stomach being with someone that "hates" everything i stand for, nationality, faith etc

[IP address logged]

Although CMC technologies provide a forum for Poster 085 to vent his sectarian opinions, they also provide an opportunity for other posters to disagree with him. As such, this is an example of the productive internal conflict highlighted on Day 1. Poster 085 is criticised for his comments and, although this does not change his mind, he is willing to listen to the viewpoints of others and will, at the very least, know that alternate views exist. Also, those who criticised Beattie will now be aware that this is not the common Celtic perspective on the matter.

6.5.2. Arguing with the intruders

On Day 2, the Rangers board had only 2 intruders in 684 threads. Intruder led conflict was therefore found only on the Celtic board. There is a paradox at work when looking at the issue of intrusion. As argued previously, internal conflict allows posters to understand that their fellow supporters do not necessarily share their views. It has also been agreed that the discussion of sectarian-related issues is a healthy affair which may eventually lead to self-policed online communities. Therefore, this point must also be extended to discussion with intruders. By blocking intruders from the message board while simultaneously continuing to allow sectarian-related discussion amongst its own members, Follow Follow is allowing Rangers-centred opinions to go unchallenged and is ultimately limiting the debate. It is not being suggested here that every intruder will be visiting a rival board to engage in a serious intellectual debate. In actual fact, the majority of intruders visit to taunt and abuse rival fans and it is the sort of intrusion which the Follow Follow admin are no doubt targeting. However, while the channels of communication remain open there is still opportunity for fruitful debate.

On the Celtic board, there are multiple examples of intrusion and debate, all more or less in the same vein as the examples cited in the Day 1 report.

6.6 Non Old-Firm intrusion: identification with the Old Firm

Motherwell intruders to the Celtic board are accused of bigotry for singing songs about paedophilia at a match the preceding day and are called 'Huns without the bus fare' (i.e. to get to Glasgow and follow Rangers at Ibrox). For other teams in Scotland, Celtic and Rangers are inextricably part of the same Old Firm package. Perhaps as a result of this, the following Celtic poster appears to express some identification with Rangers as fellow members of the Old Firm in opposition to the other less successful teams in Scotland.

Posted by [Poster 074](#) on 31 Oct 15:03

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: had you all lost your voices yesterday? ...

But of course, bigotry in Scotland only exists in the OF. The rest of the wee diddy teams all have family atmospheres who have a picnic outside the ground before the match and who all hold hands and sing Kumbya my Lord at half time.

Aye, right.

[IP address logged]

Defence of the traditional rivals occurs when they are being attacked from outside of the Old Firm. Poster 102 in a post on the Celtic board entitled 'Aberdeen fans are truly the scum of the earth ...' writes that Celtic fans have never stooped as low as the Aberdeen fans with their Ibrox Disaster and Ian Durrant chants. Poster 103, an Aberdeen fan on the Celtic board writes repeatedly about his hatred of Rangers and claims that they deserved these chants. Although many other Celtic posters on the thread wholeheartedly concur, one poster defends Rangers.

Posted by [Poster 104](#) on 01 Nov 22:41

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: ABERDEEN FANS WERE BRILLIANT!!!! ...

i hate these people (*Aberdeen fans*), they sing celtic minded songs at ibrox then sing rangers minded songs at celtic.....feck off and live your own lives....old firm fans get dogs abuse for singing tunes that are about certain parts of history, a history that we all believe in...yet you lot can sing disgusting chants, and sing flower of scotland..a song which is about scotlands history and slaughtering English people.....leave us old firm fans alone!!!

[IP address logged]

However, simultaneously, insults towards Motherwell fans are mainly couched in terms of comparison with Rangers fans and accusations of being similarly bigoted.

Posted by [Poster 105](#) on 31 Oct 19:58

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: re: re: motherwell ...

i was subjected to abuse from well fans when i was walking up to the game including stuff such as feck the pope ya feni@n bast@rd and ill fecking kill you ya tattie muncihn feni@n.

I expect this from Rangers and possibly Hearts but not from my local "family" club. i also saw a Celtic fan almsr get attacked and when he stood up to them the police gave him a warning while doing nothing about the well fans trying to fight him. All this disappointed me as i have attended many well games as a well fan and enjoyed some good banter with a couple of well fans due to me sitting right next to the segregation line.

And to top it off some well fans come on here last night shouting the odds about us singing IRA songs when they were singng about Child rape and subjected myself (and probably others) to sectarian abuse outside the ground.

[IP address logged]

6.7. Casual sectarianism

One interesting post on the Celtic board is from a Rangers intruder who fails to take seriously both the Loyalist and Republican chants sang at football matches. He is aware of how these songs look to everyone else but views them as simply a part of the football experience, songs which can be sung without conviction or true political intent.

Posted by [Poster 106](#) on 01 Nov 22:54

[Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: Aberdeen fans are truly the scum of the earth ...

See my take on it is Rangers and Celtic fans should give as good as they get, if they want to sing Irish songs I'll sing some orange songs. I also stupidly sing about the UVF, UDA etc when I am not for killing innocent people of any religion, stupid, but I just take it as being part and parcel of the songs. If Celtic fans want to sing IRA songs then that's up to them, like us it only makes us all look bad to everywhere else...

[IP address logged]

This post illustrates a dismissive attitude towards the deeper meanings of sectarian words and the possible effects of using this language. Rather than using sectarian language in a concerted and conscious effort to damage the identity of the rival community, it is no more than 'part and parcel' of a football match and Old Firm rivalry. Placing this rivalry in a historical, political or religious perspective heightens the atmosphere at the match and provides a rationale for hatred, which, in reality, has little more substance than football rivalry and hatred of the opposition. In contrast, however, there remains a hardcore who has political intent in excess. The following is an indignant post from one fan who has heard that his commitment to Britain and the flag is being questioned:

Posted by [Poster 107](#) on 01 Nov 16:29

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Me and the Union Flag ...

Don't know where it came from guys, but apparently there is word going round that I have opposed the Union Flag at Ibrox in favour of the Saltire.

My only connection with the Saltire in Ibrox is I was asked and successfully brought the large flag from Blackpool last year which is still in my warehouse, well what was left of it when we got it.

I want all bears who know me personally that I would be the first at the door of Ibrox should it ever be removed.

It is the flag I serve under first and foremost and the flag my grandparents died defending in Ulster and my Father still defends.

Anyone who stated different and doubts my pride in being British has never met me.

God Save the Queen!!!!!!!!!!

from and angry and insulted Unionist

6.8. Sectarian posters: levels of involvement and intrusion

Many of the posters on each board have no involvement with sectarian related topics, preferring either football related posting or more light-hearted off-topic chat. It could be hypothesised that it will be the same posters on each board who are consistently involved in sectarian-related postings. Therefore, a list of user names was compiled while analysing those threads which contained sectarian related comment. These names were crosschecked for:

- (i) multiple posting on own team's board
- (ii) high levels of intrusion to the rival team message board

It must be mentioned here that it is difficult to say whether the presence of multiple posting by the one poster means that he or she is 'more sectarian' than another poster. As the name analysis has been done over one day only this could just mean that this poster happened to post a great deal that day and perhaps nothing on other days.

6.8.1 Multiple posting on own team's message board

The poster names involved in each sectarian-related thread were transferred to an Access database, thread by thread. Therefore, if, for example, the same poster was involved in three threads, his or her name was entered three times into the database. It was then possible, via a filter query, to ascertain the frequency of involvement for each poster involved in sectarian related discussion on day 2. On the Rangers board, there were a total of 137 Rangers posters:

Levels of involvement	Number of posters
Involvement in one thread	103
Involvement in two threads	21

Involvement in three threads	6
Involvement in four threads	5
Involvement in five threads	1
Involvement in six threads	-
Involvement in seven threads	1
Total number of posters	137 posters

Table 6.8.1 Level of involvement in Rangers sectarian-related threads (Day 2)

It is clear from the table above that the majority of Rangers posters who took part in sectarian-related discussion on day 2 did so in a non-committed and haphazard fashion, with 75% of all posters entering into sectarian-related threads only once. Level of involvement is therefore inversely proportional to the numbers of posters, as shown by the chart below.

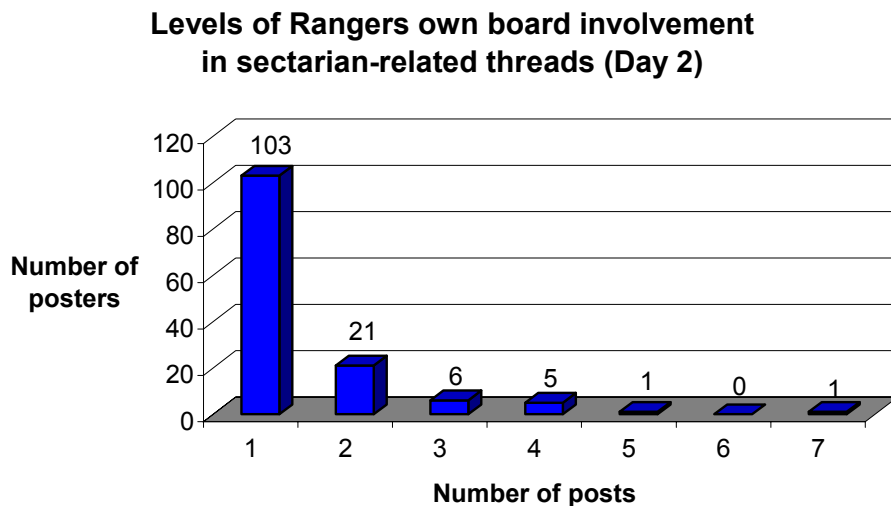


Figure 6.8.1 Rangers own board involvement in sectarian related threads (Day 2)

On the Celtic board, the same pattern is repeated. Of the 103 posters who participated in some way to the sectarian-related threads 69% contributed to only one thread.

Levels of involvement	Number of posters
Involvement in one thread	71
Involvement in two threads	20
Involvement in three threads	5
Involvement in four threads	4
Involvement in five threads	1
Involvement in six threads	1
Involvement in seven threads	-
Involvement in eight threads	1
Total number of posters	103 posters

Table 6.8.2 Level of involvement in Celtic sectarian-related threads (Day 2)

The chart shows that levels of involvement and numbers of Celtic posters are inversely proportional, just as they are on the Rangers board.

**Levels of Celtic own board involvement in sectarian-related threads
Day 2 (1st November 2004)**

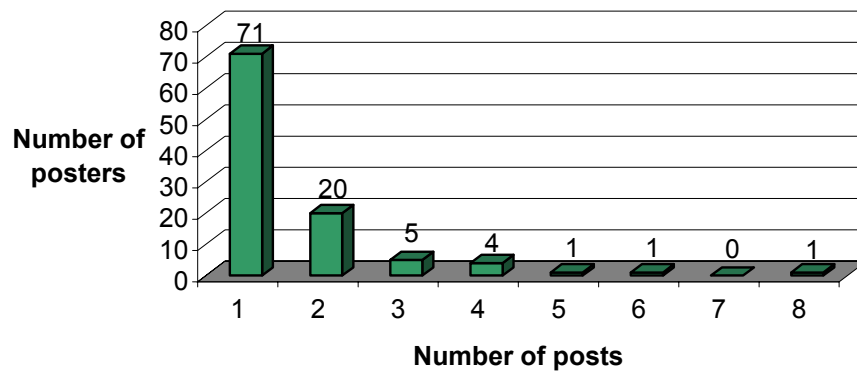


Figure 6.8.2 Celtic own board involvement in sectarian related threads (Day 2)

As this analysis was done only for Day 2 it is impossible to say whether the handful of posters who made multiple sectarian-related contributions do so on a regular basis and can therefore be singled out as long term sectarian posters. Indeed, as stated previously, high levels of involvement need not mean high levels of ‘negative’ sectarian comment; it may mean only a desire to discuss the issue and perhaps argue with sectarian-minded posters. Indeed, some posters might interject with posts which are entirely unrelated to the main sectarian theme of the thread. This was tested by looking at all of the posts made by the highest-ranking sectarian-related posters on both boards.

On the Celtic board, the most involved poster's user name, (Poster 108), is a mocking imitation of an admin Rangers poster Poster 080, (who, in fact, has 4 entries on the Rangers board)

1. **R all huns bigots ... 01 Nov 00:24**

Poster 108 answers his own question with 'or just most of them?' This is not designed to provoke a debate, only to provoke a response from a lurking intruder which he succeeds in doing.

2. **re: Whit's the score with..... ... 01 Nov 01:00**

Reference to Loyalist terrorist Johnny Adair hopefully being shot 'by his own kind'.

3. **The Huns ... 01 Nov 00:58**

He claims that 'the Huns really hate me, wonder why?' another post designed to provoke a response from a Rangers intruder. He later laughs at the accusation that he is a bigot who hates Rangers more than he loves Celtic.

4. **Spare tickets today ... 01 Nov 00:37**

He taunts Rangers intruders by claiming they can't sell all their tickets.

5. **re: If Poster 103 is welcome here-I'm off ... 01 Nov 22:13**

A Rangers intruder writes that if an Aberdeen intruder, Poster 103, who is justifying the controversial Aberdeen chants is welcome on the Celtic board then he is leaving. Poster 108 writes sarcastically 'Sorry to see you go. Bye.'

6. **re: re: re: ABERDEEN FANS WERE BRILLIANT!!!! ... 01 Nov 21:58**

He then welcomes Poster 103 to the Celtic board: 'Bada you're welcome here. That ignorant prick edinbear is teh one who should get to fúck. They are paranoid bassas and claim they dont care, when we all know different.'

7. **re: re: re: re: Aberdeen fans are truly the scum of the eart ... 01 Nov 21:27**

He calls Poster 088 an 'ignorant prick' for attacking Aberdeen fans and reminds Rangers fans about a banner at Ibrox following Desmond White's death which claimed that he 'sucks cocks in hell', citing this as an example of hypocrisy and bigotry.

8. **A website I found interesting ... 01 Nov 21:26**

He states interest in Irish history and provides a link to a WW1 website which he advises 'Hun árseholes' to read and stop claiming that it was only Ulster protestants who fought at the Battle of the Somme.

The most involved Rangers poster is Poster 091:

1. **re: re: re: Tomorrow at work: Rangers/Celtic/Huuns. 01 Nov 00:58**

Poster 091 writes that it isn't likely Celtic fans will be wearing poppies for Remembrance Day and that he'll be holding his nose at upcoming Old Firm games: 'Smelly bassas'.

2. **Aiden McGeady ... 01 Nov 11:16**

This is simply a mistake – another poster writes that McGeady looks like a 'typical tim' and Poster 091 says 'Black with long curly hair and big buck teeth?'; thinking that the poster meant a Barcelona player.

3. **re: Yir average Aberdeen fans ... 01 Nov 12:10**

A poster suggests that Rangers fans shouldn't condemn the Ibrox Disaster chants as they sing every week about Bobby Sands. Poster 091 writes: 'I really hope that isn't an attempt to compare the death of ol' pencil box with the passing of 66 innocents whose only crime was a love of the Rangers.'

4. **Scottish Green Party - Scrap the Bigot Factories ... 01 Nov 11:21**

He says that his vote is now decided upon hearing that the Green Party would plan to scrap funding for denominational schooling and mocks the objection that this would mean Jewish schools would also have to close: 'A kafflick church spokesman was quoted as saying "Oh but the Jews, won't someone think of the Jews?"'

5. **re: Tim at my work ... 01 Nov 11:34**

This is the thread complaining about the banning of password 'gersftp1690'. Poster 091 immediately asks about the validity of the administrators knowing the Ranger poster's password.

6. **re: re: McNamara lines up ROI testimonial ... 01 Nov 14:16**

The idea of the testimonial being in the Republic of Ireland rather than Scotland makes Poster 091 'sick to his Protestant stomach' and he claims that the 'mhankies' actively promote sectarianism: 'I think I can feel a "we're an Irish club" statement coming up'.

7. **Segregated schooling - Petition reaches 100 ... 01 Nov 13:59**

This is ambiguous. A poster asks everyone to sign his online petition against Catholic schools and implies that it has been very successful; Poster 091 writes 'over 100 now!' which could be taken as admiration or sarcasm at the fact that 100 signatures are not going to annihilate the denominational schools system.

A selection of Poster 080's posts are simply taunts towards Rangers fans. His accusations of bigotry may simply be football rivalry expressed in an 'easy' insulting manner. However, some of his posts also refer to Northern Irish politics and history. Poster 091 seems more religiously minded, referring to himself as Protestant and discussing issues

such as Catholic schooling. The posts listed above provide a snapshot of the issues discussed in sectarian related threads on both boards. It is, however, impossible to quantify sectarianism and decide who is ‘more sectarian’ than another. A more long-term analysis of this type would be necessary to collect more conclusive outcomes regarding levels of involvement and how they are related to levels of sectarianism.

6.8.2 High levels of intrusion to the rival team message board

It has already been established that intrusion levels are substantially higher on the Celtic board than on the Rangers board. However, do these intruders also post on their own team’s sectarian-related threads or are they just interested in arguing with the rival set of fans? There were two intruders to the Rangers board on Day 2. The table below compares their intrusion to the Rangers sectarian-related threads with their contribution to the same type of thread on their own boards. N.B. The Poster numbers used in these tables are different from those used in the main report body to make it more difficult for the posters to be identified:

Poster number	Involvement in intruder sectarian-related threads	Involvement in own board sectarian-related threads	More intrusion than own board participation?
Poster 1	1	0	YES
Poster 2	1	0	YES

Table 6.8.3 Rangers involvement in sectarian related threads - own board and rival board (Day 2)

In total, there were 14 Rangers intruders to the Celtic board, often more than one at a time in any one thread. The table below compares their intrusion to their participation on the Ranger boards’ sectarian-related threads.

Poster number	Involvement in intruder sectarian-related threads	Involvement in own board sectarian-related threads	More intrusion than own board participation?
Poster 1	6	0	YES
Poster 2	2	0	YES
Poster 3	1	0	YES
Poster 4	1	0	YES
Poster 5	2	0	YES
Poster 6	1	1	NO

Poster 7	2	0	YES
Poster 8	1	0	YES
Poster 9	2	0	YES
Poster 10	2	0	YES
Poster 11	3	0	YES
Poster 12	1	0	YES
Poster 13	1	0	YES
Poster 14	2	0	YES

Table 6.8.4 Celtic involvement in sectarian related threads - own board and rival board (Day 2)

In almost every instance, the Rangers posters who intrude on the Celtic board make no contribution to the – largely Celtic poster free – sectarian-related threads on his or her own board. It may well be that they use alternate monikers while intruding and are therefore known under different names on their home board; it is impossible to ascertain whether this is the case unless given access to IP addresses of posters. However, another explanation might be that it is the confrontation found on the rival message boards which attracts posters. Some posters are therefore more likely to use the rival board to argue about sectarian related matters or visit simply to taunt the opposition.

6.9. Conclusions for Day 2

The Day 2 analysis both corroborates the findings on Day 1 and highlights some interesting new features on Follow Follow and Celtic Mad/Comeonthehoops.

The volume of traffic on both boards remained as high as on Day 1 for the Celtic board, and almost as high on the Rangers board. The levels of sectarian related discussion on these boards remained roughly the same as on Day 1, with a 3% rise on the Rangers board and a 3% drop for the Celtic board as a whole (see Table 6.4.1). The Celtic board remained the main locus of sectarian activity, as on Day 1. This was, in part, connected to the high levels of rival intrusion to the board, a feature which was absent from the Rangers board itself. Outwardly sectarian threads remained the main type of thread on both boards.

References to the bigotry of the other side and assertions of innocence on one's own team behalf were extremely common on Day 2 in outwardly directed posts on both boards. The majority of intruder posts to the Celtic board also made accusations of

bigotry. Context and events occurring at the time of posting remain crucial to the content, volume and nature of threads. The categories of paranoia and threats of violence were included for consistency on Day 2 but were deemed unnecessary. Themes on the boards shift accordingly with what is happening in the footballing and wider world and how this is perceived by the two communities.

Intrusion to the Celtic board is at a higher level than on Day 1 but Rangers moderation appears to have been improved. Criticism from intruding Motherwell and Aberdeen fans led to an interesting boundary being drawn around the Old Firm. Although OF fans hate their derby rivals they remain the elite of Scottish football and the two most frequently criticised groups of supporters. When criticised from outside the OF, some posters express an identity with the rival. These same Aberdeen fans come to the Celtic board because they have been banned by Follow Follow and expect to be able to have their views heard by Rangers posters – in one post, ABERDEEN FANS WERE BRILLIANT!!!! ... the thread becomes almost Celtic free at points. As irritating as this might be, Celtic Mad is providing a forum for debate, whereas Follow Follow posters will only ever hear the opinions of Rangers fans and although internal debate is inevitable it can never be as virulent or provocative as debate with a rival team and community. Fruitful debate with intruders is a positive feature of message boards such as these and a balance between moderation and free speech must be struck.

On both the Rangers and Celtic boards, the majority of posters who contribute to sectarian-related threads do so sparingly and without commitment. As this analysis was done only for Day 2 it is impossible to say whether the handful of posters who made multiple sectarian-related contributions do so on a regular basis and can therefore be singled out. However, the names of rival board intruders were absent from sectarian-related chat on their home boards. As stated, it is possible that these intruders change their names before posting on the rival board but, equally, it is also plausible that they do not take part in sectarian related chat on their own board as they prefer to indulge in confrontation with rival board members when it comes to sectarian related matters.

Many of the themes of the sectarian-related threads on Day 2 are identical to those of Day 1 and it can be supposed that this would be the same of any day, with a shift in emphasis from theme to theme as context dictates. The same opportunities for

productive online debate were discovered alongside similar conflict encouraged by the anonymity and consequence free nature of the medium. The findings from Day 2 therefore reinforce those from Day 1.

7. Day 3 Analysis – Extent of Sectarianism Across All Threads

The studies undertaken of both Day 1 and Day 2 had suggested a high level of sectarianism on the OF message boards chosen for the study. The emphasis on Day 1 and 2 was identifying content within off-topic threads on message boards. For the follow-up study on Day 3, all posts over a 24-hour period were classified and analysed to give a much clearer picture of the full extent of sectarianism on the message boards.

7.1. Day 3 Context and Background

The 24 hour period chosen for the Day 3 study was the 21st November 2004, the day following an OF league match which Rangers won 2-0. The match proved very controversial, with Alan Thompson of Celtic being red-carded in the first half for head-butting Peter Lovenkrands of Rangers, a challenge which many commentators felt the Rangers player made more of than it merited. Many of the threads on the message boards discussed the merits of this sending off. Chris Sutton of Celtic was also sent off for two hand-ball offences. The match also proved controversial for a series of other incidents including:

- A half-time tunnel bust-up where it was alleged Peter Lovenkrands was allegedly kicked by a Celtic player
- The alleged spitting on a Rangers scarf by Neill Lennon of Celtic
- Martin O'Neill walking on the pitch and hugging Neil Lennon after the match while giving a defiant salute to the Celtic fans
- Rangers substitute Bob Malcolm being spoken to the Police for making a 'gesture' to the Celtic bench after Rangers scored their first goal.

As might be expected for such a high profile match, the number of threads on the message boards was significantly higher in the aftermath of the match than it was on any of the other two days studied for this report:

Message Boards	Number of threads	Number of threads	Number of threads
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Rangers message board (Followfollow.com)	815	684	1064
Celtic message board (Celticmad.com)	287	277	369

Table 7.1. Levels of Posts Across all 3 Days

The graph below illustrates the dramatic difference in levels of postings, especially relating to the Rangers board:

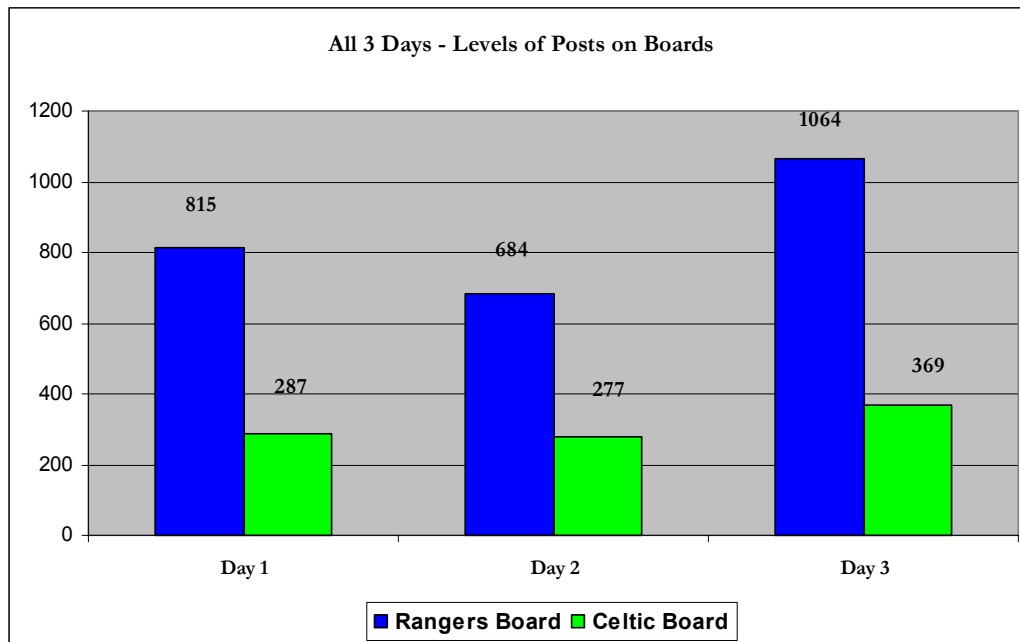


Figure 7.1. Levels of Posts Across all 3 Days

The classification system used in Days 1 and 2 was repeated on Day 3, with some minor alterations. Each thread was classified in terms of category and nature of post, following the schema set out below:

Category

- Northern Irish religion, history and politics e.g. references to Republican and Loyalist incidents and organisations in Northern Ireland, historical battles, Irish immigration and the Great Famine.
- Stereotypes or sectarian terms used. E.g. Hun, Fenian, etc
- Accusations of bigotry
- Accusations of paranoia
- Threats of violence (i.e. physical threats)
- General issues in the debate on sectarianism (e.g. Orange Order, Denominational Schools)
- No sectarianism
- Interlopers attempting to cause conflict

Nature of post

- Inward-looking (by and about own community)
- Outward-looking (about other community)

The main change was that as well as identifying when threads offered stereotypes of the other side, sectarian terms were also identified in this category. Terms such as fenian, hun, proddy, tarrier and the like were all deemed to be sectarian terms for the purpose of this exercise.

7.2. Extent of Sectarian Threads on Boards on Day 3

When all threads were analysed on Day 3 using the schema above, the level of threads with sectarian content proved to be extremely high:

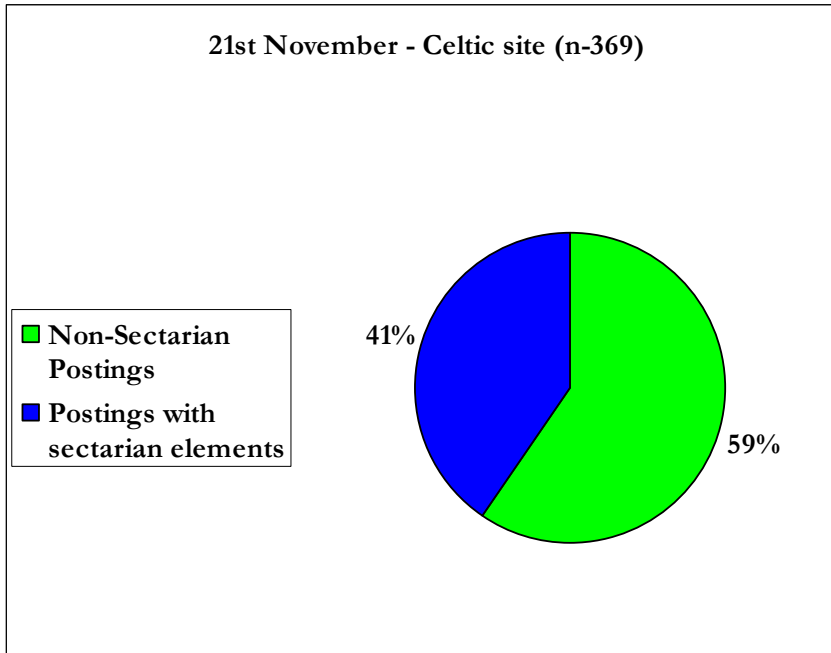


Figure 7.2.1 Levels of Posts on Celtic Board with Sectarian Elements

The level of threads with sectarian elements present on the Celtic board was 41% of the total threads for the day. On the Rangers Board, the percentages of all threads with sectarian elements was almost identical, albeit from a much higher total, with 39% of threads indicating sectarian elements in the content:

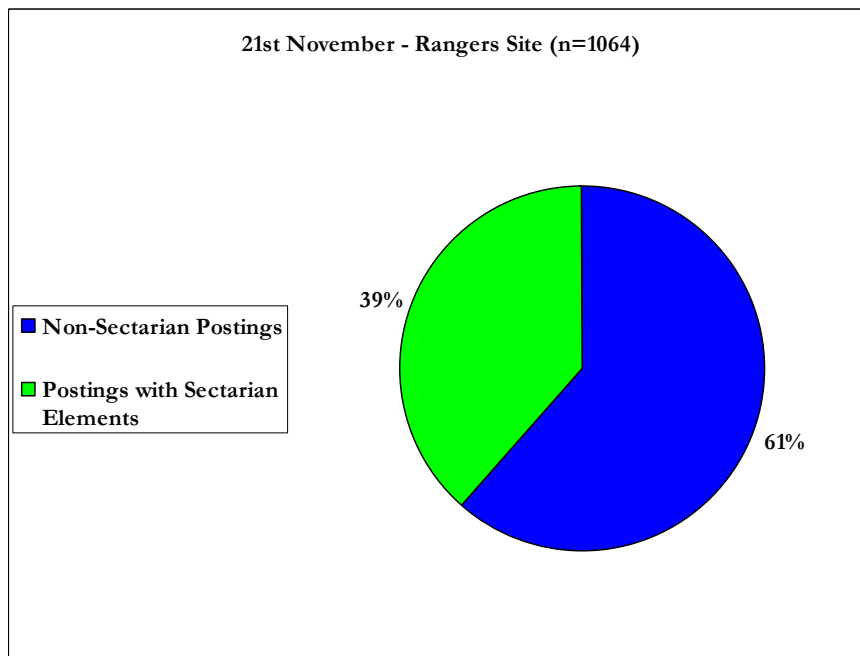


Figure 7.2.2 Levels of Posts on Rangers Board with Sectarian Elements

Many of the threads, as will be seen below, did not look overtly sectarian, but when delved into it is the loose use of sectarian terms associated with support of the OF clubs that make the threads sectarian, whether this was the intention of the poster or not. In the following thread, an alleged Rangers fan interloper on the Celtic board is attempting to tease the Celtic fans after the victory by pretending to be a Celtic fan:

Posted by Poster 108 on 21 Nov 04:56 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)
Banned from Follow Follow ...

Cant take it from a true Celt!!!

Hail Hail

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 109 on 21 Nov 04:56 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: Banned from Follow Follow ...

Prove it!!!!!!

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 108 on 21 Nov 04:59 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: Banned from Follow Follow ...

I love to use intellectual debate to wind up scummy prods.....All black bassa's

U and me know

;)

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 109 on 21 Nov 05:01 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: Banned from Follow Follow ...

Now hun, You have let your mask slip, since Celtic fans ar not racist.

Dont be so thick as to let that happen again. Admin will erase all your posts and help you start again.

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 108 on 21 Nov 05:07 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)
re: re: re: re: Banned from Follow Follow ...

Black refers to character...not skin colour.....****

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 109 on 21 Nov 05:12

[Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

re: re: re: re: **Banned from Follow Follow ...**

No reference to character there, since it would not make sense to claim that all Bbastards are black in character. You should know, since your own birth certificate stated in the section under Father...

Some soldiers

[IP address logged]

The loose use of terms such as “proddy” and “hun” seem out of place in a dialogue between football fans, yet they seem an accepted part of the process of interchange between OF fans. Substitute the terms with “nigger” or “paki” and a new perspective might open up on the part of the posters. The alleged interloper, Poster 108, is pretending to be a Celtic fan and Poster 109 challenges him by suggesting his racism shows him up not to be a Celtic fan. The irony of this interchange if Poster 108 is an interloper, which seems likely, is that he or she is using derogatory terms against their own side by loosely using the term ‘proddy’ in order to remain unchallenged on the board.

7.3. Types of Sectarian Threads on Boards on Day 3

The types of the sectarianism present on both boards were mixed. The graph below illustrates the type of sectarian content present on the Celtic board:

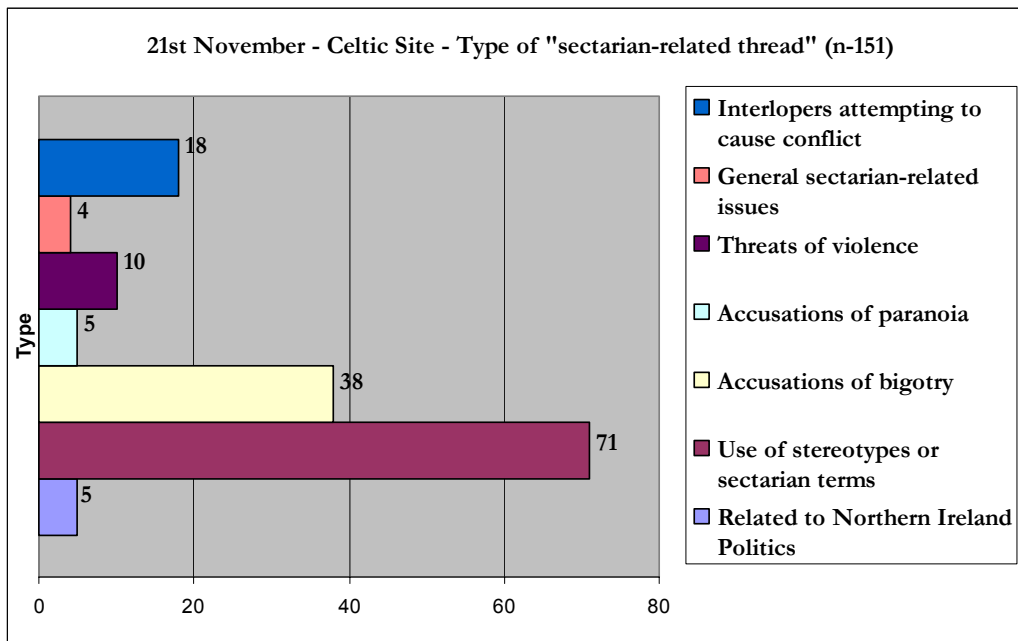


Figure 7.3.1 Type of sectarian-related threads on Celtic board

As can be seen, by far the largest number of threads related to the use of stereotypes or sectarian terms. The next most popular expression of sectarian content was in the charges levelled at the other side of bigotry. These were by far the most popular, although of note are the 18 threads that witnessed interlopers attempting to stir up conflict on the board. With regards the Rangers board, the results were as follows:

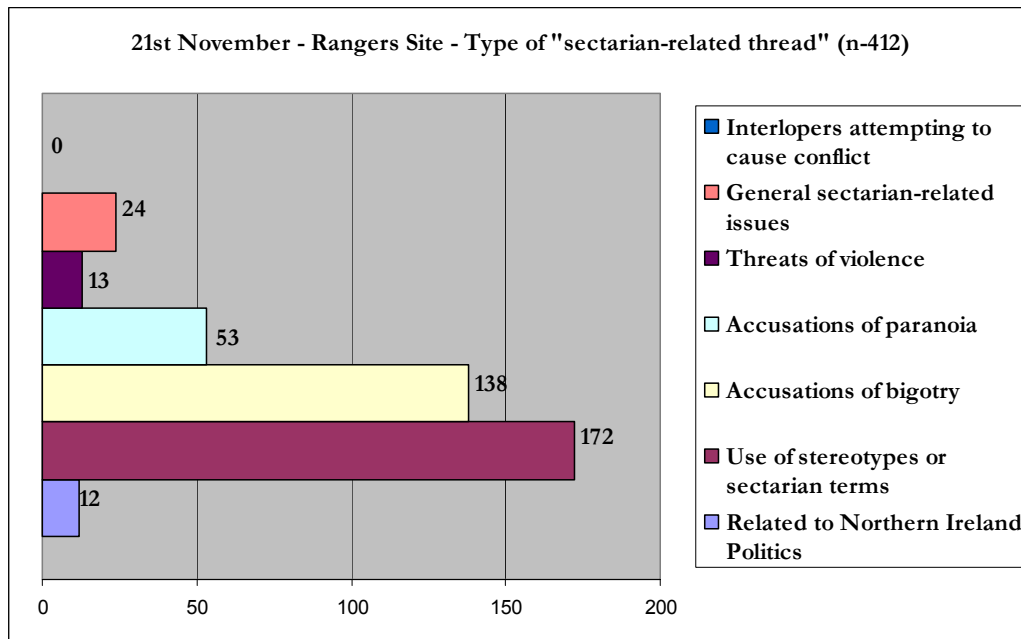


Figure 7.3.2 Type of sectarian-related threads on Rangers board

Again the largest proportion of threads related to use of stereotypes or sectarian terms. Accusations of bigotry were also prevalent on the Rangers board, many of which were aimed not at the fans of the other side, but at the manager and players. The following thread is indicative of how many contributors to the Rangers board saw Martin O'Neill and Neil Lennon's behaviour after the match:

Posted by Poster 110 on 21 Nov 13:51 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Lennon the most bigoted player ever to play for the old firm ...

Him and his scummy manager confirmed what we all knew yesterday, a bitter twisted wee ginger headed f enian b astard i hope someone knocks him out

WATP

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 111 on 21 Nov 13:54 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

Lennon the most bigoted player ever to play for the old firm ...

i thought it was a sad pathetic performance from them both and we shouldn't lower ourselves to such a level as we know we are better people than them and we ALWAYS will be

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 112 on 21 Nov 13:58 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

Lennon the most bigoted player ever to play for the old firm ...

No of course he's not he is just a poor wee innocent soul who's countless gestures towards the Rangers support is simply misunderstood them he is in no way to blame for any abuse directed at him.

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 113 on 21 Nov 13:58 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

Lennon the most bigoted player ever to play for the old firm ...

Surely O'Neill and Lennon deserve to be carpeted by the SFA for bringing the game into disrepute after their actions at full time yesterday.
If our players having a huddle, after just winning the league, at parkhead was worthy of us being dragged over the coals then I'd say yesterday's actions deserve the same.

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 114 on 21 Nov 14:00 [Complain](#) | [Reply](#)

Lennon the most bigoted player ever to play for the old firm ...

It was brilliant. Time and time again he shows himself up to be the pathetic individual we all know him to be.

[IP address logged]

Posted by Poster 115 on 21 Nov 14:06 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Lennon the most bigoted player ever to play for the old firm ...

For the whole game ye can see him mouthing away, gesturing and being in general a little prick. He is hated by every set of supporters but he gets the 'awww poor neil lennon' treatment in the papers. Last season when he insulted the Hearts support at Tynecastle nothing was said about it and the same will probably happen again.

[IP address logged]

The irony of Poster 110's initial post that begins the thread is that it accuses Lennon of being the most bigoted player to play in Scotland, while calling him a "fenian bastard".

This again may reflect the notion that bigotry is seen as a one-way street, in other words

sectarianism in the other side is pinpointed, while little navel-gazing goes on. It is hypocritical to call someone a “fenian bastard” and then accuse them of bigotry.

7.4. Obsession with the “Other”

One of the most startling aspects of the message boards is just how much each side seems to be obsessed with the other. Among both boards is an almost complete focus on the other side of the sectarian divide. The Rangers board is illustrated below:

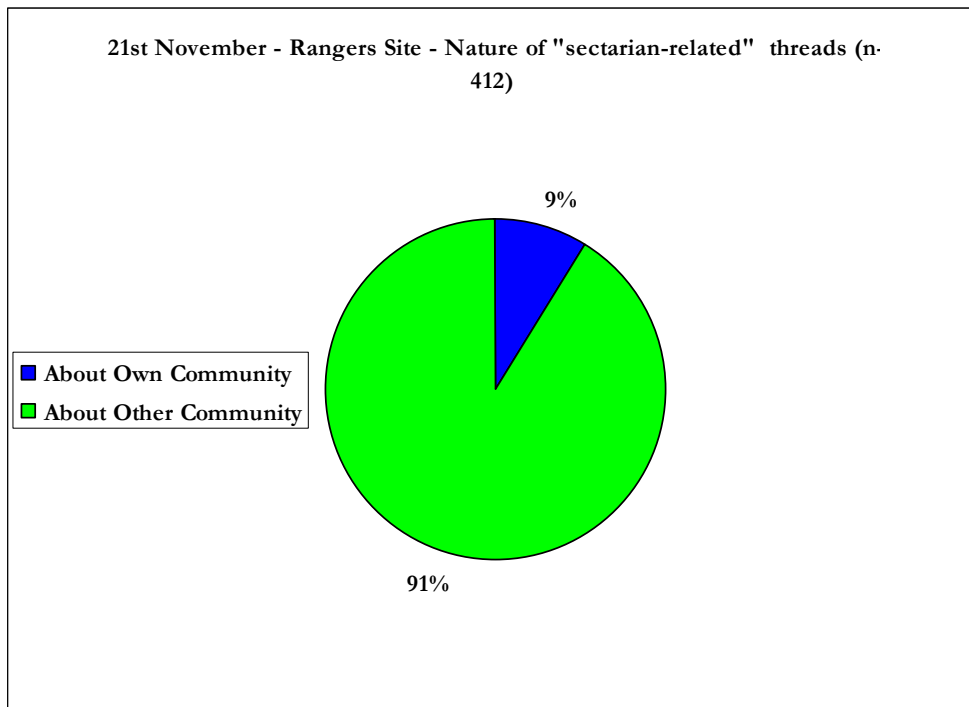


Figure 7.4.1 Nature of sectarian-related threads on Rangers board

91% of the threads with sectarian content relate to Celtic or Catholicism. The other 9% relate to the Protestant community, Northern Irish politics, or Protestant issues in Scotland. Similarly, the Celtic board shows that it too is obsessed with the other side:

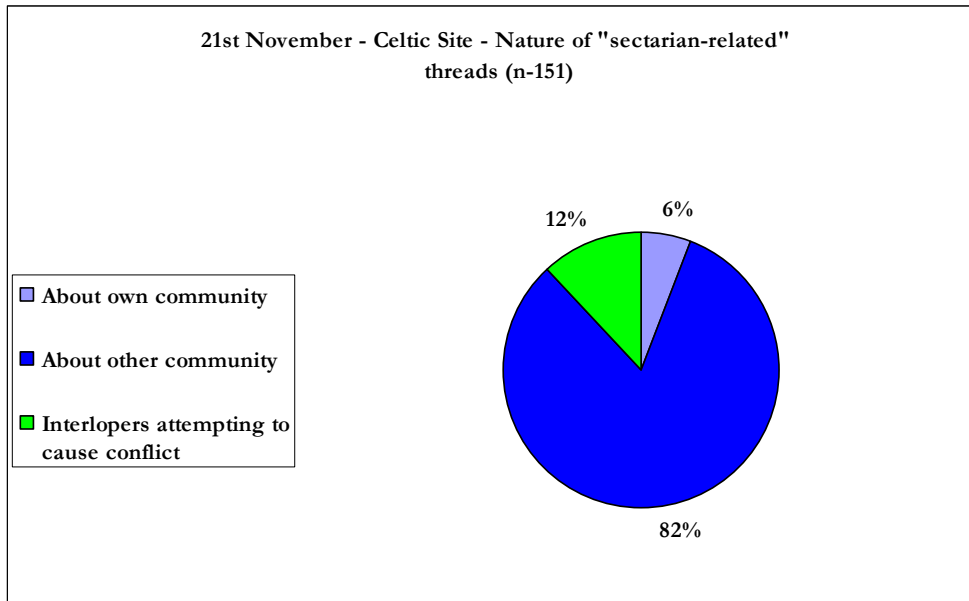


Figure 7.4.2 Nature of sectarian-related threads on Celtic board

It seems problematic for a solution to be found to sectarianism if each side is obsessed with the problems of the other while making little or no attempt to challenge such views on their own side. The thread below, from the Celtic board, illustrates this clearly with regards the young Celtic player Aiden McGeady, who sparked controversy by opting to play for the Republic of Ireland rather than Scotland:

Posted by Poster 116 on 21 Nov 20:10 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

The huns and Mcgeady ...

do they not realise that while they boo an 18 year old boy for playing for Ireland and seemingly turning his back on Scotland, they are flying ulster flags which turns their back on Scotland. Mindless filth.

[IP address logged]

Poster 116 criticises the Rangers fan for bigotry while referring to them as “huns” and “filth”. Again we see loose use of sectarian terms when referring to the other side, while simultaneously labelling them bigoted. The following example from the Rangers board illustrates the same denial at play in the mind a Rangers fan as he accuses the contributors to the Celtic board of being both paranoid and bigoted, while using sectarian terminology his/herself:

Posted by Poster 118 on 21 Nov 00:44 [Complain](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Reply](#)

Anybody been on Tottie-Mad today? ...

Hilarious!

Masonic Refs, corrupt linesman, Rangers players cheating and acting disgracefully(cant figure that on out at all), etc etc.

Its always somebody elses fault isn't it? Instead of admitting being ungracious, dirty, devious, unsporting cheating cunts, they always have to blame someone else.

They truly are scum of the earth.

[IP address logged]

Yet again the emphasis of the poster is on the behaviour of the other side, while using sectarian terminology themselves. It is quite possible that the posters in both of these threads do not see their own sectarianism for what it is, that the terminology is so ingrained with the support of the clubs that they only see what the other side does. The important issue to consider in this is the challenge in enabling fans of each side to see how such loose use of sectarian terminology can be offensive.

7.5 Summarising the issues found in Day 3

Clearly the findings of Days 1 and 2 have been confirmed again in the analysis of Day 3. What Day 3 also proves is that the levels of sectarian postings increase after an OF match, especially one where controversial incidents occur. This certainly reinforces the point that what the players and representatives of the clubs do on the pitch has a direct consequence off the pitch. While none of the message board discussions may lead to violence, there is evidently deep passion being stirred in many posters, which if it were to manifest itself on the streets, may lead to conflict.

Unlike the analysis in Day 1 and 2, the Day 3 analysis examined all postings on the boards for sectarian content.. It is only in this analysis that the real extent of sectarian content on the boards can be seen. Both Follow Follow and Comeonthehoops have almost identical ratios of sectarian threads, 41% on the Celtic board and 39% on the Rangers board. As discussed, a vast number of these postings involve careless use of language, terminology that is overtly sectarian and insulting towards the target, yet may not be designed to be so by the poster.

The conclusion to be drawn from the Day 3 study is that it is as likely that you would find sectarian content as easily amongst the football postings as it is amongst the off-

topic postings, suggesting again that the terminology and the obsession with and hatred of the Other is an integral part of supporting Celtic and Rangers for many fans.

Another cause for concern from analysing the Day 3 threads is the effect misbehaviour or controversial incidents within OF matches can have on the discussions on the message boards. While controversy is part and parcel of football, and while the same incidents would have been the stuff of TV and radio phone-ins and newspaper editorials, the fact remains that controversial incidents are debated on the message boards with overtly sectarian overtones. With no filter, as would be found in traditional media outlets, posters are free to discuss the incidents while using sectarian terminology. This potentially exacerbates the situation and causes further polarisation of the sides, as the incidents themselves become greater than their original context deserves. The call for players and officials for the clubs to examine their behaviour is an obvious one that should be made at this juncture, but it is harder to call for fans on relatively unmoderated message boards to do likewise when a *laissez faire* attitude exists.

Albeit this is a virtual world example, but the analysis on Day 3 proves that the unprofessional and thoughtless actions of players in matches has a direct effect on the actions of fans after games. This is worrying, since after 90 minutes have passed the players and representatives of the clubs can return to their homes while the after-effects are played out in bars and streets in the West of Scotland.

8. Conclusions

This study has clearly proven that sectarianism related to the Old Firm clubs does exist on the Internet. Although only two message boards were chosen for extensive study, the nature of fan sites that contain forums suggest that unless they are strictly moderated, that unacceptable threads can and do occur.

8.1 Discussing the findings

One of the first and most crucial points to note is the volume of traffic apparent on all of the message boards studied; although they vary in popularity they are all unquestionably well used. The statistics retrieved from Alexa and presented in section 2 of the study serve to emphasise the ubiquity and status of these types of message boards. The brief period of time in which the thread analysis was carried out is a disadvantage in that the levels of conflict or sectarian content may have been higher or lower than average in this twenty four hour period. However, the fact that such a vast amount of significant content was found in such a short space of time is worthy of note and leads one to the conclusion that the online environment does exacerbate sectarianism. Sectarianism is undoubtedly an issue in Scottish society but it is unlikely that anyone will have to confront it on a daily basis; some deny that it exists at all. However, on the OF message boards, sectarian comment is a daily occurrence and it is reasonable to conclude that it is the anonymity of the online environment and the consequent freedom afforded to ‘cyber warriors’ which has led to this.

Much of the conflict in the sectarian-related threads would be unlikely to occur in ‘real life’ as it would undoubtedly lead to confrontation. It is impossible to know whether those users who indulge in aggressive sectarian-related postings truly believe the things that they write or whether it is done for flaming or identity status reasons (this is particularly true of intruder posts). However, to a large extent, posts in the online environment are taken at face value; the absence of contextualising cues means that all that is left are the words on the screen. Although large-scale identity play may be uncovered over time, the generally concise posting styles of Footymad and Rivals.net users alongside the large and ever-changing numbers of posters and the high volume of

posts every day will mean that identity play goes unnoticed and sectarian content will be seen to be the strongly held personal beliefs of the poster.

Neither side of the OF divide is blameless as sectarian content and conflict exists on both boards. However, in the period studied there was a far higher level of intrusion and conflict creation by Rangers fans due to their own message board having interlopers clearly banned. It might look from the figures shown earlier, that Rangers fans alone try to bait the opposition with sectarian content. This is not the case, and should be plainly stated here. It seems as though for the OF, blocking out opposing fans and their opinions may be a sensible thing to do, even though in all other football boards baiting the opposition is one of the pleasures to enjoy in being a football fan. While this does solve the problem of interlopers creating conflict via sectarian postings; it does not solve the issues relating to sectarian posts from within the community itself. This is a major challenge, as the sites could be in danger of creating an insular mentality that promotes sectarian viewpoints, unless challenges come from within the community itself, or externally via the company hosting the message boards, or wider society.

Although the majority of sectarian-related posts were about and against the rival community/team it is entirely subjective as to whether one perceives the minority of inward looking threads (by and about the community) to be sectarian or harmlessly celebratory. Certainly, Loyalist or Republican discussion is often perceived to be allied with discrimination and terrorist activity by the rival community. The presence of Northern Irish users on each board may serve to aggravate sectarian discussion as daily interaction with Northern Irish posters will undoubtedly make religious divides and conflict seem more significant and also more normal to Scottish OF fans. Whether inward and passive or outward and active, those threads containing content pertaining to religion and to Northern Irish history or politics simply do not belong in a football message board. The peculiarity of the OF boards was demonstrated by the contrasting absence of sectarianism on the control boards, Dundee United and Dundee and Everton and Liverpool.

Geographical location of posters is an interesting point for future research (although it is difficult to ascertain for certain without IP addresses). Do those posters who most frequently post sectarian content live in Glasgow (i.e. in the midst of the OF affair) or

live elsewhere in the UK or overseas? Are sectarian sympathies exacerbated by geographical proximity or distance? Linked to this is the issue of nicknames and user identities online, which can also potentially reveal locality.

Some sectarian posters are labelled armchair or cyber warriors: their bile can only be disseminated via the anonymity of the message boards. However, this conclusion casts a negative light over CMC technologies and that is not the intention of this study. There is substantial evidence of counter argument and public derision in response to sectarian remarks; as Zickmund (1997) states, CMC technologies provide a forum for extremism but also a forum from which to oppose this extremism. It would be naïve to suggest that every instance of debate will result in revelatory changes in attitude. However it is also naïve to believe that the presence of extremist material online will persuade all who read it of its worth: attitudes are not this easily influenced. It is worthwhile here to re-quote in part a point from the CMC theory section of this study, “The Internet... like any form of communication, it is as helpful or harmful as those who use it.” (Thurlow et al. 2004) What sites hosting sectarian content need is for a wider awareness to be raised of their presence, and for reasonable people from within the communities the sites purport to serve to challenge the propagation of unacceptable material.

Crucially, more attention must be paid to the online world by policy makers and by those who wish to banish sectarianism from Scottish society. Online message board culture and communities have quietly grown to gigantic proportions yet have not been heeded by those who should be most aware of it. It must be recognised that online communication provides a forum for extremism but also a platform for dissenting opinion. Although CMC technologies provide an outlet for an exacerbated and consequence free form of sectarianism, the solution may lie partly in the problem.

8.2 Issues for the Clubs themselves to consider

While both Rangers and Celtic may be concerned with unofficial web sites and the content therein, there is little doubt that the existence of such sites also offers advantages to them in marketing their brand. The term viral marketing was coined in the late 1990s to define a strategy that “encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and

influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions.” (Wilson, 2000) Fan sites, while not necessarily being a marketing strategy encouraged by the clubs, offer viral marketing opportunities to them that other companies could only dream of. While there is no doubt that the clubs do not sanction unofficial web sites and would be appalled at some of the material therein, there is also no doubt that the existence of such sites offers extensive free marketing for their brands. The popularity of these sites in addition to the official sites provides opportunities for fans to be exposed to the brand in multiple locations, and more importantly means that a search on the web for either club will result in many sites to visit over and above the official sites.

The down side of this is that with inappropriate material being accessed on sites bearing the names of the clubs, then new supporters from home or abroad who are perhaps merely seeking information on the clubs may stumble across the sectarian material and automatically associate such sentiments and beliefs with support of the clubs. This is all the more dangerous if such new seekers of information on the clubs are children or are others who do not have the information literacy skills to separate an official site from an unofficial one in their mind. There must also be financial repercussions for the OF in that sectarian content will appear bizarre to that audience of 'floating' football fans who follow successful teams and may drop into one of the popular OF boards. As a result they will not pay to watch OF games, buy shirts etc. Since the OF teams are the brand leaders for Scottish club football, OF sectarianism could also be harmful for the public image of Scottish club football generally.

It is inconceivable that the clubs are not aware of the main fan sites and also their huge popularity. To merely let the sites exist without challenging inappropriate material is a dereliction of responsibility that would be unacceptable to other companies who found their online brand being tarnished in this way. The clubs need to be challenged and prepared to do more on this issue. Pretending the content does not exist is not only an unsustainable position, it is also potentially dangerous.

Several approaches may be open to the clubs:

1. Ignore the sites and hope that users of the Internet use the official sites as the main source of information.
2. Challenge those site owners who are using the names of the clubs in ways that damage the brand name or associate it with sectarian beliefs. This may be similar to the approach taken recently by both clubs to challenge sellers of sectarian material such as scarves and banners at home matches.
3. Allow the sites to exist, but have employees of the clubs actively engaging in debate and challenging material on such sites when sectarian material is posted.
4. Operate a system of authorising or licensing fan sites as sectarian-content free

Option 1 is a naïve approach, as people are far more likely to seek out sites where they can debate issues relating to the clubs in a consequence-free environment. Much of the content on official club sites is for registered users only, a barrier in place for marketing reasons, but one that can be frustrating for new users and perhaps drive information seekers to unofficial sites. The open nature of sites such as Footymad, message boards can be read by guest viewers, is something that allows visitors to explore the site and return regularly. Both of the OF sites require registration before information is imparted. Some of the services also require subscription. While making sense as a commercial model, it makes none if the clubs wish to encourage fans to visit their sites before any unofficial sites. The clubs need to start to embrace a more inclusive role for their websites, making news and information easily accessible.

Option 2 is a road that the clubs have gone down recently in a bid to prevent sectarian merchandise being sold near the stadiums. The challenges for the clubs of such a strategy in the online arena would be the extent of fan sites and message boards. While it is easy enough to marshal resources towards patrolling for merchandise sellers at home matches every two weeks or so, it would be a full time job to keep on top of the number of fan sites that exist and that are used potentially every minute of every day. The complexity of tackling the sites in the Courts would also be immensely problematic, since sites may be hosted in other countries and potentially out of the reach of the clubs. The expense this would entail may also be prohibitive.

Option 3 where employees of the clubs are active users of the site is, on paper, a proactive stance. It holds out many potential problems, however, including employees

potentially becoming involved in controversial debates or becoming targets for troublemakers on sites. There are also potential legal problems for the clubs if their employees do become embroiled in debates that perhaps breach ethical or legal guidelines.

Option 4 in the list, a potential licensing scheme, is not altogether as strange as it may sound. The clubs license supporters clubs in the real world and in the past have been known to clamp down on the sale of sectarian-themed merchandise on sale near their stadiums. The issue of fan sites is a 21st century amalgam of both issues, the online brand being tarnished by offensive, and possibly illegal material on web sites, and the sites themselves acting as a gathering place for supporters.

The licensing of sites containing forums or message boards is recommended as a potential solution for the clubs, this will involve:

1. The clubs having a named contact for each site
2. This named contact should moderate all interloper postings based on an agreed criteria for acceptable content
3. This named contact should also post a standard form message which both clubs should agree on, which says that the clubs do not approve of sectarianism content, that they wish the discussion to concentrate on football and football alone, and that posting sectarian content could make the poster liable for legal sanctions.
4. Finally, the named contact should be responsible for reporting to the Police any threats to individuals, either posters or other individuals named in sectarian postings.

This seems to the authors to be a minimalist response which both enables the clubs to discharge their responsibilities, but puts the onus on the moderator or moderators of the board. This scheme may have to extend to cover other Internet facilities, e.g. websites, chat channels, etc. We realise based on the number of sites that exist that this may well be impractical; therefore focussing on prominent sites might be a way to proceed in order for the clubs to:

1. Raise awareness of the issue in the fans' minds
2. Set a precedent for how the clubs expect their fans to behave when representing the fan base online
3. Reassure wider society that they are doing all they can do combat sectarianism related to support of the clubs

8.4. Companies Hosting Sites Containing Sectarianism

The role of the site hosts is another challenge if the problem is to be remedied. The reality is that companies hosting such material may be completely oblivious to the extent of the sectarian debate in Scotland. The opposite view, of course, is that the commercial reality is that sectarian content sells the sites to visitors.

To update the statistics on the host company, Footymad, a further search was performed on Alexa to gauge the popularity of the site while the report was being finalised. On April 1st 2005 the Footymad site was ranked at 19,822 in the list of the world's most used sites. However further analysis is necessary. Using Alexa, it was found that 93% of users visit Footymad to view or engage with the message boards. This essentially blows any myth that the nature of the site is about information provision, the sites are primarily being used to discuss and debate about football teams, with all of the extra sectarian baggage that comes with support of the Old Firm.

On further analysis a potentially more troubling statistic emerges. Over the 20th and 21st March 2005 snapshots were taken of the number of visitors to the Footymad message boards during those days. The sites updates visitor figures every twenty minutes and gives statistics for:

- a) Number of visitors logged in to all boards
- b) Number of visitors logged into Rangers message board.

In this short period studied between 35% and 44% of users logged in to the message boards were viewing the Rangers message board. When put into context, the Rangers board is just one of 159 boards hosted by Footymad. The earlier day studies presented suggested that traffic on the Celtic board was on average around a third of that on the

Rangers board. If this statistic is maintained throughout, it is quite possible that the Old Firm fans are accounting for around 50% or more of the traffic visiting the Footymad website. This has immense implications for the number of people who are viewing the sectarian content on these message boards. The graph below illustrates the numbers of visitors to the message boards at specific points in time over the period of 20th and 21st March 2005:

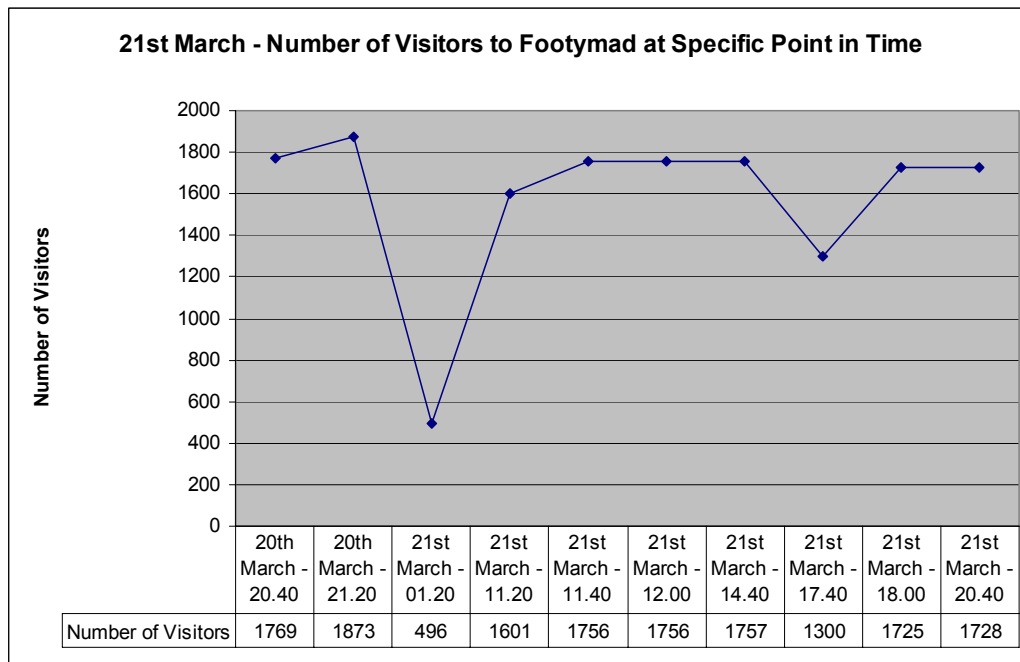


Figure 8.4.1 Number of Visitors to Footymad at Specific Point in Time

As can be seen we are dealing with highly significant numbers of people who are regularly using the Footymad message boards. Remember the figures above represent all boards, we roughly estimate that the OF fans represent around half of this figure. This is still, however, a significant number of people who are either actively engaged with or who are being exposed to sectarian material. This is major concern, and confirms that we are not dealing with a minority issue. Regardless of how many contributors to the boards actually post sectarian material, there does seem to remain a high number of people who are consuming it, either actively or passively. Since it is impossible to ascertain where these people are based, their ages or background, it is immensely disconcerting.

It does also seem rather troubling that a company based in Lancashire is providing a vehicle for people to gather and promote sectarian views about issues relating to Scottish

society. The larger question is simply this; do the owners of this company understand the societal problems in Scotland related to sectarianism? If they do not then perhaps again the clubs need to take them to task over what is being allowed to be presented in their name. It also seems pertinent that representatives of Footymad be invited to any future sectarian summits hosted, and that they be made fully aware of the nature and extent of the debate in Scotland on sectarianism. It does not seem an overt statement to make that the recent summit on sectarianism probably involved some organisations with a far lower reach than this company has through its message boards. They need to be brought into the debate on sectarianism and have their awareness raised regarding the issues involved and their potential role in combating the problem

8.4. Further Issues of Concern

In the period the message boards were being analysed, there appeared an occasional disturbing, and potentially dangerous, element to the content from the point of view of harassment. While general debate on sectarian issues would take place, there were also instances where individuals who raised issues in the media were targeted by fans on the boards. This was noticeable in threads involving journalists, academics and anti-sectarian campaigners, and more common on the Rangers board. To prevent unnecessary naming of the victims in these cases, the following is a general overview of what occurred in the several cases witnessed:

1. The individual would make a public comment related to an OF team or sectarianism
2. A debate would begin on the board relating to the issues raised
3. The debate would shift to the background of/intentions of the individual, sometimes involving potentially libellous comments
4. Contact details would be posted on the boards for the individual, normally email, but sometimes work address and telephone number
5. Fans would be “encouraged” to contact the individual with their “views”.

On one occasion a death threat was posted, but removed after complaints. On speaking to several of the individuals targeted in this way, it is clear that the volume of mail and phone calls received was at harassment levels. In addition, many of the contacts made were not attempts to debate, but were abusive and/or sectarian in nature.

While the democratic nature of the Internet is something to be cherished, the harassment evident in these incidents is certainly intimidating, and is something that the owners of the site themselves may have to take responsibility for. Another potentially legal issue concerned with such incidents was the tendency of posters on the message boards to post replies they may have received to emails from the individuals concerned. This is a major breach of copyright law, and opens the owners of the sites up to potential legal challenges.

As a footnote to this general discussion, the case of Andy Davis, an Assistant Referee involved in a controversial decision in a Hearts and Rangers match, highlights the potential of the problem. Mr Davis' home address, home telephone and mobile number were posted on the Celtic Footymad message board at the beginning of March 2005 before being removed by a moderator after complaints. The Police were informed and the individual who posted the details is in danger of losing his job, and may indeed have broken the law by his actions and may face charges. (McAulay, 2005, p.5) While this particular case was newsworthy due to the controversy of his match decision and the press coverage it had received since the match in question, this incident on the message boards was merely one example of several observed by the authors over the period of this study. None of these other incidents made the newspapers, many of them never had the abusive threads removed. Some of them had the same potential for placing the subjects in harms way, and need to be seen in the same context at that of the Davis thread.

8.5. Areas of Potential Further Research

- a) Some method of automatic computer based keyword extraction would be necessary for a large-scale long-term study of the boards. The system would have to be sophisticated enough to extract content in which the poster has evaded censorship – for example, 'h.un' for 'hun' or 'f.en1ain' for 'fenian?'. This study has only examined a small proportion of material on a small number of message boards. Scaling up this study to other boards and other Internet facilities, such as chat, would be impractical in terms of the personnel necessary. Thus a tool not only looking at message boards but at other Internet facilities also, would be extremely useful.

- b) A fuller comparison between the content of paper fanzines and online 'e-zines' should also be carried out. It has been hypothesised here that sectarian content is more likely to be found online due to anonymity and disinhibition. However, this area requires fuller analysis.
- c) As previously mentioned, geography of posters needs to be fully understood. The nature of the Internet allows people to post from around the world, and it may be possible that sectarianism in Scotland is being exacerbated by ex-patriates or people with a political axe to grind in Northern Ireland.
- d) To protect children or others accessing the material innocently, funding should be made available to design and create education materials aimed children and others looking for quality information on football web sites. At the moment it is far too easy to stumble across sectarian content when simply searching for information on the clubs, and this should be of great concern.

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APPENDIX: The Old Firm on the Internet

This section is intended to produce a comprehensive list (as at the time of last update, 28th February 2005) of sites and services on the Internet which relate to either or both of the Old Firm teams.

A structured Internet search was performed, following the steps set out below. At each step, and for each individual search engine of whatever type, the following groups of search statements were used:

Group 1: Celtic football Rangers football

Group 2: Celtic Glasgow Rangers Glasgow

Group 3: Celtic Scotland Rangers Scotland

Paired search terms were used as single terms, like 'Celtic' or 'Rangers', would bring up too many results that would be 'false drops' i.e. not the sort of result sought. Group 1 search terms should produce the most relevant sets of results, in that the proportion of relevant results to false drops should be quite high. Groups 2 and 3 will produce less relevant sets of results, but were used to widen the search beyond the obvious concept of 'football'. No synonyms were thought to be present.

The search steps followed were as follows:

Step 1: Use search engines which cover discussions in all types of forum (web-based, email-based, conference-based and chat-based). The chosen search engines were:

BoardReader (<http://www.boardreader.com>) - web-based conferencing

DayPop (<http://www.daypop.com/>) - weblogs (personal diary sites which permit others to contribute to the diary)

Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com/>) - Usenet conferences

Topica (<http://www.topica.com/>) - descriptions of mailing lists (discussion groups which work through e-mail).

Search IRC (<http://searchirc.com/>) – active Internet Relay Chat channels

Step 2: Use ‘meta’ search engines, which search across a number of search engines at the same time and present the integrated results on a single page. Essentially they have no searchable content of their own, rather they just use other search engines that do have searchable content. The advantage of using them is that they cover a wide range of search engines which then do not need to be searched individually. The chosen meta search engines below were picked because of their reputation for producing good search results:

Teoma (<http://www.teoma.com>)

Zapmeta (<http://www.zapmeta.com>).

Step 3: Use search engines which create their own databases of web pages which they copy and store from websites. Each search engine sends out a piece of software, called a robot or a spider or a crawler, to copy pages from the web into its searchable database. The chosen search engines below were picked because of their reputation for producing good search results:

A9 (<http://www.a9.com>)

Ask Jeeves (<http://www.ask.com/>)

Google (<http://www.google.com/>)

WiseNut (<http://www.wisenut.com/>).

Step 4: Use ‘specialist search engines’ which will find web resources not in well-known general search engines, like the ones covered in steps 2 and 3 above. Search engines chosen were:

CompletePlanet (<http://www.completeplanet.com/>)

Internet Search Engines (<http://www.searchengineguide.com/searchengines.html>)

Step 5: The final type of search engine used were directories (also called portals or subject gateways) and are characterized by the use of human effort to creating listings

content. Content is typically organised by an alphabetical index or a classification scheme. Content ideally will have been selected for quality. The chosen search engines were:

Open Directory Project (<http://dmoz.org/>) which has the most comprehensive web directory using the input of several thousand volunteer editors who select and add resources to the service.

Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.co.uk>) which used to be predominant in this category

Lists of items found in the search follow, in alphabetical order by category.

Forums and Mailing lists

1. Belfast Shamrock Celtic Supporters
 - a. <http://lists.topica.com/lists/bscsc/>
2. Brisbane Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://lists.topica.com/lists/BrisbaneCSC/>
3. Celtic
 - a. <http://lists.topica.com/lists/celtic/>
4. Celtic FC Mailing List
 - a. [mailto:majordomo@haymarket.ed.ac.uk:subscribe celtic](mailto:majordomo@haymarket.ed.ac.uk:subscribe%20celtic) [emailaddress]
5. Duntocher Celtic Mad
 - a. <http://lists.topica.com/lists/CelticMad/>
6. Hail Hail
 - a. <http://lists.topica.com/lists/Hail-Hail/>
7. The Old Firm
 - a. <http://lists.topica.com/lists/theoldfirm/>
8. The Rangers List
 - a. [mailto:majordomo@sagarmatha.com:subscribe rangers-list](mailto:majordomo@sagarmatha.com:subscribe%20rangers-list).
9. Southern Hemisphere Celtic Supporters
 - a. <http://lists.topica.com/lists/sh-tims/>

Chat channels

1. <irc://#celtic>
 - o Network: DALnet

2. irc://#celtic
 - Network: UniBG
3. irc://#celtic_north_stand
 - Network: EFnet
4. irc://#cybertims
 - Network: Blitzed
5. irc://#glasgow-celtic
 - Network: UniBG
6. irc://#GLASGOW.CELTIC.THE.PRIDE.OF.IRELAND
 - Network: UniBG
7. irc://#hackavenue
 - Network: MagicStar.Net
8. irc://#rangers
 - Network: UniBG

Newsgroups

1. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/alt.sports.soccer.celtic>
2. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/alt.scottish.clans>
3. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/alt.sports.soccer>
4. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/alt.sports.soccer.european.uk>
5. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/rec.collecting.sport.football>
6. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/rec.music.celtic>
7. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/rec.sport.football.misc>
8. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/rec.sport.football.pro>
9. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/rec.sport.soccer>
10. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/soc.culture.australian>
11. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/soc.culture.celtic>
12. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/soc.culture.irish>
13. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/soc.culture.new-zealand>
14. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/soc.culture.scottish>
15. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/uk.local.glasgow>
16. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/uk.sport.football>
17. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/uk.sport.football.clubs.celtic>
18. <http://groups-beta.google.com/group/uk.sport.football.clubs.rangers>

Web-based conferences

1. allForums > Entertainment > Sport
 - a. <http://www.allforums.net/forumdisplay.php?s=e05902a48a8b218cd09c5f3ac408d527&forumid=15>
2. Alternative Nation > Football
 - a. <http://www.alternativenation.net/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=26>
3. Big Football Forum > Scottish, European & World Football
 - a. <http://www.big-football-forum.co.uk/forum/viewforum.php?f=6>
4. BigSoccerBoards > UK > Scotland, N. Ireland and Wales
 - a. <http://www.bigsoccer.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=37>
5. Football Forums: > United Kingdom Football Forums > Celtic
 - a. <http://www.footballforums.net/forums/forumdisplay.php?s=7dc0742b99256b490210922ac62f8cdb&forumid=127>
6. Football Forums: > United Kingdom Football Forums > Rangers
 - a. <http://www.footballforums.net/forums/forumdisplay.php?s=7dc0742b99256b490210922ac62f8cdb&forumid=137>
7. Football Forums: > United Kingdom Football Forums > Scottish Football
 - a. <http://www.footballforums.net/forums/forumdisplay.php?s=7dc0742b99256b490210922ac62f8cdb&forumid=19>
8. Footie Threads: > Scottish Football
 - a. <http://footiethreads.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?s=39ffc7ee0604c0c61656e2c8d1a4e646&f=19>
9. My Football Forum: > European Soccer Forums > Scottish Football
 - a. <http://www.myfootballforum.com/forumdisplay.php?f=27>
10. Singapore Soccer Community – General Soccer Chat
 - a. <http://www.singaporesoccer.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=10>
11. Tiscali – Forums – General Discussion – Sport - Football
 - a. <http://www.tiscali.co.uk/forums/forumdisplay.php?s=46c18129ccc22130331e3e04a8c2e221&forumid=33>

Webblogs

1. blogfc.com - the football blog
 - a. <http://www.blogfc.com/blog/>

2. Slugger O'Toole: Notes on Northern Ireland politics and culture
 - a. <http://www.sluggerotoole.com/>

Yahoo Groups

1. Recreation & Sports > Sports > Soccer > By Region > Countries > United Kingdom > Leagues > Scottish Football League > Clubs > Glasgow Celtic (54 groups)
2. http://sports.dir.groups.yahoo.com/dir/Recreation___Sports/Sports/Soccer/By_Region/Countries/United_Kingdom/Leagues/Scottish_Football_League/Clubs/Glasgow_Celtic?show_groups=1
3. Recreation & Sports > Sports > Soccer > By Region > Countries > United Kingdom > Leagues > Scottish Football League > Clubs > Glasgow Rangers (27 groups)
4. http://sports.dir.groups.yahoo.com/dir/Recreation___Sports/Sports/Soccer/By_Region/Countries/United_Kingdom/Leagues/Scottish_Football_League/Clubs/Glasgow_Rangers

Conclusions

Forums found focus on the Old Firm clubs, on Scottish football or football generally. Essentially anywhere football is discussed, an Old Firm thread could appear. Peripheral forums covered Scottish culture, either directly or indirectly. Again, the Old Firm rivalry is a topic that is appropriate for these forums. The number of forums is large, but many might not to be that active in terms of membership or postings.

Websites

Individual websites

1. Affiliation of Registered Celtic Supporters Clubs
 - a. <http://www.affreg-celtic.co.uk/>
2. Ardoyne RSC

- a. <http://ardoynersc.4mg.com/>
3. Arthur Numan Loyal RSC Milngavie
 - a. <http://www.arthurnumanloyalrscmilngavie.co.uk/>
4. Association of Donegal Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.donegalassoc-csc.com/>
5. Austin Celtic Supporter Club
 - a. <http://austincsc.org/>
6. Barrhead St.Marys CSC
 - a. <http://www.barrheadstmaryscsc.com/>
7. Bhoys Fever
 - a. <http://bhoyfever.co.uk/>
8. The Bhoys
 - a. <http://members.tripod.com/~nizzen/>
9. The Bhoys 2001
 - a. <http://www.thebhoys-2001.cityslide.com/>
10. Big Apple Bears, New York City
 - a. <http://www.bigapplebears.com/>
11. The Big Green Book
 - a. <http://www.donegalinternet.com/bgb/>
12. Blind Ref Home Page
 - a. <http://www.blindref.fsnet.co.uk/>
13. Boston Rangers Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.bostonrangers.homestead.com/>
14. Brian's Glasgow Rangers Football
 - a. <http://www.teesdale1999.freerve.co.uk/>
15. Brido's Celtic Site
 - a. <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/bridosceltic>
16. Brighton Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.brightoncsc.co.uk/>
17. Bristols Chosen Few RSC
 - a. <http://bounce.to/bristolschosenfew>
18. Burghead Loyal Rangers Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.burgheadloyal.co.uk/>
19. Calgary RSC

- a. <http://www22.brinkster.com/rsc>
- 20. Celtic #1 Fan Page
 - a. <http://www.freewebs.com/glasgowcelticfootballclub>
- 21. Celtic 1888
 - a. <http://www.celtic-1888.com/>
- 22. Celtic Crazy
 - a. <http://www.100megsfree3.com/celticcrazy/>
- 23. Celtic Fanatic
 - a. <http://alfahype.lashout.net/celtic/>
- 24. Celtic Fans Site
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/fitba2001>
- 25. Celtic FC 2000
 - a. <http://website.lineone.net/~kingkenny/celticfc2000.htm>
- 26. Celtic FC Online
 - a. <http://www.cfconline.co.uk/>
- 27. Celtic Football Club (official site)
 - a. <http://www.celticfc.co.uk/>
- 28. Celtic Football Club, Glasgow, information & news
<http://www.celticfootballclub.info/>
- 29. Celtic Heaven
 - a. <http://celticbhoys.moonfruit.com/>
- 30. Celtic Mad
 - a. <http://www.celtic-mad.co.uk/>
- 31. Celtic Paradise
 - a. <http://www.docsparadise.co.uk/>
- 32. Celtic Supporters Association
 - a. <http://www.celticsupporterassoc.co.uk/>
- 33. Celtic Whonderland
 - a. <http://www.freewebs.com/celticwhonderland/>
- 34. CelticBhoys
 - a. <http://www.celticbhoys.8k.com/>
- 35. Celticstuff.co.uk
 - a. <http://www.celticstuff.co.uk/>
- 36. Celtsonline, von Chaz Ferry

- a. <http://www.celtsonline.cjb.net/>
- 37. Chicago Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.chicagocsc.com/>
- 38. Claddagh Celtic Supporters Club Galway
 - a. <http://www.galwayguide.net/claddagh.html>
- 39. Clarkson RSC
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/clarkstonrsc>
- 40. Cologne RSC, Ibrox.de
 - a. <http://www.ibrox.de/>
- 41. Copland-RD.com
 - a. <http://www.copland-rd.com/>
- 42. Cybertims
 - a. <http://www.cybertims.com/>
- 43. Dubai Loyal RSC
 - a. <http://www.dubailoyal.com/>
- 44. Dublic City University Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/dcucss>
- 45. Dun Dealgan No.1 Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/dundealgancsc>
- 46. The East Enclosure
 - a. <http://ayeready.com/>
- 47. The Electronic Tims (has forum)
 - a. <http://www.etims.net/>
- 48. The Fenian Page
 - a. http://uk.geocities.com/samrod_lee/
- 49. FollowFollow.com, The Glasgow Rangers Fanzine
 - a. <http://www.followfollow.com/>
- 50. French Celtic Supporters Page
 - a. <http://www.frenchcsc.com/>
- 51. The Frog's Pond Homepage
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/8030/index.html>
- 52. Gavs Rangers Page
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/butcherhav>
- 53. GersBlueHeaven.com

- a. <http://www.gersblueheaven.com/>
- 54. GersNet.com
 - a. <http://www.gersnet.cjb.net/>
- 55. GersOnline.co.uk
 - a. <http://www.gersonline.co.uk/>
- 56. Giffnock GFK Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.giffnockjfk.com/>
- 57. Glasgow Rangers FC
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/colosseum/field/2968>
- 58. Glasgow Rangers Football Forum
 - a. http://happy_bear_2000.tripod.com/frontpage.html
- 59. Glasgow Rangers Supporters Club of Sydney
 - a. <http://surf.to/sydneysrc>
- 60. The Glasgow Rangers Web Directory
 - a. <http://www.rangers-web.com/>
- 61. Glaswegian Gers
 - a. <http://www.angelfire.com/sc/rangers9/index.html>
- 62. A Grand Old Site
 - a. <http://www.grand-old-site.co.uk/>
- 63. The Grandstand
 - a. <http://www.fisher.worldonline.co.uk/>
- 64. Hamburg Loyal RSC
 - a. <http://www.hamburg-rsc.de/>
- 65. Harrogate True Blues Rangers SC, Broxi.co.uk
 - a. <http://www.broxi.co.uk/>
- 66. Henrik Larsson Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.manchestercsc.com/>
- 67. Henrik's Tongue
 - a. <http://www.gla.ac.uk/~cmc1z/>
- 68. Heriot Watt and Edinburgh Universities CSC
 - a. <http://www.hweucsc.com/>
- 69. Ibrox Football Club, Ibrox.co.uk
 - a. <http://www.ibrox.co.uk/>
- 70. Internet Loyal RSC

- a. <http://www.internetloyal.com/>
- 71. Inverness True Blues RSC
 - a. <http://www.invernesstrueblues.co.uk/>
- 72. Jock Stein Celtic Supporters Club Melbourne
 - a. <http://www.jocksteincsmelbourne.com/>
- 73. Jock's Rangers Football Website
 - a. <http://members.tripod.com/redhand1873/index.htm>
- 74. Johnny's Ranger Page
 - a. <http://www.thegers.fanspace.com/jonnyfront22.html>
- 75. "Just Another Site"
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/justanothersite>
- 76. Kearny RSC
 - a. <http://www.kearnyrsc.com/>
- 77. Keep the faith
 - a. <http://www.keep-the-faith.net/>
- 78. King Henrik's Celtic Shrine
 - a. <http://www.freewebs.com/kinghenrikscelticshrine/>
- 79. Let's All Laugh At Celtic
 - a. http://www.letsall_laughat_celtic.strayduck.com/
- 80. Lisbon Lions
 - a. http://www.geocities.com/lisbon_celtic/www
- 81. London Branch Rangers FC Supporters Association
 - a. <http://www.rangersfcsalondonbranch.co.uk/>
- 82. Lone Bar Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.lonestarceltic.com/>
- 83. Los Angeles True Blues RSC
 - a. <http://www.losangelestrueblues.com/>
- 84. Lothian True Blues RSC
 - a. <http://www.lothiantrueblues.fsnet.co.uk/>
- 85. Melbourne Glasgow Rangers Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.mgrsc.org.au/>
- 86. Melbourne No.1 Glasgow Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.melbournecelticno1.com/>
- 87. The Mighty Gers

- a. <http://www.themightygers.20m.com/>
- 88. Montreal Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.angelfire.com/mt/montrealcsc/>
- 89. Montreal RSC
 - a. <http://web.securennet.net/members/mrahajas/mrsc>
- 90. Motown Loyal RSC
 - a. <http://www.motownloyal.com/>
- 91. New Cumbernauld Loyal RSC
 - a. <http://www.loyal.f2s.com/>
- 92. North American Federation of Celtic Supporters Clubs
 - a. <http://www.nafcsc.com/>
- 93. North American Rangers Supporters Association, NARSA
 - a. <http://frontpage.spectranet.ca/narsa>
- 94. The Northumbrian True Blues
 - a. <http://members.tripod.co.uk/geordieger>
- 95. Not the View Celtic Fanzine Online
 - a. <http://www.ntvcelticfanzine.com/>
- 96. Number 1 site for Celtic fans
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/doddsy67>
- 97. The Old Firm
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Loge/6354/index.html>
- 98. Orange County Rangers Supporters Club, OCRSC.com
 - a. <http://www.ocrsc.com/>
- 99. Ottawa Rangers Supporters Club
 - a. <http://klik.to/ORSC>
- 100. Paradise On Line
 - a. <http://www.thebhoys.org/>
- 101. Paradise Web – Bristol CSC
 - a. <http://www.celticbristol.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/>
- 102. Patrick Sarsfield CSC
 - a. <http://www.patricksarsfieldcsc.com/>
- 103. Paul Abrams Celtic Supporters club
 - a. <http://www.paulabramscsc.co.uk/>
- 104. PlanetRangers.co.uk

- a. <http://www.planetrangers.co.uk/>
- 105. Plymouth True Blues
 - a. <http://www.plymouthtrueblues.com/>
- 106. The Pope's Eleven
 - a. http://www.geocities.com/marc_smyt
- 107. Pride of Ibrox
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/prideofibrox>
- 108. Rangers Fans Rant
 - a. <http://www.murdy.freeserve.co.uk/>
- 109. Rangers FC by British Premier Soccer
 - a. <http://www.britishpremiersoccer.com/rangers.html>
- 110. Rangers FC, Ibrox Disaster
 - a. <http://www.ayeready.com/ibrox/disaster.html>
- 111. Rangers Home, Rangers1.co.uk
 - a. <http://www.rangers1.co.uk/>
- 112. Rangers Net
 - a. <http://www.ibrox.dircon.co.uk/>
- 113. Rangers.co.uk (official site)
 - a. <http://www.rangers.co.uk/>
- 114. RangersFansVCelticFans.com
 - a. http://www.oldfirmfans.com/cfc_links.html
- 115. RangersSupportersClub.net
 - a. <http://www.rangerssupportersclub.net/>
- 116. RFCGoals.net
 - a. <http://www.rfcgoals.net/>
- 117. Riyadh RSC
 - a. <http://www.riyadhrangers.cjb.net/>
- 118. Rostock Loyal
 - a. <http://eastgers.de5.de/>
- 119. St.Andrew's Campus CSC Paul
 - a. <http://www.angelfire.com/ct2/PaulMcStay>
- 120. San Diego Rangers Supporters Club, SDRSC.com
 - a. <http://www.sdrsc.com/>
- 121. San Francisco RSC

- a. <http://www.geocities.com/sfrsc>
- 122. A Season in the Sun
 - a. <http://www.sol.co.uk/1/lionbooks/>
- 123. Serbian Loyal RSC, [Serbianloyalrsc.tripod.com](http://serbianloyalrsc.tripod.com)
 - a. <http://serbianloyalrsc.tripod.com/>
- 124. Shawlands Shamrock CSC
 - a. <http://www.shawlandscsc.netfirms.com/>
- 125. Sincerely Celtic
 - a. <http://www.sincerelyceltic.co.uk/>
- 126. Slim Celtic Suite
 - a. <http://uk.geocities.com/slimceltic/Welcome.htm>
- 127. Smell the Clover
 - a. <http://www.geocities.com/BourbonStreet/9587/>
- 128. Soccer-Online.co.uk
 - a. <http://www.soccer-online.co.uk/teams/rangers.htm>
- 129. South Derry CSC
 - a. <http://www.southderrycsc.com/>
- 130. Stockport True Blues RSC
 - a. <http://www.stockport.trueblues.cwc.net/>
- 131. Tameside Emerald Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.tamesideemerald.co.uk/>
- 132. Tiofaidh Ar La - For Celtic & Ireland
 - a. <http://www.talfanzine.com/>
- 133. Teeside and Darlington Hoops CSC
 - a. <http://teessideanddarlingtonhoops.co.uk/>
- 134. Texas True Blues RSC
 - a. <http://www.texastruebluersc.com/>
- 135. Thebluebears.com
 - a. <http://www.thebluebears.com/>
- 136. TheIbroxForum.com
 - a. <http://www.theibroxforum.com/>
- 137. Top Of The Hill True Blues Rangers Supporters Travel Club
 - a. <http://www.topofthehilltrueblues.cjb.net/>
- 138. Toronto Central Rangers Supporters Club, TCRSC.com

- a. <http://www.tcrsc.com/>
- 139. Up The Celts
 - a. <http://www.upthecelts.com/>
- 140. Vancouver Barnet Celtic SC
 - a. <http://www.barnetceltic.ca/>
- 141. Vancouver Rangers Supporters Club Branch #2
 - a. <http://members.home.net/thisbears/#>
- 142. Washington D.C. Celtic Supporters Club
 - a. <http://www.dccsc.com/>
- 143. Wim the Tim CSC
 - a. <http://www.wimthetimcsc.fsnet.co.uk/>
- 144. Year of Triumph
 - a. <http://www.jive.nl/~mag/celtic.html>

Directories

1. Clubs - Europe : Scotland : Premier League : Glasgow Celtic (22 links)
2. http://www.soccerlinks.net/pages/Clubs_-_Europe/Scotland/Premier_League/Glasgow_Celtic/index.html
3. Clubs - Europe : Scotland : Premier League : Glasgow Rangers (16 links)
4. http://www.soccerlinks.net/pages/Clubs_-_Europe/Scotland/Premier_League/Glasgow_Rangers/index.html
5. Sports: Soccer: UEFA: Scotland: Clubs: C: Celtic F.C. (78 entries)
6. http://dmoz.org/Sports/Soccer/UEFA/Scotland/Clubs/C/Celtic_F.C./
7. Sports: Soccer: UEFA: Scotland: Clubs: R: Rangers (26 entries)
8. <http://dmoz.org/Sports/Soccer/UEFA/Scotland/Clubs/R/Rangers/>
9. United Kingdom > Recreation and Sport > Sport > Football > Leagues > Scottish Football League > Scottish Premier Division > Clubs > Celtic FC (14 entries)
10. http://uk.dir.yahoo.com/Regional/Countries/United_Kingdom/Recreation_and_Sport/Sport/Football/Leagues/Scottish_Football_League/Scottish_Premier_Division/Clubs/Celtic_FC/
11. United Kingdom > Recreation and Sport > Sport > Football > Leagues > Scottish Football League > Scottish Premier Division > Clubs > Celtic FC (12 entries)

12. http://uk.dir.yahoo.com/Regional/Countries/United_Kingdom/Recreation_and_Sport/Sport/Football/Leagues/Scottish_Football_League/Scottish_Premier_Division/Clubs/Rangers_FC/

Conclusions

The above listing of websites is voluminous but unfortunately probably not exhaustive. Sites proliferate around a range of topics not just the teams: players, supporters clubs, competitions, incidents (e.g. the Ibrox Disaster) and more. Not listed above are websites for higher level topics, like the Scottish Premier League, Scottish football, UK football, European football and finally just football, all of which could include Old Firm content.

Fighting against the tide of unofficial websites, the official websites come out top on most rankings but there are hosts of other sites which might attract visitors. Many of these sites have forums. Many of these sites are hosted overseas, and support overseas communities of supporters, who may have opinions which do not match those of Glasgow-based supporters. Neither official site acknowledges the existence of fan websites on their own sites.