

Crossrail in the counties: A case study of place identity in Brentwood, Essex

LSE GROUPS 2018

Group 2

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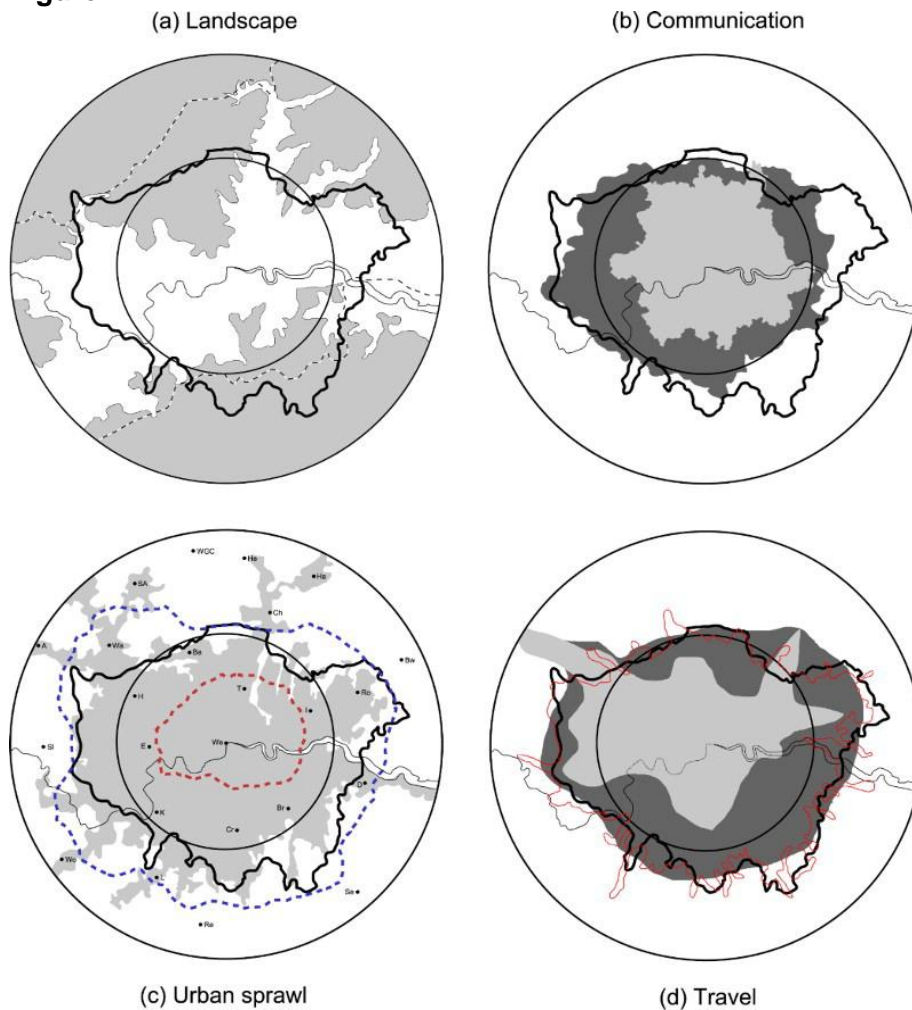
Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between place identity and metropolitan transport links, using the case study of Brentwood, Essex, and its integration into the London transport network through the Crossrail project. Using locally collected data, this paper is more geographically specific than previous studies of place identity in the UK. It was hypothesised that whilst the iconic branding of London transport would have some influence on their perception of spatial extent of London, the new TfL Rail service would not significantly alter the residents' sense of county identity. An individual's age, length of residency, and place of upbringing were also expected to affect their Essex and London identities, hence this data was gathered as part of the survey. By conducting the survey on 57 residents, who rated their sense of belonging to Essex, to London, and whether the new TfL/Crossrail link had had an impact on this, it was found that while half of the participants agreed that Brentwood has become part of London, 60% of the participants disagreed that TfL has made them feel more part of London. Rather than the limits of the transport network, it was found that cultural differences better describe the boundaries of London.

Introduction

The question of where London ends is as old as it is frequently discussed. There are multiple arbitrary boundaries of London, defined by postcodes, telephone numbers, transport fare zones, the orbital motorway, and of course the Greater London Authority, consisting of 33 local authorities known as boroughs (Figure 1).

Figure 1¹



Circles = 20 km and 40 km from Charing Cross, generally considered to be the centre of London. Greater London political boundary is represented as a bold black line.

(a) Dashed lines delineate central London Basin (i.e. edge of chalk outcrop to north and south); grey = land over 50 m elevation.

(b) Dark grey = London telephone dialling code (020) area; light grey = London postcode area.

(c) Blue and red dashed lines = M25 motorway and inner circular trunk road, respectively. Grey = contiguous urban area

(d) Red line = London (red) buses area; dark grey = Oyster card limit; light grey = Transport for London (TfL) controlled railway stations (as of March 2015)

¹ Jonathan D. Paul (2016) The limits of London, International Journal of Urban Sciences, 21:1, 41-57,

An experiment in a previous study² showed that the London tube map can affect people's perceptions of space and distance. When participants were asked to sketch a map of London, the results were almost always influenced by the tube map, and using line termini to demarcate the extremities of London. Since 2015, Brentwood, a town in Essex outside of every traditional aforementioned definition of London, has been included on this iconic map as part of London's Crossrail project. Our aim was to examine whether Crossrail, operated by TfL (Transport for London) under the brand of TfL Rail (soon to become the Elizabeth Line), has had any effect on Brentwood's perception of the extent of London.

Although the effective boundary of London may have extended towards Brentwood due to TfL Rail, it was found in a 2018 YouGov survey that the percentage identifying fairly or strongly with an English county strengthens further away from London, with Essex being an anomaly (Figure 2).³ Despite its physical proximity to London, made ever closer by better rail connections, Essex has retained a strong county identity.

Identity strengthens further from London

Percentage identifying very or fairly strongly with an English county

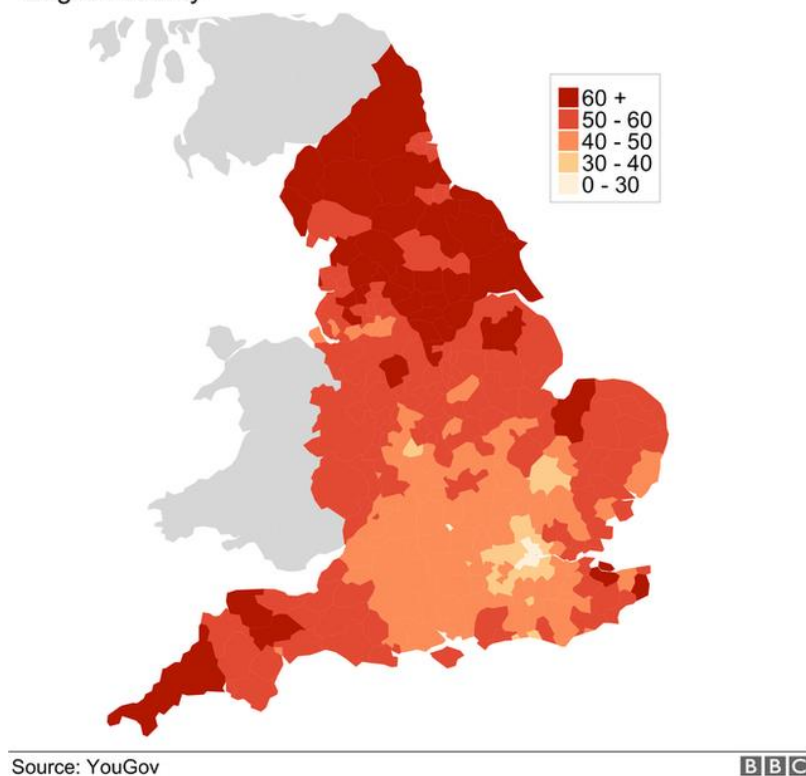


Figure 2

² Vertesi, J., 2008. Mind the gap: The London underground map and users' representations of urban space. *Social Studies of Science*, 38(1), pp.7-33.

³ The English question: Young are less proud to be English, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-44142843>

There is a growing trend in the UK for local government to be organised by economic boundaries rather than historic ones, especially with metropolitan regions such as the West Midlands Combined Authority. Brentwood is a prime example of this, with rail and bus services now under the jurisdiction of London's transport authority, despite its belonging to Essex. It is of considerable interest to know how these changing boundaries affect citizens' sense of place identity to their historic county and to the cities upon which they are economically dependent. Despite the YouGov survey showing that county identity within Essex remains strong, it is still not clear what individual factors contribute to this, and how strongly. Hence, it is possible that the extended jurisdiction of the London transport authority has *decreased* the sense of county belonging, when considered on its own.

According to Parr (2007), the spatial existence of a city can be defined in four ways: 'the Built City', 'the Consumption City', 'the Employment City', and 'the Workforce City', .⁴ As half of Brentwood's workforce commutes to London for work⁵, it can be considered part of the Employment/Workforce City, yet the Metropolitan Green Belt restricts new development, thus preventing Brentwood from joining the Built City.

One way to construe the topic of belonging is to see it as being related to social identity and personal identity (Fearon, 1999)⁶. Social identity refers to a sense of belonging to a particular community of people, or a social group an individual feels they are part of. Personal identity refers to those aspects of our identity that form the basis of our self-conception, and for that reason it is something that people resist changing. Putting this all together, we can say that since social identity, which refers to belonging, is an important part of one's resilient personal identity, then a person's sense of belonging to their home community will be resistant to change. Therefore, in the context of the TfL Rail in Brentwood, we would expect to see that Brentwood residents' sense of belonging and ownership of their Essex identity will continue to persist despite the enhanced transportation links to London.

Based on this information and context, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Has the introduction of TfL Rail in Brentwood changed residents' perception of the extent of London?
2. Has the expansion of TfL had any effect on county identity for Brentwood's residents?

And we sought to test the following hypotheses:

1. Brentwood Residents' perception of boundary of London has extended to Brentwood with the introduction of TfL Rail.
2. County identity of Brentwood residents has not been affected by the TfL Rail connection.

⁴ John B. Parr, Spatial Definitions of the City: Four Perspectives, Urban Studies Vol 44, Issue 2, pp. 381 - 392 (2007), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43084455>

⁵ National Census 2011, Office for National Statistics, Nomis

⁶Fearon, J. D. (1999). What Is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)? California: Stanford University.

Methodology

The notion of “belonging” can be construed as how “rooted” one feels in a particular place . Since this is a highly subjective notion towards which each ⁷individual will feel differently, it was decided that the best way to capture data on this topic would be through a carefully designed questionnaire. This was conducted in a physical, face-to-face format. We decided against conducting the survey online, as it would have been costly to target such a specific area and difficult to include older residents. Physical questionnaires ensured we had people’s attention and gave us control over the response rate. Moreover, the conversations we had before and after each interview gave us useful insights of a qualitative nature into the town and into people’s thoughts, which helped to direct our research. It was also important to have face-to-face interaction for the word association questions, in order to understand the sentiment and context of their answers. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

We predicted that living a greater number of years in Brentwood and growing up in Brentwood would correlate with certain responses to questions about belonging. In the same vein, question 2 asked for the participant’s age in order to test our prediction that the older a person is, the greater their sense of belonging.

The fourth section of the questionnaire asked participants to rate how much they agreed with a set of statements, each on a scale of 0-10, with 10 being ‘strongly agree’ and 0 being ‘strongly disagree’. We anticipated that those living in Brentwood for a longer period and those who grew up in Brentwood would produce higher scores towards the statements 4(a) and 4(c), and lower scores towards the statements 4(b) and 4(d).

The fifth section involved asking participants what three words first came to mind when they thought about ‘London’ and ‘Londoners’. These words were then to be grouped into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Words from each category were assigned 1, 0 or -1 points, respectively. These points were then added up to give a total score on each participant’s sentiment towards London and Londoners.

The sixth section was formulated in order for us to get a clear sense of the participants’ attitude towards TfL’s effect on their sense of belonging to London, and Brentwood’s sense of belonging to London. Participants were again asked to rate how much they agreed with the presented statements. This was to measure any potential change towards sense of belonging, in both directions.

This survey was conducted in Brentwood over the course of two weekday afternoons in June 2018, for a total of 6 hours. This could not go on for longer due to the time constraints of our project. We approached passers-by in public areas (e.g. High Street), and talked to shopkeepers when they were available. As the survey was conducted during the daytime on weekdays, we could not avoid a bias in the sampling of demographics. Those available for interview might be skewed towards pensioners, those not in full-time employment and other economically inactive population. The participants we interviewed might not use the TfL Rail as frequently to commute to London for the purpose of consumption, employment or

⁷ Antonsich, M., 2010. Searching for belonging—an analytical framework. *Geography Compass*, 4(6), pp.644-659

workforce, while their sense of belonging to Essex or London might be influenced by the TfL Rail link, they might not feel that the TfL Rail is as relevant to their daily commute compared to the working population that we have missed out in our survey. This assumption should be taken into account if the subjects' sense of belonging did not change with the TfL Rail service.

Similar to the YouGov survey, we wished to make our questions as specific as possible in order to accurately answer our question with minimal manipulation. Hence using percentages to describe how many people agreed with the statements in our survey was the easiest, most digestible way to interpret the survey data. However, wanting to better understand the reasons behind these feelings of belonging, we wished to use regression analysis to understand whether there was any correlation between people's agreement with the statements "TfL Rail has made me feel more a part of London" and "TfL Rail has made Brentwood a part of London" (our dependent variables) with age, time lived in Brentwood, area of growing up and sentiment towards London and Londoners (our covariates).

In order to do so we used statistical package SPSS in order to carry out our analysis. We first regressed "TfL Rail has made me feel more part of London" on all of the covariates (Appendix B: Model 2). We suspected however potential correlation between "Age" and "Time spent in Brentwood" prompting us to drop "Time spent in Brentwood" as a regressor (Appendix B: Model 1). This in fact served to make our parameter estimates for "age" statistically significant, thus allowing us to use this in our analysis. We repeated this but with "TfL Rail has made Brentwood a part of London" with all covariates, again without "Time lived in Brentwood" yielding similar results.

Evaluation of Methodology

After conducting the survey, we identified the following limitations in our methodology:

- It was difficult to communicate to certain participants how the 0-10 scale worked. Some participants were not certain what number best fit their sentiment. It is possible then, that the 0-10 scale was too finely-grained to truly reflect the sentiment of the participants. Using a more coarse-grained way to quantify people's sentiment towards a statement using categories such as "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" may have been beneficial (or paradoxically, more accurate).
- As mentioned in preceding sections, it is likely that the people interviewed were not representative of the population of Brentwood. This was due to the time of day in which the survey was conducted, the early afternoon, when a large proportion of the population was at work and so, unable to be interviewed. This may have contributed to the fact that a large proportion of our participants were possible retirees. Moreover, we noticed that non-native English speakers were less likely to consent to participate.
- Not all participants could give three words to describe London/Londoners in section 5. This might limit the conclusions we can infer from this data. Additionally, it was not possible to be completely certain about an individual's tone and sentiment when stating the words. Especially given that our researchers are mostly ethnically non-white, this might partly explain the political correctness of the choice of vocabularies (e.g. multicultural, multiracial) by the mostly ethnically white demographics of the survey participants when asked to describe London/ Londoners. We rated words such as 'multicultural' as ambiguous in sentiment, whereas the participant may have intended it either in disgust or admiration.

Results and Analysis

A score of 6 or above was taken to be an agreement with the statement. The results below are the percentages of the respondents who agreed with the statements in sections 4 and 5 of the survey with at least 6 on a scale of 0-10.

Figure 3

Question	Statement	Agreeing at least 6/10	Mean score out of 10	Median score out of 10
4a	"I belong to Essex"	58%	6.3	7
4b	"I belong to London"	23%	3.3	3
4c	"Brentwood is a part of Essex"	90%	8.8	10
4d	"Brentwood is a part of London"	12%	2.0	0
6a	"TfL rail has made me feel more a part of London"	40%	4.7	5
6b	"TfL rail has made Brentwood a part of London"	50%	5.4	6

1. Hypothesis: Perception of boundary of London has extended to Brentwood with the introduction of TfL Rail.

With only 50% of the participants agreeing with the statement that "TfL rail has made Brentwood a part of London", our hypothesis that 'perception of boundary of London has extended to Brentwood with the introduction of TfL Rail' has not been proven. The new TfL rail had no effect on people's perception of boundary of London in Brentwood. (It should be noted, however, that more participants agreed with the statement that 'TfL made Brentwood part of London' (50%) than the statement 'Brentwood is part of London' (12%). This shows that the TfL branding did add to an individual's perception of boundary of London, although this did not reflect the Brentwood community's overall perception.)

2. Hypothesis: County identity of Brentwood residents has not been affected by the TfL Rail connection.

The results show that 60% people of participants do not feel that TfL rail has made them more a part of London. We can take this to confirm our second hypothesis when we consider the response to 4a) in which most people feel they belong to Essex. Since a majority of people feel like they belong to Essex and that the TfL rail link has not changed this (by increasing a sense of belonging to London), we can say that the TfL link has not had an effect on county identity amongst residents.

Other Relevant Findings (Using regression data in Appendix B)

1. There is a negative correlation between age and score in statements about the impact of TfL rail on belonging to London.

These findings can be explained by the fact that since most of the elderly participants may have been retired, they are less likely to use the rail link on a regular basis. Since these London transport links do not factor much into their daily lives, they are unlikely to have much of an impact on their sense of belonging to London. This is consistent with Hypothesis 2, that the TfL rail link has not had an impact on residents' sense of belonging as there has been no increase their feelings of belonging to London.

2. Those who grew up 'elsewhere' felt the highest impact of TfL on their sense of belonging to London.

This suggests that that given the fact that these individuals grew up elsewhere, they have no particularly strong senses of belonging to Brentwood and hence their sense of belonging is less resilient to change following the TfL link.

As shown by a research done by Centre of London⁸, 70% of people nationally think that where they live shapes their identity. Belonging to the city is formed through contributing to its economic and civic life; electing to move there and committing to stay, or feeling respected as a citizen regardless of other identities held. As people who moved to Brentwood from elsewhere probably did not identify with a particularly strong place identity, the integration with TfL might have contributed more to their sense of commitment to the economic and civic life in London.

3. There was a negative correlation between 'growing up in London' and a higher score for statement "TfL rail has made me feel more a part of London". Those that grew up in London agreed least with this statement.

This may be because these already have a strong sense of identity with London having grown up there, thus the inclusion of Brentwood on TfL does little to change that. This is consistent with the second hypothesis, that the TfL rail link will not alter county identity.

4. There was a negative correlation between 'growing up in Brentwood' and a higher score for statement "TfL rail has made me feel more a part of London". However, those who grew up in Brentwood agreed more than those who grew up in London that TfL rail has made them more a part of London.

The latter point seems to suggest that people who grew up in Brentwood have had their sense of belonging has shift at least partly from Brentwood to London. At glance, this seems to conflict with our second hypothesis, that county identity is resilient and has not changed. One way to justify this would be to say that a very slight change, which is all that the regression analysis suggests, is only to be expected when considering the reach and influence of a huge and important city like London. Any potential small change in itself is not enough to contradict the second hypothesis.

⁸ Bosetti N., Colthorpe T., *London Identities*, Centre For London, 2018

Qualitative Explanations

As a result of spending many hours in Brentwood to conduct the survey, we learned a lot from the informal conversations that arose during our research. Whilst these conversations are not primary data, it provides clues as to why Brentwood residents feel so strongly about London and their Essex identity. Firstly, whilst 21% of our respondents identified as having grown up in London, many more mentioned that their families were from London (especially the East End), or that they had family in London. Although we did not ourselves record this data, postwar migration out of the East End to Essex is well documented⁹. These historic ties and memories of London, especially of the traditional cockney East End, are discordant with the modern reality of London. Many respondents commented that London had 'changed', and 39% used at least one word such as "diverse", "multicultural", or "varied" to describe the city. This suggests that the real distinction between Essex and London is one of culture; 92.2% of Brentwood residents are white, according to the 2011 census, as opposed to 59.8% in Greater London. Obviously this cultural difference goes beyond race; respondents also noted 'vibrancy' and 'cosmopolitanism' of London, words which describe infinitely more than ethnicity alone. As far as our research question is concerned, this may suggest that the real impact of Crossrail on Brentwood's place identity is yet to happen. As the Elizabeth Line opens in full, offering fast and easy access to central London, it is likely that a new generation of commuters will move out of London to the Essex green belt, as did generations of Londoners before them.

Conclusion

We set out to examine the impact of the new TfL Rail on Brentwood residents' sense of belonging to London, and through the course of this study we have arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Only 50% of participants agreed with the statement "TfL Rail has made Brentwood a part of London".
2. 60% of participants do not agree with the statement that TfL Rail has made me feel more a part of London.
3. There is a negative correlation between age and score in statements about the impact of TfL rail on belonging to London.
4. Those who grew up 'elsewhere' felt the highest impact of TfL on their sense of belonging to London.
5. There was a negative correlation between 'growing up in London' and a higher score for the statement "TfL Rail has made me feel more a part of London". Those that grew up in London agreed least with the statement that TfL has made them feel more part of London.
6. There was a negative correlation between 'growing up in Brentwood' and a higher score for statement "TfL Rail has made me feel more a part of London". However,

⁹ Watt P., Millington G., Huq R. (2014) East London Mobilities: The 'Cockney Diaspora' and the Remaking of the Essex Ethnoscape.

those who grew up in Brentwood agreed more than those who grew up in London that TfL rail has made them more a part of London.

All of these key findings were broadly in line with what we had expected when we started out with our research and also in accordance with what the relevant academic literature suggests. We hope this paper makes a contribution to the academic literature on belonging (and place identities) and on the social impact of transport infrastructure with special emphasis on urban geography. We further hope this research will inspire further studies into metropolitan place identity on the boundaries of urban areas, particularly as transport and other services in England are devolved to city regions, rather than historic counties and districts. We feel this topic has been under-researched, given the magnitude of reforms currently taking place to regional government in England.

Appendix A - Survey

LSE GROUPS Brentwood Survey 2018

1. How long have you been living in Brentwood?
 - a. More than 10 years
 - b. 5-10 years
 - c. Less than 5 years

2. In what year were you born?

3. Where did you grow up?
 - a. Brentwood
 - b. Elsewhere in Essex
 - c. London
 - d. Other

4. How far do you agree with the statement, where 0 means 'strongly disagree' and 10 means 'strongly agree':
 - a. "I belong to Essex"
 - i. (Strongly disagree) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (strongly agree)
 - b. "I belong to London"
 - i. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - c. "Brentwood is part of Essex"
 - i. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - d. "Brentwood is a part of London"
 - i. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. What are the first three words that come to your head when you think about...
 - a. London

 - b. Londoners

6. How far do you agree with the statement:
 - a. "TfL Rail has made me feel more a part of London"
 - i. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - b. "TfL Rail has made Brentwood a part of London"
 - i. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix B - Regression Table

Dependent Variables (Columns)	TfL Rail has made me feel more a part of London		TfL Rail has made Brentwood a part of London	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	10.027*** (1.4155)	10.988*** (1.8819)	8.852*** (1.4215)	10.089*** (1.8833)
Age	-0.056** (0.0224)	-0.055 (0.0224)	-0.038* (0.0225)	-0.036 (0.0224)
Time in Brentwood		-0.437 (0.5683)		0.563 (0.5687)
Grown up in Brentwood	-3.561*** (1.0285)	-3.275*** (1.0885)	-1.869* (1.0329)	-1.500 (1.0893)
Grown up in London	-4.431*** (1.1264)	-4.409*** (1.1208)	-3.279*** (1.1312)	-3.251*** (1.1216)
Grown up in Essex	-4.122*** (1.3717)	-4.125*** (1.3644)	-2.448* (1.3775)	-2.451* (1.364)
Grown up Elsewhere	0 (Reference)	0 (Reference)	0 (Reference)	0 (Reference)
London Sentiment	-0.169 (0.3109)	-0.166 (0.3093)	-0.057 (0.3123)	-0.053 (0.3095)
Londoner Sentiment	-0.203 (0.2929)	-0.199 (0.2914)	-0.105 (0.2914)	-0.101 (0.2916)
Sample Size	55	55	55	55

Key

* - p value of <0.1

** - p value of <0.05

*** - p value of <0.01

Slope coefficient (Standard error)
