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# Measuring empathy feelings in football through media value

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*MEASURING EMPATHY FEELINGS IN FOOTBALL THROUGH MEDIA VALUE*

KEYWORDS: Media Value, Sport Talent, Football Players and Teams, Fans' Empathy.

ABSTRACT: This paper applies media value appraisals to measure the degree of identification that players and teams inspire in football supporters. Using a large data set of media value scores in season 2014/15, we rank the most popular football players and clubs worldwide; as well as the teams' managers with the greatest media value exposure. Then, building upon individual ratings, we determine the hierarchy of the "Big Five" European domestic leagues, according to their comparative media value status.

The aim of this paper is applying media value records to approximate the degree of interest and identification that players and teams inspire in football supporters. The issue is particularly relevant from an economic perspective, given that players and teams' media value recognition is critical to approximate the potential contribution they will procure to the football industry.

The business of professional football, which depends on players' talent, has become in our days one of the major providers within the global industry of entertainment. Actually, the size of the market is growing as Deloitte (2014) makes clear: the total revenues in European football are estimated in €20 billion. Moreover, according to Andrews and Harrington (2016), the worldwide figure rise up to $33 billion.

The results presented in this paper are calculated from media value ratings of season 2014/15. Our appraisals of players' media value capture immediately the sporting talent but also the ability to arouse interest in the mass media, which in turn reflects the degree of empathy feelings that they inspire in the fans and in the general public. Using large data sets, we identify the most popular football players and clubs all over the world. Then, building upon individual ratings, we determine the hierarchy of the "Big Five" European domestic leagues, by looking at their comparative media value exposure. Finally, we also examine the media value of teams' managers.

The sport industry depends on individuals' talent and capacity to draw attention in the mass media. To develop their business, football clubs try to concentrate the greatest possible sport achievements and titles. The rationale behind such a behavior is clear, since the better sport performance and achievements (of football players and teams) the greater the interest they draw from the crowds. Besides, new technologies and cheap access to the mass media have boosted, in recent times, the number of potential consumers, provoking a transformation of the professional football industry.

Regarding the literature on the football industry, some papers may help to learn about the general context; for instance: Sloane (1971); Rosen (1981); Hoehn and Szymanski (1999); Szymanski and Kuypers (2000); Dobson and Goddard (2001); Rodriguez et al. (2015); etc. Additionally, there are other peculiarities of this industry that deserve attention. As concerns the relationship between player spending and team success; as well as between team success and team revenues: Szymanski and Smith (1997) and Forrest and Simmons (2002) may be confronted.

Other important place in the literature is devoted to debating whether football clubs behave as win maximizers or as profit maximizing: Sloane (1971); Késenne (1996); Késenne (2000); Garcia-del-Barrio and Szymanski (2009). Besides, the sporting competition in professional football is typically characterized by the usual contest system. Precisely, the uncertainty attached to the unpredictable outcomes of matches is considered one of the key features in order to attract the interest of fans and to develop the business. (i.e., Szymanski (2001) and Szymanski (2003), for instance).

Another feature which is commonplace in sports industries is what Frank and Cook (1995) called the winner-take-all phenomenon. This feature implies that individuals slightly more productive than the others become the "winners" of the market and, proportionally, are more generously rewarded than the others. In industries like pop culture, arts, and sports, many individuals compete for a few prizes, but only a few of them succeed to achieve the large earnings at the top. Rosen and Sanderson (2001) highlight how the winner-take-all element characterizes an increasing number of work activities. Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol (2007) and Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol (2009) show that the winner-take-all hypothesis operates in various different sports industries.

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## Method

### Procedure

This paper adopts the approach proposed by MERIT: Methodology for the Evaluation and Rating of Intangible Talent. To carry out this study, we have collected and examined – with the help of the new technologies – millions of press articles and websites contents across the Internet.

The MERIT indexes approximate the economic value of talent, as it is captured through the degree of mass media exposure and the interest of fans. Our appraisals, based on media value records, are able to jointly capture players' personal talent as well as the attractiveness beyond their contribution in the form of sport performance. Moreover, the exposure in the media is supposed to stem from their sport performance, but also from the social recognition of other personal skills.

To carrying out this study, we have collected records on media value of more than 5,000 football players. The MERIT index of media value is then expressed with respect to the average of the top 2,500 players included in our data collection. More specifically, the media value score is the factor by which the value of a particular player multiplies the number of news of the representative (average) player in our sample. The media value of football clubs or national teams can be derived by grouping the fifteen individuals with the greatest media value within the roster of the team. Similarly, the aggregate figures for evaluating the media value status of domestic leagues can be derived by adding up individual records. Indeed, one of the strengths of MERIT methodology is its capacity to deliver homogeneous indicators of media value in a wide variety of sport competitions and entertainment industries. This feature permits to perform accurate comparisons across individuals today and over time.

Finally, before we present the results, there is a methodological aspect that must be mentioned: the media exposure might sometimes be associated to negative rather than positive perceptions. This problem led us to perform some tentative qualitative studies in the past. In 2009, for instance, we carefully examine the nature of the perception that Formula One drivers had in the public opinion. We then found that, generally, the proportion of positive news articles were about 95%; moreover, the figure reached even 98% of the total number of news in particular cases. Other studies were made to address the same aspect for star football players and top coaches, resulting that both groups of professionals enjoyed a positive perception ranging between 90% and 95%.

While further research is needed to get more conclusive answer, the following two points summarize so far our conclusions: (i) There is an extremely large proportion of news with a clear positive character associated to athletes in the media (meaning that the number of negative comments may be considered irrelevant); (ii) This result holds even for controversial professional groups, such as the teams' managers.

## Results

Once the scope of and methodology of the paper have been described, in Table 1 we present the MERIT media value ranking for the main football players worldwide in season 2014/15. As it was already mentioned, the values of the MERIT index are expressed in terms of the average computed for the 2,500 players with the highest media value (from our database of more than 5,000 players). Specifically, individual scores of the index are expressed as the factor by which the player multiplies the number of news of the representative (average) player in the sample.

According to our data, during the 2014/15 season, Messi had a mass media presence which was a whopping 52.78 times higher than the average player. Then, Ronaldo came a close second at 49.92.

Within the Top-10 we see Real Madrid and Barcelona as big contributors with three players each, making the Liga BBVA the one with the largest number of star players in the Top-10. Among the rest of players it is worth mentioning James's great season, both with his national team and as Real Madrid's new golden boy striker, which boosted him to the fourth place. Besides, Hazard's brilliant season 2014/15 put him on the spotlight in terms of media value. FC Barcelona's Suarez and Neymar, in turn, displayed great performances which helped them climb to the fifth and sixth places respectively.

Then, as team media value is concerned, each team's index is obtained by adding the individual figures (for the 2014/15 season) of the 15 most popular players in the team's roster. Table 2 lists the principal teams according to their media value index.

Our results indicate that these two Spanish football clubs attract the greatest levels of interest from the crowds worldwide, even if a more detailed analysis should be made for a qualitative interpretation of this result. Behind Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, we find Manchester United and, a few steps behind, other four English teams, followed then by the main team in each of the other domestic leagues: Germany, Italy, and France.

We next address the issue of teams' managers by applying the same methodology, and using the same reference value than that taken for the MERIT index of players.

Table 3 reveals the Top 15 most popular managers in season 2014/15. The analysis is carried out from a sample of over 100 international first-level managers. The leader in season 2014/15, always according to our measurements of media value status, was Jose Mourinho. Notice that in this table the values of the MERIT index are also expressed with respect to the reference value used for players. (It means, for instance, that Mourinho multiplies by 28.05 the media value exposure of the average (representative) football player.

The media value of managers seems to be highly affected by the team's sporting and media status. There are exceptions, of course, because some managers enjoy significant recognition and a brand image status due to their past accomplishments. Besides, Premier League managers seem to enjoy a media premium just for belonging to the English football market. This feature is presumably related with the series of additional tasks and responsibilities managers are given in the UK over those given to their peers in other competitions across Europe. As we have already mentioned, one aspect that deserves future research is exploring the extent to which media exposure is associated to a positive perception on part of journalist and fans worldwide.

Finally, we come to examine the relative position, in terms of media value status, of the "Big Five" European domestic football leagues. The media value status of each competition is computed by aggregation of the individual indexes for the most highly rated 400 players. As a robustness check, we used as well either 300 or 500 players, but no significant differences were

| Rank 2014/15 | Player | Team | MERIT media value index |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lionel Messi | FC Barcelona | 52.78 |
| 2 | Cristiano Ronaldo | Real Madrid | 49.92 |
| 3 | Wayne Rooney | Manchester United | 36.94 |
| 4 | James Rodríguez | Real Madrid | 33.99 |
| 5 | Luis Suárez | FC Barcelona | 29.94 |
| 6 | Neymar | FC Barcelona | 26.50 |
| 7 | Gareth Bale | Real Madrid | 22.13 |
| 8 | Alexis Sánchez | Arsenal FC/FC Barcelona | 21.03 |
| 9 | Diego Costa | Chelsea FC / Atletico Madrid | 17.79 |
| 10 | Kun Agüero | Manchester City | 17.61 |
| 11 | Radamel Falcao | Man United / Monaco | 16.37 |
| 12 | Cesc Fàbregas | Chelsea FC | 16.27 |
| 13 | Eden Hazard | Chelsea FC | 15.75 |
| 14 | Robin van Persie | Manchester United | 14.95 |
| 15 | David Silva | Manchester City | 14.83 |
| 16 | David de Gea | Manchester United | 14.83 |
| 17 | Steven Gerrard | Liverpool FC | 13.60 |
| 18 | Mesut Özil | Arsenal FC | 13.18 |
| 19 | Manuel Neuer | Bayern Munich | 10.78 |
| 20 | Iker Casillas | Real Madrid | 10.58 |
| 21 | Yaya Touré | Manchester City | 10.33 |
| 22 | Mario Balotelli | Liverpool FC | 10.28 |
| 23 | Sergio Ramos | Real Madrid | 10.00 |
| 24 | Dani Alves | FC Barcelona | 9.65 |
| 25 | Paul Pogba | Juventus FC | 8.95 |
| 26 | Marcelo | Real Madrid | 8.84 |
| 27 | Pepe | Real Madrid | 8.59 |
| 28 | Gerard Piqué | FC Barcelona | 8.57 |
| 29 | Andrés Iniesta | FC Barcelona | 8.29 |
| 30 | Karim Benzema | Real Madrid | 7.93 |
| 31 | Xavi Hernández | FC Barcelona | 7.17 |
| 32 | Carlos Tévez | Juventus FC | 6.58 |
| 33 | Didier Drogba | Chelsea FC / Galatasaray | 6.48 |
| 34 | Zlatan Ibrahimovic | Paris Saint-Germain | 5.92 |
| 35 | Ángel di María | Man United / Real Madrid | 5.49 |
| 36 | Francesco Totti | AS Roma | 4.64 |
| 37 | Petr Cech | Chelsea FC | 4.63 |
| 38 | Juan Mata | Manchester United | 4.30 |
| 39 | Frank Lampard | Manchester City | 4.30 |
| 40 | Andrea Pirlo | Juventus FC | 4.16 |
| 41 | Arjen Robben | Bayern Munich | 3.98 |
| 42 | Toni Kroos | Real Madrid / Bayern Munich | 3.93 |
| 43 | Franck Ribéry | Bayern Munich | 3.58 |
| 44 | Thiago Silva | Paris Saint-Germain | 3.41 |
| 45 | Arturo Vidal | Juventus FC | 3.39 |
| 46 | Thibaut Courtois | Chelsea FC | 3.36 |
| 47 | Marco Reus | Borussia Dortmund | 3.18 |
| 48 | Raheem Sterling | Liverpool FC | 3.13 |
| 49 | Luka Modric | Real Madrid | 3.10 |
| 50 | Arda Turan | Atlético Madrid | 3.09 |

Source: MERIT social value - Data collection

*Table 1. MERIT media value ranking for the main football players worldwide in season 2014/15*

| Rank 2014/15 | Team | League | MERIT media value index |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Real Madrid | Liga BBVA | 170.3 |
| 2 | FC Barcelona | Liga BBVA | 160.2 |
| 3 | Manchester United | Premier League | 105.2 |
| 4 | Chelsea | Premier League | 81.5 |
| 5 | Manchester City | Premier League | 61.8 |
| 6 | Arsenal | Premier League | 56.8 |
| 7 | Liverpool | Premier League | 44.3 |
| 8 | Bayern Munich | Bundesliga | 41.1 |
| 9 | Juventus | Serie A | 36.6 |
| 10 | Paris Saint Germain | Ligue One | 26.1 |
| 11 | Atlético Madrid | Liga BBVA | 20.5 |
| 12 | Roma | Serie A | 19.4 |
| 13 | Napoli | Serie A | 13.0 |
| 14 | Tottenham | Premier League | 12.8 |
| 15 | Borussia Dortmund | Bundesliga | 12.6 |
| 16 | Fiorentina | Serie A | 12.0 |
| 17 | Everton | Premier League | 11.8 |
| 18 | Valencia | Liga BBVA | 10.9 |
| 19 | AC Milan | Serie A | 10.7 |
| 20 | Inter Milan | Serie A | 10.7 |

Source: MERIT social value - Data collection
*Table 2. MERIT media value ranking for the main football teams worldwide in season 2014/15*

| Rank 2014/15 | Manager | Team | MERIT media value index |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jose Mourinho | Chelsea | 28.05 |
| 2 | Luis Enrique | FC Barcelona | 23.75 |
| 3 | Arsene Wenger | Arsenal | 21.84 |
| 4 | Louis van Gaal | Manchester United | 21.25 |
| 5 | Carlo Ancelotti | Real Madrid | 20.20 |
| 6 | Manuel Pellegrini | Manchester City | 17.31 |
| 7 | Brendan Rodgers | Liverpool | 12.38 |
| 8 | Pep Guardiola | Bayern Munich | 10.64 |
| 9 | Laurent Blanc | Paris Saint Germain | 8.74 |
| 10 | Diego Simeone | Atletico Madrid | 6.83 |
| 11 | Jurgen Klopp | Borussia Dortmund | 6.46 |
| 12 | Massimiliano Allegri | Juventus | 5.55 |
| 13 | Rafael Benitez | Napoli | 4.79 |
| 14 | Pochettino | Tottenham | 2.54 |
| 15 | Rudi Garcia | Roma | 2.32 |

Source: MERIT social value - Data collection
*Table 3. MERIT media value ranking for the main football coaches worldwide in season 2014/15*

found at adopting those alternative calculations. In the light of the players' and teams' rankings discussed above it was more than expected to find both the Premier League and the Liga BBVA on the top of this new ranking.

The Premier League and the Liga BBVA have a wide gap with respect to the other main European domestic leagues. The results are summarized in Figure 1, which defines the hierarchy of European domestic leagues in season 2014/15.

Something we should be keeping in mind is the high share of attention given to the Spanish Liga BBVA, which seems to contradict the view that the Liga BBVA suffers a decreasing interest of fans a result of its presumably unbalanced sport competition.

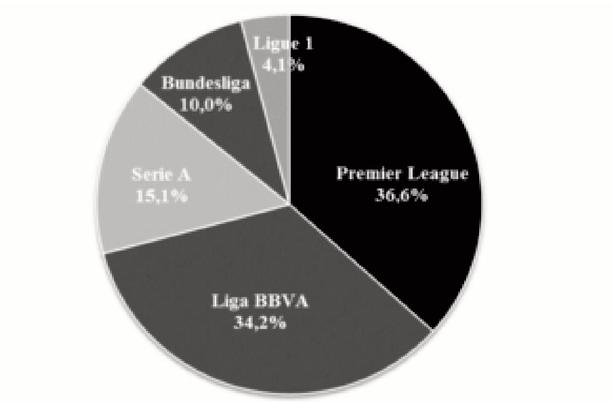


*Figure 1. Media Value Share - European Leagues in 2014/15*

*VALOR MEDIÁTICO EN EL FÚTBOL Y AFINIDAD DE LOS FANS*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Valor mediático; Talento deportivo; Futbolistas y clubs; Afinidad de los aficionados.

RESUMEN: En este artículo se emplean indicadores de valor mediático en el fútbol para estimar el grado de identificación que jugadores y clubs inspiran entre los aficionados. A partir de amplias bases de datos del valor mediático en la temporada 2014/15, se elaboran los rankings mundiales de jugadores y clubs, así como el ranking de los entrenadores con mayor visibilidad en los medios. Además, agregando registros individuales, puede determinarse la jerarquía de estatus mediático de las cinco grandes ligas domésticas de Europa.

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