Stock Valuation Multiple & Drivers

By Hayden Cheng chc92, Suet Cho sc2299

Abstract

Today, trillions dollars of assets are managed by investment managers in the U.S., with a majority utilizing traditional fundamental analysis. This study identifies valuation metrics (we will refer to this as "metric") for different market sectors to assist equity analysts in valuing stocks within their industry. Statistical analysis were performed to discover the best valuation metric for each industry. We have also built statistic models to help predict the real/reasonable multiple of a company based on financial ratios (we will refer to this as "drivers"). A second test was conducted to verify the significance of these financial ratios in stock valuation. This information provides amateur investors a guide for applying multiples valuation techniques.

Introduction

Two most common approaches to calculate the fair value of a company are the Discounted Cash Flow (DCF) approach and the valuation multiples approach. While DCF is more complicated and thus might be more accurate, it is much less interpretable comparing to the valuation multiples approach. Moreover, the valuation multiples approach allows investors to directly compare the "cheapness" of two companies of the same industry. Generally, a lower Price-to-X, where X can be any financial value (e.g. Book Value Per Share, Revenue, etc.), indicates a cheaper stock and thus a stronger buy-signal. This approach consists of the following steps:

- Identifying the best metric to be used for the stock based on its sector (Price-to-Earnings, Price-to-Sales, etc)
- 2. Using information from its financial statement, also known as drivers (Earnings Growth, Return on Assets, etc) to predict its reasonable multiple value.
- 3. Project a stock price with the reasonable multiple value

In this study, we will use statistical analysis to identify the most significant metric and the corresponding drivers for each industry to improve the interpretability of the valuation process and to predict a reasonable stock price.

Methodology

This project applies the valuation approach above to identify the best multiple for each sector and build models to predict reasonable multiples for each sector with a data mining approach. We used stock data spanning from 2011 to 2016. The analysis consists of:

1. For each market sector, we pick the best multiple out of the following with best subset selection:

P/E, P/B, P/E, EV/EBIT, EV/EBITDA, EV/S, EV/FCF1

- 2. For each market sector, given its best multiple, we build linear models to predict the values of the metric using lasso regression.
- 3. For each market sector, we identify the important drivers (financial ratio) of the sector's metric using random forests.

¹ P/E = Price-to-Earnings ratio; P/B = Price-to-Book-Value ratio; P/S = Price-to-Sales ratio; EV/EBIT = Enterprise-Value-to-EBIT ratio; EV/EBITDA = Enterprise-Value-to-EBITDA ratio; EV/S = Enterprise-Value-to-Sales ratio; EV/FCF = Enterprise-Value-to-Free-Cash-Flow ratio

Data Preparation

Data preparation was very tedious in this project. We used the dataset "Core US Fundamentals Data" from Quandl. This dataset provides 6 years of history for 123 fundamental indicators and financial ratios for 10,000~ US public companies. The 123 indicators fall under the categories of income statement, cash flow statement, balance sheet, metric & ratios etc.

Unfortunately, many of these "indicators" (or "predictors" in our case) have duplicated meanings. For example, both of the indicators "revenue" and "revenueusd" refer to the revenue of the stock, but in different currencies for foreign companies listed in the New York Exchange. Thus, many of them are highly correlated with each other. Collinearity will decrease the accuracy for our final linear model. Therefore, we used excel to create a covariance matrix of all predictors and for each highly correlated pair, we deleted one of the predictor. Luckily, it turned out that all correlated pairs of predictors have similar meaning, just like the case of "revenue" and "revenueusd". Thus, we didn't have to remove any meaningful predictor.

Next, we built a train dataset and a test dataset for each industry. We have 8 industries: Basic Materials, Consumer Goods, Financials, Healthcare Industrials, Services, Technology and Utilities. For each industry, we sample ¼ of the stocks in the industry to be the test dataset. Then, we began building datasets for step 1 and step 2 of our analysis. For each industry, we built 2 training datasets (one for step 1 and one for step 2) and 2 testing datasets (one for step 1 and one for step 2).

The step 1 datasets consist of the following columns:

Price, P/E, P/B, P/E, EV/EBIT, EV/EBITDA, EV/S, EV/FCF

where Price is the response variable and the metrics are the predictors. Recall that in step 1, we want to pick a metric that is the best for predicting stock price. More details about step 1 will be discussed later. P/E, P/B and P/E are included in the original dataset. We calculated EV/EBIT, EV/EBITDA, EV/S, EV/FCF by dividing Enterprise Value by EBIT, EBITDA, Revenue and Free Cash Flow, respectively, to obtain the other four metrics.

The step 2 datasets consist of the following columns:

Asset Turnover, Debt/Equity, Dividend Yield, EBITDA Margin, Gross Margin, Net Margin,

Payout Ratio, ROA, ROE, ROIC, ROS, Sales Growth, EPS Growth

plus the response variable, which is the metric we selected from step 1.

Note that the response variable for each industry in step 2 are different. It depends on the result from step 1.

The dataset built for step 2 is also used in step 3.

Lastly, for each predictor that we have to use (listed above), we deleted the rows with missing data. Moreover, since the original dataset does not provide sales growth and EPS growth, we calculated them using excel. For the first year (2011), we don't have the revenue and EPS data from 2010, so we used the average of the stock's EPS growth and sales growth for its observation in 2011.

Step 1: Identifying the Best Metric for each Sector with Best Subset Selection

One may wonder why we decided to pick one metric for each sector instead of building a valuation model that regresses all metrics. This is because valuation metrics serve a purpose other than calculating a reasonable price to buy a stock. Metrics are more often used to directly compare the cheapness/value of two stocks in the same industry. Therefore, we would like to find the most suitable valuation metric for each sector in a data mining approach.

Once the data was cleaned, we began step 1 of our analysis. We first applied best subset selection to find the most suitable metric for each sector. The response variables are the stock prices; the predictors are the 7 metrics presented in the introduction. Then, we built a one-variable linear regression model for each sector, where the variable is the selected metric, to obtain the p-value i.e. accuracy of the model. These linear regression models would be used to calculate the reasonable stock price in step 3 of the analysis.

The results are summarized in the table below. Screenshots of summary of each regression from R are attached in page 14.

Industry	Best Valuation Metric	βο	β1	p-value	Adjusted R^2
Basic Material	EV/EBIT	115.7406	0.0679	0.6639	- 0.001278
Consumer Goods	P/S	15.8512	14.6011	<2.2e-16	0.5212
Financials	P/B	31.5406	2.1454	1.66e_07	0.52302
Healthcare	EV/EBIT	2.174e2	8.493e-3	0.9457	-0.001273

Industrials	P/B	27.93716	0.06448	0.02426	0.6882
Services	EV/EBIT	2184e3	2696	0.5676	-0.005333
Technology	EV/S	16.7924	3.9707	<2.2e-16	0.7533
Utilities	EV/EBIT	34.9663	-0.0703	0.236	0.00216

The models for Basic Materials, Services, Utilities and Healthcare have high p-values, indicating that there is little to no relationship between stock prices and the proposed metric. In fact, none of the 7 metrics have strong relationship with stock prices of companies in these industries. We believe there are better ways to value stocks in these industries, but we will continue our analysis without these industries because we conclude that the metric approach is not suitable for Basic Materials, Services, Utilities and Healthcare.

As mentioned above, we split ¼ of the data set as the test data. Applying the one-variable linear regression models on the test datasets of Consumer Goods, Financials, Technology and Utilities, respectively, the resulted test Mean Squared Errors are \$28.23, \$17.53, \$10.28, \$7.82.

Step 2: Building a Linear Model to Project Reasonable Valuation Metric Values for each Sector from Financial Ratios of Companies

After selecting a suitable valuation metric for each sector, we built lasso regression models to predict a valuation metric that reflects the intrinsic value of a stock. Thus, the response variables in step 2 are the metrics selected in step 1, while the predictors are the following set of financial ratios:

- 1. Asset turnover
- 2. Dividend yield
- 3. EBITA Margin
- 4. Gross Margin
- 5. Net Income Margin
- 6. Payout ratio
- 7. Return on Asset
- 8. Return on Earning

- 9. Return on Invested Capital
- 10. Return on Sales
- 11. Earnings per Share Growth
- 12. Sales Growth
- 13. Debt to Equity ratio

Note that we are predicting the metric here. When we predict a stock price i.e. finding the true value of the stock, we do not use the metric given by the original dataset from Quandl because it only reflects current information rather than the intrinsic value of a stock (e.g. Price to Book Value is simply calculated by dividing the current stock price by its current asset value, but the stock price is the ultimate quantity we are trying to predict).

Lasso regression was used because not only that we want to avoid overfitting, but also that we would like to identify important drivers to each metric. As such, we would use Random Forests later in our analysis to identify important drivers and compare the results. While building our lasso regression models, we used Cross Validation to tune the parameter λ for each model i.e. each sector.

For consistency, the data that we use for step 2 are corresponding to those for step 1. The splitting proportion of the training and testing data sets are also equivalent. Since we have to scale the data in the pre-processing phrase for lasso regression, in order to predict the value accurately using the beta coefficients that we obtained, we have to unscaled the data after performing lasso regression.

The results are summarized in the table below. Screenshots of plots on lasso regression from R are attached in page 13.

	Consumer goods	Financial	Industrial goods	Technology
Intercept	6.60220e-18	-3.72671e-17	-4.868433e-17	4.148546e-17
Asset turnover	-1.050787e-01	4.186060e-01	0	-1.911773e-01
Debt/Equity	0	6.814763e-04	9.285767e-01	0
Dividend yield	0	0	-2.315864e-03	-5.155058e-02
EBITDA margin	1.900462e-01	9.292609e-04	0	3.533316e-01
Gross margin	4.799017e-01	4.657095e-02	1.207317e-02	2.988093e-01
Net margin	0	0	0	-6.553070e-01
Payout ratio	0	0	0	7.151913e-03
ROA	0	3.984200e-01	1.607174e-02	8.528043e-02

ROE	0	1.317299e-02	-3.917249e-02	-9.375288e-03
ROIC	5.941937e-02	-9.395115e-03	0	0
ROS	0	0	0	0
Sales growth	0	0	0	1.072097e-01
EPS growth	0	0	0	0

Note that the intercept terms in the table above are all extremely close to 0. This is because normalization been done to all predictors prior to running Lasso Regressions.

After performing Lasso regression on the 13 predictors, we are hoping to opt out the insignificant predictors in order to enhance the prediction accuracy and interpretability of this statistical model. From the table above, we can interpret that the predictors with a beta of 0 are insignificant and thus omitted from the model. Note that the coefficients have the similar values due to the normalization of the data sets in the pre-processing phrase. Normalization is necessary for Lasso Regression because Lasso Regression penalize for overfitting caused by using excessive predictors. The non-zero coefficients indicate that the corresponding predictors will be used. For instance, in the consumer goods industry, Asset turnover, EBITDA margin, Gross margin and ROIC will be used in the model. Notice that for the technology industry, the majority of the predictors have non-negative beta. However, only Asset turnover, EBITDA margin, Gross margin, Net margin, and Sales growth are significant in this model since the absolute values of their coefficients are over 0.01 and larger than that of other drivers.

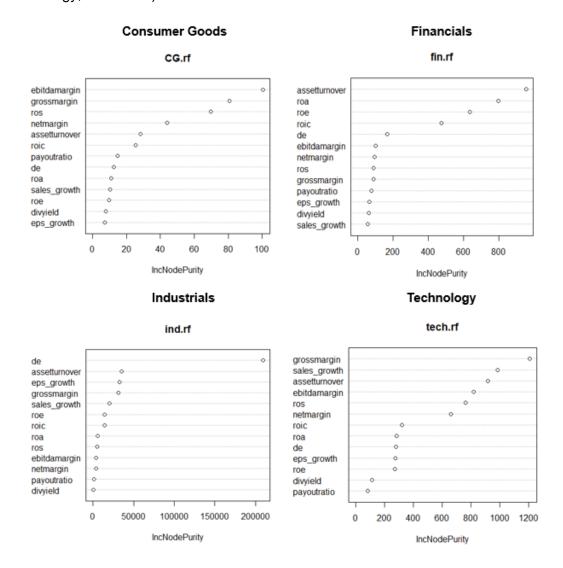
With the optimal tuning parameter, we can calculate the mean squared prediction error on the test set on the predicted values. As mentioned previously, we split ¼ from the data as the test set to verify our model. Using the predict function in R and the actual values from the test set, we calculated the <u>mean squared test error to be 0.4611606, 0.547454, 0.1840327, and 0.5361655</u>, corresponding to the Consumer goods, Financial, Industrial goods and technology industry. These MSE are totally acceptable, as valuation metrics typically range from -5 to 5.

Step 3: Identifying the important drivers (financial ratio) of the sector's valuation metric using random forests

Random forest models are not as easily interpretable as linear regression models.

However, the plots below provide insights into which drivers (predictors) were most important

for predicting the intrinsic value of the metric for each industry (Consumer Goods, Industrials, Technology, Financials).



From the plots, we can summarize that the significant drivers for the valuation metric of each industry are:

Industry	Metric	Significant Drivers (The order of importance is left to right)				
Consumer Goods	P/S	EBITDA Margin	Gross Margin	Return on Sales	Net Margin	

Financials	P/B	Asset Turnover	Return on Asset	Return on Earnings	Return on Invested Capital
Industrials	P/B	Debt/Equity Ratio			
Technology	EV/S	Gross Margin	Sales Growth	Asset Turnover	EBITDA Margin

The plots above show how much the node purity increases when a given predictor is present in the tree. Node purity is measured by the Gini Index, which captures how similar the observations that fall under the same branch are.

These results are consistent with what we found in step 2. Therefore, we are confident to use the lasso regression models in step 2 to predict the metric for each industry. Theses

These results are consistent with what we found in step 2. Therefore, we are confident to use the lasso regression models in step 2 to predict the valuation metrics for each stock in the test data sets of each industry. Investors should also pay attention to these statistically significant drivers when analyzing companies that fall under the industries above.

Conclusion

Our findings are somewhat different from the usual approach of equity research analysts in the investment industry. For example, analysts usually use P/E or P/S to value stocks in the Industrials sector. However, our analysis found that stock prices of Industrials companies are statistically significant related to its P/B ratio, rather than P/E or P/S.

Let's say you are deciding whether you should buy/sell the stock of a financials company. How should you utilize our results to help make your decision? First, based on our findings in step 1, you should use P/B to value your stock. This aligns with the insights of equity research analysts in the investment industry.² Then, you can compare the stock you are considering with other stocks that fall under the Financials sector to see if your stock is relatively "cheaper". A small P/B indicates that the value of the stock (valued by its Book Value Per Share) has not yet been revealed in its stock price, showing that it's a buy.

² Schreiner, Andreas. Equity valuation using multiples: an empirical investigation. Springer Science & Business Media, 2009.

Comparing P/B between companies with similar business might help you find another (or better) investment opportunity. Next, you can use our lasso regression model to find the "reasonable P/B" of the stock you are considering, using the information of its financial statements we calculate:

Reasonable P/B =

(4.186060e-01)(Asset Turnover) + (6.814763e-04)(D/E) + (9.292609e-04)(EBIT Margin) + (4.657095e-02)(Gross Margin) + (3.984200e-01)(ROA) + (1.317299e-02)(ROE) + (-9.395115e-03)(ROIC).

Then,

Fair stock price =

 $oldsymbol{eta_0}$ of the one-variable linear regression model for financials in step 1

+

Reasonable P/B * BVPS³

If the fair stock price is higher than the current stock price, you can consider buying the stock. Otherwise, you can consider shorting the stock. You should obviously consider other factors while using our model, such as the case presented in the paragraph right below.

The random forest model could also be used for evaluating an investment opportunity. It could be used when you are deciding whether you should buy/sell the same stock of a financials company. From our random forest model, ROA and Asset Turnover are the two most important drivers for P/B of financial stocks. This again aligns with the insights of equity research analysts in the investment industry.⁴ If the stock's P/B looks attractive comparing to other stocks in the same industry, you might consider buying the stock. However, if it's Return on Asset and Asset Turnover have been decreasing for years, the company might be experiencing a downturn. As such, you might want to reconsider your buy decision.

We have stopped our analysis for Basic Materials, Healthcare, Services, Utilities after step 1 because we found that even the best valuation were not statistically useful for predicting the stock price. This might due to scarcity of data for these industries or that the valuation multiple approach is not suitable for evaluating stocks in these industries.

On the other hand, our results for Consumer Goods, Industrials, Technology and Financials aligned with our hypothesis. P-values for these industries in step 1 were very small.

³ BVPS = Book Value Per Share

⁴ Schreiner, Andreas. Equity valuation using multiples: an empirical investigation. Springer Science & Business Media, 2009.

MSE of our Lasso Regression models in step 2 were small relative to the typical range of valuation metrics of stocks in the New York Exchange (e.g. P/B € [-5.5]). The important drivers of each industry found with random forests models in step 3 mostly align with insights of equity research analysts in the investment industry. Therefore, we concluded that models built in this study is useful for investors to evaluate their investment opportunities.

Bibliography

Ely, Kevin, et al. Equity Valuation Metrics & Drivers. Boston University School of Management, Sept. 2008,

James, Gareth. An Introduction to Statistical Learning: with Applications in R. Springer, 2014.

Liu, Jing, Doron Nissim, and Jacob Thomas. "Equity valuation using multiples." Journal of Accounting Research 40.1 (2002): 135-172.

Ohlson, James A. "Earnings, book values, and dividends in equity valuation." Contemporary accounting research 11.2 (1995): 661-687.

Schreiner, Andreas. Equity valuation using multiples: an empirical investigation. Springer Science & Business Media, 2009.

Basic material:

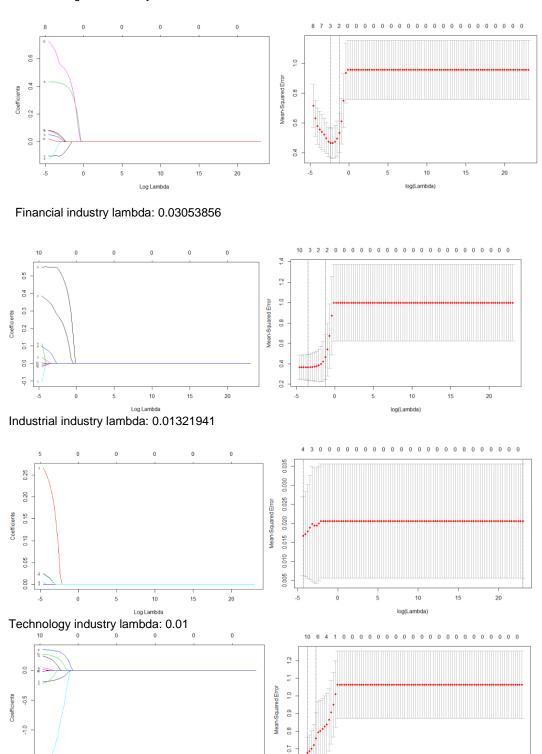
Step1: Best subset selection R printout

```
Consumer goods:
                                                                      Subset selection object
Call: regsubsets.formula(price ~ ., CGdata, nvmax = 1)
7 variables (and intercept)
Subset selection object
Call: regsubsets.formula(price ~ ., BMdata, nvmax = 1)
7 variables (and intercept)
          Forced in Forced out
                                                                                Forced in Forced out
               FALSE
                                                                       pb
                                                                                     FALSE
                                                                                                   FALSE
pe
               FALSE
                             FALSE
                                                                       pe
                                                                                     FALSE
                                                                                                   FALSE
                                                                                     FALSE
                                                                                                   FALSE
ps
               EALSE
                             EALSE
                                                                       DS
                                                                       .
evebit
evebit
               FALSE
                                                                                     FALSE
                                                                                                   FALSE
                             FALSE
evebita
               FALSE
                             FALSE
                                                                       evebita
                                                                                     FALSE
                                                                                                   FALSE
               FALSE
                             FALSE
                                                                       evs
                                                                                     EAL SE
                                                                                                   FALSE
                                                                       evfcf
evfcf
               FALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                                     FALSE
                                                                                                   FALSE
                                                                      1 subsets of each size up to 1
1 subsets of each size up to 1
Selection Algorithm: exhaustive
                                                                       Selection Algorithm: exhaustive
           pb pe ps evebit evebita evs evfcf
                                                                                 pb pe ps evebit evebita evs evfcf
                                                                      1 (1)
Financials:
                                                                       Healthcare:
                                                                     Subset selection object
Subset selection object
                                                                     Call: regsubsets.formula(price ~ ., HCdata, nvmax = 1)
Call: regsubsets.formula(price ~ ., findata, nvmax = 1)
                                                                     7 Variables (and intercept)
Forced in Forced out
7 Variables (and intercept)
Forced in Forced out
                                                                                    FALSE
                                                                                                 FALSE
pb
               FALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                                    FALSE
                                                                                                  FALSE
                                                                     pe
pe
               FALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                                    FALSE
                                                                                                  FALSE
DS
               FALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                     evebit
                                                                                    FALSE
                                                                                                 FALSE
evebit
                            FALSE
               FALSE
                                                                     evebita
                                                                                    EAL SE
                                                                                                 EAL SE
evebita
               FALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                     evs
                                                                                    FALSE
                                                                                                 FALSE
               FALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                     evfcf
evfcf
                                                                                    FALSE
                                                                                                 FALSE
               EALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                     1 subsets of each size up to 1
1 subsets of each size up to 1
Selection Algorithm: exhaustive
                                                                    pb pe ps evebit evebita evs evfcf
                                                                     Selection Algorithm: exhaustive
          pb pe ps evebit evebita evs evfcf
1 (1)
Industrials:
                                                                      Services:
Subset selection object
Call: regsubsets.formula(price ~ ., inddata, nvmax = 1)
Call: regsubsets.formula(price ~ ., serdata, nvmax = 1)
7 Variables (and intercept)
                                                                    7 Variables (and intercept)
                                                                             Forced in Forced out
         Forced in Forced out
                                                                                  FALSE
                                                                    pb
                                                                                                FALSE
pb
              FALSE
                            FALSE
               FALSE
                                                                    pe
                                                                                   FALSE
                            FALSE
pe
                                                                    ps
                                                                                   FALSE
                                                                                                FALSE
               FALSE
                            FALSE
ps
                                                                    .
evebit
                                                                                   FALSE
                                                                                                FALSE
.
evebit
               FALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                    evebita
                                                                                   FALSE
                                                                                                FALSE
evebita
               FALSE
                            FALSE
               FALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                                   FALSE
                                                                                                FALSE
evs
                                                                    evfcf
evfcf
               FALSE
                            FALSE
                                                                                  FALSE
                                                                                                FALSE
1 subsets of each size up to 1
Selection Algorithm: exhaustive
                                                                    1 subsets of each size up to 1
                                                                    pb pe ps evebit evebita evs evfcf
                                                                    Selection Algorithm: exhaustive
          pb pe ps evebit evebita evs evfcf
1 (1)
Technology: subset selection object
                                                                      Utility:
Subset selection object
Call: regsubsets.formula(price ~ ., techdata, nvmax = 1) Subset selection object
7 Variables (and intercept)
Forced in Forced out
Call: regsubsets.formula(price ~ ., utildata, nvmax = 1)
7 Variables (and intercept)
Physical Regsubsets.formula(price ~ ., utildata, nvmax = 1)
Forced in Forced out
Forced in Forced out
                                                                               FALSE
                                                                                           FALSE
              FALSE
                           FALSE
pe
                                                                                FALSE
              FALSE
                           FALSE
                                                                   DS
                                                                                FALSE
                                                                                            FALSE
evebit
              FALSE
                           FALSE
                                                                   evebit
                                                                                FALSE
                                                                                            FALSE
evebita
              FALSE
                           FALSE
                                                                   evebita
                                                                                FALSE
                                                                                            FALSE
              FALSE
                           FALSE
                                                                                FALSE
                                                                                            EAL SE
evfcf
              FALSE
                           FALSE
                                                                                FALSE
1 subsets of each size up to 1
                                                                  1 subsets of each size up to 1
Selection Algorithm: exhaustive
Selection Algorithm: exhaustive
                                                                  pb pe ps evebit evebita evs evfcf
          pb pe ps evebit evebita evs evfcf
```

Step 2: Lasso regression R printout

Consumer goods industry lambda: 0.09326033

Log Lambda



10

log(Lambda)

20

Step 1: Linear regression summaries

Basic material:

Residual standard error: 4031 on 782 degrees of freedom Multiple R-squared: 7.348e-07, Adjusted R-squared: -0.001278 F-statistic: 0.0005746 on 1 and 782 DF, p-value: 0.9809

Consumer goods:

Financials:

Healthcare:

Industrials:

Services:

Technology:

```
Utilities:
```

Residual standard error: 21.58 on 190 degrees of freedom Multiple R-squared: 0.007385, Adjusted R-squared: 0.00216 F-statistic: 1.414 on 1 and 190 DF, p-value: 0.236