**Introduction to Data Science**

**Term Project Milestone 2**

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The Dallas Cowboys have been dubbed “America’s Team” (<https://www.bloggingtheboys.com/2020/5/11/21254504/cowboys-still-americas-team-whether-they-are-contenders-or-not>, 2020), implying that they are the most popular NFL team in the nation. As a Pittsburgh Steelers fan, I question this assertion. As long as I have been following the Steelers, they seem to have a very broad fan base; they often have more fans in attendance at an away game than the home team, and I notice people wearing Steelers merchandise across the country. This evidence is admittedly anecdotal and likely biased as well. Since, however, the Steelers have never been given a title that would imply that they are more popular than any other team, I thought it would be more interesting to test the claim that the Cowboys are.

Viewership ratings for different NFL teams can tell us which team draws the largest TV audience, and we could also look at how many home games are sold out across all the teams in the league. We could also look at the sales of team merchandise across all the teams in the league. These are certainly metrics of a team’s popularity, and do not rely on Google search trend data to determine. But are there other ways of measuring a team’s popularity that Google trends could provide insight into? I think there are.

Some research along these lines has already been done (<https://www.wsn.com/nfl/least-most-popular-nfl-teams-facebook/>, 2021), in which a team’s popularity was measured based on social media metrics (Facebook likes, Twitter followers, and Instagram followers). Sure enough, both the Cowboys and the Steelers are in the top four, along with the New England Patriots and the Green Bay Packers. This study is based on 2020 metrics, however. In order to focus my question, I will focus on a team’s popularity over the last decade, i.e. 2010 – 2020. That is, I believe longevity is an essential element to answering this question.

Just in terms of on-field success, the Patriots, Steelers, and Packers are all in the Top 10 for the decade ((Werner, 2020; Sessler, n.d.) while the Cowboys are at number 11. If we assume that the saying “everybody loves a winner” is true, then this can become confounding factor. I believe that loyalty, i.e., not being a “fair-weathered” fan, is an essential part of being a sports fan. The Patriots’ domination during this decade was unprecedented in the history of the NFL – they made the playoffs every year, went to the Super Bowl five times, and won it three times. I believe that to truly measure a team’s popularity we need to be able to track it over a period where on field success has been up and down. The Steelers’ and Packers’ success has been much more modest during this decade. For this reason, I will exclude the Patriots from this analysis. The fact that the Cowboys have not experienced the same on-field success could be a confounding factor, but could also make it easier to test the claim that they are the most popular team. If their popularity is on par with the Steelers and the Packers, then this would suggest that they are more popular in terms of loyalty.

References

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