

MENG INDIVIDUAL PROJECT

IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON

DEPARTMENT OF COMPUTING

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## Cryptocurrency Statistical Arbitrage on Decentralised Exchanges

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Cryptocurrencies . . . . .	3
1.1.1	Blockchain . . . . .	3
1.1.2	Ethereum . . . . .	4
1.1.3	Decentralised Finance . . . . .	5
1.2	Arbitrage . . . . .	5
1.3	State of Art . . . . .	6
1.3.1	Pure Arbitrage Techniques . . . . .	6
1.3.2	Statistical Arbitrage Techniques . . . . .	9
<b>2</b>	<b>Project Plan</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Evaluation Plan</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Ethical Issues</b>	<b>18</b>

# Chapter 1

## Background

### 1.1 Cryptocurrencies

Before going delving into the financial side of the project, it is important to understand the underlying assets and the technology that drive them.

#### 1.1.1 Blockchain

The building blocks of cryptocurrencies comes from blockchain. Blockchain is a distributed ledger that stores data, in blocks, in a chain, comprising the data itself as well has a full transaction history [1]. Below shows a diagram of blocks in a blockchain.

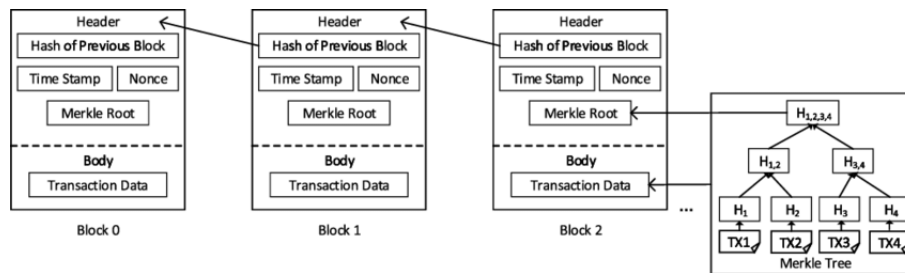


Figure 1.1: Blockchain Diagram [2]

#### Header, Hash of Previous Block and Timestamp

The timestamp and hashes of the block and its' predeccessing block are all used to ensure the ordering of blocks within a chain. By hashing the data to a fixed size, and storing in its succeeding block makes the tampering of chains difficult as it would mean the chain deviates from its old state. In addition to this, by hashing and using Nonce, blockchain employs the Proof-of-Work algorithm to ensure correctness. The Proof-of-Work algorithm is used to confirm and add new transaction to the chain.

#### Nonce

A nonce, 'Number Only used Once', is a number that is added to a hashed block to make the transaction more secure. It is randomly generated which miners use to validate a transaction. A miner first guesses a nonce, appends the guess to the hash of the current header. The miner then rehashes the value and compares this to the target hash. If the guess was correct, the miner is granted the block [3].

#### Merkle root

A merkle root is also stored in each block to validate transactions in an efficient manner, in terms of storage and searching. A merkle tree is a a tree of hashes where each leaf node is it's data hash and it's parent node, the hash of their children's hashes. In storing the merkle root, we do not need to directly store each transaction in each block, and also allows a quick search for any malicious alterations in differing blocks [4].

### 1.1.2 Ethereum

One of the first application of blockchain was by Satoshi Nakamoto to create the first ‘purely peer-to-peer version of electronic cash’ [5]. Nakamoto’s solution details the process in which a decentralised, peer to peer approach to verify and track transactions without a centralized institution. Since then, many other technologies derived from using blockchain as its underlying technology. One of them was proposed by Vitalik Buterin, the co-founder of Ethereum, in a whitepaper that proposed the idea of using smart contracts to create financial products and services that could operate independently of traditional financial institutions, hence decentralised finance was birthed [6].

#### Ethereum

Ethereum’s architecture is similar to bitcoin’s but has a few differences, one of which is the blockchain contains a copy of the transaction list and the most recent state. The process of how transactions are validated is below:

1. Validate the parent block
2. Validate that the current timestamp is greater than the previous timestamp
3. Check that the Ethereum concepts are valid
4. Perform Proof of Stake on the block
5. Check for errors and gas
6. Validate the final state

Proof-of-Stake (PoS) is a consensus protocol that is used by Ethereum and Bitcoin for the entire network to agree on the state of the blockchain. This provides security from malicious users to attempt to altering, adding/removing transactions or maintaining a second chain, the blockchain as it requires for 51% of the network to agree on the alteration.

To measure how much computational effort is required to execute operations on the ethereum network, gas is used [7]. Every block has a base fee, derived from the demand for the block space, which is burnt. Therefore, users of the network are expected to set a tip (priority fee) to reimburse miners for adding their transaction in blocks, thus the higher the tip, the greater the incentive for miners to validate the transaction. Using gas means that the ethereum network is tolerant to spam and also has a maximum gas fee to make ethereum tolerant to malicious code that would be used to waste resources.

Another difference between Ethereum and other cryptocurrencies is that rather than managing a distributed ledger, it uses a distributed state machine. The Ethereum Virtual Machine (EVM) defines the rules of changing states from block to block. Each node on the Ethereum blockchain contains an immutable instance of the EVM [8].

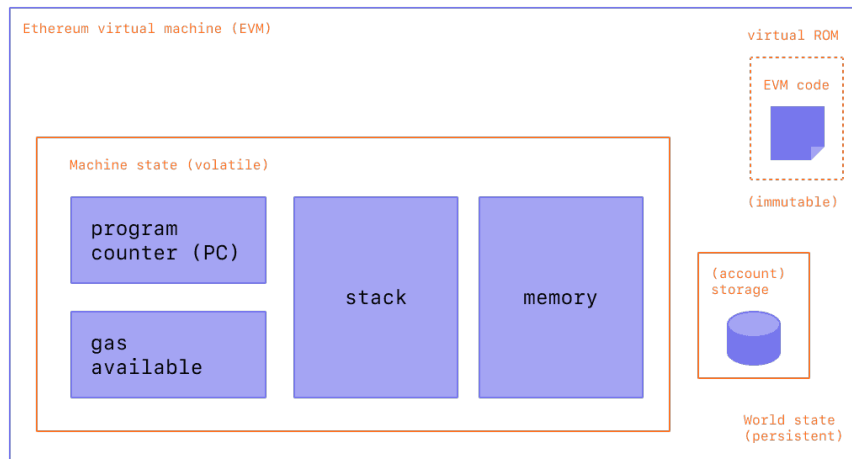


Figure 1.2: EVM components [8]

## Smart Contracts

Smart contracts are programs that are self-executing contracts between buyers and sellers that deploy on the ethereum network. It allows for the automation of a contract's execution, and can be used to facilitate, verify, and enforce the negotiation or performance of a contract [9, 10].

### 1.1.3 Decentralised Finance

One of the main applications of Ethereum and smart contracts are Decentralised Exchanges (DEXes). Before delving into DEXes it is important to understand centralized exchanges.

#### Centralized Exchanges

Centralized exchanges allow agents to discover and trade assets. CEXs facilitate trading between buyers and sellers by providing an online platform that manages and maintains an order book. An order book aggregates buy and sell orders and executes matching buy and sell orders. The order book and transactions are typically managed on a database as opposed to interacting with the blockchain. When trading, exchanges charge trading fees for the maker and the taker to operate the exchange and do not charge any gas fees as there is no interaction with the blockchain.

#### Decentralized Exchanges

In contrast, DEXes utilize blockchain technology and smart contracts to execute trades thus providing a high level of determinism. These trades are executed on the blockchain via smart contracts and on-chain transactions. There are two types of DEX, order book DEXes and Automated Market Makers (AMMs). An order book DEX is less common and is similar to CEXs however, the orderbook is stored on the blockchain rather than on a central database. This means each order placed requires the order book to be posted on the block chain at each transaction. Automated Market Makers are more common and provide instant liquidity by using liquidity pools so that users can swap their tokens for a price that is determined by the portions within the liquidity pool [11]. DEXes have multiple pros including lower transaction fees, privacy, diversity and trustless transactions but they also have their drawbacks such as scalability and poor liquidity are a lot of the DEXes are quite new [12].

## 1.2 Arbitrage

Arbitrage is the process in which a trader simultaneously buys and sells an asset in order to take advantage of a market inefficiency [13]. Arbitrage is also possible in other types of securities by finding price inefficiencies in the prices of options, forward contracts and other exotics.

Sources have shown that the word “*Arbitrage*” has been used as early as the Renaissance era where surviving documents showed a large amount of bills being exchanged [14]. There has also been some evidence to suggest that arbitrage was used as early as the Greek and Roman eras. Objects such as Sumerian cuneiform tablets show trade of ancient bills however we cannot come to strong conclusions of this. Early forms of arbitrage would likely to have been purchasing a commodity then transporting them to a foreign land and selling them at a higher price. This type of arbitrage is called commodity arbitrage and is still applicable today. With the example above, transporting the goods takes a significant amount of time to the merchant, trader, which could cause variations in the price, however in the modern day this has been reduced and with electronic exchanges this time to buy and sell is very small. This means inefficiencies in the market, where a trader can profit purely by buying and selling, should not exist. This is called the “Law of One Price”. The “Law of One Price” states that every identical commodity or asset should have the same price regardless of exchange or location, given there are no transaction costs, no transportation costs, no legal restrictions, the exchange rates are the same and no market manipulation occurs [15]. This is because if this were not the case, an arbitrage opportunity would arise and someone would take advantage of the scenario causing the prices on both markets to converge due to the market forces. In the real world arbitrage opportunities are tremendously common, thus allowing a risk-free investment [16, 17].

There are countless types of arbitrage such as spatial arbitrage, which profits off of different prices on exchanges in different locations, temporal arbitrage, which takes advantage of price differences

at different times, risk arbitrage, which profits from perceived discrepancies in their risk-return profiles and finally market arbitrage which takes advantages of different prices on different exchanges/markets. Statistical methods include pairs trading, which involves buying and selling assets that are believed to be mispriced relative to one another, momentum trading, which identifies if assets have a strong momentum (either up or down) and profiting off of that, and finally algorithmic trading which uses algorithms to analyze data and trades based on statistical analysis. This project shows how these opportunities can be exploited both in a pure manner as well as using statistical methods.

## 1.3 State of Art

To better understand the project and to be able to research into something new and novel it is important to understand the current state of art, i.e. previous research on the topic. Research into cryptocurrency arbitrage is still in its infancy and previous research has mainly focussed on the economics of cryptocurrencies, i.e. miner/trader behaviour and influence of cryptocurrency trading [18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24]. Furthermore, there has been very limited research in comparing statistical strategies and pure methods of arbitrage of cryptocurrencies. Despite this, there has been plentiful research on arbitrage as a whole as it is immensely profitable, as a result of this people/institutions tend to keep their newly found research secret. Of the published research, I have looked into the arbitrage techniques that are used. As arbitrage can be highly profitable, it can be found in countless types of assets, such as options, stocks, bonds and many other types of products. Research into all types of products exist going into the theory and practical aspects of each [25, 26]. The most similar type of asset class to cryptocurrencies is fiat currencies, such as the US Dollar and the Great British Pound Sterling. The research in arbitrage in foreign exchanges show that using a triangular/cyclic arbitrage is highly profitable and effective [27, 28, 29].

### 1.3.1 Pure Arbitrage Techniques

As I am using pure arbitrage as a baseline, thus choosing the most optimal strategy is most ideal to better understand the impacts of the optimizations and the statistical strategies themselves. There has been some research on pure arbitrage strategies by finding cyclic opportunities on both centralized and decentralised exchanges, which I go further into in this section.

As previously mentioned, research into this topic is still in its infancy thus which means a very thin slice of exploration on the subject matter. Majority of the research has been into the arbitrage on centralized exchanges, [30, 31, 32]. These all find massive inefficiencies within these exchanges by finding arbitrage opportunities. One of the more in depth pieces of research, Igor Makarov's and Antoinette Schoar's Trading and arbitrage in cryptocurrency markets [30] finds a large violation in the Law of One Price by finding price discrepancies between the same cryptocurrencies depending on different geolocations. The paper uses 34 exchanges in 19 differing countries, each exchange is grouped accordingly to its location and base currencies, leaving China, Japan, Korea, US, Europe and another group for that uses the Tether, USDT. Within each group the arbitrage index is calculated to compare the maximum difference in prices between exchanges within the same exchange group. This is done by calculating the volume-weighted average price at each exchange, then dividing the maximum price by the minimum price thus if the arbitrage index is 1, then there does not exist an arbitrage opportunity. It is shown that the arbitrage index is over 1 most of the time in all regions thus show a large amount of arbitrage opportunities across different exchanges, with opportunities lasting for as long as several weeks. It is also shown that the arbitrage spreads are consistent and correlated between regions and countries. Although the paper goes into some detail about how one can go about implementing such strategies and it's complications, it didn't implement them thus provides a simply theoretical hypothesis that may or may not work in practice.

Cristian Pauna implements an arbitrage strategy in [32]. The paper details the technical details of arbitrage trading from the data and the system architecture used. Pauna finds complications such as requesting data from multiple exchanges, converting the data such that it is homogeneous and also managing server load. Pauna presents the architecture such that the servers request data from the necessary exchanges, stores them in a relational database which then triggers a server that is used to generate trading signals.

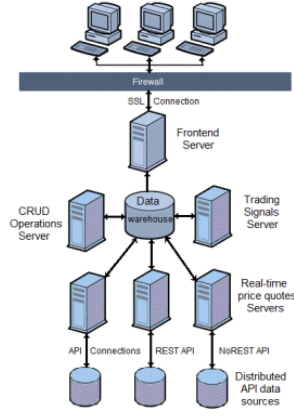


Figure 1.3: Arbitrage system architecture [32]

Now looking at DEXes, research done by Stephen Bryne in his paper, [33] introduces other methods that are commonly used however, not been academically been explored. Methods using properties of ethereum such as using smart contracts for flash loans and buying and selling the same asset in large volumes within the same block in the chain, leading to large profits. The paper details into the technical implementations and issues such as security and reliability, however it fails to provide analysis and quantitative results on the different methods used to exploit arbitrage opportunities and their differences.

As previously mentioned triangular and cyclic arbitrage is one of the most used and purest forms of arbitrage to implement and analyse, [34] explores triangular arbitrage on decentralised exchanges. Algorithm 1 is the algorithm used to find the most profitable arbitrage route on a particular platform, once this is calculated, it is compared with other routes on other platforms. Initially, the system converts the base token into another token and converts it back into the base token, using only one token is used as a middle route, then using the algorithm below, increases the number of middle tokens.

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**Algorithm 1** Maximum Profit Route Searching (R)

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**Input:**  $T$  (token list),  $P$  (price graph),  $n$  (current route)

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```

for  $i = 1, \dots, T$  do
   $r = get\_profit(n + i)$ 
  for  $j = 1, \dots, P[i]$  do
     $p = max(r, R(T, P, n_j))$ 
  end for
end for
return  $p$ 

```

---

On evaluating the performance of the strategy on differing platforms depended on three main features of each exchange:

1. Portion size - Depending on how much the “trader” invested revenues differed and infact the larger protion size the revenue decreases as the token pair prices are adjusted based on supply/demand.
2. Transaction fees - Each exchange has their own transaction fee.
3. Other considerations such as price slippage - Exchanges have different liquidity levels which depends on the usage and liquidity providers that the exchange employs.

It is found that using this strategy out of the exchanges; Uniswap, 1inch, Kyberswap and Bancor. 1inch was the only exchange that generated a profit whereas the others lose money. The results are shown below on the revenues recieved on each platform experimented on.

Another paper that implemented and evaluated a cyclic arbitrage opportunity is [35]. The research consists of proposing a theoretical arbitrage model and further evaluation on real transactional data. The arbitrage model used is simple to understand, as it searches for a cyclic transaction between  $n$  tokens,  $A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n$  is a sequence of  $n$  trades:

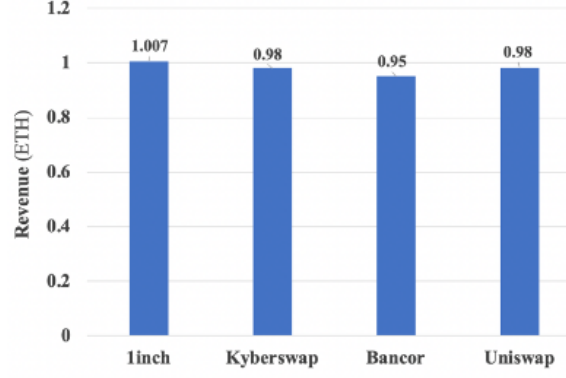


Figure 1.4: Trading revenues same token routes within different exchange [34]

Trade 1: Exchange  $\delta_1$  of  $A_1$  to  $\delta_2$  of  $A_2$

Trade 2: Exchange  $\delta_2$  of  $A_2$  to  $\delta_3$  of  $A_3$

...

Trade  $n$ : Exchange  $\delta_n$  of  $A_n$  to  $\delta'_1$  of  $A_1$

It is important to note that  $\delta_i = \delta_{i+1}$ , i.e. the output of a trade is equivalent to the input of the next. The revenues within a cycle are defined as  $\delta_{i+1} - \delta_i$ , and the overall profit is  $\delta'_1 - \delta_1$ . This is not as simple as the revenues obviously depend on how liquid the exchange is, thus the liquidity pools of each possible trading pair is hugely important. Therefore, the paper proposes a theorem, below:

**Theorem 1** For a given cycle  $A_1 \rightarrow A_2 \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow A_n \rightarrow A_1$  with  $n$  tokens, there exists an arbitrage opportunity for the cyclic transaction if the product of exchange rates  $\frac{a_{2,1}a_{3,2}\dots a_{1,n}}{a_{1,2}a_{2,3}\dots a_{n,1}} > \frac{1}{r_1^n r_2^n}$  where  $a_{i,j}$  denotes the liquidity of token  $A_i$  in the liquidity pool with token  $A_j$ . [35]

In addition to the theorem, to obtain an optimal strategy we need to compute the optimal trading volume of a cycle,  $A_1 \rightarrow A_2 \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow A_n \rightarrow A_1$ . The paper proposes the optimal trading volume to be  $\delta_a^{op} = \frac{\sqrt{r_1 r_2 a' a - a}}{r_1}$  where  $a = \frac{a'_{1,n} a_{n,1}}{a_{n,1} + r_1 r_2 a'_{n,1}}$  and  $a' = \frac{r_1 r_2 a'_{1,n} a_{n,1}}{a_{n,1} + r_1 r_2 a'_{n,1}}$ . Thus in order to calculate such arbitrage opportunities knowing the liquidity of tokens in other tokens' liquidity pools, algorithm 2 infers the direction and volumes to trade to get the optimal revenue.

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**Algorithm 2** Computing the equivalent liquidity of the cycle

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```

 $a'_{1,n} \leftarrow a_{1,2}$ 
 $a'_{n,1} \leftarrow a_{2,1}$ 
for  $i$  from 2 to  $n - 1$  do
   $a'_{1,n} \leftarrow \frac{a'_{1,n} a_{i,i+1}}{a_{i,i+1} + r_1 r_2 a'_{n,1}}$ 
   $a'_{n,1} \leftarrow \frac{r_1 r_2 a'_{1,n} a_{i+1,i}}{a_{i,i+1} + r_1 r_2 a'_{n,1}}$ 
end for

```

---

After analysis, it is found that between 4th May 2020 to 15th April 2021, there were countless exploitable arbitrage opportunities and in fact grew to 1,750 in the 11 months that it was tested on. Only cycles with length 3 were experimented with and only cycles including ETH as 80% of the liquidity pools on Uniswap include ETH and another cryptocurrency [36]. Furthermore, it is found that 287,241 of the 292,606 arbitrages executed started with ETH, 85% of the arbitrages used a cycle of length 3. The total revenue of the cyclic arbitrage was 34,429 ETH. However, gas fees accounts for 24.6% of the total revenue leaving an approximate 25,971 ETH profit.

The paper then delves into the implementation of the smart contract, the paper explored how both *sequential* and *atomic* implementations would affect the revenue and execution of the contracts. It was found that 52.3% of the arbitrages that were executed sequentially generated a loss, likely due to the fact when one submits  $n$  orders, the  $n$  blockchain transactions are executed sequentially, meaning some external transactions can be inserted between these transactions. Thus using atomic



transactions avoids this issue of external transactions do not effect the market price that may effect the outcome of the arbitrage.

Furthermore, the authors of the paper also investigated the performance differences of using private smart contracts and public contracts. Deploying a smart contract that calls Uniswap functions, i.e. a private smart contract, is intuitively better and achieves a higher success rate of a lower bound of 52% and a higher bound of 90% in comparison to calling a public Uniswap smart contract which has success rate of 27.3%. Overall the paper provides an insightful look into cyclic arbitrage in DEXes and highlights important decisions made such as liquidity calculations and smart contracts, while comparing the performance of differing options available.

### 1.3.2 Statistical Arbitrage Techniques

As mentioned previously mentioned and the subject of the project is to optimize statistical arbitrage methods to be able to compete with a more purer form of arbitrage, i.e. cyclic arbitrage. As previously mentioned there are many methods of stat arb, pairs trading, momentum trading and algorithmic trading. Within these methods there are countless strategies to adopt and profit off of, thus to limit the scope, this project I will be investigating strategies within pair trading. Research within Pair trading has been vast with many streams of approaches emerging; distance approach, cointegration approach, time-series approach, stochastic approach and some others, including using machine learning [37].

The distance approach is easy to understand; using the euclidian squared difference of combinations historical normalized prices of assets from a selected time period and selecting the top 20 pairs of assets with the least historical distance. Once pairs are selected, monitor the prices and if the prices diverge by over 2 standard deviations, buy the undervalued asset and sell the overvalues asset and when the prices converge, close the position [38]. This is called Mean reversion and is fundemental technique used in pairs trading.

The cointegration approach follows three key steps. The first being selection of pairs based on similarity measures, the next being assessing the tradability and finally thresholds are set for trading. The spread is defined as

$$\varepsilon_{ij,t} = P_{i,t} + \gamma P_{j,t}$$

where  $P_{i,t}$  and  $P_{j,t}$  denote the  $I(1)$  non-stationary price processes of the assets  $i$  and  $j$ ,  $\gamma$  is the cointegration coefficient, also refered to in literature as the hedge ratio.  $\varepsilon_{ij,t}$  is the linear combination of the non-stationary prices and is  $I(0)$  stationary and hence mean-reverting, note that stationary processes are those of which have a constant mean. Rad's implementation of this approach on stocks result in a 0.83% return before considering transaction costs [38]. Another paper, [39], looked into setting the thresholds and setting a minimum profit,  $MP_{ij,t_c}$ :

$$MP_{ij,t_c} = \frac{n(\varepsilon_{ij,t_0} - \varepsilon_{ij,t_c})}{|\gamma|}$$

Where  $t_0$  and  $t_c$  are the opening and closing times,  $n$  is the volume longed of asset  $j$ .

There has been further research into optimizing mean reversion, one of which was to use the successive convex approximation method on the mean reverting portfolio design [40]. The paper initially proposes the mean reversion portfolio:

- For each asset, the price at time  $t$  is denoted as  $p_t$  and its correspondeing log-price  $y_t \triangleq \log(p_t)$ , its vector form of  $M$  assets  $\mathbf{y}_t \triangleq [y_{1,t}, \dots, y_{M,t}]^T$ .
- The log-price spread is given by  $y_t \triangleq \beta^T \mathbf{y}_t$ , where  $\beta \triangleq [\beta_1, \dots, \beta_M]^T$  denotes the hedge ratios.
- The cointegration space with  $N$  relations is defined by  $\mathbf{B} \triangleq [\beta_1, \dots, \beta_N]$ , thus the  $N$  spreads are  $s_t \triangleq \mathbf{B}^T \mathbf{y}_t$ .
- For these  $N$  spreads, the portfolio weight matrix is denoted as  $\mathbf{w} \triangleq [w_1, \dots, w_N]^T$ .
- The auto-covariance matrix for the spreads  $s_t$  is defined as  $M_i \triangleq Cov(s_t, s_{t+i}) = \mathbb{E}[(s_t - \mathbb{E}[s_t])(s_{t+i} - \mathbb{E}[s_{t+i}])^T]$

Now that we have defined everything required, we can now formulize the problem. The general problem of mean reversion portfolio design problem is formalized by:

$$\begin{aligned} & \underset{\mathbf{w}}{\text{minimize}} && F(\mathbf{w}) \triangleq U(\mathbf{w}) + \mu V(\mathbf{w}) + \gamma S(\mathbf{w}) \\ & \text{subject to} && \mathbf{w} \in \left\{ \mathbf{w} \mid \|\mathbf{B}\mathbf{w}\|_0 \leq L \right\}, \quad \text{where } L \text{ is the total leveraged investment} \end{aligned}$$

- $\mu$  defines the trade-off between the mean reversion measure and the variance preference.
- $\gamma$  defines the regularization parameter of how sparse we would like the cointegration space to be.

Where the Mean Reversion term:

$$U(\mathbf{w}) \triangleq \xi \frac{\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{H} \mathbf{w}}{\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{M}_0 \mathbf{w}} + \zeta \left( \frac{\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{M}_1 \mathbf{w}}{\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{M}_0 \mathbf{w}} \right)^2 + \eta \sum_{i=2}^p \left( \frac{\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{M}_i \mathbf{w}}{\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{M}_0 \mathbf{w}} \right)^2$$

And the variance term:

$$V(\mathbf{w}) \triangleq \begin{cases} 1/\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{M}_0 \mathbf{w} & \text{VarInv}(\mathbf{w}) \\ 1/\sqrt{\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{M}_0 \mathbf{w}} & \text{StdInv}(\mathbf{w}) \\ -\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{M}_0 \mathbf{w} & \text{VarNeg}(\mathbf{w}) \\ -\sqrt{\mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{M}_0 \mathbf{w}} & \text{StdNeg}(\mathbf{w}) \end{cases}$$

The variance term can be represented in any of the four forms.

And the asset selection term:

$$S(\mathbf{w}) \triangleq \|\mathbf{B}\mathbf{w}\|_0 = \sum_{m=1}^M \text{sgn}(|[\mathbf{B}\mathbf{w}]_m|)$$

This asset selection criterion is not necessary however as trading incur a cost, selecting all of the asset is costly, thus selecting a subset of assets to trade is more profitable. To formulize this goal, we would like to minimize the cointegration space thus we use the  $\ell_0$  norm.

The paper then goes on to solve the optimization problem using the successive convex approximation (SCA) method [41]. The SCA method takes an optimization problem in the form of:

$$\begin{aligned} & \underset{\mathbf{x}}{\text{minimize}} && f(\mathbf{x}) \\ & \text{subject to} && \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \end{aligned}$$

Where  $\mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^N$  is convex and  $f(\mathbf{x})$  is non-convex. The SCA method involves starting at an initial point  $\mathbf{x}^{(0)}$  and solving a series of subproblems of surrogate functions  $\tilde{f}(\mathbf{x}; \mathbf{x}^{(k)})$  over the set  $\mathcal{X}$ . The sequence  $\{\mathbf{x}^{(k)}\}$  is generated by:

$$\begin{cases} \hat{\mathbf{x}}^{(k+1)} = \underset{\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}}{\text{argmin}} \tilde{f}(\mathbf{x}; \mathbf{x}^{(k)}) \\ \mathbf{x}^{(k+1)} = \mathbf{x}^{(k)} + \gamma^{(k)} (\hat{\mathbf{x}}^{(k+1)} - \mathbf{x}^{(k)}) \end{cases}$$

The first step is to generate a descent direction and then update the variable with a step size of  $\gamma^{(k)}$ . After applying this method to the MRP problem and further analysis the paper, the following algorithm is proposed and used to solve the MRP design problem:

However, 4 line is a convex problem and has no closed form solution thus to solve this subproblem using the ADMM method, this is done by introducing an auxiliary variable  $\mathbf{z} = \mathbf{B}\mathbf{w}$ .

$$\begin{aligned} & \underset{\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{z}}{\text{minimize}} && \mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{A} \mathbf{w} + \mathbf{b}^T \mathbf{w} \\ & \text{subject to} && \|\mathbf{z}\|_1 \leq B, \mathbf{B}\mathbf{w} - \mathbf{z} = \mathbf{0} \end{aligned}$$

This is then summerized into Algorithm 4:

After all of this analysis, the authors of the paper, [42, 40], ran simulations on real data comparing underlying spread. It found that it resulted in consistent profits as shown in figure 1.5:

Overall, this research succesfully formulizes, solves the optimization problem mathematically, and goes further to implement the algorithms to solve the problem programmatically. In addition, the

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**Algorithm 3** SCA-Based Algorithm for The Optimal MRP Design Problem

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**Require:**  $\mathbf{H}, \mathbf{M}_i, \mu, \gamma, \mathbf{B}, L$  and  $\tau$ 

- 1: Set  $k = 0, \gamma^{(0)}$  and  $\mathbf{w}^{(0)}$
  - 2: **repeat**
  - 3:   Compute  $\mathbf{A}^{(k)}$  and  $\mathbf{b}^{(k)}$
  - 4:    $\hat{\mathbf{w}}^{(k+1)} = \underset{\mathbf{w} \in \mathcal{W}}{\operatorname{argmin}} \mathbf{w}^T \mathbf{A}^{(k)} \mathbf{w} + \mathbf{b}^{(k)T} \mathbf{w}$
  - 5:    $\mathbf{w}^{(k+1)} = \mathbf{w}^{(k)} + \gamma^{(k)} (\hat{\mathbf{w}}^{(k+1)} - \mathbf{w}^{(k)})$
  - 6:    $k \leftarrow k + 1$
  - 7: **until** convergence
- 

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**Algorithm 4** An ADMM-Based Algorithm for Problem on line 4 in Algorithm 3

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**Require:**  $\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{b}, \mathbf{B}, B, \rho$ 

- 1: Set  $\mathbf{w}^{(0)}, \mathbf{z}^{(0)}, \mathbf{u}^{(0)}$  and  $k = 0$
  - 2: **repeat**
  - 3:    $\mathbf{w}^{(k+1)} = -(2\mathbf{A} + \rho\mathbf{B}^T\mathbf{B})^{-1}(\mathbf{b} + \rho\mathbf{B}^T(\mathbf{u}^{(k)} - \mathbf{z}^{(k)}))$
  - 4:    $\mathbf{h}^{(k)} = \mathbf{B}\mathbf{w}^{(k+1)} + \mathbf{u}^{(k)}$
  - 5:    $\mathbf{z}^{(k+1)} = \Pi_C(\mathbf{h}^{(k)})$
  - 6:    $\mathbf{u}^{(k+1)} = \mathbf{u}^{(k)} + \mathbf{B}\mathbf{w}^{(k+1)} - \mathbf{z}^{(k+1)}$
  - 7:    $k \leftarrow k + 1$
  - 8: **until** convergence
- 

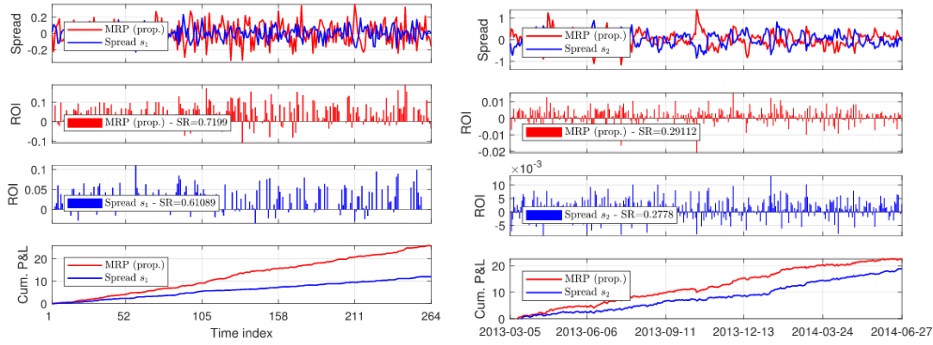


Figure 1.5: A mean-reversion trading based on real data [40]

author compares the implementation with other benchmark algorithms, showing that it results in a greater P&L and sharpe ratio.

Although, the research in the papers previously mentioned do not investigate the cointegration approach on cryptocurrencies, the takeaways are the mathematical fundamentals that are used in statistical arbitrage. Kristoufek and Bouri researched into the sources of stat. arb. of bitcoin in multiple centralized exchanges. The Grey correlation is built on top of the Grey system theory [43], and is able to capture non-linear correlations without assuming a Gaussian distribution, thus using Grey correlation provides a more robust metric to understand correlations between series'. The Grey correlation  $\gamma(X_0, X_i)$  is defined with two steps:

1.  $\gamma(x_0(k), x_i(k)) = \frac{\min_i \min_k |x_0(k) - x_i(k)| + \varepsilon \max_i \max_k |x_0(k) - x_i(k)|}{|x_0(k) - x_i(k)| + \varepsilon \max_i \max_k |x_0(k) - x_i(k)|}$
2.  $\gamma(X_0, X_i) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \gamma(x_0(k), x_i(k))$

With  $\varepsilon \in [0, 1]$ , the standard is set to  $\varepsilon = 0.5$ .

The DCC-GARCH(1,1), [44], model also used to obtain conditional correlations for Bitcoin exchanges. The model was designed to used a combination of parameters such as the standard deviation of Bitcoin returns, traded volume, volume of on-chain transactions, fees paid to miners, ratio of current price and recent price history and internet hype/trends.

Upon analysis of Grey and DCC-GARCH(1,1) correlations, it is found that the DCC correlations

show a little variability whereas the Grey correlations being a lot more variable ranging from 0.29 to 1. In addition, the paper then further investigates these sources and finds that these opportunities are introduced when there is a large number of inter-exchange transfer requests, i.e. the network is congested, and high price volatility. In contrast, high volume of exchanges and on-chain activity cause the arbitrage opportunities to decrease. This paper finds and explains these sources of statistical arbitrage however does not implement or devise an algorithm that uses statistical arbitrage to generate a profit from price discrepancies of Bitcoin on different exchanges.

A paper that investigates statistical arbitrage on multiple cryptocurrencies is [45]. The authors of this paper analysed co-movements and cointegration of different cryptocurrencies on a centralized exchange using Augmented Dickey Fuller (ADF) and Kwiatkowski-Phillips-Schmidt-Shin (KPSS), Ljung-Box autocorrelation tests on both stationary form ( $I(0)$ ) and the original form ( $I(1)$ ). The paper then develops a dynamic factor model based on the assumption that the price dynamics of cryptocurrencies is driven by Bitcoin [46], this is then evidenced by similar paths found in cryptocurrencies shown in Figure 1.6.

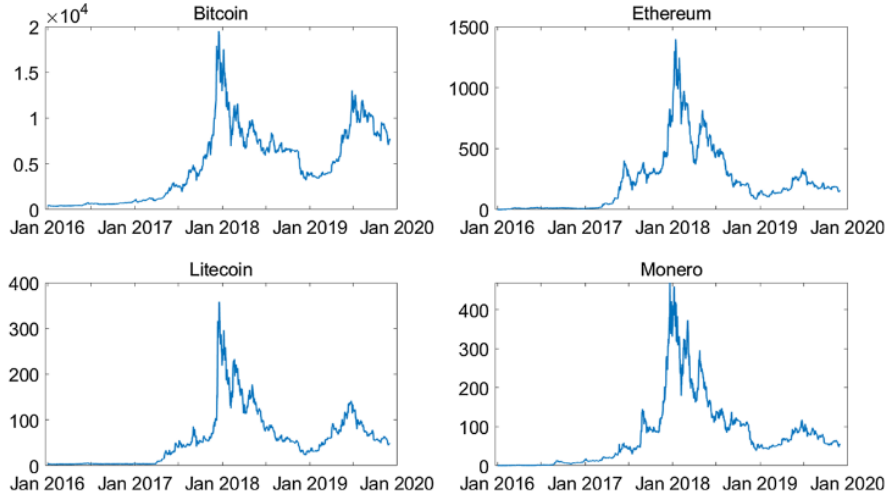


Figure 1.6: Price behaviour of Bitcoin, Ethereum, Litecoin, Monero [45]

For simplicity the authors set the number of hidden factors to 2 and upon analysis  $f_1$  is a  $I(1)$  process and the second factor  $f_2$  is a stationary process that is independent from  $f_1$ . It is also found after overlaying  $f_1$  with the price of Bitcoin, that the first factor strongly correlates with the price of Bitcoin.

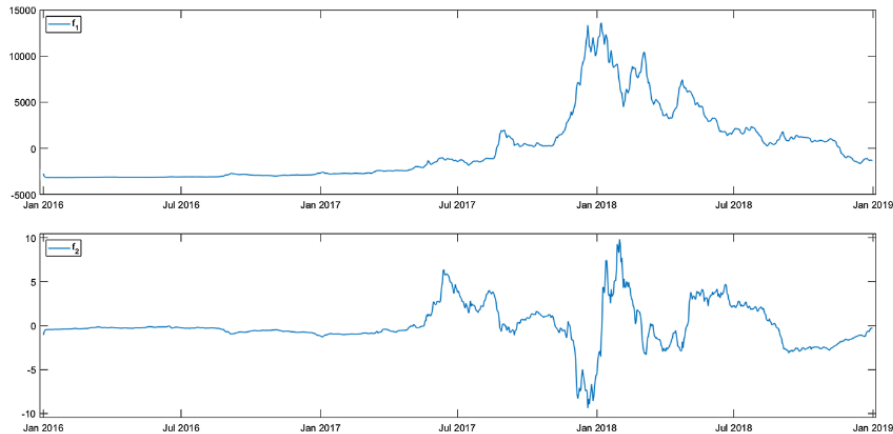


Figure 1.7: Hidden factors  $f_1$  and  $f_2$  from Jan 2016 to Dec 2018 [45]

The paper then uses this model to build an investment strategy, using forecasting using the estimated parameters:

$$\hat{p}_{i,\tau+1} = \mathbb{E}_\tau(p_{i,\tau+1}) = \hat{\alpha}_i + \hat{\beta}_{i1}\mathbb{E}_\tau(f_{1,\tau+1}) + \hat{\beta}_{i2}\mathbb{E}_\tau(f_{2,\tau+1})$$

Where

$$f_{1,t} = \lambda_1 f_{1,t-1} + \eta_{1,t}$$

$$f_{2,t} = \lambda_2 f_{2,t-1} + \eta_{2,t}$$

The expected gains one day ahead is given by:

$$g_{\tau+1} = \mathbb{E}_{\tau}[v_{\tau+1}] = \sum_{i=1}^{\lfloor I/2 \rfloor} \hat{p}_{\tau+1}^{(i)} - \sum_{i=\lfloor I/2 \rfloor + 1}^I \hat{p}_{\tau+1}^{(i)}$$

Using this and a thresholds which are calculated by the combination of the current price and standard deviation of the trading position value:

- if  $g_{\tau+1} > v_{\tau} + c\sigma_{\tau}^v$ , go long
- if  $g_{\tau+1} < v_{\tau} - c\sigma_{\tau}^v$ , go short
- if  $v_{\tau} - c\sigma_{\tau}^v \leq g_{\tau+1} \leq v_{\tau} + c\sigma_{\tau}^v$ , no trade

The researchers of the paper evaluated their trading strategy for 334 days and a moving window of 3 years, 1096 observations, every day to estimate the parameters for the dynamic factor model. We can see in Figure 1.8 that the strategy was able to consistently generate a profit even when considering transaction costs.

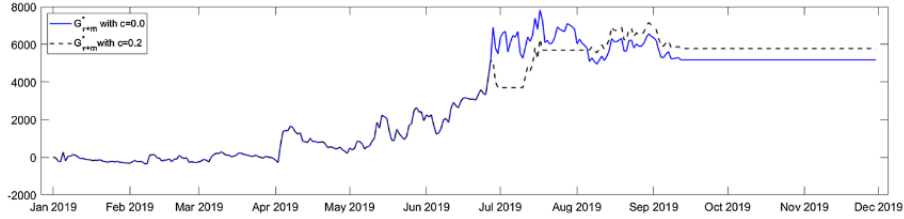


Figure 1.8: Net gains taking transaction fees into account [45]

Another method that is used in statistical arbitrage is using the Kalman Filter. Recall the equation for spread:

$$\varepsilon_{ij,t} = P_{i,t} + \gamma P_{j,t}$$

The Kalman filter is a recursive algorithm for estimating the state of data that is usually very noisy and thus needs to be filtered [47]. This makes it very useful to estimate the hedge ratio  $\gamma$ . Initially, a book by Vidyamurthy discusses best practices for choosing cointegrated equities and found that the kalman filter was found optimal when the state-space and observation equations are linear and the noise is Gaussian [48]. Since then there has been many extensions of the filter such as the Extended Kalman Filter (EKF) and Unscented KF aimed to handle when the state-space and observation equations are non-linear and the noise is not Gaussian.

The Kalman Filter works in 2 phases, prediction and update. The prediction phase is as follows

$$\hat{\mathbf{x}}_k = \mathbf{F}_k \hat{\mathbf{x}}_{k-1} + \mathbf{B}_k \vec{\mathbf{u}}_k + \mathbf{w}_k$$

$$\mathbf{P}_k = \mathbf{F}_k \mathbf{P}_{k-1} \mathbf{F}_k^T + \mathbf{Q}_k$$

Where  $\hat{\mathbf{x}}_k$  is the new best estimate (prediction) that is derived from  $\hat{\mathbf{x}}_{k-1}$ , the previous estimate and the prediction function  $\mathbf{F}_k$ .  $\vec{\mathbf{u}}_k$  is the correction term, called the control vector, that is used when it is known that there are external influences in combination with  $\mathbf{B}_k$  which is called the control matrix. In addition to this, the new uncertainty (covariance matrix),  $\mathbf{P}_k$ , is calculated using the previous uncertainty and additional uncertainty from the environment,  $\mathbf{Q}_k$ ,  $\mathbf{w}_k$  is called the state noise. The update is as follows

$$\hat{\mathbf{x}}'_k = \hat{\mathbf{x}}_k + \mathbf{K}'(\vec{\mathbf{z}}_k - \mathbf{H}_k \hat{\mathbf{x}}_k)$$

$$\mathbf{P}'_k = \mathbf{P}_k - \mathbf{K}' \mathbf{H}_k \mathbf{P}_k$$

$$\mathbf{K}' = \mathbf{P}_k \mathbf{H}_k^T (\mathbf{H}_k \mathbf{P}_k \mathbf{H}_k^T + \mathbf{R}_k)^{-1}$$

Where  $\mathbf{K}'$  is defined as the Kalman gain,  $\mathbf{H}_k$  is the measurement matrix,  $\vec{\mathbf{z}}_k$  is mean of the observed values, which is also calculated by  $\vec{\mathbf{z}}_k = \mathbf{H}_k \hat{\mathbf{x}}_k + \mathbf{v}_k$  where  $\mathbf{v}_k$  is the measurement noise, and  $\mathbf{R}_k$  is the covariance of the uncertainty of the observed values [49].

A paper that investigated the use of the Kalman Filter on ETFs found that the strategy it employed worked well for in-sample data points and worse, but still profitable, results of out-of-sample data. The paper adapted the Kalman Filter to be able to use it for pairs trading to the following:

$$\mathbf{y}_t = \mathbf{x}_t \beta_t + \epsilon_t$$

$$\beta_t = \mathbf{I} \beta_{t-1} + \omega_t$$

Then calculating the Kalman Gain:

$$\text{Kalman Gain} = \frac{\text{Error in the estimate}}{\text{Error in the estimate} + \text{Error in the measurement}}$$

Then to calculate the estimate:

$$\text{Estimate}_t = \text{Estimate}_{t-1} + \text{Kalman Gain} \times (\text{Measurement} - \text{Estimate}_{t-1})$$

And finally, calculating the new error:

$$E_{\text{estimate}_t} = \frac{E_{\text{measurement}} \times E_{\text{estimate}_{t-1}}}{E_{\text{measurement}} + E_{\text{estimate}_{t-1}}}$$

$$E_{\text{estimate}_t} = E_{\text{estimate}_{t-1}} \times (1 - \text{Kalman Gain})$$

The paper later hypothesises the causes for the disappointing results to the “pairs trading strategies have gained widespread acceptance thus making profitability much more elusive”, however the author fails to find evidence or provide sufficient evidence to justify the claim [50].

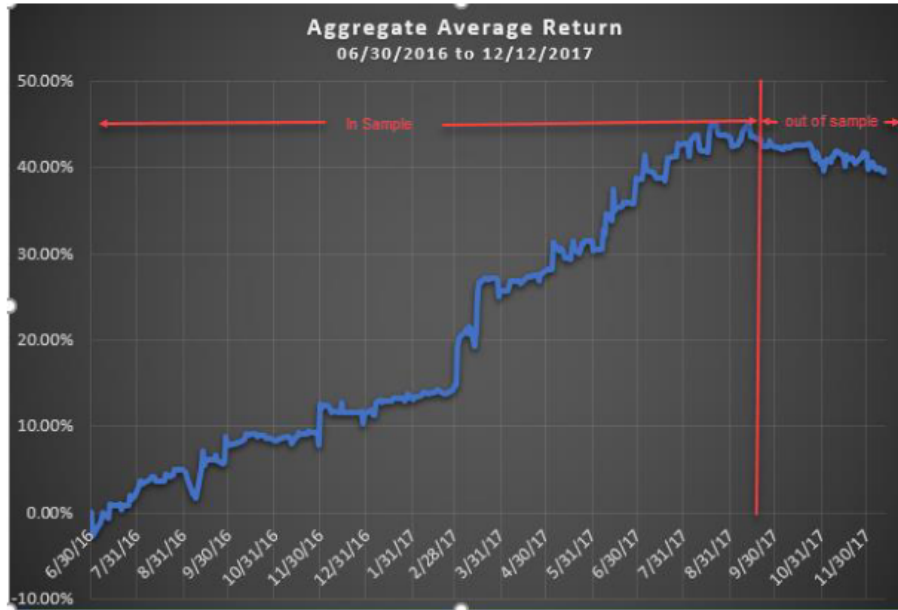


Figure 1.9: Aggregate average return of using the kalman filter for pairs trading on ETFs [50]

Another paper used the combination of the Kalman Filter and Machine Learning, more specifically Extreme Learning Machine and Support Vector Regression (SVR) to build a statistical arbitrage strategy on the Brazilian Stock Exchange. The strategies can simply be explained as using SVR and ELM to forecast returns and using the Kalman Filter to improve the forecast.

The paper also compares methods, such as LASSO, BMA, GRR, to benchmark the performance of the Kalman Filter. The research found that using simply ELM and SVR forecasts result in a return of 20.19% and 21.32% respectively for out-of-sample data points and by using a combination with

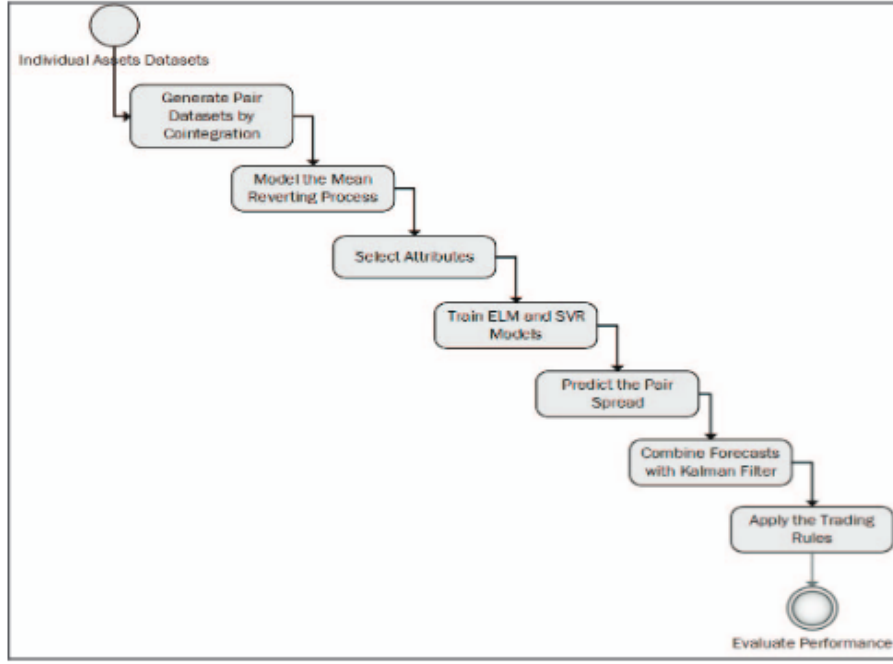


Figure 1.10: Visualisation of the trading strategy used in [51]

TABLE IV. ECONOMETRIC PERFORMANCE – ELM AND SVR – IN-SAMPLE

MODEL	MAX. DD	SHARPE	VOLATILITY	RETURN
ELM	-2.31%	1.80	<b>3.05%</b>	5.83%
SVR	<b>-2.18%</b>	1.73	3.20%	5.39%

TABLE V. ECONOMETRIC PERFORMANCE ELM AND SVR – OUT-OF-SAMPLE

MODEL	MAX. DD	SHARPE	VOLATILITY	RETURN
ELM	-2.80%	3.83	5.64%	20.18%
SVR	-2.72%	4.31	5.29%	21.32%

TABLE VI. ECONOMETRIC PERFORMANCE – COMBINATION MODELS– IN-SAMPLE

MODEL	MAX. DD	SHARPE	VOLATILITY	RETURN
BMA	-2.24%	1.38	<b>3.05%</b>	4.94%
GRR	-2.34%	<b>2.07</b>	3.20%	6.37%
KALMAN	-2.30%	1.97	3.57%	<b>6.89%</b>
LASSO	-2.43%	2.06	3.39%	6.30%

TABLE VII. ECONOMETRIC PERFORMANCE – COMBINATION MODELS – OUT-OF-SAMPLE

MODEL	MAX. DD	SHARPE	VOLATILITY	RETURN
BMA	-2.97%	3.83	<b>5.12%</b>	19.33%
GRR	<b>-2.53%</b>	4.76	5.49%	23.69%
KALMAN	-2.64%	<b>5.29</b>	5.17%	<b>26.13%</b>
LASSO	-2.64%	4.76	5.49%	23.79%

Figure 1.11: Econometric results [51]

the Kalman Filter give a return of 26.13% for out-of-sample data points. The full results can be seen below in Figure 1.11. In addition to this it can be seen that the volatility of the return also decreases which is ideal for investment managers.

Other papers/articles such as [52, 53, 54] have designed, compared and analysed other statistical arbitrage techniques using Machine Learning algorithms and revealed that some algorithms are profitable. The majority of research on machine learning trading strategies has been on assets such as stocks on centralized exchanges. The little research that has been done on statistical arbitrage on cryptocurrencies has all been on analysing arbitrage on centralized exchanges and not decentralised exchanges. One of the research projects that analysed machine learning methods of statistical arbitrage on cryptocurrencies on a centralized exchange, compared a logistic regression approach with a random forest approach [54].

## Chapter 2

# Project Plan



## Chapter 3

# Evaluation Plan

## Chapter 4

# Ethical Issues

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