

1 Automated Residual Plot Assessment with the R Package 2 autovi and Shiny App autovi.web

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Summary

Visually assessing residual plots is the common advice for linear model diagnostics, however this approach requires manual human evaluation and thereby is not a scalable approach. Human evaluation also suffer from the potential for inconsistent decisions from different analysts. Using a lineup protocol, where the residual plot is embedded among null plots, can help to alleviate inconsistency, but requires even more human effort. This is the type of task that in today's world might employ a robot to do the tedious work for a human. Here we describe a new R package that includes a computer vision model for automated assessment of residual plots, and an accompanying Shiny app for ease of use. For a user-provided sample of residuals, it predicts a measure of visual signal strength (VSS) and provides a suite of supporting information to assist the analyst decide on the appropriateness their model fit.

8 Key words: initial data analysis; statistical graphics; data visualization; visual inference;
computer vision; machine learning; hypothesis testing; regression analysis

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9

1. Introduction

Regression analysis is a widely used statistical modeling technique widely for data in many fields. There are a vast array of software for conducting regression modeling and generating diagnostics. The package `lmttest` (Zeileis & Hothorn 2002) provides a suite of conventional tests. The `stats` package (R Core Team 2022) offers standard diagnostic plots such as residuals vs. fitted values, quantile-quantile (Q-Q) plots, and residuals vs. leverage plots. Packages like `jtools` (Long 2022), `olsrr` (Hebbali 2024), `rockchalk` (Johnson 2022), and `ggResidpanel` (Goode & Rey 2019) provide similar graphical diagnostics, often with alternative aesthetics or interactive features. All of these tools deliver the types of diagnostic plots outlined in the classical text by Cook & Weisberg (1982). The `ecostats` package (Warton 2023) incorporates simulation envelopes into residual plots, while DHARMA (Hartig 2022) compares empirical quantiles (0.25, 0.5, and 0.75) of scaled residuals to their theoretical counterparts. DHARMA is particularly focused on detecting model violations such as heteroscedasticity, incorrect functional forms, and issues specific to generalized linear and mixed-effect models, like over/under-dispersion. It also includes conventional test annotations to help avoid misinterpretation.

However relying solely on subjective assessments of these plots can lead to issues, such as over-interpreting random patterns as model violations. Li et al. (2024a) demonstrated that visual methods using the lineup protocol (Buja et al. 2009) for assessing residuals are more useful, and also perform more practically than conventional tests due to their reduced sensitivity to minor departures. Packages such as `nullabor` (Wickham et al. 2020), `HLMdiag` (Loy & Hofmann 2014), and `regressinator` (Reinhart 2024), enable users to compare observed residual plots with samples from null distributions, helping to quantify the significance of any detected patterns.

However, as discussed in Li et al. (2024b), the lineup protocol has significant limitations in large-scale applications due dependence on human labor. Thus, a computer vision model was developed with an associated statistical testing procedure to automate the assessment of residual plots. This model takes a residual plot and a vector of auxiliary variables (such as the number of observations) as inputs and outputs the predicted visual signal strength (VSS). This strength estimates the distance between the residual distribution of the fitted regression model and the reference distribution assumed under correct model specification.

To make the statistical testing procedure and trained computer vision model widely accessible, we developed the R package `autovi`, and a web interface, `autovi.web` to

44 make it easy for users to automatically read their residual plots with the trained
45 computer vision model.

46 The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a detailed
47 documentation of the `autovi` package, including its usage and infrastructure. Section 3
48 focuses on the `autovi.web` interface, describing its design and usage, along with
49 illustrative examples. Finally, Section 4 presents the main conclusions of this work.

50 **2. R package: autovi**

51 The main purpose of `autovi` is to provide rejection decisions and p -values for testing
52 the null hypothesis (H_0) that the regression model is correctly specified. The package
53 provides automated interpretation of residual plots using computer vision. The name
54 `autovi` stands for **a**utomated **v**isual **i**nference.

55 There are two ways to access the package, directly using R or through a web interface,
56 `autovi.web`. The web interface has the advantage that it can be used without installing
57 Python, R and the relevant packages locally.

58 **2.1. Why use it**

59 Figure 1 shows three sets of plots of residuals against fitted values. The simulated
60 example in (a) might be interpreted as a heteroscedastic pattern, however the
61 automated reading would predict this to have a visual signal strength (VSS) of
62 1.53, with a corresponding p -value of 0.25. This means it would be interpreted as
63 a good residual plot, that there is nothing in the data to indicate a violation of
64 model assumptions. Skewness in the predictor variables is generating the apparent
65 heteroscedasticity, where the smaller variance in residuals at larger fitted values is
66 due to smaller sample size only. The Breusch-Pagan test (Breusch & Pagan 1979) for
67 heteroscedasticity would also not reject this as good residual plot.

68 The data in (b) is generated by fitting a linear model predicting `mpg` based on `hp`
69 using the datasets::`mtcars`. It is a small data set, and there is a hint of nonlinear
70 structure not captured by the model. The automated plot reading would predict a
71 VSS of 3.57, which has a p -value less than 0.05. That is, the nonlinear structure is
72 most likely real, and indicates a problem with the model. The conventional test, a
73 Ramsey Regression Equation Specification Error Test (RESET) (Ramsey 1969) would
74 also strongly detect the nonlinearity.

The third example is generated using the `surreal` package (Balamuta 2024) where structured residuals are hidden in data, to be revealed if the correct model is specified. Here a quote based on Tukey is used as the residual structure “visual summaries focus on unexpected values”. The automated plot reading predicts the VSS to be 5.87, with a p -value less than 0.05. This structure is blindingly obvious visually, but a RESET test for nonlinear structure would not report a problem. (It would be detected by a Breusch-Pagan for heteroscedasticity and also Shapiro-Wilk test (Shapiro & Wilk 1965) for non-normality.)

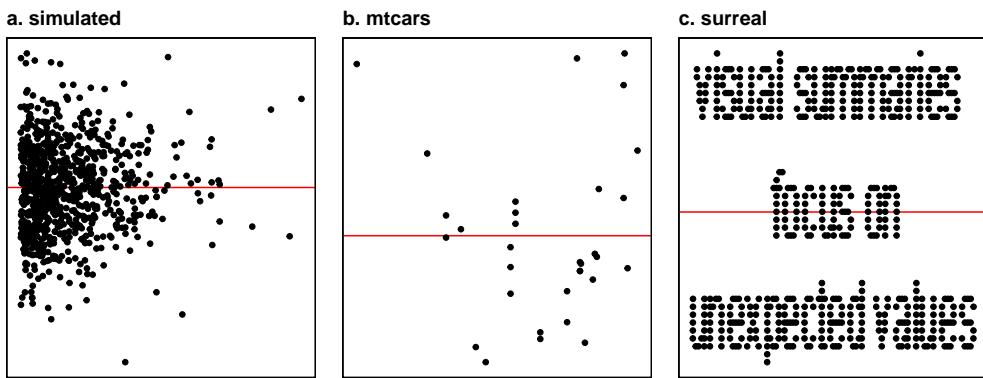


Figure 1. Reading residual plots can be a difficult task, particular for students new to statistical modeling. The `autovi` package makes it easier. Here are three examples of residual plots, which may appear to have structure. According to `autovi`, the visual signal strengths (VSS) of these three examples are approximately (a) 1.53, (b) 3.57, (c) 5.87, resulting in (b), (c) being significant violations of good residuals, but (a) is consistent with a good residual plot.

2.2. Implementation

The `autovi` package is built on the `bandicoot` object-oriented programming (OOP) system (Li 2024), marking a departure from R’s traditional S3 generic system. This OOP architecture enhances flexibility and modularity, allowing users to redefine key functions through method overriding. While similar functionality could be achieved using R’s S3 system with generic functions, the OOP framework offers a more structured and extensible foundation for the package.

The `autovi` infrastructure effectively integrates multiple programming languages and libraries into a comprehensive analytical tool. It relies on five core libraries from Python and R, each playing a critical role in the analysis pipeline. In Python, `pillow` (Clark et al. 2015) handles image processing tasks such as reading and resizing PNG files of residual plots, then converting them into input tensors for further analysis. The `TensorFlow` (Abadi et al. 2016) library, a key component of modern machine learning,

96 is used to predict the VSS of these plots through a pre-trained convolutional neural
97 network.

98 In the R environment, `autovi` utilizes several libraries. `ggplot2` (Wickham 2016)
99 generates the initial residual plots, saved as PNG files for visual input. The `cassowaryr`
100 (Mason et al. 2022) library computes scagnostics (scatter plot diagnostics), providing
101 numerical features that capture statistical properties of the plots. These scagnostics
102 complement the visual analysis by offering quantitative metrics as secondary input to
103 the computer vision model. The `reticulate` (Ushey, Allaire & Tang 2024) package
104 bridges R and Python, enabling seamless communication between the two languages
105 and supporting the integrated infrastructure.

106 **2.3. Installation**

107 The `autovi` package is available on CRAN. It is actively developed and maintained,
108 with the latest updates accessible on GitHub. The code discussed in this paper is
109 based on `autovi` version 0.4.1.

110 The package includes internal functions to check the current Python environment used
111 by the `reticulate` package. If the necessary Python packages are not installed in the
112 Python interpreter, an error will be raised. If you want to select a specific Python
113 environment, you can do so by calling the `reticulate::use_python()` function before
114 using the `autovi` package.

115 We recommend using the Shiny app `autovi.web` if encountering installation problems.

116 **2.4. Usage**

117 **2.4.1. Numerical Summary**

118 Three steps are needed to get an automated assessment of a set of residuals and fitted
119 values:

- 120 1. Load the `autovi` package using the `library()` function.
121 2. Create a checker object with a linear regression model.
122 3. Call the `check()` method of the checker, which, by default, predicts the VSS for
123 the true residual plot, 100 null plots, and 100 bootstrapped plots, storing the
124 predictions internally. A concise report of the check results is then printed.

125 The code to do this is:

```
library(autovi)
checker <- residual_checker(lm(dist ~ speed, data = cars))
checker$check()
```

126 It produces the following summary:

127

```
128 -- <AUTO_VI object>
129 Status:
130 - Fitted model: lm
131 - Keras model: UNKNOWN
132 - Output node index: 1
133 - Result:
134 - Observed visual signal strength: 3.162 (p-value = 0.0396)
135 - Null visual signal strength: [100 draws]
136 - Mean: 1.274
137 - Quantiles:
138
139      25%    50%    75%    80%    90%    95%    99%
140 0.8021 1.1109 1.5751 1.6656 1.9199 2.6564 3.3491
141
142 - Bootstrapped visual signal strength: [100 draws]
143 - Mean: 2.786 (p-value = 0.05941)
144 - Quantiles:
145
146      25%    50%    75%    80%    90%    95%    99%
147 2.452 2.925 3.173 3.285 3.463 3.505 3.652
148
149 - Likelihood ratio: 0.7275 (boot) / 0.06298 (null) = 11.55
```

150 The summary includes observed VSS of the true residual plot and associated p -value
 151 of the automated visual test. The p -value is the proportion of null plots (out of the
 152 total 100) that have VSS greater than or equal to that of the true residual plot. The
 153 report also provides sample quantiles of VSS for null samples and bootstrapped data
 154 plots, providing more information about the sampling variability and a likelihood of
 155 model violations. The likelihood is computed from the proportion of values greater

156 than the observed VSS in both the bootstrapped data values and the simulated null
 157 values.

158 **2.4.2. Visual Summary**

159 Users can visually inspect the original residual plot alongside a sample null plot using
 160 `plot_pair()` or a lineup of null plot `plot_lineup()`. This visual comparison can
 161 clarify why H_0 is either rejected or not, and help identify potential remedies.

```
checker$plot_pair()
```

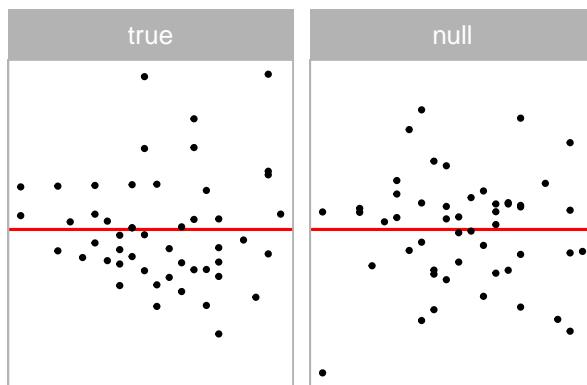


Figure 2. True plot alongside one null plot, for quick comparison.

162 The `plot_pair()` method (Figure 2) displays the true residual plot on the left and a
 163 single null plot on the right. If a full lineup was shown, the true residual plot would
 164 be embedded in a page of null plots. Users should look for any distinct visual patterns
 165 in the true residual plot that are absent in the null plot. Running these functions
 166 multiple times can help any visual suspicions, as each execution generates new random
 167 null plots for comparison.

168 The package offers a straightforward visualization of the assessment result through
 169 the `summary_plot()` function.

```
checker$summary_plot()
```

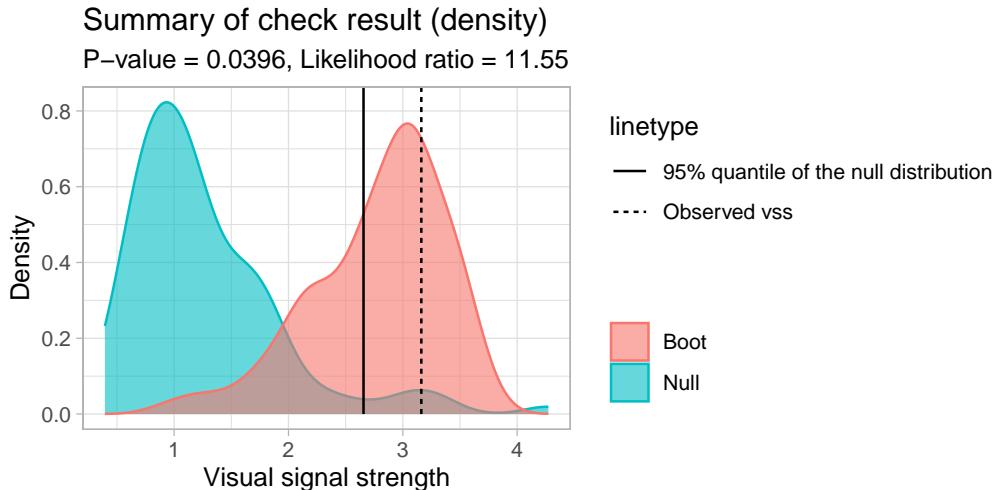


Figure 3. Summary plot comparing the densities of VSS for bootstrapped residual samples (red) relative to VSS for null plots (blue).

- 170 In the result, shown in Figure 3, the blue area represents the density of VSS for null
 171 residual plots, while the red area shows the density for bootstrapped residual plots.
 172 The dashed line indicates the VSS of the true residual plot, and the solid line marks
 173 the critical value at a 95% significance level. The p -value and the likelihood ratio are
 174 displayed in the subtitle. The likelihood ratio represents the ratio of the likelihood
 175 of observing the VSS of the true residual plot from the bootstrapped distribution
 176 compared to the null distribution.
- 177 Interpreting the plot involves several key aspects. If the dashed line falls to the right of
 178 the solid line, it suggests rejecting the null hypothesis. The degree of overlap between
 179 the red and blue areas indicates similarity between the true residual plot and null
 180 plots; greater overlap suggests more similarity. Lastly, the portion of the red area to
 181 the right of the solid line represents the percentage of bootstrapped models considered
 182 to have model violations.
- 183 This visual summary provides an intuitive way to assess the model's fit and potential
 184 violations, allowing users to quickly grasp the results of the automated analysis.

185 2.5. Modularized Infrastructure

- 186 The initial motivation for developing `autovi` was to create a convenient interface for
 187 sharing the models described and trained in Li et al. (2024b). However, recognizing
 188 that the classical normal linear regression model represents a restricted class of models,

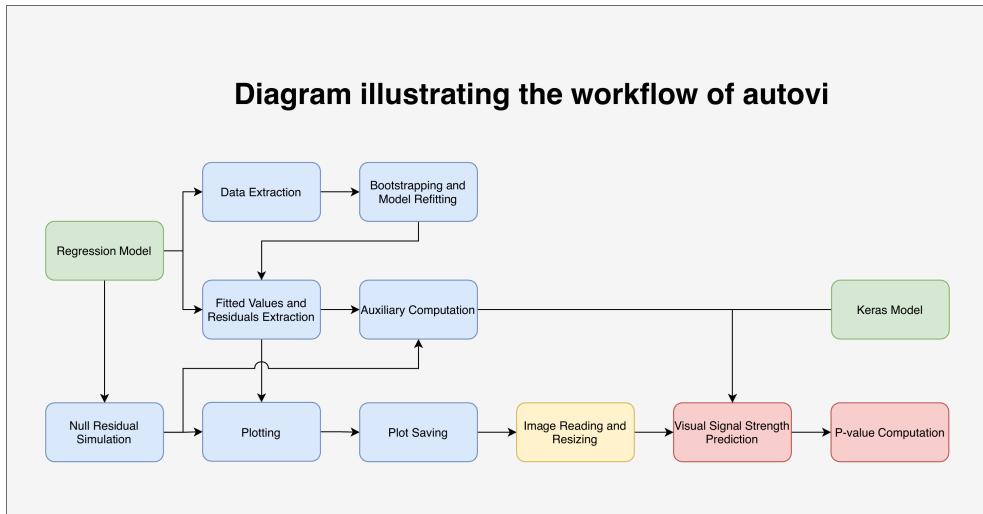


Figure 4. Diagram illustrating the infrastructure of the R package `autovi`. The modules in green are primary inputs provided by users. Modules in blue are overridable methods that can be modified to accommodate users' specific needs. The module in yellow is a pre-defined non-overridable method. The modules in red are primary outputs of the package.

189 we sought to avoid limiting the potential for future extensions, whether by the original
 190 developers or other users. As a result, the package was designed to function seamlessly
 191 with linear regression models with minimal modification and few required arguments,
 192 while also accommodating other classes of models through partial infrastructure
 193 substitution. This modular and customizable design allows `autovi` to handle a wide
 194 range of residual diagnostics tasks.

195 The infrastructure of `autovi` consists of ten core modules: data extraction,
 196 bootstrapping and model refitting, fitted values and residuals extraction, auxiliary
 197 computation, null residual simulation, plotting, plot saving, image reading and resizing,
 198 VSS prediction, and *p*-value computation. Each module is designed with minimal
 199 dependency on the preceding modules, allowing users to customize parts of the
 200 infrastructure without affecting its overall integrity. An overview of this infrastructure
 201 is illustrated in Figure 4.

202 The modules for VSS prediction and *p*-value computation are predefined and cannot be
 203 overridden, although users can interact with them directly through function arguments.
 204 Similarly, the image reading and resizing module is fixed but will adapt to different
 205 Keras models by checking their input shapes. The remaining seven modules are
 206 designed to be overridable, enabling users to tailor the infrastructure to their specific
 207 needs. These modules are discussed in detail on the software's website.

208

3. Web interface: `autovi.web`

209 The `autovi.web` package extends the functionality of `autovi` by offering a user-
210 friendly web interface for automated residual plot assessment. This eliminates the
211 common challenges associated with software installation, so users can avoid managing
212 Python environments or handling version requirements for R libraries. The platform
213 is cross-platform and accessible on various devices and operating systems, making it
214 suitable even for users without R programming experience. Additionally, updates are
215 managed centrally, ensuring that users always have access to the latest features. This
216 section discusses the implementation based on `autovi.web` version 0.1.0.

217 **3.1. Implementation**

218 The package `autovi.web` is built using the `shiny` (Chang et al. 2022) and
219 `shinydashboard` (Chang & Borges Ribeiro 2021) R packages. Hosted on the
220 `shinyapps.io` domain, the application is accessible through any modern web browser.
221 The R packages `htmltools` (Cheng et al. 2024) and `shinycssloaders` (Sali & Attali
222 2020) are used to render markdown documentation in shiny application, and for loading
223 animations for shiny widgets, respectively.

224 Determining the best way to implement the interface was difficult. In our initial
225 planning for `autovi.web`, we considered implementing the entire web application using
226 the `webr` framework (Moon 2020), which would have allowed the entire application
227 to run directly in the user's browser. However, this approach was not feasible at the
228 time of writing this paper. The reason is that one of the R packages `autovi` depends
229 on the R package `splancs` (Rowlingson & Diggle 2023), which uses compiled Fortran
230 code. A working Emscripten (Zakai 2011) version of this package, which would be
231 required for `webr`, was not available.

232 We also explored the possibility of implementing the web interface using frameworks
233 built on other languages, such as Python. However, server hosting domains that
234 natively support Python servers typically do not have the latest version of R installed.
235 Additionally, calling R from Python is typically done using the `rpy2` Python library
236 (Gautier 2024), but this approach can be awkward when dealing with language syntax
237 related to non-standard evaluation. Another option we considered was renting a server
238 where we could have full control, such as those provided by cloud platforms like Google
239 Cloud Platform (GCP) or Amazon Web Services (AWS). However, correctly setting up
240 the server and ensuring a secure deployment requires significant expertise. Ultimately,
241 the most practical solution was to use the `shiny` and `shinydashboard` frameworks,

242 which are well-established in the R community and offer a solid foundation for web
243 application development.

244 The server-side configuration of `autovi.web` is carefully designed to support its
245 functionality. Most required Python libraries, including `pillow` and `NumPy`, are pre-
246 installed on the server. These libraries are integrated into the Shiny application using
247 the `reticulate` package, which provides an interface between R and Python.

248 Due to the resource allocation policy of `shinyapps.io`, the server enters a sleep mode
249 during periods of inactivity, resulting in the clearing of the local Python virtual
250 environment. Consequently, when the application “wakes up” for a new user session,
251 these libraries need to be reinstalled. While this ensures a clean environment for each
252 session, it may lead to slightly longer loading times for the first user after a period of
253 inactivity.

254 In contrast to `autovi`, `autovi.web` does not use the native Python version of
255 `TensorFlow`. Instead, it leverages `TensorFlow.js`, a JavaScript library that allows
256 the execution of machine learning models directly in the browser. This choice enables
257 native browser execution, enhancing compatibility across different user environments,
258 and shifts the computational load from the server to the client-side. `TensorFlow.js`
259 also offers better scalability and performance, especially when dealing with resource-
260 intensive computer vision models on `shinyapps.io`.

261 While `autovi` requires downloading the pre-trained computer vision models from
262 GitHub, these models in “.keras” file format are incompatible with `TensorFlow.js`.
263 Therefore, we extract and store the model weights in JSON files and include
264 them as extra resources in the Shiny application. When the application initializes,
265 `TensorFlow.js` rebuilds the computer vision model using these pre-stored weights.

266 To allow communication between `TensorFlow.js` and other components of the Shiny
267 application, the `shinyjs` R package is used. This package allows calling custom
268 JavaScript code within the Shiny framework. The specialized JavaScript code for
269 initializing `TensorFlow.js` and calling `TensorFlow.js` for VSS prediction is deployed
270 alongside the Shiny application as additional resources.

271 3.2. Usage

272 The workflow of `autovi.web` is designed to be straightforward, with numbered
273 steps displayed in each panel. There are two example datasets provided by the web
274 application. The single residual plot example uses the `dino` dataset from the R package

275 `datasauRus` (Davies, Locke & D'Agostino McGowan 2022). The lineup example uses
 276 residuals from a simulated regression model that has a non-linearity issue. We will
 277 walk through the lineup example to further demonstrate the workflow of the web
 278 application.

279 **3.2.1. Reading data and setting parameters**

280 The user can select to upload data as either a single set of residuals or a pre-computed
 281 lineup of residuals and nulls. Here we illustrate use with lineup example data sets
 282 (Figure 5). To use the lineup example data, click the “Use Lineup Example” button.
 283 The data status will then update to show the number of rows and columns in the
 284 dataset, and the CSV type will automatically be selected to the correct option. Since
 285 the example dataset follows the variable naming conventions assumed by the web
 286 application, the columns for fitted values, residuals, and labels of residual plots are
 287 set automatically (middle image). If the user is working with a custom dataset, these
 288 options must be set accordingly. Regardless of the dataset, the user must manually
 289 select the label for the true residual plot, whenever a lineup file is provided, as the
 290 web application allows assessments without this label. The last step is to click the play
 291 button (right image) to start the assessment.

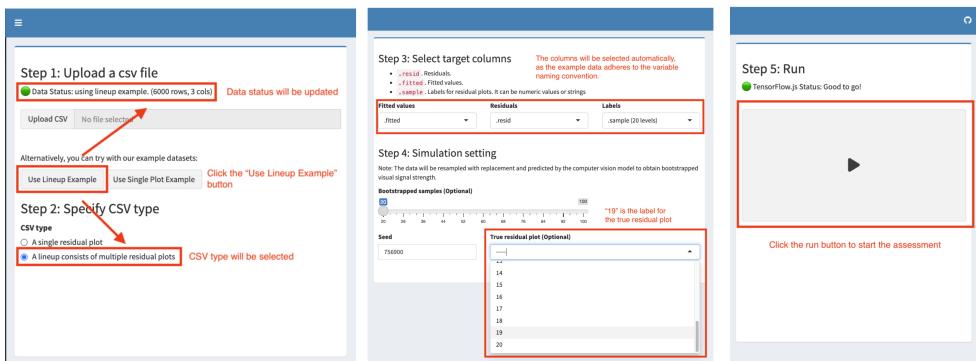


Figure 5. To begin the workflow for `autoovi` using the lineup example dataset, the user clicks the “Use Lineup Example” button (left) to load the example dataset, during which the data status and CSV type will be automatically updated. The target columns are selected automatically, though the user must manually select the label for the true residual plot (middle), as the web application permits assessment without this label. The user initiates the assessment of the lineup example data by clicking the run button (right).

292 **3.2.2. Results provided**

293 Results are provided in multiple panels. The first row of the table Figure 6 is the most
 294 crucial to check, as it provides the VSS and the rank of the true residual plot among

295 the other plots. The summary text beneath the table provides the p -value, which can
 296 be used for quick decision-making. The lineup is for manual inspection, and the user
 297 should see if the true residual plot is visually distinguishable from the other plots, to
 298 confirm if the model violation is serious.

299 The density plot in Figure 7 offers a more robust result, allowing the user to compare
 300 the distribution of bootstrapped VSS with the distribution of null VSS. Finally, the
 301 grayscale attention map (right image) can be used to check if the target visual features,
 302 like the non-linearity present in the lineup example, are captured by the computer
 303 vision model, ensuring the quality of the assessment.

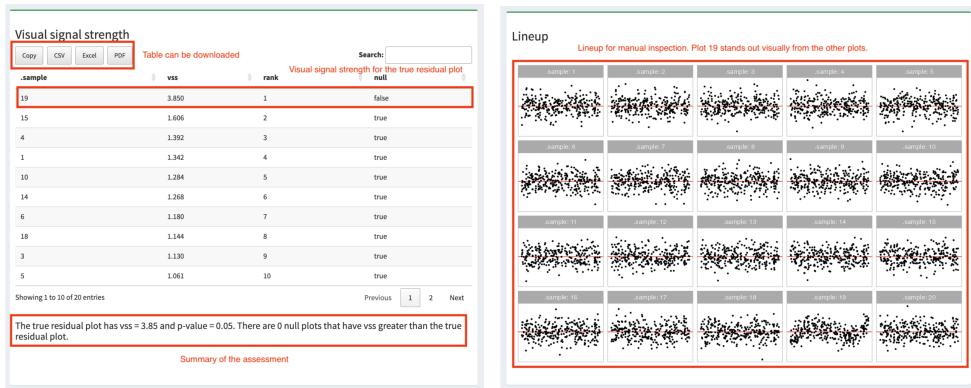


Figure 6. Results for the lineup. The VSS of the true residual plot is displayed in the first row of the table of VSS values for all the null plots (left image), with a summary text beneath the table providing the p -value to aid in decision-making. A lineup of residual plots allows for manual inspection (right image).

304

4. Conclusions

305 This paper presents new regression diagnostics software, the R package **autovi** and its
 306 accompanying web interface package, **autovi.web**. It addresses a critical gap in the
 307 current landscape of statistical software. While regression tools are widely available,
 308 effective and efficient diagnostic methods have lagged behind, particularly in the field
 309 of residual plot interpretation.

310 The **autovi** R package, introduced in this paper, automates the assessment of
 311 residual plots by incorporating a computer vision model, eliminating the need for
 312 time-consuming and potentially inconsistent human interpretation. This automation
 313 improves the efficiency of the diagnostic process and promotes consistency in model
 314 evaluation across different users and studies.

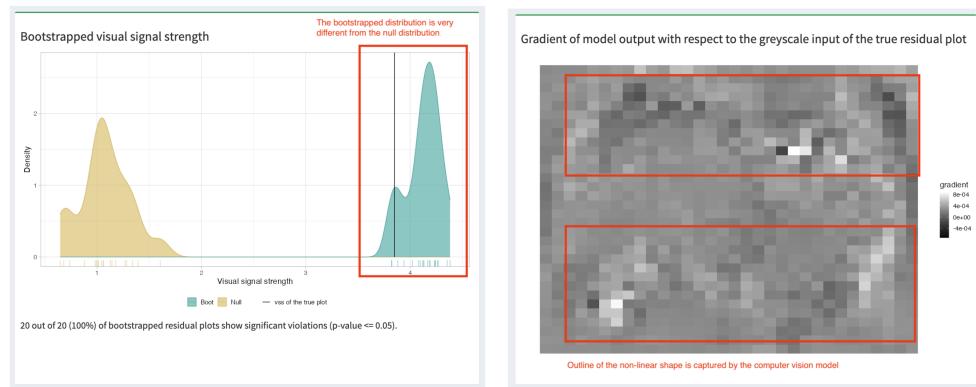


Figure 7. Summaries assessing the strength of the pattern and which elements of the plot contribute. The density plot helps verify if the bootstrapped distribution differs from the null distribution (left image). The attention map (right image) offers insights into whether the computer vision model has captured the intended visual features of the true residual plot.

- 315 The development of the accompanying Shiny app, **autovi.web**, expands access to these
 316 advanced diagnostic tools, by providing a user-friendly interface. It makes automated
 317 residual plot assessment accessible to a broader audience, including those who may not
 318 have extensive programming experience. This web-based solution effectively addresses
 319 the potential barriers to adoption, such as complex dependencies and installation
 320 requirements, that are often associated with advanced statistical software.
- 321 The combination of **autovi** and **autovi.web** offers a comprehensive solution to the
 322 challenges of residual plot interpretation in regression analysis. These tools have the
 323 potential to significantly improve the quality and consistency of model diagnostics
 324 across various fields, from academic research to industry applications. By automating
 325 a critical aspect of model evaluation, they allow researchers and analysts to focus more
 326 on interpreting results and refining models, rather than grappling with the intricacies
 327 of plot assessment.
- 328 The framework established by **autovi** and **autovi.web** opens up exciting possibilities
 329 for further research and development. Future work could explore the extension of these
 330 automated assessment techniques to other types of diagnostic plots and statistical
 331 models, potentially revolutionizing how we approach statistical inference using visual
 332 displays more broadly.

333

5. Resources and Supplementary Material

334 The the current version of `autovi` can be installed from CRAN, and source code for
 335 both packages are available at <https://github.com/TengMCing/autovi>. The web
 336 interface is available from autoviweb.netlify.app.

337 These R packages were used for the work: `tidyverse` (Wickham et al. 2019), `lmtest`
 338 (Zeileis & Hothorn 2002), `kableExtra` (Zhu 2021), `patchwork` (Pedersen 2022),
 339 `rcartocolor` (Nowosad 2018), `glue` (Hester & Bryan 2022), `here` (Müller 2020),
 340 `magick` (Ooms 2023), `yardstick` (Kuhn, Vaughan & Hvitfeldt 2024) and `reticulate`
 341 (Ushey, Allaire & Tang 2024).

342

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