

# Quantification of energy savings in smart buildings, physics or data?

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## Abstract

Many efforts from several organisms are focused on the increase of energy efficiency. It is in the interest of everybody, from individuals to governments, since energy efficiency yields to economical savings for households and companies, reduces greenhouse gas emissions benefiting environment, helps alleviate energy poverty and contributes to growth and jobs. Before implementing an energy efficiency solution, it is necessary to define the relationship which exists between energy use and the current operating conditions in order to determine energy savings that result from the implementation of the solution.

Traditionally, white box models based on physics equations are used to model systems to predict whole buildings and their sub-systems behaviors, such as their energy consumption and indoor comfort. However, nowadays by means of the Internet of Things we count on vast amounts of data that can be used for knowledge extraction.

We propose a machine learning approach for the creation of an energy consumption prediction model that is used to estimate the energy consumption in normal operation state, i.e., if the system would not have been altered by the energy efficiency experiment. This allows us to compare the predicted for normal operating state and the actual consumption in order to quantify the energy savings.

Our method shows better prediction accuracy than the so-called white box methods.

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*Keywords:*

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## 1. Introduction

Energy consumption of buildings in developed countries comprises 20-40% of total energy use and it is above industry and transport in EU and US [1].

In order to address climate change, together with the use of non-fossil and environmental friendly sources such as solar and wind, cutting energy consumption is also crucial. Reducing energy consumption to the necessary levels so as to keep comfort for buildings users helps to preserve finite resources and lowers the costs for consumers.

When it comes to energy savings, energy management is the process of monitoring, controlling, and conserving energy in a building. Typically this involves the following steps:

- Metering and collecting energy consumption data,
- Proposing ways of saving energy by analysing the data and putting them into practice, and
- Tracking the consumption in order to quantify the gains due to the proposed activity.

The collection of methods and processes used to face the third step, that is to assess the performance of energy efficiency activities by quantifying the gains on efficiency are called Evaluation, Measurement, and Verification (EM&V).

The traditional EM&V methods for determine if a program is generating the expected level of savings are based on linear regression models and they are described in the ASHRAEs Guideline [2].

Regression models need to be typically adjusted in ad hoc manners in order to capture nonlinear behavior, which arises from complex (physical) multivariable interactions between ambient conditions, occupancy levels, and building operating conditions [3].

Regression has always been the standard approach to modeling the relationship between one outcome variable and several input variables, and it can be seen both from a white-box and a black-box point of view. That means, we could use regression for analytical purposes, where a scenario is understood through physics or for data-driven purposes where a scenario is modeled using data alone.

However, with recent advances in sensor and communication technologies, the generation of data about our surrounding environment and ourselves is explosively growing in terms of *velocity*, *variety* and *volume*. This implies that there is more value hidden in the data and as the datasets are generally too large for a p-value to have meaning, predictive data-driven modeling uses other ways to fit a model such as machine learning.

Our proposal for evaluating the gains on energy consumption after an action implementation towards energy efficiency is to take a machine learning approach, where black box models are used in order to predict energy consumption, reducing the cost compared to traditional white box processes which require a level of building engineering expertise that limits scalability.

## 2. Related work

Most of the building energy systems are complex nonlinear systems, which are strongly influenced by weather conditions, building operating modes, and occupant schedules.

Three general categories of building energy forecasting models have been reported in the literature which include white-box (physics-based), black-box (data-driven), and grey-box (combination of physics based and data-driven) modeling approaches [4].

- White-box models:

Building structure, systems and equipments need to be considered for this kind of models together with weather conditions. The firsts are usually obtained from design plans, manufacture catalogues or need to be measured in place.

There exist a lot of mature white box simulation engines, that through the combination of mathematical equations simulate the building operation and calculate its energy consumption. Very well-known engines such as EnergyPlus [5] and TRNSYS [6] have been widely used to analyze energy consumption and determine building control and operation scheme [7].

Even though these elaborate simulation tools are effective and accurate, they require detailed information and parameters of buildings, energy systems and outside weather conditions. These parameters, however, are always difficult to obtain, and sometimes they might not be available.

- Black-box models:

Black-box models are also known as solely data-driven model. In this case, statistical models are directly applied to capture the relationship between building energy consumption and the inputs: operation and weather data. This type of models need baseline measurements over a certain period of time.

Regression can be used as a data-driven model, however, it is highly more interpretable than machine learning approaches. Machine learning systems figure out how to solve problems with minimal human guidance and once a machine learning algorithm is trained, it can be difficult to understand

why it gives a particular response to a set of data inputs. The adaptability of the machine learning models through a self-tuning process, which is different from mathematical models such as regression models, makes accurate decisions without outside expert intervention when unusual perturbations, disturbances, and/or changes in building background conditions occur.

Several data-based modeling techniques have been used for EM&V, including multiple linear regression [8], Gaussian process modeling [3]. In the case of machine learning techniques such as neural networks, support vector machines and their combination [9] and fuzzy logic models [10] are some examples.

- Grey-box models:

Grey box models are hybrid models that use simplified physical descriptions to simulate the behavior of building energy systems. In cases where limited amounts of data are available and the information about the building architecture is partially known, grey models are suitable alternatives for the prediction of electricity consumption [11].

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Inputs

Energy forecasting studies that use machine learning are usually intended to predict consumption a priori in order to manage and store the suitable amount of energy, taking into consideration the market prizes and also the necessities of the buildings. However, our approach is different in the sense that our goal is to quantify the energy savings relative to a baseline period due to certain experiment related to efficiency improvement.

This translates into a difference in the inputs that are available for being used. In other scenarios, data concerning energy consumption in previous hours and days is very useful because it is evidently highly correlated with the later consumption [12]. However, we should not use such data since the consumption is altered by the experiment.

On the other side, in other scenarios environmental data is not available yet (it is the future) and predictions have to be used. When applying prediction for M&V, environmental and occupation variables are usually available and it is not necessary to predict them. The most commonly used weather information is outdoor dry-bulb air temperature.

#### 3.2. Modeling

Our interest lies on weekly quantification of the energy savings. However, daily dynamics are useful since there are patterns that can be found depending on the day of the week. In order to do so, we predict daily energy consumption and then compute the metrics in a aggregated way so that the global quantification is done weekly.

Daily aggregate consumption is used as output and we try to capture the relationship between the whole day temperature and the consumption by relating the time series composed by every hours' mean temperature and the daily consumption.

Then, we can use several machine learning models in order to asses which is the best one for our scenarios. The models are generated following the next steps [? ]:

- Clean and transform the data: selecting predictive variables such as temperature and day type, deleting outliers
- Aggregate: compute daily consumption, create the time series with the input variables and represent the series in a lower dimension. That is, apply hourly average or other representation and feature selection methods in order to serve as inputs of our models.
- Divide the dataset into train (75 %) and test (25 %)
- Validation method: 10-fold cross validation and 5 repetitions over the training data set in order to find the hyperparameters of each machine learning algorithm
- Evaluate: apply the algorithm to the test dataset in order to obtain the metric for the model

### 3.3. Model Accuracy Metrics

To assess model accuracy, this work uses two metrics: the mean absolute percentage of error (MAPE) and the coefficient of variation of the room mean squared error (CVRMSE). The MAPE metric has been used in a wide number of electricity prediction studies [13, 14]. It expresses the average absolute error as a percentage and is calculated as follows:

$$MAPE = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{|y_i - \bar{y}_i|}{y_i} \times 100,$$

where  $y_i$  is the real consumption,  $\bar{y}_i$  is the predicted consumption and  $n$  is the number of observations.

Whereas the CVRMSE has often been used in energy prediction studies [15]. It evaluates how much error varies with respect to the actual consumption mean and is calculated as follows:

$$CVRMSE = \frac{\sqrt{\frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y}_i)^2}}{\bar{y}} \times 100,$$

### 3.4. Savings Metrics

To determine energy savings and uncertainty levels from energy efficiency measures, the IPMVP [13] and ASHRAEs Guideline 14 [2] provide three methods. The one that is suitable for our approach is whole-building metering, since it compares the total energy demand or cost during pre-experiment and post-experiments periods.

How to assess the accuracy and usefulness of whole-building energy models by testing predictions of baseline energy use against actual energy use being the objective to quantify and minimize the uncertainty in reported whole-building savings, which depends on baseline model effectiveness, building predictability, and depth of savings being measured [16].

The predictive baseline models have as an output the metered pre-experiment energy use  $energy_{pre}$  and uses the predictors such as environmental conditions inputs  $inputs_{pre}$  as inputs of the model. Therefore, the error in reported savings is proportional to the error in the baseline model forecasts.

## 4. Use case

The reference building in which the proposed procedure has been carried out to generate accurate building models is the Chemistry Faculty of the University of Murcia.

The data that is used in order to build and train our baseline is 1 year data, from February 2016 to February 2017.

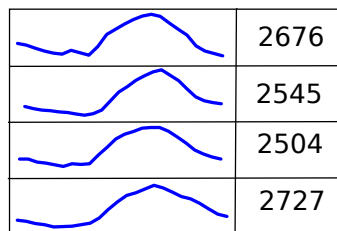


Fig. 1. Daily temperature time series input and consumption output

We have created a methodology with high versatility with respect to the input data, that is, it allows the addition of variables with minimal effort. In a constructive way, we start by relating the 24 temperature values of each day with the energy consumption of the building (see Fig. 1).

Having introduced the daily temperature time series, we consider that the addition of a categorical variable indicating season is irrelevant. However, the subject building has several features that are typical of

educational buildings: the load on weekends is substantially lower than the load on weekday and there are also differences between the day of the week (mainly Fridays). In those terms, we use analysis of variance (ANOVA) in order to determine whether there exist differences between the consumption of the different days of the week ( $p\text{-value} = 0.001 < 0.05$ ). In a posthoc test, the conclusion is that we can consider that Fridays have a different behaviour than the rest of the days, due to a diminishment on occupation. That way, we can add a dichotomous variable that indicates the kind of the of the week. Weekends and holidays consumption is estimated with the mean of the previous weekends and holidays.

		Models		
		SVM	RF	XGB
Daily	CVRMSE	12.4	9	11
	MAPE	7.2	6	7.3
Weekly	CVRMSE	6.4	5	6.2
	MAPE	5.2	4.5	5.5

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