

# Deloitte Advertising

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# 1 Introduction

Data regarding the behaviour of customer on the e-commerce website of the company Alpha has been collected across three different cities: Milan, Rome, Naples. The latter are considered as broadly representative of the Italian market in the three main geographical areas (respectively North, Center, South).

The objective of the analysis is to build a significant time-series model which will determine, as a result, the impact (causal effect) of the advertising campaign launched by company Alpha on perfume's sales. In detail, the advertisement was conducted from December 3rd 2019 to December 24th of the same year.

## 2 Data description

The dataset used in the analysis has been obtained by merging the two assigned datasets: "Sales", and "Web Traffic". The resulting dataframe is composed of 1461 observations, and 7 variables (1 categorical, and 6 numeric, the target variable is included).

The variables are: **city** (describes the three cities in which the data of customers has been extracted. Those are: Milan, Rome, Naples) **day** (represents the date for each customer activity on the website. This variable ranges from the 15th of October 2018 to the 13th of February 2020); **visits** (number of visits to the ecommerce website); **conversion rate** (ecommerce conversion rate, computed as the fraction of website visitors that finalized an online purchase of the products); **average spend** (average expenditure (EUR) of visitors who finalized an online purchase); **sales** (identifies the sales finalized by customers and has been computed by multiplying visits with conversion rate); **total spending** (indicates the total spending (EUR) of customers, and has been derived by multiplying average spend with sales).

## 3 Data visualisation

A Data visualization analysis has been performed in order to obtain deeper insights of the dataset. In fact, comparing the number of visits to the ecommerce website in the three regional areas during 2018 and 2019 (Appendix 7.1, graph 1-2) led to interesting considerations: the visits experienced an increase from 2018 to 2019 in all the cities. In detail, the city with the highest number of visits to the website both in 2018 and 2019 is Milan. Contrary, the city with the lowest number of visits throughout both the years is Rome.

Moreover, the graphical representation of the conversion rate pointed out some differences in the customers' purchase behaviour across the three cities throughout 2018 and 2019. In 2018 (Appendix 7.1, graph 3), the website visitors that finalized an higher number of online purchases are located in Rome; whereas the lower conversion rate is registered in Naples. In 2019 (Appendix 7.1, graph 4), the highest conversion rate is equal across the three cities; whereas the website visitors that finalized the lowest number of online purchases are located in Naples. Indeed, it can be deduced from the graphs that from 2018 to 2019 the purchase behaviour of the customers changed across the three cities, but Naples remained the one with the lower conversion rate throughout the two years.

Furthermore, the average spending habits of the customers also have mutated during the two years: in 2018 (Appendix 7.1, graph 5) the customers tended to spend less on average (around 20/50) whereas in 2019 (Appendix 7.1, graph 6) the customers slightly increased their average spending

(around 30/60).

The previous trend is reflected also in the total spending of the customers throughout the two periods (Appendix 7.1, graph 7-8): the total spending increased from 2018 to 2019 across the three cities. Throughout 2018 and 2019, Rome is the city where customers totally have spent less; in Naples the spending pattern is similar to the one in Rome but customers tend to totally spend slightly more, whereas in Milan the total spending of the customers is much higher compared to the other two cities.

The heatmap (Appendix 7.1, graph 9) has been useful to display the correlation (that ranges from -1 to 1) between the variables of the dataset. It resulted that : the **sales** show a 0.6 correlation with the conversion rate, a 0.7 correlation with the total spending, and a 0.8 correlation with the number of website visits. The **average spending** is not correlated to the sales, but has a 0.7 correlation with the total spending. Interestingly, the **web site visits** show a correlation of 0.9 with the variable total spending, a slight uncorrelation with the conversion rate of -0.1. Lastly it emerged that the **total spending** and the conversion rate are slightly uncorrelated (-0.2).

## 4 Data analysis

### 4.1 Data Manipulation

The second part of the analysis focused on data manipulation with the aim of maximising the performance of the data for later use. For this purpose, the two original datasets "Sales" and "Web Traffic" have been merged. The merged dataset was then used to compute two key features in the analysis : the variables "sales" and "total spending". Subsequently, in order to get a clearer insight of possible seasonality or trend in the data, a function to transform the daily data into weekly data was specified. This process resulted in a new dataframe containing the weekly data that ranges from the 1st of December 2018 to the 31st of January 2020 of the following variables: sales, conversion rate and website visits. A graph showing the sales (Appendix 7.2) in the three different cities, during the above cited period was then displayed: the graph shows that in December 2018 the sales were comparatively high in all the areas with a subsequent fall in January of 2019. Interestingly, December 2019 shows the same pattern, but with overall higher sales. Moreover, the norther region registered the highest number of sales, whereas the central region the lowest.

#### 4.1.1 Modeling

This phase of the analysis aimed at building a model to quantify the impact of the advertising campaign, launched by company Alpha during December 2019, on sales by analyzing visits to its website and online purchases. Since the data refers to three different Italian cities which represent the three main geographical areas (North, Center, South) of the Italian market; a model for each city was built with the objective of inspecting the trend of the perfume's sales. The procedure followed throughout the building of the model for each city has been the same.

#### 4.1.2 Seasonality

A time series is considered to be a sum or combination of the following components: trend, seasonality, and residual. The detection of the seasonal component, in this study, has been handled by employing an univariate time series (only the variable sales was under investigation) for each city. The

decomposition graphs of the three cities (Appendix 7.3) outlined a clear weekly seasonal pattern in the sales: changes in data values are repeated regularly over the same time period (increases and decreases). Moreover, the ACF was graphically represented (Appendix 7.3). Analyzing the autocorrelation function enabled to identify seasonality in time series data. From the ACF, it is evident that the city with the highest number of lags (higher sales' seasonal component) is Naples, followed by Rome and Milan.

#### 4.1.3 Multivariate Time series

The model employed for the following study is a Vector Autoregression model (VAR). The latter is a statistical model used to capture the relationship between multiple quantities as they change over time. The variables employed to build the model for each city are: sales, website visits and the conversion rate. In order to carry out a multivariate time series analysis, the dataset was splitted in two parts: the train set containing observations from December 2018 to December 2019, and the test set which was created including only the last part of the dataset (January 2020). At this point, a time series for each city was generated using the train set (Appendix 7.4). In the VAR(p) model each variable is a linear function of past lags of itself and past lags of the other variables. The VAR model is a multi-equation system where all the variables are treated as endogenous (dependent). There is one equation for each variable as dependent variable. In its reduced form, the right-hand side of each equation includes lagged values of all dependent variables in the system.

$$y_t = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 y_{t-1} + \beta_2 y_{t-2} + \dots + \beta_p y_{t-p} + \epsilon_t$$

where:

yt: an (nx1) stationary vector of time series variables(sales, convrate, visits)

alpha: an (nx1) vector of intercepts

beta: (nxn) parameters matrix (coefficient matrices)

epsilon: an (nx1) vector of unobservable (zero mean error term, white noise)

In this case, the VAR model general equations (for each city) are as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} sales_{t,1} &= \alpha_1 + \beta_{11}convrate_{t-1,1} + \beta_{12}visits_{t-1,2} + \beta_{13}sales_{t-1,3} + \epsilon_{t,1} \\ convrate_{t,2} &= \alpha_2 + \beta_{21}convrate_{t-1,1} + \beta_{22}visits_{t-1,2} + \beta_{23}sales_{t-1,3} + \epsilon_{t,2} \\ visits_{t,3} &= \alpha_3 + \beta_{31}convrate_{t-1,1} + \beta_{32}visits_{t-1,2} + \beta_{33}sales_{t-1,3} + \epsilon_{t,3} \end{aligned}$$

#### 4.1.4 ADF test and differencing

Subsequently, an Augmented Dickey Fuller Test was performed in order to check for stationarity of the time series. The statistical properties of a stationary time series such as mean, variance, and auto-correlation are constant over time, resulting into more accurate outcomes when performing predictions.

Since all the three models presented a p-value greater than 0.05 (implying non-stationarity), differencing was performed. The latter was employed in order to stabilise the mean of the time series, therefore eliminating trend and seasonality. One order of differencing was sufficient to reduce the p-values, making the series stationary (Appendix 7.5).

#### 4.1.5 Lag order identification and fit of the model with VAR

In order to fit the three models, lag order identification was performed. According to the results, a max lag of 10 was considered the one to minimize the AIC for all the three models.

Based on these results, the Autoregressive Vectorial models were fitted.

Among all the metrics used to evaluate the accuracy of a fitted model, the MASE (Mean Absolute Scaled Error) was analysed in this case for each of the three models for mainly three reasons:

- MASE is independent of the scale of the forecast since it is defined using ratio of errors in the forecast. This means MASE values will be similar if we are forecasting high valued time series;
- MASE gives an indication of effectiveness of forecasting algorithm with respect to a naïve forecast. If MASE is less than 1, it means that the forecast is better than the naïve method on training data. If it is more than 1, it means that the forecast method is worse than the forecast using the naïve forecasting approach;
- Another advantage of MASE is that it can be used both on a single series, or as a tool to compare multiple series.

By comparing and analysing the accuracy of the three models it emerges that the MASE is less than 1, specifically: in Milan's model is 0.632, in Rome is 0.547 and in Naples is 0.542. It can be concluded that the forecast is better than the naïve method on training data.

For what concerns the adjusted  $R^2$  for each equation of the three models, the values are the following: In Milan's model: adjusted  $R^2$  of sales is equal to 0.66, of the conversion rate is 0.67 and of visits is 0.61. In Naples's model: adjusted  $R^2$  of sales is equal to 0.71, of the conversion rate is 0.76 and of visits is 0.67. In Rome's model: adjusted  $R^2$  of sales is equal to 0.72, of the conversion rate is 0.79 and of visits is 0.66.

#### 4.1.6 Granger Causality Test and Impulse response function

At this point, causality has been checked through the Granger Causality Test. The latter is a crucial statistical hypothesis test used for determining whether a predictor in the time series is relevant, and indeed useful for forecasting another one.

In the Granger test the Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) denies the existence of causality between the endogenous variables under analysis. In this case, since the p-values are all significant and below the threshold of 0.05, indicating strong evidence against the null hypothesis, it can be deducted that there is, indeed, Granger causality.

This means that one time series "Granger-causes" the other; suggesting that even though it still can not be affirmed that one time series exactly causes the other, they can certainly be used to make accurate predictions of each other. This in practice can be translated in: if "visits" Granger-cause sales and convrate, then past values of visits should contain information to predict sales and conversion rate above and beyond the information contained in past values of sales and conversion rate alone.

The following step focused on the analysis of the Impulse Response Function's (IRF) graphs. The latter was used to describe the evolution of the models' variables in reaction to a shock in one or more of the other variables. In this case, the three regions under analysis showed different results. Specifically:

the response of **sales** to a shock in website visits in Milan and Rome is significant at time 2,4 and 6;

whereas in Naples it is significant only at time zero and six (graph 13). As a matter of facts, Naples showed a slightly higher value in the Granger-causality test if compared to the other variables. The response of **sales** to a shock in the conversion rate in Milan showed significant results in a 95% confidence interval at time 3,4,7 and 8 with a similar trend recorded in Naples; whereas in Rome it is significant only at time 8 (Appendix 7.6).

#### 4.1.7 Variance Decomposition

The forecast error variance decomposition is used to analyse the contribution of one variable to the h-step forecast error variance of the other endogenous variables present in the model.

This information is useful to understand in the forecast how much of the prediction of one variable depends on the others, and how much it depends on itself. For the current model, a step- forecast of five months was used. The result is a matrix of values in which:

In all the three cities (Appendix 7.7) the variable **sales** depends for the first month entirely on itself. This trend remains overall the same in the following months.

Among the three variables, the one showing most interesting results is **visits**. The latter in Milan and Naples shows an average composition of 50% on the variable sales in the first month. In Rome this trend is more evident: in the same period, the visits depend for 81% on the sales.

The variable **conversion rate** shows in Milan and Naples a high dependency on the sales (overall 80%). Whereas, in Rome this trend decreases with a dependency of 50% on the sales and 40% on itself.

## 4.2 Model validation

Finally, the three fitted models has been employed to carry out forecasting for the following 5 months. For each city, the forecast for variable sales, convrate and visits are represented in the following plot (Appendix 7.8). All the forecast values fall under a 95% confidence interval. Specifically, in Milan, all the three variables remain constant throughout the first period with a subsequent sharp drop in two intervals to then increase again in the last forecasted period.

For what concerns Naples, the variables tend to have a decreasing trend in the forecasted values. In detail, by comparing the the data regarding Milan and Naples results that (negative amount of values being the same in the five periods), the positive values in Naples are comparatively lower.

The forecasted results for Rome show overall a lower amount of negative values in the 5 steps; but also the lowest amounts of sales, conversion rate, and visits recorded when compared to the other two cities.

## 5 Results and Conclusions

At this point, the findings can be delineated based on the results obtained from the analysis. Firstly, the year 2018 was included in the analysis in order to analyse the counterfactual. The latter enables to estimate advertising effectiveness and indeed to get precise insights on what would have happened without the ad exposures. Consequently, weekly seasonality was removed from the training data (2018-2020). This step was performed because data at hand was generated in periods when the purchase probability is higher; making it harder to observe causal relationship between the ad campaigns and the variables sales, visits and conversion rate.

Moreover, proving causality was one of the main aims of this study. Granger-causality test showed

that the variables sales, visits and conversion rate for each city have a causal relationship: indeed, not only they depend on themselves, but also on the other variables.

Aside the analysis on the counterfactual, forecast on the three different models was conducted with the objective of investigating also the future trends of the variables. From that, a significant change in the future trend of the three variables was not detected.

In conclusion, by comparing the counterfactual, December 2018, (period without the ad campaign) and December 2019 (period in which the ad campaign was launched), it resulted that there has not been a significant increase in the sales, visits and conversion rate in all the three cities from December 2018 to December 2019. This outcome is reflected also in the variables' values obtained from the forecast: the future predicted values show a trend similar to the one of the periods under analysis. These findings lead to the conclusion that launching the ad campaign in December 2019 was not significantly effective.

#### **5.0.1 Possible Future Strategies**

Despite the ad campaign was found to not have a significant impact on the sales, different customers' behaviour emerged from the analysis. In detail, the Northern region presents overall higher values in the sales, visits and conversion rate with respect to the Central and Southern regions. Specifically, the region with the lowest scores recorded in all the features is the Center of Italy .

Indeed, from a business perspective the company Alpha might take the following potential actions:

- the company could exploit its already established presence in the Northern area, and the potential of the latter by concentrating future investments in this region;
- the company could decide to focus on the Central and Southern geographical areas of Italy, where all the variables scored overall lower values. This action might stimulate customers to make more purchases, increasing the presence of the company in this region.

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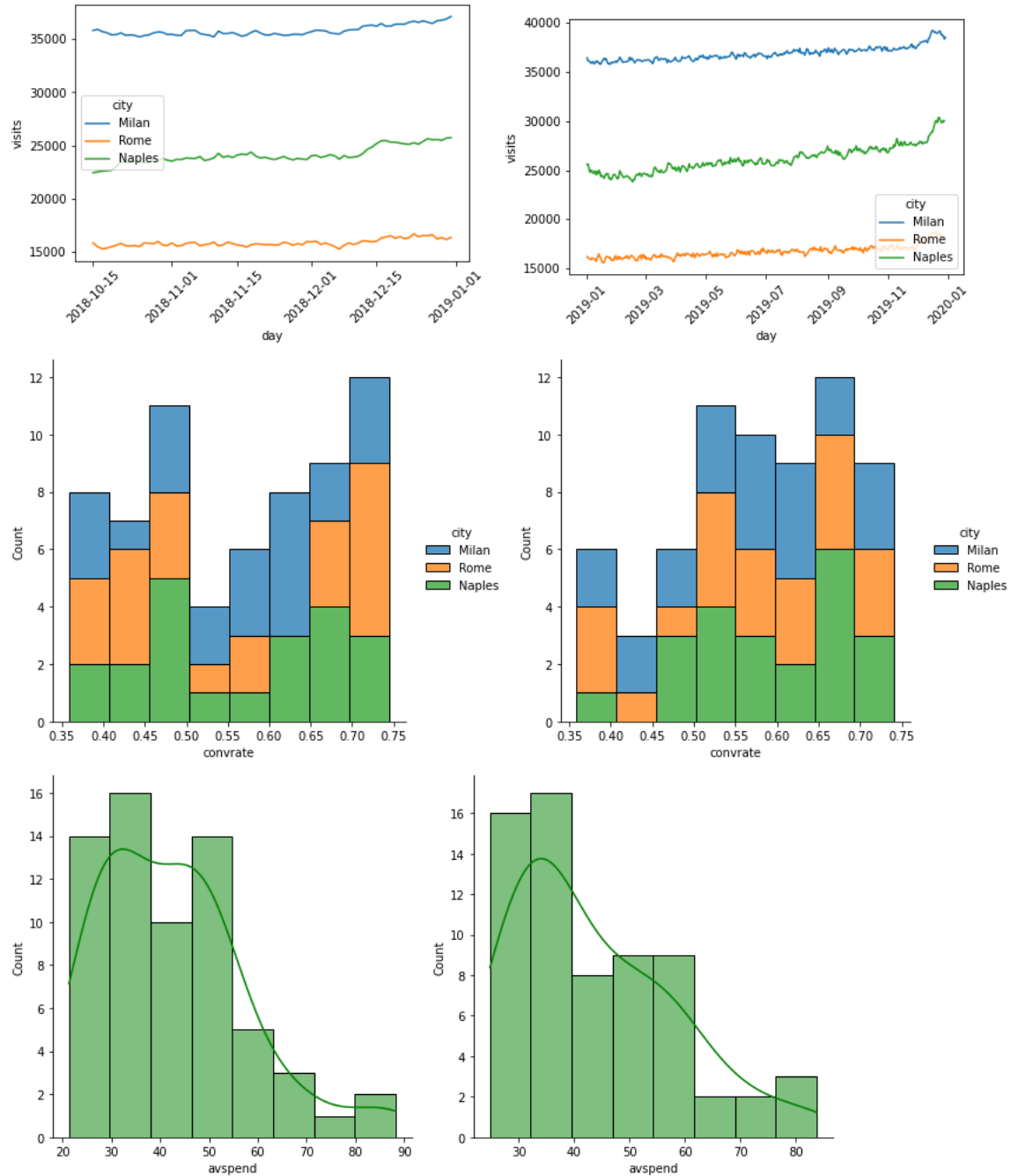
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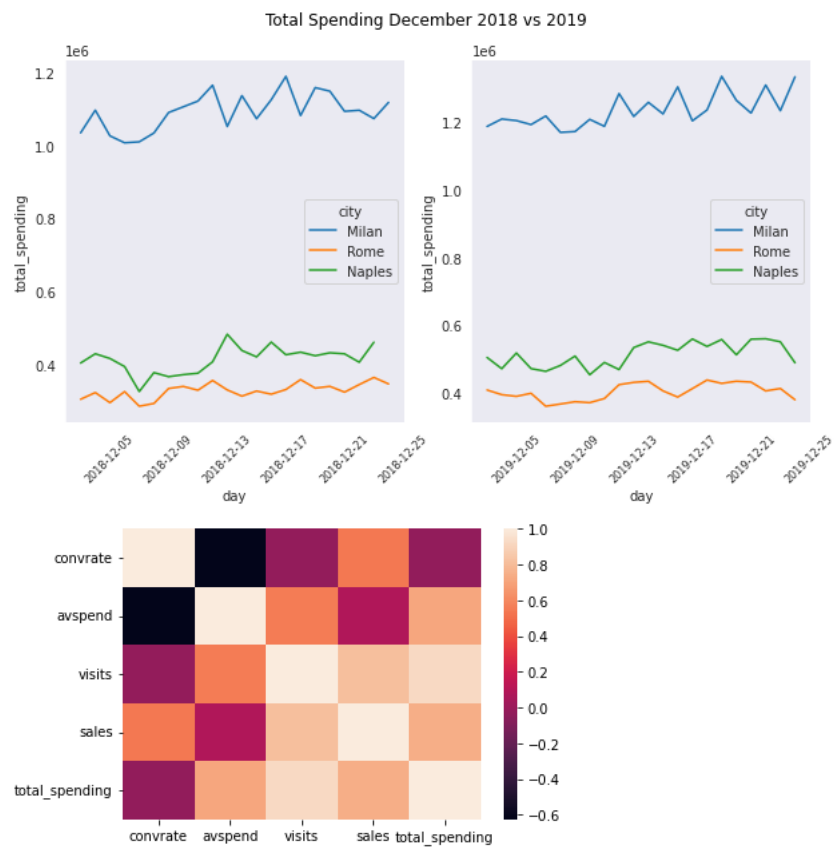
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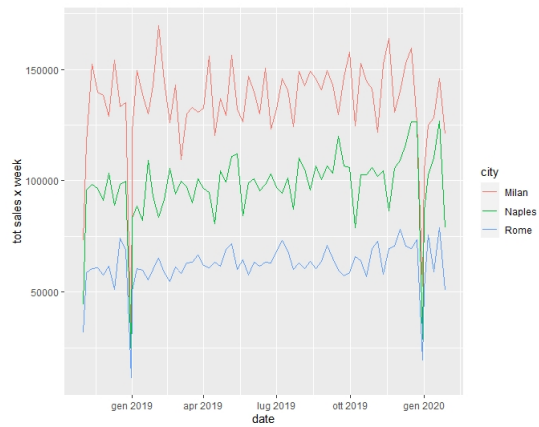
## 7 Appendix

### 7.1 Data Visualisation

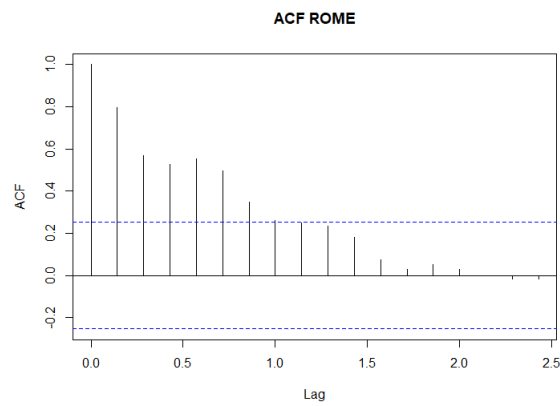
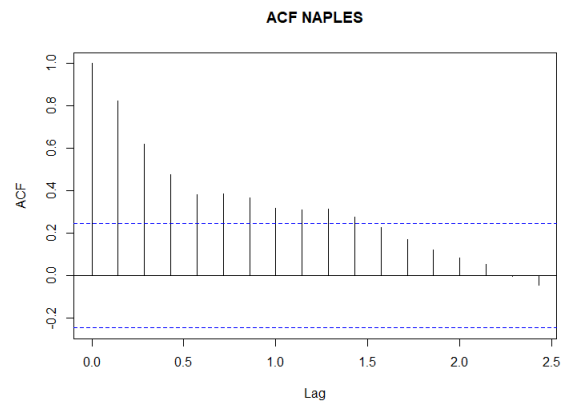
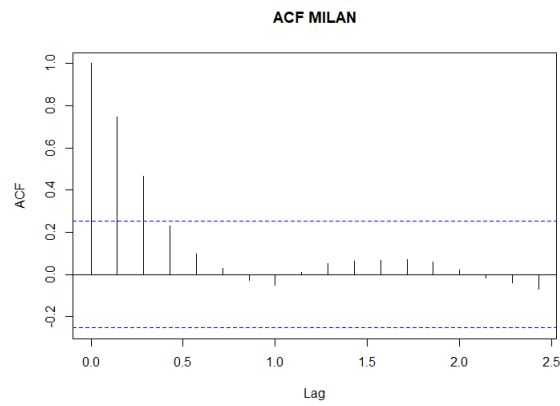
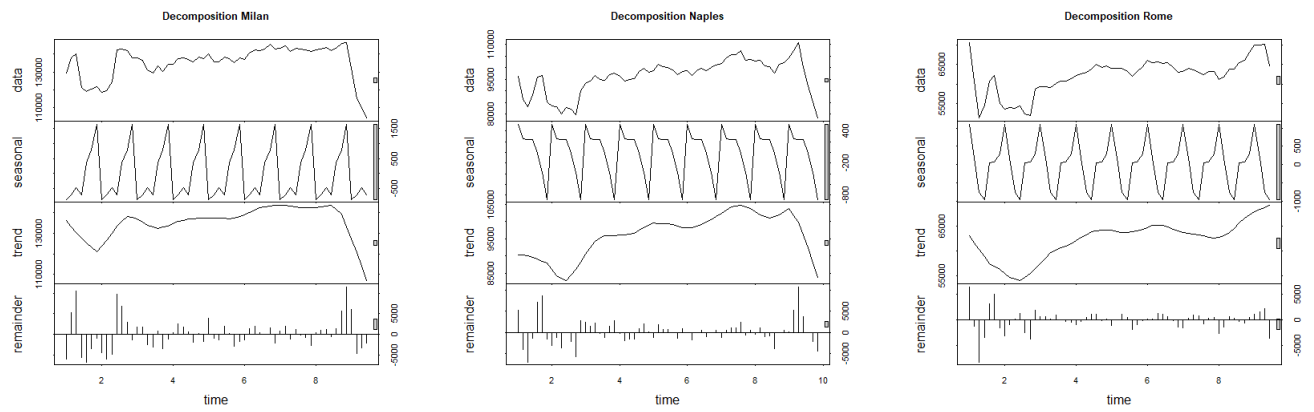




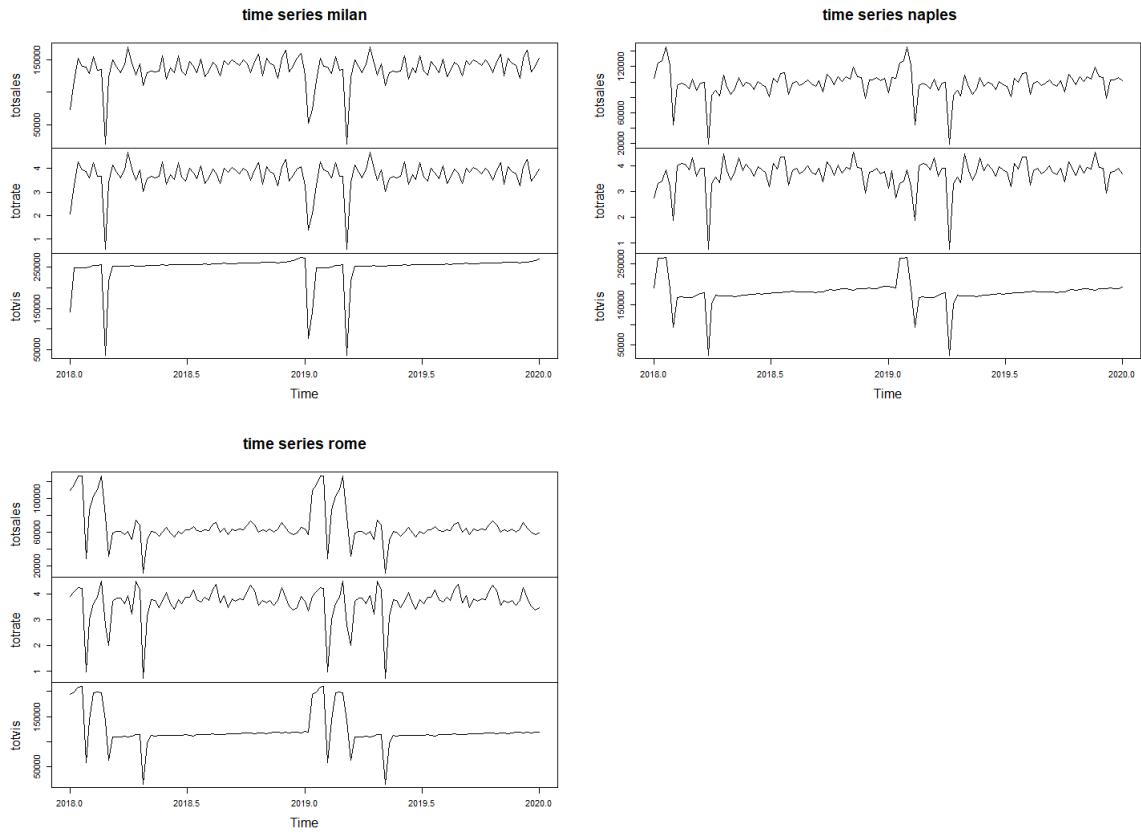
## 7.2 Data Manipulation



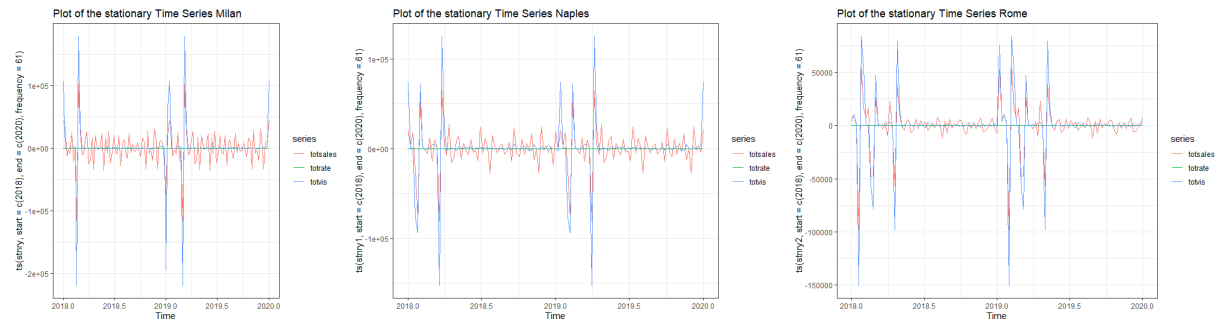
## 7.3 Seasonality



## 7.4 Multivariate Time Series

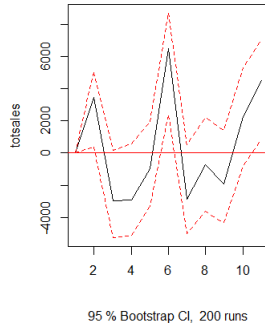


## 7.5 ADF test and differencing

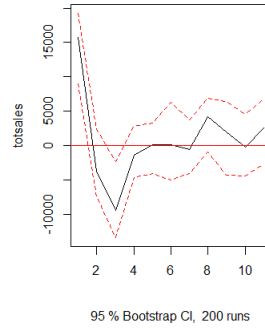


## 7.6 Granger Causality Test and Impulse Response Function

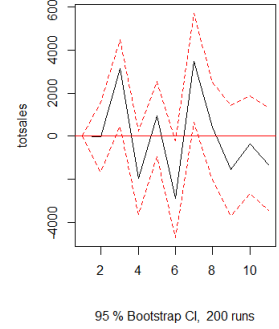
response of sales to visits Milan



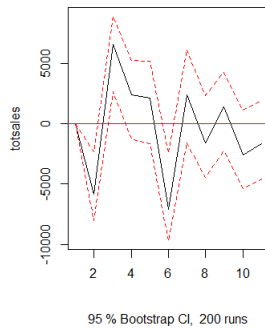
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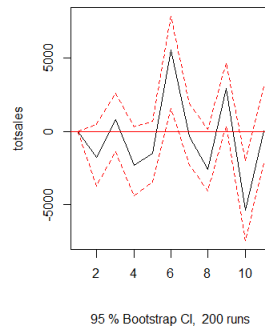
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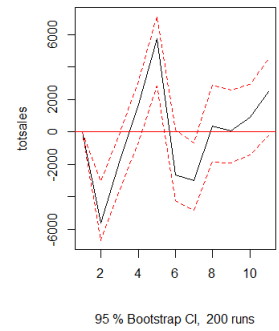
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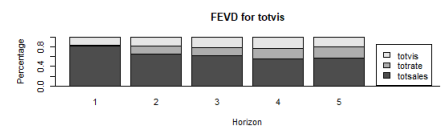
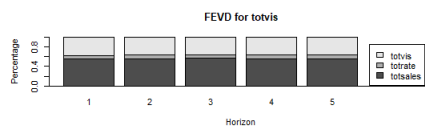
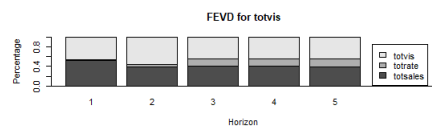
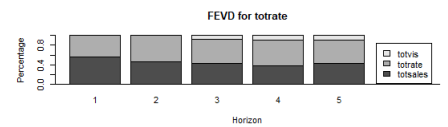
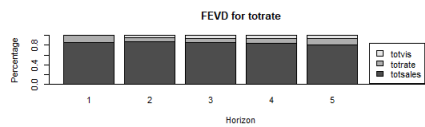
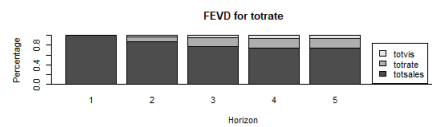
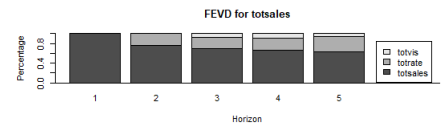
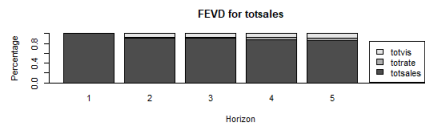
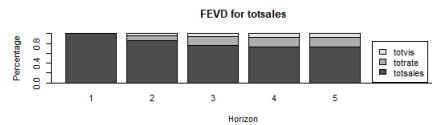
response of sales to convrte Naples



response of sales to convrte Rome



## 7.7 Variance Decomposition: graphs for Milan, Naples and Rome



## 7.8 Model validation: graphs for Milan, Naples and Rome

