

MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT PLAN

ELECTRICITY CONSUMPTION FORECASTING USING AN EXPLAINABLE AI FRAMEWORK

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the electricity market has been affected by large variations in price and periodically very high electricity prices. This has increased the need for customers to understand and influence their electricity consumption and future electricity costs. To address this need, Umeå Energi has worked on developing and improving their interfaces for customers, for example by developing an application for private customers. Customers wish to, before the invoice arrives, receive an estimation of the electricity cost. A first step towards a cost forecast is forecasting the electricity consumption. Currently, Umeå Energi has developed a linear regression model to forecast the consumption for the current month. The model is based on historical consumption and temperature, aggregated by month. For certain customer groups, Umeå Energi has access to high definition measurement data where electricity consumption is registered on a 15-minute level, which creates opportunities for more advanced modeling. There may also be other factors, apart from historical consumption, that affect the electricity consumption, for example weather data, calendar information (holidays etc.), and energy prices.

The goal with this Master's thesis is to develop and evaluate forecasting models that show the predicted energy consumption for the current month. Previous research has identified several models that are able to accurately predict energy consumption for different time intervals, utilizing various combinations of data sources [1, 2]. In recent years, increasing interest has been shown for Machine Learning (ML) solutions to energy consumption forecasting, as well as for Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) [3]. This study will address these topics by using XAI to evaluate the contributions of different variables to the energy forecast. Additionally, efforts will be

made to continuously update and improve the forecast during the month, as actual observed values of electricity consumption become available.

2 Problem Formulation

This project aims solve the problem of accurately predicting customers' monthly electricity consumption based on consumption data and external data sources. The main focus of the project will be to quantify and explain the contribution of each variable in the forecast. Several research questions are posed in the following priority order:

1. Which external sources of data contribute to the accuracy of the forecast, and which sources provide little to no improvement?
2. How can the accuracy of the monthly forecasts be increased as actual observed values become available?
3. What type of forecasting model gives the best results for predicting electricity usage of the current month?

3 Method

To answer the research questions, the following main steps will be performed:

- **Literature study:** Review existing work in the field of electricity consumption forecasting, in order to gain valuable theoretical background and insights on suitable ML models and XAI techniques.
- **Data preparation:** Retrieve 15-minute level electricity consumption data, as well as relevant external data sources (such as weather data, calendar data, and electricity prices). Perform data analysis and pre-processing.
- **Primary model implementation:** Choose an ML/DL model (e.g. ANN, SVM, LSTM) that will be the main focus of the thesis, and implement a forecasting model based on the consumption data and the external sources.
- **Evaluation of data sources:** Analyze and evaluate how the different data sources contribute to the accuracy of the forecasts using Explainable AI. The goal is to identify data sources that add significant value, and sources that are not able to motivate the increased complexity.
- **Continuous forecast updates:** Develop a method for improving the forecasts during the current month by continuously replacing predicted values with actual observations.

- **Integration perspectives:** Develop a prototype that demonstrates how the forecasting models can be integrated into Umeå Energi’s existing environments (Microsoft SQL Server). The prototype includes reading of input data from database tables, execution of forecasting models in Python, and storing of results.
- **Quality assurance:** Develop a suggestion on how to continuously follow up the accuracy of the models after implementing them in production.

In case there is time, more than one model will be implemented (or possibly ensemble learning [4]) in order to allow more extensive comparisons and accuracy improvements. Reviewing of literature will be used to identify relevant models.

3.1 Evaluation Methods

Evaluation will mainly be performed on the data sources’ contributions, the forecast improvement over time, and in case of time, the different models’ performance. As a baseline comparison, an existing linear regression electricity consumption model (based on historical monthly consumption and temperature data) will be utilized. XAI methods such as feature importance and Shapley values will be used to evaluate the contributions of the different data sources. Different combinations of data sources may also be evaluated. All results will be evaluated for statistical significance.

4 Literature

Two comprehensive reviews on electricity consumption forecasting have been identified:

- An extensive review and comparison of both statistical and ML/DL techniques for forecasting is found in [1]. They also review combinations of different techniques, i.e. hybrid models. Claims that ANN has more advantages than statistical models, and has better performance for nonlinear problems. Highlights that hybrid models can be beneficial to capture complexities in building energy and operational data.
- Another review of statistical, AI, and hybrid methods for forecasting is found in [2]. They also highlight the strength in AI models for dealing with nonlinear patterns. Claims that hybrids between AI and Swarm Intelligence (SI) methods show potential for increased accuracy. Provides a clear overview of different studies regarding prediction time intervals, included features, building types etc.

Papers where experiments have been performed:

- Support Vector Machine (SVM) for forecasting energy consumption: [5].
- Monthly electricity consumption forecasting based on decomposition methods and ARIMA: [6].
- Forecasting cooling energy using ANN (for three university buildings, weekly/monthly): [7].
- Forecasting high voltage consumers' electricity consumption using LSTM, GRU, TCN: [8].

Papers specifically on XAI and energy consumption forecasting:

- Forecasted hourly energy consumption for the steel sector using three different LSTM models [9]. Used SHAP to interpret the decision-making, and found that leading current reactive power and the number of seconds from midnight contributed significantly to the model output.
- Ensemble learning for electricity consumption forecasting. Evaluated several decision tree-based ensemble learning techniques using SHAP [10]. Found that temperature-humidity index and wind chill temperature has a greater impact on short-term forecasts than more traditional parameters such as temperature. Released the code at https://github.com/sodayeong/PLOS-ONE_Github.
- Predicted electricity consumption for residential buildings based on hourly data with information about consumption for different household areas (such as kitchen and appliances) [3]. Used LSTM as prediction model, and LIME and SHAP to provide comprehensible explanations of the predictions.
- Proposed a methodology for selecting input variables for energy consumption prediction using XAI (SHAP) [11]. Used Extreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost), Support Vector Regression (SVR), Light Gradient Boosting Model (LightGBM), and LSTM for prediction. Found that variables with strong impact on the forecast include year, hour, energy consumption difference, temperature, and surface-temperature.

5 Implementation

The implementation of the project consists of one or several models for predicting electricity consumption, as well as integration of resulting model

predictions in the existing Umeå Energi database. Part of the implementation is also to use Explainable AI methods to evaluate the contributions of each variable in the prediction. The implementation will be performed on an Umeå Energi computer with access to their database holding electricity consumption data. Python and standard ML/DL/XAI libraries will be used for the model implementation and variable interpretation. The integration part of the project will utilize SQL.

6 Work Structure and Time Plan

The work structure of the project will follow agile principles, in order to allow flexibility and adjustments of plans as the project develops. Writing the paper will be performed continuously throughout the project. Peer review sessions will be organized with other students taking the course, to get more feedback in addition to the feedback from supervisors. A time plan in form of a GANTT chart can be found via this link: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/10SVX8NpNxUo1fw0eReo7ZZRdi8UZkltd-iCjr12E06o/edit?usp=sharing>. Week 17 has been left intentionally blank to make time for catching up in any area needed, but also because I will be quite busy outside the thesis that week.

7 Risk Analysis

Below follows a list of potential risks for the project, and what can be done to circumvent them.

- **Risk 1: Difficulties with finding data sources.** Possibly the largest risk for the project is the availability of high-quality external data sources for the forecasts. Previous studies have, apart from historical electricity consumption, focused on numerous variables, often pertaining to weather and building specific factors. The historical consumption data will in this project be provided by Umeå Energi, but retrieval of external parameters relies on open APIs. To begin with, two external APIs have been identified: SMHI¹ which provides both historical and forecasted weather data, and Dagsmart² which provides Swedish calendar information. Ideally, other variables will be retrieved from other open APIs, but availability will be determined during the data preparation phase of the project.
- **Risk 2: Problems with assembling training data.** Since several data sources will be used, there may be difficulties in assembling all

¹SMHI Open APIs: <https://opendata.smhi.se>

²Dagsmart API: <https://dagsmart.se/api/>

data into a format that is useable with the prediction model(s). If this turns out to be the case, the methodologies of similar experiments will be surveyed further to find out how they solved the problem.

- **Risk 3: Limited time.** The limited time frame of the project means that all project goals may not be fulfilled. To address this, the research questions have been ordered in priority, with the XAI part of the project being ranked highest. The other goals will be worked on in case of time. Writing the paper will be done continuously to avoid any big chunks of writing being left at the end of the project.

8 Supervision

8.1 UmU Supervision

Supervision with my internal supervisor will be arranged as needed, roughly once a week or once every two weeks. Email will be used to book time slots, and meetings can happen either in person on campus or digitally via zoom.

Table 1: Contact information for internal supervisor.

Name	Esteban Guerrero Rosero
Email	esteban.guerrero@umu.se

8.2 External Supervision

I will be spending most of my time at the Umeå Energi office, so arranging supervision with my external supervisor will be easy. If needed, I am also able to get help from other team members at Umeå Energi.

Table 2: Contact information for external supervisor.

Name	Elin Eriksson
Email	elin.eriksson@umeaenergi.se

9 Project Diary

The project diary can be found via this link: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1z1Nd_QyX17tCN-93EjTk_8BK8745s6sru_kyz7s-aGM/edit?usp=sharing.

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