



# Forecasting intermittent inventory demands: simple parametric methods vs. bootstrapping<sup>☆</sup>



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 1 October 2013

Received in revised form 1 February 2014

Accepted 1 February 2015

Available online 8 April 2015

### Keywords:

Inventory management

Operations forecasting

Time series methods

Intermittent demand

## ABSTRACT

Although intermittent demand items dominate service and repair parts inventories in many industries, research in forecasting such items has been limited. A critical research question is whether one should make point forecasts of the mean and variance of intermittent demand with a simple parametric method such as simple exponential smoothing or else employ some form of bootstrapping to simulate an entire distribution of demand during lead time. The aim of this work is to answer that question by evaluating the effects of forecasting on stock control performance in more than 7,000 demand series. Tradeoffs between inventory investment and customer service show that simple parametric methods perform well, and it is questionable whether bootstrapping is worth the added complexity.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The intermittent demand forecasting problem

Traditionally, the relevant literature treats inventory management and demand forecasting as independent problems. Most inventory papers ignore forecasting altogether and simply assume that the distribution of demand and all its parameters are known, while most forecasting papers do not evaluate the stock control consequences of employing different forecasting methods. The interactions between forecasting and stock control are analyzed in this paper for items with intermittent demand. Such demand series are characterized by zero demand occurrences interspersed by positive demands. The choice of forecasting method is shown to be an important determinant of the customer service that can be obtained from a given level of inventory investment.

Since the early work of Brown (1959), the problem of forecasting for fast moving inventory items has attracted an enormous body of

academic research. However, forecasting for items with intermittent demand has received far less attention, even though such items typically account for substantial proportions of stock value and revenues. Intermittent demand items dominate service and repair parts inventories in many industries (including the process industries, aerospace, automotive, IT and the military sector), and they may constitute up to 60% of total stock value (Johnston, Boylan, & Shale, 2003). A survey by Deloitte (2011) benchmarked the service businesses of many of the world's largest manufacturing companies with combined revenues reaching more than \$1.5 trillion; service operations accounted for an average of 26% of revenues. Thus small improvements in management of intermittent demand items may be translated to substantial cost savings; research in this area has direct relevance to a wide range of companies and industries.

In addition, intermittent items are at the greatest risk of obsolescence, and case studies have documented large proportions of dead stock in many different industrial contexts (Hinton, 1999; Molenaers, Baets, Pintelon, & Waeyenberg, 2010; Syntetos, Keyes & Babai, 2009). Improvements in forecasting may be translated to significant reductions in wastage or scrap with further environmental implications.

Intermittent demand series are difficult to forecast because they usually contain a (significant) proportion of zero values, with non-zero values mixed in randomly. When demand occurs the quantity may be highly variable (Cattani, Jacobs, & Schoenfelder, 2011). One critical research question is whether one should make point forecasts of the mean and variance of intermittent demand with a simple parametric method or else employ some form of bootstrapping to simulate an

<sup>☆</sup> The authors thank Ruud Teunter, University of Groningen, Nikos Kourentzas, Lancaster University, Thomas Willemain, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and Powell Robinson, University of Houston, for comments on earlier drafts of this paper. At least one of the authors has read each reference in this paper. We contacted Ruud Teunter and Thomas Willemain to ensure that our study summarizes their work accurately.

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entire distribution of demand during lead time. Is bootstrapping worth the added complexity? The aim of this study is to answer that question in an empirical investigation of forecasting more than 7,000 inventory demand series.

## 1.2. Research background

Two parametric methods, simple exponential smoothing (SES) and Croston's (1972) method with corrections by Rao (1973), are widely used to forecast intermittent demand. SES forecasts the mean level of demand for both non-zero and zero demand periods, treating them in the same way, while Croston makes separate forecasts of the mean level of non-zero demand and the mean inter-arrival time (time between demand occurrences). Croston assumes that the distribution of nonzero demand sizes is normal, the distribution of inter-arrival times is geometric, and that demand sizes and inter-arrival times are mutually independent. Shenstone and Hyndman (2005) challenge these assumptions and show that Croston's method is inconsistent with the properties of intermittent demand data. The primary problem is that Croston's method assumes stationarity, while any possible model underlying the method must be non-stationary. Furthermore, the underlying model must be defined on a continuous sample space that can take on either negative or positive demand values, something that is inconsistent with the reality that demand is always non-negative.

Despite its theoretical shortcomings, Croston's method has been successful in empirical research (see the review in Gardner, 2006) and is widely used in practice. Both Croston and SES are available in demand planning modules of component based enterprise and manufacturing solutions (e.g. Industrial and Financial Systems – IFS AB) and in integrated real-time sales and operations planning processes (e.g. SAP Advanced Planning and Optimisation – APO 4.0).

Many improvements to Croston's original method appear in the literature including Johnston and Boylan (1996), Snyder (2002), Syntetos and Boylan (2005), Shale, Boylan, and Johnston (2006), and Teunter, Syntetos, and Babai (2011). The Syntetos and Boylan method (known as the SBA method for Syntetos-Boylan approximation), is the only Croston improvement that has substantial empirical support. Although Croston claims that his method is unbiased, Syntetos and Boylan (2001) show that the opposite is true and present an improved method that corrects for bias (Syntetos & Boylan, 2005). The SBA method was tested by Eaves and Kingsman (2004) using a sample of more than 11,000 monthly repair parts demand series from Royal Air Force (RAF) inventories. The results varied somewhat depending on the degree of aggregation of the data (weekly, monthly, quarterly) and the type of demand pattern (ranging from smooth to highly intermittent). However, in general the SBA method was more accurate than SES and the original Croston method. Another study by Gutierrez, Solis, and Mukhopadhyay (2008) reaches similar conclusions. In the empirical study below, all three parametric alternatives are tested: SES, Croston's original method, and the SBA method.

Given the parametric point forecasts, a demand distribution is necessary to set inventory levels. Both the Poisson and Bernoulli processes fit demand arrivals, that is, the probability of demand occurring (Dunsmuir & Snyder, 1989; Eaves, 2002; Janssen, 1998; Willemain, Smart, Shockor, & DeSautels, 1994). Regarding the size of demand when it occurs, various suggestions have been made for distributions that are either monotonically decreasing or unimodal positively skewed. With Poisson or Bernoulli arrivals of demands and any distribution of demand sizes, the resulting distribution of total demand over a fixed lead time is compound Poisson or compound Bernoulli, respectively. Compound Poisson distributions are simpler and have empirical evidence in their support (e.g., Boylan & Syntetos, 2008). In this empirical study, demand is modeled with the Negative Binomial Distribution (NBD), which performed well in the empirical study by Snyder, Ord, and Beaumont (2012). The NBD is a compound distribution in which the

number of demands in each period is Poisson distributed, with random demand sizes governed by a logarithmic distribution.

As the data become more erratic, the true demand size distribution may not conform to any standard theoretical distribution, and it may be that non-parametric approaches (that do not rely upon any underlying distributional assumption) may improve stock control. Numerous bootstrapping methods are available to randomly sample (with or without replacement) observations from demand history to build a histogram of the lead-time demand distribution. Alternative bootstrapping methods are found in Efron (1979), Snyder (2002), Willemain, Smart, & Schwarz (2004, hereafter WSS), Porras and Dekker (2008), Teunter and Duncan (2009), Zhou and Viswanathan (2011), and Snyder et al. (2012). The most robust bootstrapping method appears to be that of WSS, a method patented earlier by Willemain and Smart (2001). WSS is tested in this paper; further discussion on the justification for excluding other bootstrapping alternatives follows in the next section.

In a large empirical study, WSS claim significant improvements in forecasting accuracy over both SES and Croston's estimator. However, Gardner and Koehler (2005) criticize this study because the authors do not use the correct lead time demand distribution for either SES or Croston's method, and they do not consider published improvements to Croston's method, such as the SBA method (see Willemain et al., 2005, for a rejoinder). These mistakes are corrected in this empirical study.

The Teunter and Duncan (2009) empirical study is similar to the study in the present paper. Using a sample of demand series for military spare parts, Teunter and Duncan compare the inventory and service tradeoffs that result from forecasting with the same parametric methods tested below. They also test a simple bootstrapping method in which they sample lead time demand with replacement to estimate mean and variance, which are then fed into a normal distribution to set stock levels. Reliance on the normal distribution defeats the purpose of bootstrapping, which does not require a distributional assumption.

## 1.3. Organization of the paper

Section 2 explains the parametric and bootstrapping methods. Section 3 discusses the data tested, performance measurement, and simulation procedures. Empirical results are given in Section 4; in contrast to most previous research in intermittent demand forecasting, results are presented in terms of stock control performance rather than forecast accuracy. Section 5 discusses implications of the results followed by conclusions and opportunities for further research in Section 6.

## 2. Forecasting intermittent demand

### 2.1. Parametric forecasting

Simple exponential smoothing (SES) is written:

$$S_t = \alpha X_t + (1-\alpha)S_{t-1}, \quad (1)$$

where  $\alpha$  is the smoothing parameter,  $X_t$  is the observed value of both zero and nonzero demand, and  $S_t$  is the smoothed average as well as the forecast for next period. Although SES is widely used to forecast intermittent demand, the method has important limitations. Exponential smoothing weights recent data more heavily, which produces forecasts that are biased high just after a demand occurs and biased low just before a demand. Replenishment quantities are likely to be determined by forecasts made just after a demand, resulting in unnecessarily high stock levels most of the time.

In an attempt to compensate for these problems, Croston's (1972) method forecasts two components of the time series separately, the observed value of nonzero demand ( $D_t$ ) and the inter-arrival time of

transactions ( $Q_t$ ). The smoothed estimates are denoted by  $Z_t$  and  $P_t$ , respectively:

$$Z_t = \alpha D_t + (1-\alpha)Z_{t-1} \tag{2}$$

$$P_t = \alpha Q_t + (1-\alpha)P_{t-1} \tag{3}$$

Croston assumes that the value of the smoothing parameter  $\alpha$  is the same in both equations. The estimate of demand per unit time, i.e. the forecast for next period ( $Y_t$ ) is then:

$$Y_t = Z_t/P_t \tag{4}$$

If there is no demand in a period,  $Z_t$  and  $P_t$  are unchanged. Note that when demand occurs every period the Croston method gives the same forecasts as conventional SES. Thus the same method can be used for both intermittent and non-intermittent demands.

Syntetos and Boylan (2001) show that  $Y_t$  is biased to over-forecast. Later, Syntetos and Boylan (2005) developed the SBA method (for Syntetos-Boylan approximation), a modified version of Eq. (4) that is approximately unbiased:

$$Y_t = (1-\alpha/2)(Z_t/P_t) \tag{5}$$

SES, Croston, and SBA are used below to forecast demand over the lead time plus review period. As Syntetos and Boylan (2006) recommend on the grounds of simplicity, the variance of the forecast errors is estimated by the exponentially smoothed mean squared error (MSE) over the lead time plus review period.

### 2.2. Non-parametric forecasting

Non-parametric or bootstrapping approaches to forecasting permit a reconstruction of the empirical distribution of the data, thus making distributional assumptions redundant. Bootstrapping works by taking many random samples from a larger sample or from a population itself. These samples may be different from each other and from the population, and they are used to build up a histogram of the distribution of inventory demands during lead time. Statistics such as the mean and variance of lead-time demand are computed directly from the histogram rather than inferred from a theoretical distribution.

The WSS method is an advanced form of bootstrapping that captures the autocorrelation between demand realizations and can produce values that have not appeared in the history. The method estimates transition probabilities in a two-state (zero vs. non-zero) Markov model and uses that model to generate a sequence of zero and non-zero demand occurrences. The non-zero occurrences are then assigned a positive value (demand) by using an ad-hoc method of “jittering” proposed by the authors. The WSS method works according to the following steps, which are found in both Willemain, Smart and Schwarz (2004) and Willemain and Smart (2001): obtain historical demand data in chosen time buckets (e.g. days, weeks, months); estimate transition probabilities for a two-state (zero vs. non-zero) Markov model; conditional on last observed demand, use the Markov model to generate a sequence of zero/non-zero values over the forecast horizon (lead time); replace every non-zero state marker with a numerical value sampled at random, with replacement, from the set of observed non-zero demands; “jitter” the non-zero demand values  $X$ . When  $X$  is selected at random, generate a realization of a standard normal random deviate  $Z$ . The jittered value is  $1 + \text{INT}(X + Z\sqrt{X})$ , unless the result is less than or equal to zero, in which case the jittered value is simply  $X$ ; sum the forecast values over the horizon to get one predicted value of lead time demand (LTD).

Porras and Dekker (2008) propose an empirical method based on the construction of a histogram of demands over the lead time ( $L$ ). A block of  $L$  consecutive demand observations is sampled repeatedly

with replacement. Such a procedure results in capturing the potential auto-correlation of the demand data. The method is intuitively appealing and links naturally to stock control. However, the method cannot extrapolate beyond previous demands (an important advantage of WSS), making it difficult to attain realistically high service level targets. Preliminary results not reported here show poor performance of the Porras and Dekker method, which is not considered further.

Viswanathan and Zhou (2008) claim an improvement to the WSS bootstrapping procedure. The key difference is that instead of the two-state Markov chain used by WSS, the historical inter-demand interval distribution generates demand arrivals. However, this procedure is heavily dependent upon lengthy demand histories that are not often available. Zhou and Viswanathan (2011) compare their procedure to parametric methods on empirical data and find the parametric methods are more accurate. They attribute the inferior performance of the bootstrapping method to the short demand histories available, and this approach is not considered further.

Finally, a parametric bootstrapping method proposed by Snyder (2002) performs well on a few SKUs. However, we did not consider the Snyder method due to its constraining theoretical assumptions that defy the purpose of using bootstrapping procedures in the first place.

## 3. Experimental design

### 3.1. Data

Forecasting performance is tested in the data described in Tables 1 and 2 (all data are available from the corresponding author). The jewelry data are one year of weekly retail demands for an inexpensive line of costume jewelry; the distribution of demand intervals is relatively compact around a median of 4.4 weeks, and most demands are for one or two units. Stock replenishment lead-times in the jewelry data are one week. A Japanese manufacturer supplied the electronics data, which consists of four years of monthly demand histories for spare parts used in European support operations. The median demand interval is relatively short at 2.6 months, but both demand intervals and sizes are skewed right due to outliers in most time series. Lead-times in the electronics data are three months, which makes stock control far more difficult than in the jewelry data.

### 3.2. Performance measurement

Syntetos and Boylan (2006) and Syntetos, Nikolopoulos, and Boylan (2010) demonstrate an insubstantial relationship exists between traditional measures of forecast accuracy such as the mean error, and stock control performance as measured by inventory investment and customer service. (For a general discussion of the organizational and inventory implications of forecast errors, refer to Sanders & Graman, 2009). Therefore, accuracy measures are bypassed in this study and forecasting is evaluated by its direct effects on stock control. Gardner (1990, 2006) recommends the use of tradeoff curves for this purpose, and that example is followed here by computing tradeoffs between total inventory investment and customer service.

**Table 1**  
Jewelry data – 52 weeks of demands for 4076 SKUs.

	Demand interval		Demand size		Demand per period	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Minimum	1.3	0.6	1.0	0.0	0.1	0.3
25th percentile	3.3	2.6	1.1	0.3	0.2	0.4
Median	4.4	3.7	1.2	0.4	0.3	0.5
75th percentile	5.6	5.0	1.4	0.7	0.4	0.7
Maximum	8.7	13.0	3.2	3.7	2.2	2.5

**Table 2**  
Electronics data – 48 months of demands for 3055 SKUs.

	Demand interval		Demand size		Demand per period	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Minimum	1.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
25th percentile	1.5	1.0	3.5	3.0	0.9	2.2
Median	2.6	2.3	5.9	6.2	2.1	4.5
75th percentile	4.7	4.4	12.1	13.9	6.0	10.5
Maximum	24.0	32.5	5366.2	9149.3	5366.2	3858.4

Another suggestion for evaluating performance is the use of average regret metrics (Sani & Kingsman, 1997) or implied stock-holdings that are based on a calculation of the exact safety margin providing a maximum stock-out of zero (Eaves & Kingsman, 2004). An alternative formulation involves fixing a target service measure and searching for the investment necessary to hit the target. However, tradeoff curves are the most realistic representation of the various methods' comparative performance and the most meaningful one from a practitioner perspective.

Performance is simulated using a periodic order-up-to-level stock control system, which is widely used in practice because it requires optimization of only one parameter, the order-up-to-level. The stock control system is designed to meet a target fraction of replenishment cycles in which total demand can be delivered from stock. This fraction is called the cycle service level (CSL) (i.e. the probability of no stock-outs during a replenishment cycle). During out-of-sample testing, the forecasting methods are used to compute weekly or monthly order-up-to-levels that attempt to meet four CSL targets: 85%, 90%, 95%, and 99%. Other service measures (like the most commonly used fill rate for example) are not considered because bootstrapping does not allow direct calculation of such measures.

For the parametric methods, the order-up-to-level in each period is computed as the inverse of the cumulative distribution function of demand over the lead time plus one review period. Replenishment decisions take place at the end of every period (week or month), so the review period is set equal to one. Demands are assumed to follow the Negative Binomial Distribution (NBD). One difficulty with the NBD is that it requires the variance to be greater than the mean; in the few cases where the reverse was true, the variance is set equal to 1.1 times the mean. Although this may look ad hoc, Sani (1995) shows that it produces robust results.

### 3.3. Model-fitting and forecasting

To test the parametric forecasting methods, the demand history for each SKU is split into two parts: within sample (for initialization and optimization purposes) and out-of-sample (for reporting performance). The first 12 observations are used as an initialization sample to compute an average for the beginning level of demand and, in the case of Croston's method, the beginning demand size and interval (expressed also as averages of the corresponding variables over the initialization block). To make the most use of the data available, the optimization block contains the initialization block and extends it by the same number of periods. That is, the first 24 observations are used as an optimization sample to select the smoothing parameter over the range 0.05 to 0.30 (in steps of 0.01) that minimizes the mean squared error (MSE) per series. (For more details on the issue of optimization of parameters in an intermittent demand context, please refer to Petropoulos, Nikolopoulos, Spithourakis, & Assimakopoulos, 2013.) Variances are estimated by the cumulative smoothed MSE using a fixed smoothing parameter of 0.25; analysis not reported here indicates that this value performs well. In Croston's original method, the same smoothing parameter updates both demand size and interval, but a separate smoothing parameter for each one is used here, following Schultz's

(1987) advice that separate parameters lead to better forecast accuracy. For the WSS method, the within sample data are used to compute an initial value for the order-up-to-level, which is then updated weekly or monthly. Out-of-sample testing starts at period 25, so there are 28 out-of-sample observations in each jewelry series and 24 in each electronics series.

## 4. Empirical results

Three performance measures are reported for every combination of forecasting method, dataset, and target CSL. First, total inventory investment is computed by pricing each SKU by unit cost and summing across all SKUs. Second, the achieved CSL is computed as the actual percentage of replenishment cycles in which demand is satisfied directly from stock on hand. Finally, total backorders are computed by averaging backorder values over time (weeks or months) for each SKU and then summing across all SKUs. These measures are presented in the form of tradeoff curves showing achieved CSL and total backorders as a function of total investment. Each curve has four plotting symbols corresponding to the four CSL targets.

### 4.1. Jewelry data

In the jewelry data, Fig. 1 shows tradeoff curves between investment and CSL. All forecasting methods achieve CSLs slightly larger than the 99% target (with the exception of SES that just falls short of that), but achieved levels are significantly greater than targets of 85%, 90%, and 95%. The descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 indicate that the jewelry data are neither particularly intermittent nor erratic, the latter referring to the variability of the demand sizes. Thus the NBD provides a good fit to the empirical data and the parametric methods produce very similar CSL tradeoff curves (with the SBA and Croston being indicated as the 'best' approaches). The curve for the WSS method runs above the parametric curves at targets of 95% and 99% and gives a slightly better CSL for any level of investment greater than about \$130,000. For example, at an investment of \$175,000, WSS adds about one percentage point to CSL compared to the other methods. Inventory investment vs. backorders are plotted in Fig. 2, and again the parametric methods produce similar results, while the WSS method yields lower backorder values for any investment greater than \$130,000.

### 4.2. Electronics data

The electronics data are more erratic than the jewelry data, and the results are considerably different. In Fig. 3, all methods achieve CSLs greater than the 85% target, and all methods are close to the 90% target. However, at the 95% and 99% target, all methods significantly underperform. For example, when SES is run with a target of 99%, the achieved CSL is only 95%. Outliers in the electronics data make it extremely difficult to estimate the parameters of the demand distribution and hit the CSL targets.

The Croston method consistently gives better CSL performance than the SBA method, even though SBA was designed to improve on Croston. The problem is that the Croston method is biased high, which increases both customer service and inventory investment. SES produces the best CSL tradeoff curve through an investment of about €48 million, and thereafter WSS is marginally better. At an investment of €40 million, SES yields a CSL about one percentage point higher than WSS. But at an investment of €65 million, WSS is about one-half percentage point better than SES.

Differences in backorder performance are more significant. In Fig. 4, all parametric methods produce smaller backorders than WSS at all levels of investment. For example, at an investment of €35 million, SES backorders are €1.4 million compared to €2.2 million for WSS. SES yields the smallest backorders though an investment of about €50 million; thereafter, the SBA method is best, followed closely by Croston.



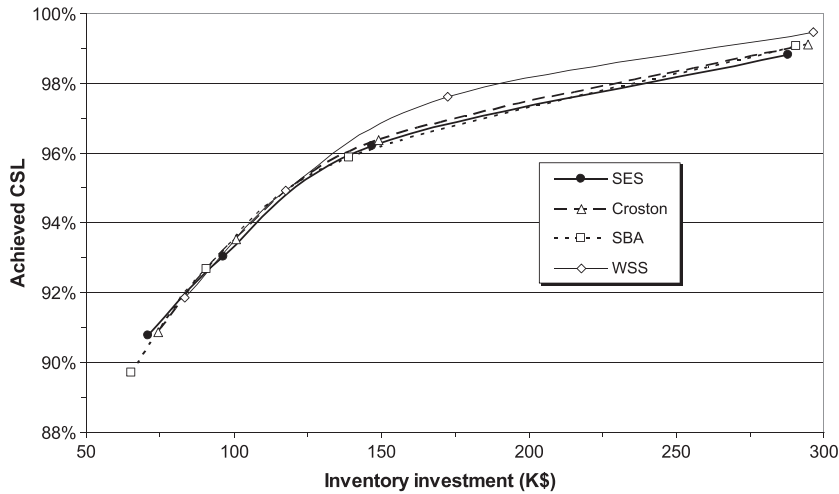


Fig. 1. Jewelry data – investment vs. CSL.

**5. Implications and practical considerations**

The jewelry data are relatively well behaved, with moderately intermittent demands and short lead times; all parametric methods give similar performance, and the WSS bootstrapping method is marginally better than the parametric methods. The electronics data are more difficult to forecast because they are more intermittent, contain more outliers, and have longer lead times. Under these conditions, we might expect WSS to perform better than the parametric methods, but this did not happen. In the electronics data, all parametric methods give significantly better backorder performance than WSS.

Willemain et al. (2004) claimed that an important advantage related to the use of bootstrapping is its attractiveness to practitioners: “Users intuitively grasp the simple procedural explanation of how the bootstrap works. Their comfort with the bootstrap approach may derive from the concrete, algorithmic nature of computational inference, in contrast to the more abstract character of traditional mathematical approaches to statistical inference.” This claim may be true for the general bootstrapping concept, but the details of the WSS method, such as the use of transition probabilities and Markov models, are more complicated and difficult to understand than any of the parametric methods tested.

Another consideration in evaluating the WSS procedure is that demand forecasts are often subject to judgmental adjustments (Syntetos, Nikolopoulos, Boylan, Fildes & Goodwin, 2009). Such adjustments can be beneficial, especially when they are based on information not available to the forecasting model. However, adjustments can be unnecessary or even harmful when they are applied without an understanding of how the forecasts were produced. Simple methods should result in fewer damaging judgmental interventions.

Although the parametric forecasting methods are simple, their interactions with stock control are not. Many authors have pointed out that forecast errors may seriously distort projections of customer service levels in an intermittent demand context. The fundamental problem is that inventory theory has been developed upon the assumptions of known moments of the hypothesized demand distribution. Although no concrete theory has been developed in this area, there is an expectation that parametric estimators will sometimes under-achieve the specified targets. A common reaction from practitioners is to incorporate some bias in the forecasts to avoid running out of stock. However, such adjustments are not straightforward since the variance of the estimates (sampling error of the mean) is also affected, leading to confusion about the effects on performance of the system.

The application of bootstrapping is relatively straightforward under the CSL constraint, but such is not the case should other service

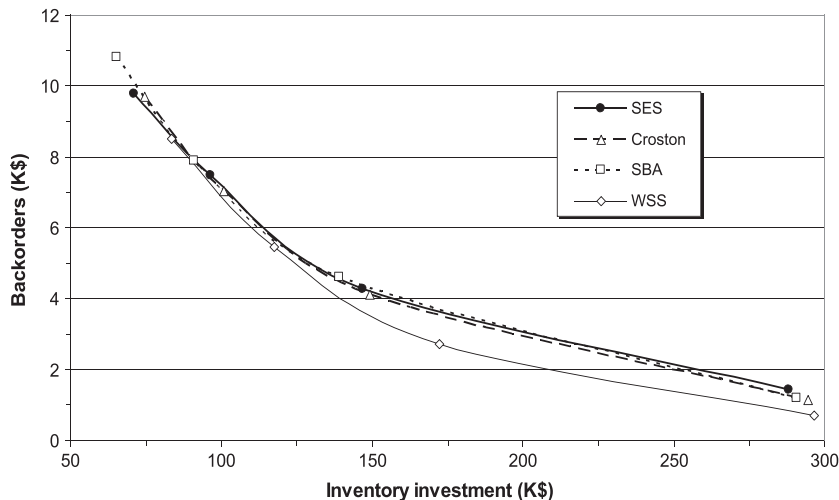


Fig. 2. Jewelry data – investment vs. backorders.

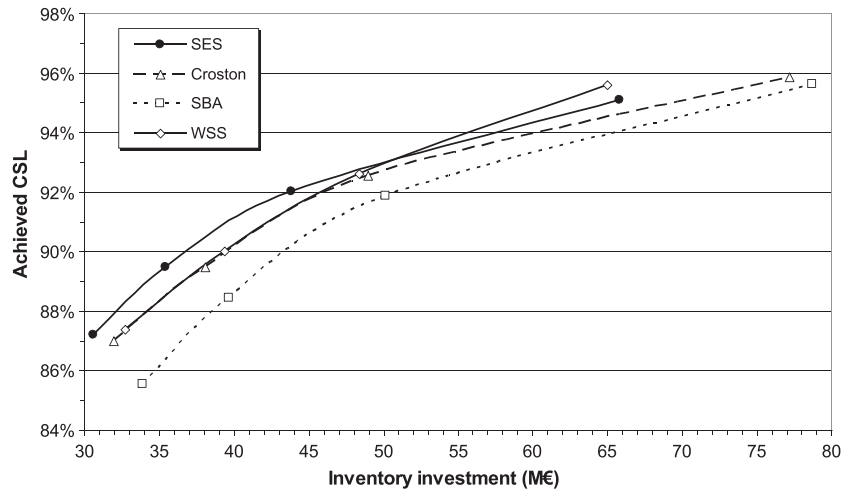


Fig. 3. Electronics data – investment vs. CSL.

measures and cost criteria be considered. Parametric theory, despite its shortcomings, does provide guidelines for optimization of the stock control system under a wide range of objectives and/or constraints. More research is needed to extend the capacity of bootstrapping to match parametric theory. Consider for example the specification of a fill-rate target as opposed to the CSL in a practical setting; bootstrapping cannot be used directly to meet a fill-rate target.

6. Conclusions and future research

The WSS method of bootstrapping does have advantages, most notably the ability to simulate demand values that have not appeared in history. However, whether or not the WSS method is worth the considerable added complexity is questionable. Parametric methods are simpler, and the simplest method of all, SES, performs well. In the messy electronics data, SES produces fewer backorders than WSS at all levels of inventory investment.

Parametric methods require less computing power, which is important when demands for very large numbers of SKUs have to be forecast. Parametric methods also require less specialist knowledge and thus are more transparent and more resistant to potentially damaging judgmental interventions.

Teunter and Duncan (2009) observe that analytical projections of customer service are often different from empirical results in an

intermittent demand context, a conclusion that applies to this study as well. In the jewelry data, achieved CSLs for all methods were significantly greater than targets of 85%, 90%, and 95%. In the electronics data, achieved CSLs were significantly less than targets of 95% and 99%. The difference between target and achieved CSLs are attributed to errors in estimating the parameters of the demand distribution; if these parameters were known, achieved CSLs should correspond to the targets.

Several opportunities are available for further research in intermittent demand forecasting. The M and M3 forecasting competitions (Makridakis, Andersen, Carbone, Fildes, Hibon, Lewandowski, et al., 1982; Makridakis & Hibon, 2000, respectively) do not consider intermittent demand data. Future competitions should include such data.

Aggregating demand in lower-frequency time buckets thereby reducing the presence of zero observations is an alternative strategy to deal with intermittent demand patterns. Temporal aggregation is a practice employed in many real world settings but there has been no research apart from a few studies (Babai, Ali, & Nikolopoulos, 2012; Nikolopoulos, Syntetos, Boylan, Petropoulos, & Assimakopoulos, 2011; Spithourakis, Petropoulos, Nikolopoulos, & Assimakopoulos, 2014).

Another research opportunity is to consider stationary models for intermittent demand forecasting rather than restricting attention to models based on Croston’s method. For example, Poisson autoregressive models have been suggested by Shenstone and Hyndman (2005). Models based on a variety of count probability distributions, coupled with dynamic

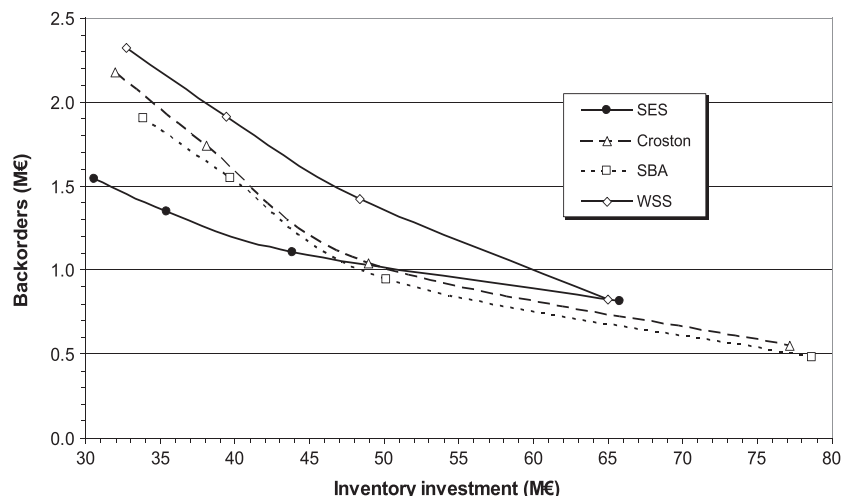


Fig. 4. Electronics data – investment vs. backorders.

specifications to account for potential serial correlation, have recently been analyzed by Snyder et al. (2012), although the authors made no attempt to evaluate stock control results. Further development and testing of such models in the context of stock control is the next step in our research.

Finally, the bootstrapping algorithm here is the exclusive property of Smart Software, Inc. under US Patent 6205431 B1. Use in this paper was permitted by a special licensing arrangement with Smart Software and does not imply a public license to use the algorithm. According to Smart Software: “This algorithm differs in several important ways from the commercial implementation in the SmartForecasts™ software, so conclusions about the performance of the algorithm implemented here cannot be extrapolated to the performance of SmartForecasts™. Further, Smart Software provides no oversight or guidance in implementing the algorithm.”

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