The 12th International Institute of Forecasters' Workshop on

"Theory and Practice in ICT* Forecasting"

Hilton London Olympia - 22-23 May 2014 – London

A Brief Report

It's a big topic for a workshop lasting one and a half days. Held in London on May 22nd and 23rd, around 30 people from research institutions, telecoms providers and consultancies attended. The workshop organized by the IIF President, Mohsen Hamoudia, was sponsored by the IIF but also by the Oxford Martin Institute for New Economic Thinking, the Lancaster Centre for Forecasting and a consultancy, Quantum-Web.

The scene was set by Nigel Meade (Imperial) reviewing research in ICT forecasting. His focus was on what was novel in the problems posed by ICT and the lessons to be learnt for other forecasting areas. Most of the published work has in recent years focused on the mobile market. It poses important questions of the diffusion of a new technology with technological and competitive substitution, often in situations of limited data. Progress has been made, lessons learnt and practical recommendations produced (the paper will appear in the IJF). Each of the talks was followed by a brief commentary, with Robert Fildes (Lancaster) in welcoming Nigel's review pointing out, as commentators will, that the topic is vast and what hasn't been researched is much larger area than what has, in particular Business-to-business.

The second presentation was by Xin Dang (Mississipi) which was concerned with econometric tests of the predictive accuracy of forecasts from panel data.

The purchase of Smart phones were naturally an important topic with Paul Rappoport (Temple) looking at paths to purchase and the impact of social media followed by Hämmäinen Heikki (Aalto University, Finland) discussing the evolution of smart phone features – a technological forecasting application.

The afternoon saw two economic analyses of the effects of ICT investment, behind which lay hidden implicit forecasts : Tommaso Valletti (Imperial) was concerned with valuing the effects of fast broadband

(through house prices). But what, one member of the audience asked, if access became primarily through mobiles. Emanuele Giovannetti (Anglia Ruskin University, UK) following the same theme looked at the value of ICT investment and its effects on innovation.

As Nigel Meade had pointed out, there has been some research in time series methods for ICT forecasting (in particular call center demand). The final presentation of the day was by Dimitris Varoutas (University of Athens) who described a novel method for combining diffusion models with time series.

The second morning saw presentations from practitioners in the industry: from Andrew Beurschgens
EE (Everything Everiwhere) who examined the role of market forecasting in EE London.. In contrast, Gilbert Owusu and Tony Frost Technology, Services & Operations, BT plc considered the important question of using demand forecasts as a basis for planning engineering support. Finally Pablo Iacopino (Analysys Mason, London) presented the consultancy's forecasting methodology for Global Telecoms Forecasts Modelling. In commentating Patrick Luciano (Orange) described the requirements providers have if consultancies are to complement the in-house forecasting activities, in particular a validated methodology..

The workshop ended with a roundtable discussion with James Allman (Colorado), Nigel Meade, Mohsen Hamoudia and Tony Frost fielding questions. Why it was asked, was there so much research on mobile and so little on other important topics, some of which had been discussed at the workshop. The answer given was that the data was public whilst most of the unsolved problems required access to corporate data. It led to a plea from the audience for the companies to share data, but also an agreement that a second workshop would be most valuable – ICT forecasting remained a big topic.

Robert Fildes and Mohsen Hamoudia