

Forecasting mortgages:

Internet search data as a proxy for mortgage credit demand

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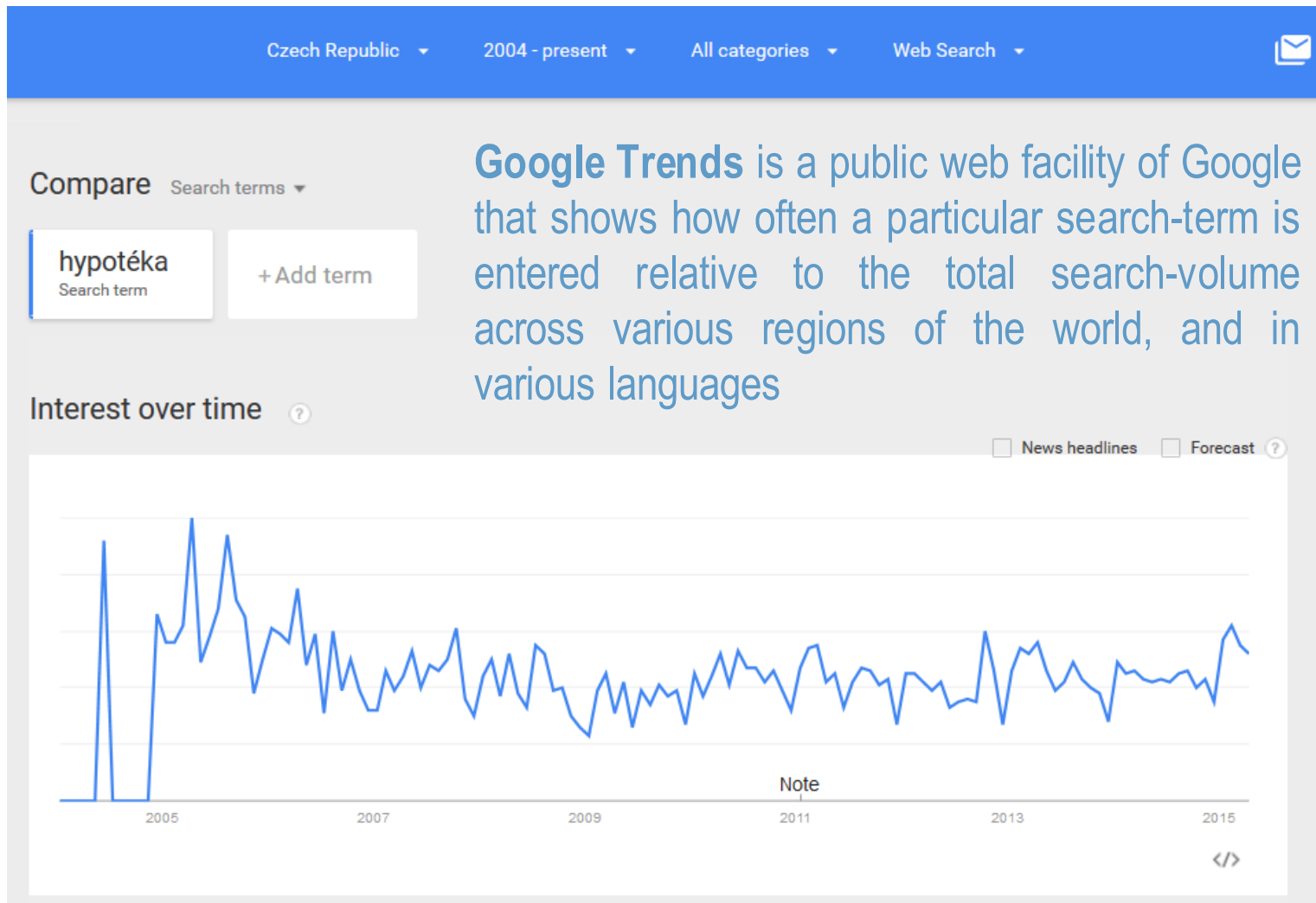
Motivation

- After the outbreak of crisis, **loan provision slowed** considerably in many countries
- Question: **Lower demand** for loans or **lower willingness** of banks to provide loans?
- At about the same time, first applications employing **internet search data** appeared (e.g. Google Flu Trends)
- Challenge: Is it possible to use internet search data to **proxy demand for mortgages**?

Overview

- Internet search data: What it is?
- Internet search data in the economic literature
- Data on Czech mortgages and stylized facts
- Empirical approach and results for the Czech Republic
 - Forecasting mortgages
 - Experimental indicator of restrictively tight bank lending standards and conditions
- Practical aspects of using Google Trends data
- Conclusion

Internet search data: What it is?

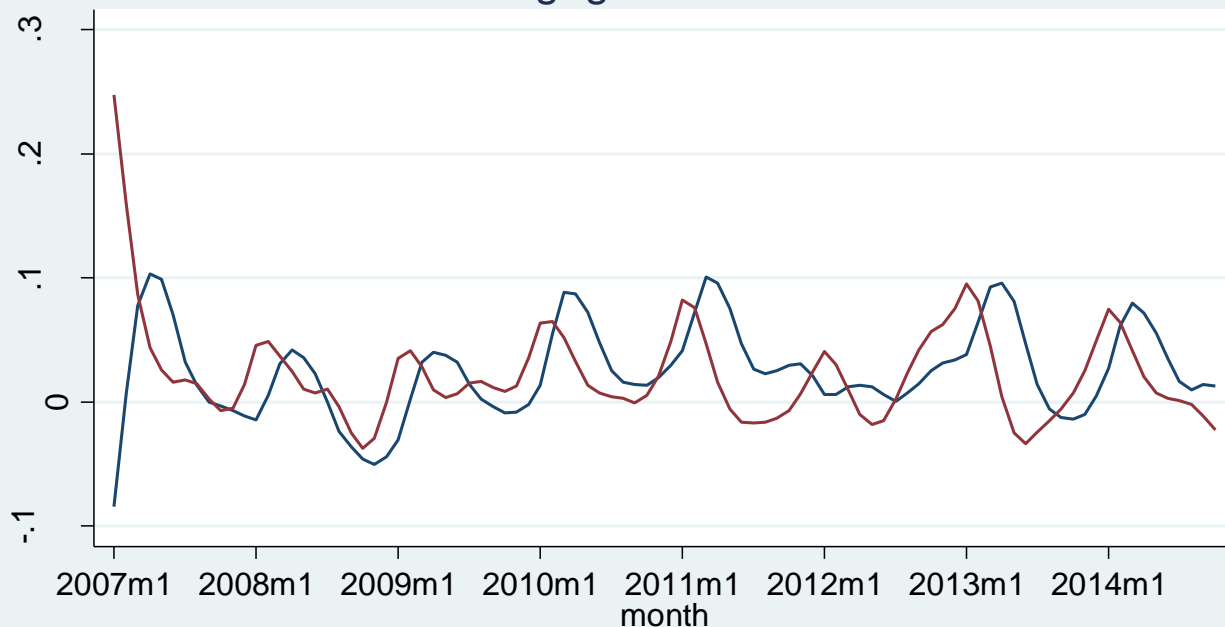


Internet search data in the economic literature

- Pioneers Choi and Varian (2009a, 2009b, 2012) use simple autoregressive models augmented with search engine data to produce near-term forecasts of **automobile sales**, **unemployment claims**, **travel destination** planning and **consumer confidence**
- Askitas and Zimmerman (2009), Pescyova (2011), McLaren and Shanbhogue (2011), Fondeur and Karame (2013): Nowcasting and near-term forecasts of **unemployment**
- Schmidt and Vosen (2009): Google Trends beat the forecasting performance of two most common **indicators of private consumption** in U.S. (the University of Michigan Consumer Sentiment Index and the Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index)

Data on Czech mortgages and stylized facts

Smoothed month-on-month growth rates of mortgages and searches



— Mortgage growth (m-o-m), smoothed
— Search growth (m-o-m), smoothed

Original series:

- Nominal volume of mortgages newly provided to households by banks in the Czech Republic (monthly, publication lag 1 month)
- Google data on search volume of the mortgage related words in the Czech language searched from the computers in the Czech Republic (weekly, no publication lag)

Transformation:

- Month-on-month growth rates smoothed using the Hodrick-Prescott filter with $\lambda = 10$

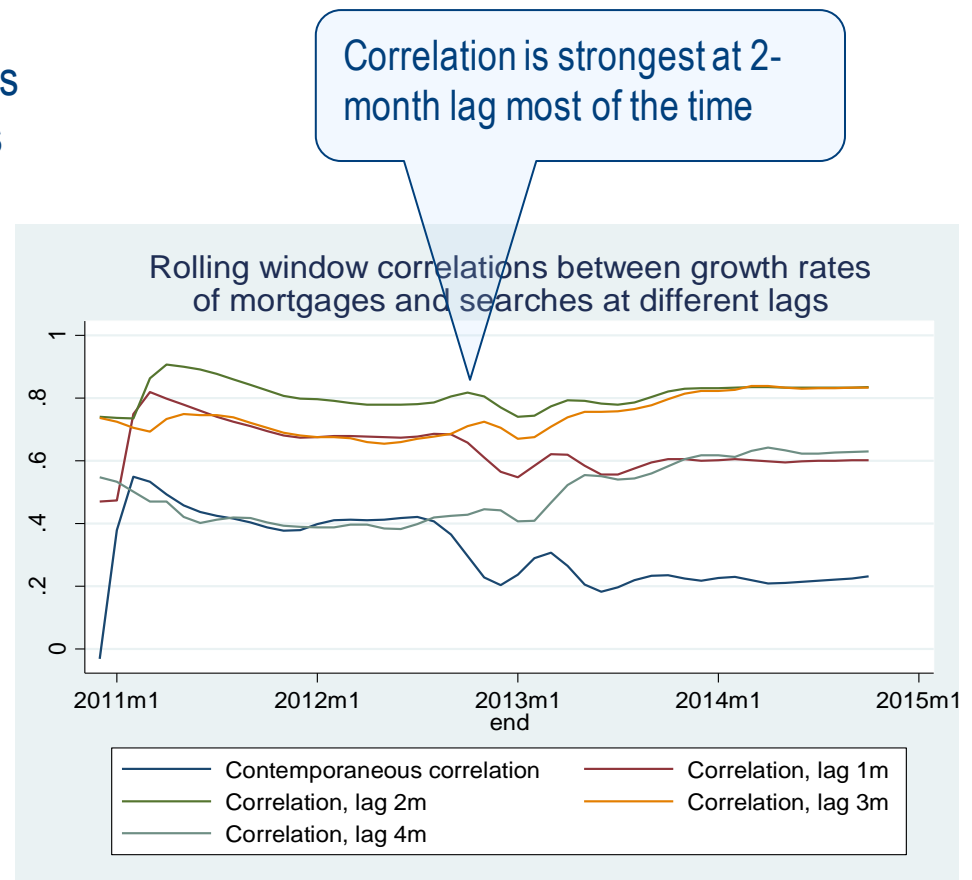
Data on Czech mortgages and stylized facts

What is the time lag between searching and providing mortgage? Is it changing over time?

Table A1: Crosscorrelations between mortgages and searches for different lags and subsamples

(significance levels in parentheses, lags with the highest correlation coefficient in bold)

Lag in months	Subsample			Whole sample
	2007m1-2009m12	2009m1-2011m12	2011m1-2014m10	2007m1-2014m10
0	-0.08 (0.66)	0.20 (0.24)	0.24 (0.11)	0.04 (0.67)
1	0.47 (0.00)	0.62 (0.00)	0.60 (0.00)	0.49 (0.00)
2	0.78 (0.00)	0.83 (0.00)	0.84 (0.00)	0.75 (0.00)
3	0.81 (0.00)	0.74 (0.00)	0.83 (0.00)	0.74 (0.00)
4	0.67 (0.00)	0.45 (0.01)	0.63 (0.00)	0.54 (0.00)



Forecasting mortgages

Table 1: Variation in mortgage lending explained by amount of searching two months earlier

(least squares estimation; the dependent variable is month-on-month growth of mortgage lending; standard errors in parentheses)

	AR(1)	ARX
L.Mortgage growth (m-o-m)	-0.24 ** (0.10)	-0.41 *** (0.09)
L2.Search growth (m-o-m)		0.58 *** (0.08)
Constant	0.03 * (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Adjusted R-squared	0.05	0.39
Number of observations	93	92

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

The amount of variation explained by the regression (proxied by adjusted R-squared) increases substantially once searches are included, from 0.05 to 0.39.

Forecasting mortgages

Real test: Out-of-sample forecasting exercise

- Estimation window extends from 2007m1–2008m8 to 2007m1–2014m9
- One and two month ahead forecasts are constructed
- MAE and RMSE of one-step ahead mortgage forecasts decreases by approximately 18% and 23%, respectively

	AR(1)	ARX	Change	Diebold-Mariano S(1)	p-value
One-step-ahead forecast					
MAE	0.1411	0.1162	-18%	4.25	0.00
RMSE	0.1919	0.1475	-23%		
Two-steps-ahead forecast					
MAE	0.1420	0.1150	-19%	4.27	0.00
RMSE	0.1924	0.1466	-24%		

$$AR(1): \Delta mortgage_t = \alpha + \beta \Delta mortgage_{t-1}$$

$$ARX: \Delta mortgage_t = \alpha + \beta \Delta mortgage_{t-1} + \gamma \Delta search_{t-2}$$

Forecasting mortgages

Big part of explained variation is seasonal. With seasonal term, searches still improve the forecast, but less substantially

- MAE and RMSE of one-step ahead mortgage forecasts decreases by approximately 8% and 10%, respectively

	SAR(1)	SARX	Change	Diebold-Mariano S(1)	p-value
One-step-ahead forecast					
MAE	0.0985	0.0909	-8%	1.50	0.13
RMSE	0.1299	0.1168	-10%		
Two-steps-ahead forecast					
MAE	0.0992	0.0925	-7%	1.41	0.16
RMSE	0.1307	0.1182	-10%		

$$\text{SAR (1)} : \Delta \text{mortgage}_t = \alpha + \beta \Delta \text{mortgage}_{t-1} + \theta \Delta \text{mortgage}_{t-12}$$

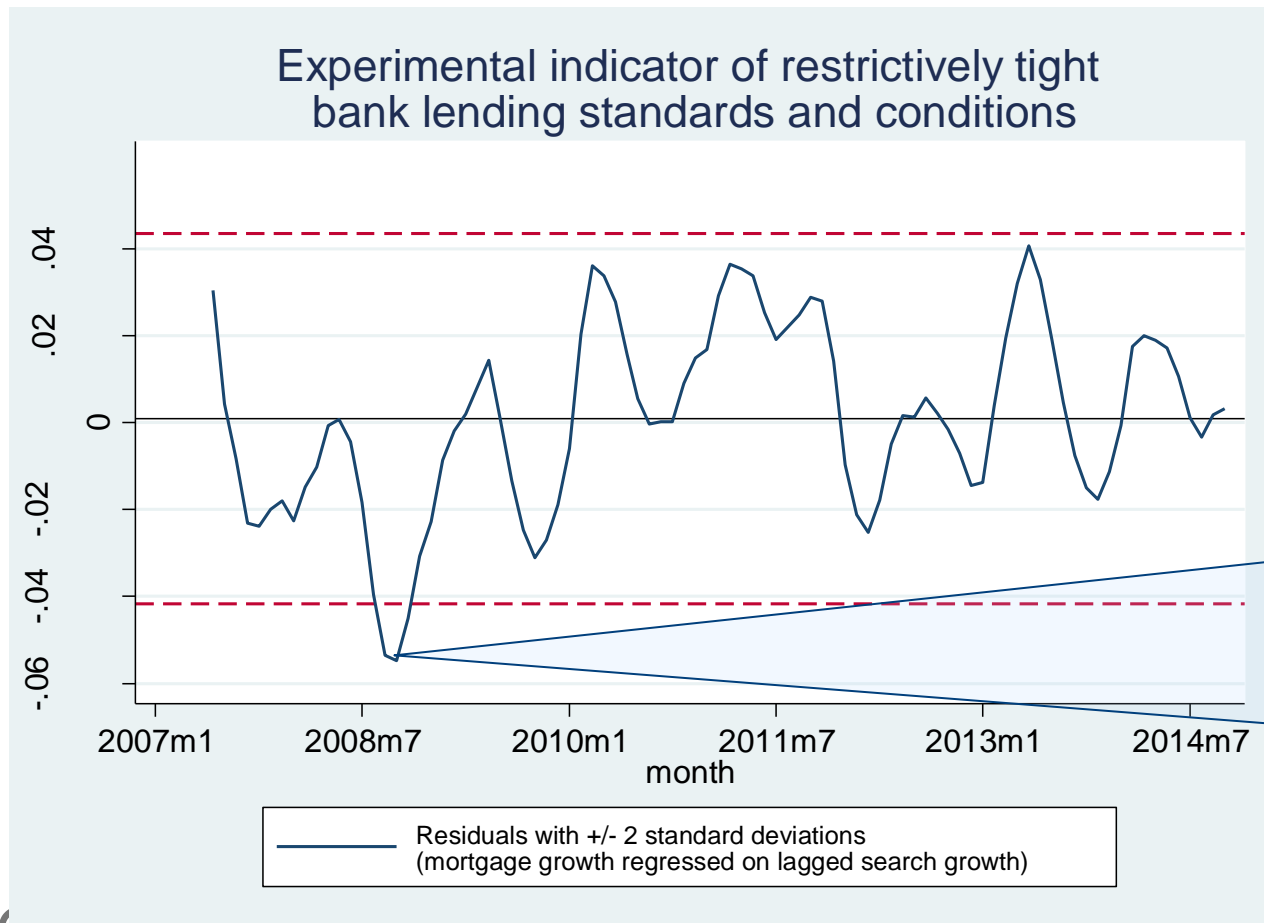
$$\text{SARX} : \Delta \text{mortgage}_t = \alpha + \beta \Delta \text{mortgage}_{t-1} + \theta \Delta \text{mortgage}_{t-12} + \gamma \Delta \text{search}_{t-2}$$

Experimental indicator of restrictively tight bank lending standards and conditions

- Experimental indicator of restrictively tight bank lending standards and conditions
 - Assumption so far: **Supply of mortgages is not limited**
 - Assumption from now on: Willingness of banks to provide mortgages changes over time and in some periods fewer mortgages are provided **not due to lower demand, but because of restricted supply**
 - Indicator: The smoothed growth rate of mortgages actually provided is regressed on the smoothed growth rate of searches lagged by two months. The **residuals** from this regression represent the part of the variation in mortgages that cannot be explained by the variation in demand for mortgages
 - Growth of demand substantially above the growth of mortgages actually provided can **signal a lower willingness of banks to provide mortgages.**

Experimental indicator of restrictively tight bank lending standards and conditions

Graph 3: Experimental indicator of restrictively tight bank lending standards and conditions



Eurozone BLS 3Q2008:
The net tightening of credit standards applied to loans to households for house purchase reached 36% (second-highest number in the history of the Eurozone bank lending survey; the only higher number was reported one quarter later)

Practical aspects of using Google Trends data

- Every data download provides indicator created using only random sample of all searches
 - Solution: Ten different data series obtained using the same query at different times were averaged for further use
- Use of 10 search terms¹ instead of one increased the usability of search data substantially

¹ “hypotéka” + “hypoteka” + “hypoteční” + “hypotecni” + “hypotéku” + “hypoteku” + “hypotéky” + “hypoteky” + “úvěr na bydlení” + “uver na bydlení”

Conclusion

- The growth rates of searches and mortgages are **strongly correlated** and the volume of searches leads the volume of mortgages provided by **two months**
- Out-of-sample near-term forecast exercises show that the volume of searches **improves the short-term predictions** of mortgage lending
- Proposed **experimental indicator of restrictively tight mortgage credit standards and conditions** successfully identifies probably the most pronounced period of credit tightening in the history