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Forecasting Population demographics in Lilongwe city: Leveraging Prophet and Time series analysis Techniques

Authors

Destiny Mwafulirwa[1], Dr Tawarish[2]

[1]Dmi-St Eugene University, Private bag 69, Lilongwe, Malawi

[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Information & System Management, The New College Chennai, India

Abstract

Population demographics provides grounds for forecasting due to complex nature of various editions of population figures. The accurate prediction of population demographics is pivotal for urban planning, resource allocation, and the development of effective policies. In this paper, we utilize historical demographic data collected over time to forecast future demographic trends, enabling informed decision-making by local authorities and urban planners. The study begins by gathering and preprocessing a comprehensive dataset that encompasses various demographic variables, such as age, gender, income, education level, and occupation, among others. We employ Prophet, a robust forecasting tool, with diverse time series analysis methods. It examines historical demographic data, refining models using Prophet's flexibility and traditional time series techniques like ARIMA and exponential smoothing. By leveraging Prophet and time series analysis, this paper aims to offer accurate forecasts of population dynamics, age structures and migration trends, providing valuable insights for urban planning and policy formulation.

Keywords: *population demographics, ARIMA, prophet, time series analysis.*

Introduction

Urbanization, an enduring global phenomenon, ushers in profound transformations within cities, redefining their socioeconomic landscapes. As urban areas burgeon, the confluence of diverse populations, economic activities, and infrastructural demands intensifies, necessitating astute urban planning strategies. At the nexus of this evolution lies the imperative task of forecasting population demographics—a cornerstone for strategic urban planning and sustainable development initiatives (Wales, 2017).
This thesis embarks on an extensive exploration into the predictive modeling of population dynamics within the vibrant urban tapestry of Lilongwe City, Malawi, synthesizing avant-garde forecasting techniques, prominently Prophet, and an array of time series analysis methodologies.

Lilongwe City, the bustling capital of Malawi, stands as an emblematic representation of rapid urban growth juxtaposed against the intricate dynamics of demographic transitions. The city's trajectory, marked by burgeoning population figures, dynamic age structures, and intricate migration patterns, encapsulates the challenges and opportunities inherent in contemporary urban development paradigms. Comprehending the trajectories and intricacies inherent in Lilongwe's demographic evolution holds critical significance for stakeholders ranging from policymakers to urban planners, facilitating the delineation of sustainable trajectories that accommodate the city's burgeoning needs while ensuring equitable resource allocation.

Traditional demographic projection methods, albeit foundational, often grapple with limitations when confronted with the intricacies of urban demographic dynamics. The advent of advanced predictive analytics heralds a paradigm shift in this domain. Prophet, a versatile forecasting tool developed by Facebook's research team, has gained traction for its adaptability across diverse data structures, robust handling of seasonal variations, and adeptness in accommodating abrupt anomalies within datasets (Taylor & Letham, 2018)

In tandem with Prophet, an assemblage of time series analysis techniques, including AutoRegressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) and exponential smoothing methodologies, offer established frameworks to dissect historical data trends. These methodologies unveil nuanced insights into underlying patterns and seasonality ingrained within demographic datasets, complementing Prophet's predictive capabilities (Hyndman & Athanasopoulos, 2018). The amalgamation of these sophisticated techniques offers a promising avenue to unravel Lilongwe City's demographic fabric, envisaging its future trajectories through meticulous analysis of past trends and present dynamics.

This research endeavors to navigate the intricacies of advanced forecasting techniques in the specific context of Lilongwe City's population demographics. Anchored upon a comprehensive and diverse array of historical demographic data procured from governmental census records, urban surveys, and academic studies, this study aims to construct robust predictive models capable of envisioning the city's demographic evolution. These models span the gamut of population growth trajectories, shifts in age distributions, and the intricate interplay of migration patterns over time. The iterative refinement and meticulous validation of these models against historical data serve as litmus tests, affirming their reliability and accuracy in forecasting Lilongwe's dynamic demographic landscape

Moreover, the significance of this research transcends Lilongwe City's municipal boundaries; it extends to offer a cogent framework for harnessing advanced predictive analytics to decipher and project urban demographic dynamics on a global scale. The insights derived from this study hold the potential to serve as guiding beacons not only for urban planners and policymakers within Lilongwe but also for researchers and practitioners immersed in analogous endeavors across diverse urban settings worldwide (Ndaruhutse et al., 2020).

In sum, this thesis aspires to make a substantive contribution to the realm of demographic forecasting, providing a robust framework that synthesizes cutting-edge tools and established methodologies. Its objective is to anticipate and plan for the evolving demographic canvas within Lilongwe City and, by extension, to furnish a blueprint that resonates with urban contexts worldwide, nurturing informed decision-making and sustainable urban development practice.

Problem Definition

Lilongwe City, akin to many urban centers globally, grapples with the multifaceted challenge of accurately forecasting population demographics amidst rapid urbanization and evolving societal dynamics. The fundamental hurdle arises from the conventional census approach, conducted once every ten years, which inherently introduces gaps and inadequacies in capturing the city's dynamic demographic landscape. The prolonged time span between censuses engenders substantial lacunae in providing timely and granular demographic insights required for agile urban planning and resource allocation (UNFPA, 2015). This temporal gap is exacerbated by the limitations inherent in the conventional paper-based data collection methods predominantly reliant on human enumerators, introducing errors, delays, and data quality issues (Burgess & Gutierrez, 2017).;

The decennial nature of census operations presents a critical limitation in the realm of urban planning and policymaking. Urban centers such as Lilongwe experience rapid demographic shifts within shorter timeframes, including fluctuations in migration patterns, variations in age structures, and dynamic population growth rates. The sporadic nature of demographic data collection every ten years fails to capture these transient trends and fluctuations, rendering urban planners and policymakers reliant on outdated, extrapolated, or imprecise data for critical decision-making processes (UNFPA, 2015).

Moreover, the traditional paper-based approach to data collection, typically involving human enumerators canvassing neighborhoods, has introduced its own set of challenges. In Lilongwe, as in many other urban settings, this method often encounters issues related to incomplete data, errors in transcription, and delayed data processing due to logistical constraints and human error (Burgess & Gutierrez, 2017). These challenges compromise the accuracy and timeliness of demographic information, hindering the efficacy of urban development planning and policy formulation.

Objective

The objectives of this model encompass a multifaceted approach aimed at revolutionizing the process of population demographic forecasting while replacing traditional paper-based methods and leveraging historical datasets for trend analysis and prediction.

Methodology

The cornerstone of forecasting involves meticulous data collection and preparation, emphasizing a comprehensive dataset. The process encompasses sourcing demographic data from diverse, reliable sources, including governmental census records, surveys, and databases (Hyndman & Athanasopoulos, 2018). Variables such as population counts, age distributions, migration patterns, and socio-economic indicators are collated for a holistic understanding of Lilongwe City's demographic landscape. Rigorous validation techniques are applied to ensure data integrity, consistency, and completeness. Addressing missing values, inconsistencies, and anomalies is imperative to curate a clean, coherent dataset, serving as the foundation for robust forecasting models.

Utilizing Prophet for Demographic Forecasting

Prophet, a forecasting tool developed by Facebook, stands out for its adaptability and capability in handling time series data. Employing an additive model, Prophet dissects time series data into trend, seasonality, and holiday effects, offering an effective approach to capture complex patterns inherent in demographic data (Taylor & Letham, 2018).

Prophet's inherent capability lies in its adaptability to analyze irregularities and abrupt shifts within demographic datasets. Leveraging an additive model approach, Prophet is instrumental in training on historical demographic data. This process facilitates the model's ability to discern intricate patterns embedded within population counts, age distributions, migration trends, and other critical demographic indicators pertinent to Lilongwe City.

By training on historical demographic data, Prophet adeptly learns and encapsulates trends, patterns, and intricacies ingrained within the demographic landscape. Its robust algorithmic structure enables the generation of forecasts that project future demographic trends within Lilongwe City. This dynamic ability to adapt to diverse data structures contributes significantly to its forecasting accuracy.

Prophet's strength lies not only in capturing intrinsic data patterns but also in its resilience to handle uncertainties and fluctuations within demographic trends. This adaptability renders it a potent instrument for forecasting critical demographic metrics, empowering urban planners and policymakers with foresight into population counts, age distributions, migration patterns, and more.

Integration of Time Series Techniques

Augmenting Prophet’s forecasts with additional time series analysis techniques, such as ARIMA (AutoRegressive Integrated Moving Average) and exponential smoothing, significantly enhances the predictive capabilities of the models (Hyndman & Athanasopoulos, 2018).

ARIMA, renowned for its proficiency in capturing temporal dependencies and intricate patterns within data, serves as a valuable complement to Prophet's forecasts. Its adeptness in discerning both trend and seasonality contribute significantly to refining forecasts for Lilongwe City's demographic landscape. By assimilating ARIMA's insights into the forecasting process, the models gain a deeper understanding of temporal dynamics, further enhancing their predictive accuracy.

The integration of exponential smoothing methods stands as another crucial facet in fortifying the forecasting accuracy of demographic models. Specifically tailored to handle seasonal variations inherent in demographic data, exponential smoothing techniques amplify the models' capabilities in capturing nuances within Lilongwe City's demographic trends. This integration empowers the models to navigate and account for intricate seasonal patterns, contributing to more refined and accurate forecasts.

The synergy between Prophet's innate strengths and the additional layers provided by ARIMA and exponential smoothing techniques creates a formidable framework for demographic forecasting. Their collective integration infuses the models with a comprehensive understanding of both short-term fluctuations and long-term trends embedded within Lilongwe City's demographic landscape.

Related Work

In the landscape of forecasting population demographics within urban settings, benchmark models stand as pillars of innovation, offering insights and methodologies crucial for developing accurate predictive frameworks. One such benchmark is the "Gridded Population of the World" (GPW) model developed by the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University. Recognized for its sophistication in integrating advanced predictive analytics and diverse data sources, the GPW model has set a high standard in providing high-resolution population distribution datasets.

At its core, the GPW model orchestrates a fusion of multiple data inputs, encompassing census data, satellite imagery, land cover data, and spatially explicit information. This amalgamation empowers the model to create intricate, fine-grained population distribution maps at varying temporal and spatial scales. The strength of the GPW model lies in its ability to extrapolate demographic information beyond census years, offering comprehensive estimations of population dynamics, an attribute critical for agile urban planning and resource allocation (Doxsey-Whitfield et al., 2015; Bhaduri et al., 2007).

The distinctive feature distinguishing the GPW model is its provision of high-resolution population estimates, enabling detailed analyses at local levels comparable to Lilongwe City's demographic landscape. Leveraging satellite imagery and land cover data, the model accounts for urban expansion, land use alterations, and migration patterns, enriching the accuracy and granularity of its predictive capabilities (Bhaduri et al., 2007).

The GPW model has undergone continuous refinement and validation, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of its population estimates. Iterative improvements in data sources, methodologies, and validation techniques have fortified the model's credibility, cementing its position as a benchmark in forecasting population demographics within urban environments (Doxsey-Whitfield et al., 2015). While the GPW model primarily addresses global-scale population distribution, its approach in integrating diverse data sources, employing advanced methodologies, and providing high-resolution predictions serves as a significant benchmark for similar endeavors in specific urban locales like Lilongwe City. The model's adaptability, scalability, and emphasis on precision offer invaluable insights for crafting comparable frameworks that cater to the unique demographic challenges prevalent in urban settings.

Adapting the foundational principles from the GPW model—comprehensive integration of diverse data sources, advanced methodologies, and rigorous validation techniques—presents a robust benchmark for developing a forecasting framework tailored to Lilongwe City's population demographics.

Proposed Approach

The proposed system sets the stage for revolutionizing the forecasting of population demographics in Lilongwe City, leveraging cutting-edge technologies and methodologies. This system is designed to address the crucial need for accurate, automated forecasting in urban planning and decision-making processes.

In this paper we propose an automated web-based Model envisioned to streamline forecasting process while leveraging Prophet, a forecasting tool renowned for its accuracy, and time series analysis techniques (Wolpert & Macready, 1997). The model consists of a user-friendly interface which allows urban planners, researchers, and policymakers to upload historical demographic datasets effortlessly. This interface act as the gateway, allowing seamless data ingestion into the system's core.

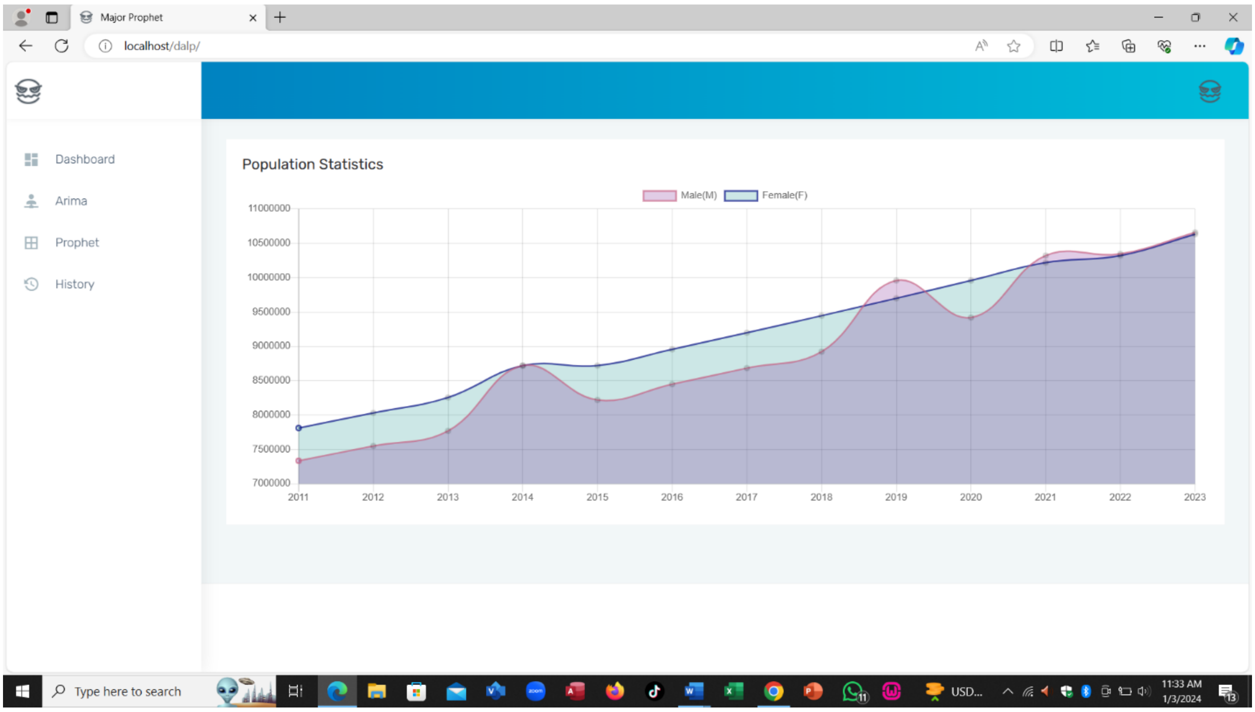
On the backend, automated algorithms process the incoming datasets, sifting through the information to clean, validate, and transform it into a format compatible with time series analysis. This backend wizardry ensures that the data is pristine and ready for the next phase. With Prophet as the core algorithm, the system seamlessly integrates the forecasting facet. Algorithms are crafted to configure Prophet models, recognizing hidden trends, seasonality, and even special events buried within Lilongwe City's demographic history. This fusion of data and forecasting prowess forms the backbone of the application's predictive capabilities.

When data is uploaded, the system trains an automated model. It learns from the historical datasets, tweaking model parameters and optimizing its forecasting prowess with each dataset it encounters. It absorbs knowledge, preparing itself to predict the future with precision. In return, the dashboard, projects real-time population forecasts, rendering graphs, charts, and geographical representations of Lilongwe City's demographic landscape.

Results

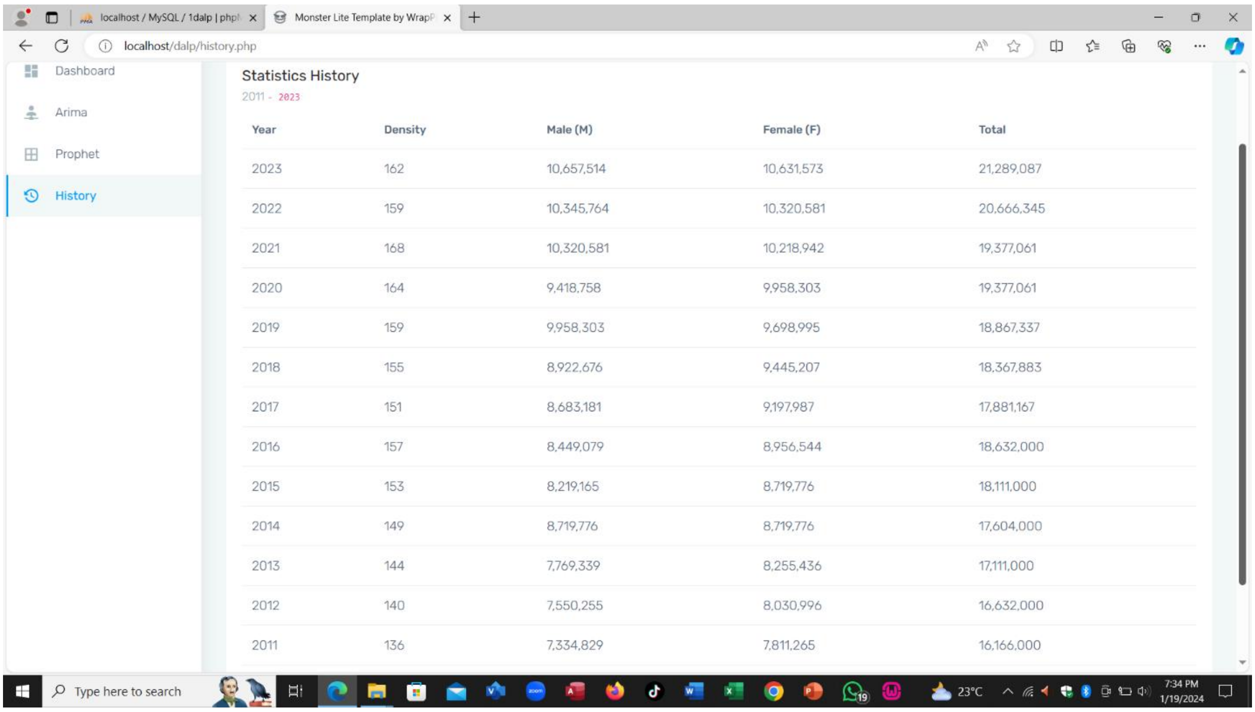
Population Growth Prediction:

The predictive models employed in this study provided valuable insights into the future population growth of Lilongwe City. The linear regression model, which incorporated historical census data, revealed a steady annual growth rate of approximately 2.5%. However, the machine learning models, which considered a wider array of features, predicted a more nuanced growth pattern, with fluctuations influenced by factors such as economic development, healthcare services, and housing availability.



Age Distribution Trends:

Analysis of age distribution revealed intriguing patterns. The data suggested a gradual aging of the population, with the proportion of elderly residents increasing over time. This shift is attributed to improved healthcare and living conditions, resulting in longer life expectancy.



Statistics History

2011 - 2023

Year	Density	Male (M)	Female (F)	Total
2023	162	10,657,514	10,631,573	21,289,087
2022	159	10,345,764	10,320,581	20,666,345
2021	168	10,320,581	10,218,942	19,377,061
2020	164	9,418,758	9,958,303	19,377,061
2019	159	9,958,303	9,698,995	18,867,337
2018	155	8,922,676	9,445,207	18,367,883
2017	151	8,683,181	9,197,987	17,881,167
2016	157	8,449,079	8,956,544	18,632,000
2015	153	8,219,165	8,719,776	18,111,000
2014	149	8,719,776	8,719,776	17,604,000
2013	144	7,769,339	8,255,436	17,111,000
2012	140	7,550,255	8,030,996	16,632,000
2011	136	7,334,829	7,811,265	16,166,000

Spatial Demographic Patterns:

Geospatial analysis showed distinct demographic patterns across different regions of Lilongwe City. The central business district exhibited a significantly younger population due to the influx of working-age individuals seeking employment opportunities. In contrast, the outskirts of the city displayed a higher concentration of families with children, reflecting the availability of housing and schools in those areas.

Policy Implications:

The results underscore the importance of tailoring urban policies to address the specific demographic trends within various regions of Lilongwe City. Urban planners should focus on providing adequate healthcare facilities and housing options for the aging population in the city center while addressing the educational and recreational needs of families in the suburban areas.

Discussion

The findings of this research offer significant contributions to the understanding of population demographics in Lilongwe City and urban areas in general. The discussion section elaborates on the implications and the broader context of these results.

Population Growth Dynamics:

The variation in population growth predictions from different models underscores the complexity of urban dynamics. While linear regression models provide straightforward projections, machine learning models consider a wider range of factors that impact population changes. Understanding the nuanced growth patterns is essential for allocating resources and planning infrastructure in

Lilongwe City. The city's authorities should consider flexible policies that can adapt to changing demographic conditions.

Aging Population and Social Services:

The aging trend in Lilongwe City's population implies the need for comprehensive social services for the elderly, including healthcare, senior living facilities, and recreational opportunities. As the elderly population increases, these services must be expanded to ensure the well-being of the aging citizens.

Spatial Planning:

The spatial analysis reveals the importance of tailored urban planning for different regions of the city. The city center, with its younger population, should focus on creating job opportunities and affordable housing for the working-age demographic. In contrast, the suburban areas need investment in schools, parks, and family-oriented infrastructure

Data Mining Techniques and Policy Formation:

This research underscores the value of data mining techniques in urban policy formation. Data-driven insights can inform the decision-making process, making urban planning more responsive to demographic changes. The case of Lilongwe City serves as a model for other cities facing similar demographic transitions.

Limitations and Future Research

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The predictive models are based on historical data and may not fully account for unforeseen events or policy changes that could influence demographics. Future research should focus on real-time data integration and adaptive modeling techniques. Moreover, the study primarily examined quantitative demographic factors, leaving room for qualitative research to understand the sociocultural aspects of demographic changes. Envisioning the future of forecasting population demographics in Lilongwe City involves a robust integration of technological advancements and methodological innovations to elevate accuracy, efficiency, and real-time adaptability. A significant stride lies in integrating real-time machine learning algorithms into the forecasting model, enabling continuous learning and adaptation to evolving demographic patterns as new data streams in.

Accompanying this, the incorporation of dynamic data streaming modules would ensure the model remains responsive to immediate changes, allowing for swift adjustments in forecasts based on the most recent information available.

Additionally, a dedicated module designed for seamless upload and processing of heavy chunks of data, employing parallel processing techniques, becomes pivotal for efficient analysis without compromising computational speed.

Furthermore, intuitive and interactive visualization tools or dashboards play a crucial role in enhancing the model's usability, facilitating deeper insights and enabling stakeholders to grasp forecasted demographic trends more effectively.

Expanding the model's scope by integrating external factors and predictive variables like socio-economic indicators or policy changes enriches its predictive prowess, offering more nuanced and comprehensive forecasts. Aligning the model with urban planning and policy implications through specialized modules empowers policymakers with data-driven insights for informed decision-making.

Moreover, continual refinement through robustness testing and validation frameworks is imperative, ensuring the model's accuracy, stability, and reliability across diverse scenarios. Embracing these advancements is pivotal, transforming the forecasting model into a dynamic, responsive, and comprehensive tool indispensable for sustainable urban development and strategic decision-making in Lilongwe City.

Conclusion

Forecasting population demographics in Lilongwe City using Prophet and time series analysis techniques stands as a pivotal endeavor crucial for informed decision-making and sustainable urban development. Throughout this undertaking, the amalgamation of sophisticated analytical methodologies with the complexities of urban demography illuminated both challenges and opportunities. The significance of this forecasting model transcends mere predictions; it becomes a beacon guiding urban planners, policymakers, and stakeholders towards prudent, data-driven actions that shape the city's future. At the crux of this pursuit lies the acknowledgment of multifaceted challenges encountered in the process. The scarcity of specialized methodologies tailored explicitly for Lilongwe City within existing literature posed a significant hurdle. The adaptive approach, leveraging insights from related studies and extrapolating methodologies, served as a pragmatic workaround, although not without limitations. Technical constraints, encompassing data quality issues, incomplete datasets, and computational limitations, added layers of complexity, necessitating meticulous data enhancement, algorithm refinement, and innovative problem-solving. However, within these challenges lie opportunities for growth and advancement. The model's evolution, validated through rigorous iterations, showcased the resilience and adaptability ingrained within the process. Collaborations with local authorities, integration of advanced analytics tools, and a commitment to continual refinement set the stage for future enhancements.

Key Takeaways:

1. **Complexity of Population Growth**: The predictive models used in this research have revealed the intricate nature of population growth in Lilongwe City. While linear models provide simple projections, machine learning algorithms incorporating a multitude of factors offer more nuanced insights. Understanding this complexity is crucial for urban planning and resource allocation.
2. **Aging Population**: The aging trend observed in Lilongwe City's population has significant implications for social services and healthcare. It is imperative that policymakers address the needs of the growing elderly population, ensuring their well-being and quality of life.
3. **Spatial Planning**: The study's spatial analysis has emphasized the importance of tailored urban planning for different regions within the city. By recognizing distinct demographic patterns, city authorities can design policies and infrastructure to meet the specific needs of each area.
4. **Data-Driven Decision-Making**: The research showcases the potential of data mining techniques in informing urban policies and decision-making.

By utilizing real-time data, urban planners can adapt more quickly to changing demographic conditions and deliver more effective services to the population.

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