

BAYESIAN NONPARAMETRIC CLUSTERING WITH DIRICHLET PROCESS MIXTURE MODEL FOR MIXED-TYPE DATA



Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2024

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

BAYESIAN NONPARAMETRIC CLUSTERING WITH DIRICHLET PROCESS MIXTURE MODEL FOR MIXED-TYPE DATA

By

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Mixture models have been applied regularly by many researchers for clustering and density estimations. In particular, the Bayesian nonparametric mixture model involving the Dirichlet process prior has recently enjoyed popularity in clustering due to its flexibility, allowing the number of mixture components to grow infinitely. In this thesis, we aim to present some modifications of Bayesian nonparametric methods focusing on clustering mixed-type data, where the data comprises of continuous, ordinal, and nominal data.

Many studies have shown successful applications of the Dirichlet process mixture (DPM) model for clustering continuous data. However, the recent DPM model for clustering mixed-type data assumes a common covariance matrix across clusters, which is too restrictive in real practice. Accordingly, we develop a DPM model for clustering mixed-type data that allows for cluster-specific covariance matrices. To demonstrate the flexibility of our model, we compare it with the model with a common covariance matrix. Through this comparison, our model shows superior performance in terms of Normalized Mutual Information (NMI) in simulated

datasets with different cluster shapes and two real data applications. Our model also succeeds in estimating the true number of clusters in all cases as opposed to the model with a common covariance assumption that tends to overcluster the data.

When dealing with multivariate data, not all variables contribute towards cluster discrimination. To distinguish between relevant and irrelevant clustering variables, the DPM model for mixed-type data is further extended by specifying hierarchical shrinkage prior on the component means. This can be thought of as an implicit variable selection in clustering. The hierarchical shrinkage prior considered involves the normal-gamma prior for the continuous and ordinal data; while for nominal data, the grouped normal-gamma prior is used. The performances of the proposed model with shrinkage prior and without shrinkage prior are then compared. The comparison shows that the model with shrinkage prior achieves better clustering performance with higher NMI value, especially in simulated datasets with highly overlapping clusters and real datasets. Throughout the comparison, the model with shrinkage prior also produces a tighter clustering output measured in the form of silhouette width. Furthermore, the proposed model also successfully distinguishes relevant variables from noisy ones, as reflected by higher NMI value observed when the model is fitted with only the relevant variables.

The standard DPM model is introduced to address unsupervised learning problems where the data is analyzed without any background knowledge. To consider this extra knowledge in the clustering process, we develop a constrained DPM model that can incorporate labels as side information. These labels are considered in our formulation through a product partition prior that gives clusters of observations with similar labels a higher prior preference. The formulation is further extended to handle multiple side information. The empirical results on several simulated and real datasets show that our model consistently improves its clustering performance in terms of NMI value as more labeled data become available. Even in the presence of noisy labels, the proposed model rarely performs worse than the standard unsupervised model, especially on continuous datasets. In multiple side information experiments, consistent increments in NMI value are also observed with access to more side information.

Keywords: Bayesian nonparametric, clustering, Dirichlet process, mixture model, model-based clustering

SDG: GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PENGELOMPOKAN BAYESIAN TAK PARAMETRIK DENGAN MODEL CAMPURAN PROSES DIRICHLET UNTUK DATA JENIS GABUNGAN

Oleh

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Model campuran sering digunakan oleh para penyelidik dalam pengelompokan dan anggaran ketumpatan. Khususnya, model campuran Bayesian tak parametrik yang melibatkan prior proses Dirichlet sangat popular dalam pengelompokan kerana keanjalannya yang membolehkan bilangan komponen campuran bertambah tanpa had. Dalam tesis ini, kami bermatlamat untuk membentangkan beberapa pengubahsuaian kaedah Bayesian tak parametrik yang memfokuskan pada pengelompokan data data jenis gabungan. Di sini, data jenis gabungan merujuk kepada data yang terdiri daripada gabungan data selanjar, data ordinal, dan data nominal.

Banyak kajian berjaya menunjukkan aplikasi model campuran proses Dirichlet (DPM) bagi pengelompokan data selanjar. Walau bagaimanapun, model DPM terkini untuk pengelompokan data jenis gabungan mengandaikan matriks kovarians yang sama untuk semua kelompok, di mana andaian ini terlalu ketat dalam amalan aplikasi sebenar. Sehubungan dengan itu, kami membangunkan model DPM untuk data jenis gabungan yang membenarkan matriks kovarians

berbeza untuk setiap kelompok. Untuk menunjukkan keanjalan model kami, kami membandingkannya dengan model yang mengandaikan matriks kovarians sama. Melalui perbandingan ini, model kami menunjukkan prestasi unggul dari segi Maklumat Bersama Ternormal (NMI) dalam set data simulasi dengan bentuk kelompok yang berbeza dan dua aplikasi data sebenar. Model kami juga berjaya menganggar bilangan kluster sebenar dalam semua kes berbanding model dengan andaian kovarians sama yang cenderung mengelompok data secara berlebihan.

Apabila berurusan dengan data multivariat, tidak semua pembolehubah menyumbang ke arah diskriminasi kelompok. Untuk membezakan antara pembolehubah pengelompokan yang relevan dan tidak relevan, model DPM untuk data jenis gabungan dilanjutkan lagi dengan penggunaan prior kecutan hierarki pada min komponen. Ini boleh dianggap sebagai pemilihan pembolehubah tersirat dalam pengelompokan. Prior kecutan hierarki yang dipertimbangkan melibatkan prior normal-gamma untuk data selanjar dan ordinal; manakala untuk data ordinal, prior normal-gamma berkumpulan pula digunakan. Prestasi model yang dicadangkan dengan prior kecutan dan tanpa prior kecutan kemudian dibandingkan. Perbandingan menunjukkan bahawa model dengan prior kecutan mencapai prestasi pengelompokan yang lebih baik dengan nilai NMI lebih tinggi, terutamanya dalam set data simulasi dengan kelompok yang sangat bertindih dan juga set data sebenar. Sepanjang perbandingan, model dengan prior kecutan juga menghasilkan output pengelompokan yang lebih ketat diukur dalam bentuk lebar bayang. Tambahan pula, model yang dicadangkan juga berjaya membezakan pembolehubah yang relevan daripada yang hingar, seperti ditunjukkan oleh nilai NMI yang lebih tinggi diperhatikan apabila model ini disuai dengan hanya pembolehubah yang relevan tersebut.

Model piawai DPM diperkenalkan untuk menangani masalah pembelajaran tanpa pengawasan di mana data dianalisis tanpa pengetahuan latar belakang. Untuk mempertimbangkan pengetahuan tambahan ini dalam proses pengelompokan, kami membangunkan model DPM terkekang yang boleh menggunakan data label sebagai maklumat sampingan. Label ini dipertimbangkan dalam rumusan kami menerusi prior produk partisi yang memberi keutamaan yang lebih tinggi kepada kelompok dengan label yang serupa. Rumusan yang sama juga diperluaskan bagi mengendalikan maklumat sampingan berganda. Keputusan empirikal pada beberapa set data simulasi dan sebenar menunjukkan bahawa model kami secara konsisten meningkatkan prestasi pengelompokannya dari segi nilai NMI apabila lebih banyak data berlabel tersedia. Walaupun terdapat label yang hingar, model yang dicadangkan jarang menunjukkan prestasi yang lebih buruk daripada model piawai tanpa pengawasan, terutamanya pada set data selanjar. Dalam eksperimen maklumat sampingan berganda, kenaikan konsisten dalam nilai NMI juga diperhatikan dengan lebih banyak capaian kepada maklumat sampingan.

Kata Kunci: Bayesian tak parametrik, pengelompokan, proses Dirichlet, model campuran, pengelompokan berasaskan model

SDG: GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, all praise to Allah S.W.T. the Almighty for giving me the blessings, chance, strength, and endurance to complete this program. Nothing can be achieved without the Almighty's will. May Allah's blessing go to the final Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his family, and his companions.

I will be ever grateful to Dr. Mohd. Bakri Adam, who, even though he is no longer with us, continues to inspire us with his dedication throughout his life. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Kamarulzaman Ibrahim for standing by me during my time of loss. I must express my gratitude to Dr. Hani Syahida Zulkafli for guidance and support throughout this program. I am also grateful to Assoc. Prof. Datin Norwati Mustapha for her effort as a supervisory committee member.

Words cannot express my deep love and gratitude to Abah, Mak, and Andak for their patience and presence through all the ups and downs of my studies. This would not be a proper gratitude if I did not acknowledge my siblings, especially Zainul and Ain, for lending me their laptops, which I would not be able to finish if they did not.

Completing this study would have been more difficult without the support provided by the members of the Department of Mathematical Sciences at UKM and the staff of the Institute of Mathematical Research at UPM. I cannot thank them enough for their assistance. Those people, the postgraduate students at UPM, who gave me a very much-required form of escape from my studies, also deserve my gratitude for helping keep things in perspective.

Last but not least, I am especially grateful to the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and the Ministry of Higher Education for providing the funding that allowed me to undertake this program.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 15 January 2024 to conduct the final examination of Nurul Afiqah binti Burhanuddin on her thesis entitled "Bayesian Nonparametric Clustering with Dirichlet Process Mixture Model for Mixed-Type Data" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CKD chronic kidney disease

CRP Chinese restaurant process

CS compound symmetry

DP Dirichlet process

DPGM Dirichlet process Gaussian mixture

DPM Dirichlet process mixture

ec-GM Gaussian mixture with equivalence constraints

EM Expectation Maximization

GIG generalized inverse Gaussian

GM Gaussian mixture

lc-DPM label-constrained Dirichlet process mixture

MCMC Markov chain Monte Carlo

NMI Normalized Mutual Information

non-CKD non-chronic kidney disease

PCA principal component analysis

pl-Kmeans W-means with partition level side information

PP product partition

SW silhouette width

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

We live in the era of big data. With the Internet, information can be obtained almost instantly. This has changed the dynamic of data acquisition; we expect to see, for example, a greater variety of topics as we read more news online, a greater variety of tags as we view more images online, and more debates as we examine individuals engaging in a social network. As more data are created and collected daily, the demand for effective data analysis tools continues to rise. Clustering is one of the common data analysis tools to identify natural grouping in a dataset. There are many different clustering methods available, such as hierarchical-based, centroid-based, density-based, and model-based. These methods differ in their underlying methodology in defining the target cluster. Hierarchical clustering builds a series of clustering outputs through a merger or division strategy based on some criteria function. Since each clustering output is irrevisable, the clustering results depend heavily on the choice of the criteria function (Murtagh, 1983). Centroid-based clustering, such as K-means (Hartigan and Wong, 1979) and K-medoid (Kaufman and Rousseeuw, 2009), groups the data based on their proximity to the cluster center called centroid. In contrast to hierarchical clustering, the centroid-based clustering method produces only one clustering output that is optimized iteratively. The density-based clustering, such as DBSCAN (Ester et al., 1996), characterizes clusters as dense regions in the sample space, separated by regions of lower density. Although density-based clustering is effective in identifying clusters of arbitrary shapes, interpretability suffers as a result. Overall, all these three clustering methods are purely heuristic without any underlying formal model.

Early on, it was discovered that the clustering method could also be built based on a statistical framework (Bock, 1996). Such clustering methods are usually based on a finite mixture model, referred to as the model-based clustering approach. In this approach, the data is assumed to arise from a mixture of distributions. Suppose we wish to partition $\mathbf{x} = (x_1, \dots, x_N)$ into K clusters. This task can be formulated through the following model:

$$p(x_i; \boldsymbol{\theta}, \mathbf{w}) = \sum_{k=1}^{K} w_k p_k(x_i; \theta_k)$$

where $p_k(x_i;\theta_k)$ is the parametric density function of observation x_i from the kth component, θ_k is the parameter that characterized the density function, and w_k s are the component weights with $\sum_{k=1}^K w_k = 1$. This formulation requires the number of components K to be known in advance. Since each component is associated to one cluster, K is used interchangeably as the number of clusters. The use of the mixture model is gaining popularity in cluster analysis primarily due to the fact that it allows us to leverage standard statistical tools in assessing and advancing the clustering method. Moreover, some of the most widely used heuristic clustering methods have been proven to be approximate estimations of some statistical models. For instance, the standard K-means can be seen as a special case of the standard Gaussian mixture (GM) model with fixed mixing proportions and covariance matrices (Neal and Hinton, 1998).

Model-based clustering has been applied successfully in a wide area of applications, including population structure (Pritchard et al., 2000), genetics (McLachlan et al., 2002), computer vision (Lee, 2005), and econometrics (Frühwirth-Schnatter and Kaufmann, 2008), just to mention a few. However, despite the success of model-based clustering, quite a few practical issues should be considered. In particular, in the applications where there is little information available on the exact number of clusters, which in this case is the K; therefore, the unknown K has to be estimated from the data. From a fully Bayesian perspective, prob-

ably the most naive approach is to consider the K as an unknown parameter by specifying a prior distribution on it. Here, the term "fully" indicates that all the model parameters are assumed to be random, including the K. For this approach, several inference algorithms have been put forth, many of them are built upon the reversible jump Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) proposed by Richardson and Green (1997). Reversible jump MCMC creates a Markov chain that jumps between mixture models of different K based on a proposal density. This proposal density can be challenging to construct, especially in a multivariate setting (Dellaportas and Papageorgiou, 2006). While there are advances in generalizing the construction of an effective proposal density for the Reversible jump MCMC (Brooks et al., 2003; Hastie and Green, 2012), these increase the complexity of the inference algorithms. Alternatively, Nobile (2004) proposed estimating the K based on the model marginal likelihood. Nonetheless, the marginal likelihood computation turns out to be demanding even for a moderate value of K (Frühwirth-Schnatter, 2004).

With the existence of a relatively simple MCMC (Escobar and West, 1995; MacEachern and Müller, 1998; Neal, 2000), it motivates us to turn to the Bayesian nonparametric approach in this thesis. The Bayesian nonparametric clustering allows the number K of the mixture model to grow infinitely, thus addressing the issue of an unknown number of clusters. This framework replaces the corresponding finite dimensional prior distribution of classical Bayesian analysis with infinite dimensional stochastic processes. Moreover, this model can be considered as an extension of the Bayesian finite mixture model with the advantage that it does not need any model selection to find the appropriate value of the K.

1.2 Scope of the Study

Motivated by such flexibility of the Bayesian nonparametric approach, this thesis focuses on using this approach to the mixture model in a clustering context. Much of our work builds upon a mixture model of the form:

$$x_i \sim F = \int p(x_i | \theta_i) dG(\theta_i),$$

 $\theta_i | G \sim G,$
 $G \sim \mathcal{P},$

where $p(x_i|\theta_i)$ denotes a probability density function parameterized by a random variable θ_i . This density function constitutes the kernel of the mixture model, and G acts as a mixing measure following some nonparametric prior \mathcal{P} . There have been many nonparametric priors available in the literature, such as the Dirichlet process, Gaussian process, Pólya tree process, and beta process. However, in this study, we restrict ourselves to the Dirichlet process (DP) prior, which plays a key role in the Bayesian nonparametric mixtures. The DP was introduced by Ferguson (1973) to serve as a prior over the space of discrete probability measures. The discreteness of the DP makes it suitable to be used as a mixing measure in mixture modeling. Basically, the role of the DP is to tie together the observations that share the same support, thus forming the different components of the mixture model. The mixture model that uses DP as the mixing measure is referred to as the Dirichlet process mixture (DPM). For Bayesian nonparametric models with other priors, refer to the following papers: Griffiths and Ghahramani (2011), Lijoi et al. (2005), Ishwaran and James (2001), and Pitman and Yor (1997).

In addition, since we are focusing on the clustering problem, it is stressed that the primary purpose of all the empirical examples in this thesis is to find the clustering classification rather than to obtain precise point estimates of parameters as in density estimation.

1.3 Problem Statement

Due to the abundance of available data, researchers have encountered increasingly complex data structures in an attempt to describe or explain some real world events. This raises many new and exciting challenges in cluster analysis.

The standard DPM model is limited to handling a single type of data at a time. In particular, the Gaussian distribution is usually adopted as the mixture kernel to handle continuous data, and the multinomial distribution to handle nominal data. In real applications, we frequently encountered mixed-type data. The mixed-type data is defined as a set of data that contains several different types of variables. For instance, we are often asked for gender and age when filling out a survey. These two pieces of information already constitute two different types of data. However, clustering approaches for handling mixed-type data are less studied in the literature, let alone its extension. Moreover, most clustering approaches and their extensions are exclusively constructed to handle only one type of variable; see Vouros and Vasilaki (2021), Sarkar et al. (2020), and Peralta et al. (2016) among others. Furthermore, the current method of DPM for clustering mixed-type data has a very restrictive assumption in terms of the cluster shape (Carmona et al., 2019). This restriction leads us to develop a more flexible model for clustering mixed-type data.

The next problem that needs to be addressed is that not all variables are relevant and contribute towards cluster discrimination. The inclusion of these irrelevant variables could obscure the true cluster structure. This is especially true in multivariate settings when there are so many variables involved. In many application domains, some variables that make up the clusters are perceived to bring about more information than others. For example, suppose in a medical diagnosis, the practitioner is clustering tissue samples into multiple cancer types. At the same time, the practitioner is also interested in isolating which genes give rise to cancerous cell behavior. This process of identifying subsets of variables that are crucial in distinguishing a cluster structure is called the variable selection process. Having a clustering model that can also identify both the cluster structure available in the data as well as the variables that contribute to this particular structure is beneficial. Some works on variable selection in clustering include Fu et al. (2021), Prakash and Singh (2019), and Marbac and Sedki (2017). Nevertheless, these methods are only applicable to continuous data. This motivates us to explore variable selection in clustering mixed-type data.

In addition, the standard DPM is initially introduced to address an unsupervised learning problem where the data is analyzed with nothing known about the true cluster structure. However, in many practical applications, one often performs cluster analysis with a rough idea of how the cluster structure should be. For instance, a few hundred billion emails are estimated to be sent and received daily. Suppose we have access to the database of emails, with some already being classified as "spam" or "non-spam". In this case, clustering can be used to classify the emails such that one group is predominantly made up of "spam" and another group is primarily made up of "non-spam". Then, to fully leverage all the available information, the pre-classified emails can be used to guide the clustering algorithm to make a more accurate grouping. This grey area between having absolutely no knowledge and having some information has encouraged the researcher to extend the current clustering algorithm to a case called constrained clustering; see, for example, Covoes et al. (2013) and Basu et al. (2008). In this thesis, we are interested in extending the DPM model to a constrained case for continuous and mixed-type data by considering labeled data as side information.

1.4 Objectives

Indeed, the present challenges give us many opportunities to devise new tools for capturing the hidden patterns in the data. Therefore, to address these challenges, we aim to provide a few contributions to the current DPM model. More specifically, the objectives of our study are:

- 1. To develop a DPM model for clustering mixed-type data based on latent variables approach.
- 2. To develop a method for variable selection in clustering mixed-type data using shrinkage prior.
- 3. To develop a constrained DPM model for clustering mixed-type data that can incorporate labeled data as side information.

Model verification of all the proposed methods in this study is done by simulation studies. In addition, the applicability of each method is also illustrated through the usage of publicly available datasets.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

We organize the rest of the thesis as follows.

In Chapter 2, we start with a brief introduction to cluster analysis, finite mixture model, and infinite mixture model. Then, we briefly review the technical concepts and discuss the necessary tools that lay a foundation for our study. This is followed by a literature review discussing important works related to this study.

Starting from Chapter 3, we begin with our main contributions. In this chapter, we propose a DPM model that simultaneously handles mixed continuous, ordinal, and nominal data. Using the latent variables approach, we describe how the ordinal and nominal data are incorporated into the Gaussian kernel. The restriction on the choice of prior is also discussed.

Chapter 4 explores the use of shrinkage prior on the component means in a mixed-type data setting., which allows for implicit variable selection. The comparison between DPM with and without shrinkage prior is also illustrated through simulated and real datasets. In addition, the validity of the variables selected is also investigated.

In Chapter 5, we propose a constrained version of the DPM model that takes into account the availability of labeled information. To be specific, the labeled data is integrated via a product partition prior, where the relationship between the product partition model and DPM is also described. The formulation is also extended to accommodate multiple side information. In the first part of the chapter, we focus on the conjugate Gaussian kernel case. We then also present a variation of the model in a mixed-type data setting.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides the concluding remarks and the significant contributions of this study. Suggestions for future works related to this study are also presented in this chapter.

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