Esssentials of Applied Data Analysis IPSA-USP Summer School 2017

Handout - Expected Value

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Expectation and mean value of a discrete random variable

Expectation and a simple game

Imagine a game where you toss a coin and get \$1 if the result is head and 0 if the result is tail. How much should you expect to earn?

The expected value of a discrete random variable can be easily obtained by summing each result multiplied by probability of that result ocurring.

$$E[X] = 0.5 * 0 + 0.5 * 1 = 0.5$$

Now, imagine a game where you roll a dice and you can get \$1 times the number you get on the dice. How much should you expect to earn?

$$E[X] = \frac{1}{6} * 1 + \frac{1}{6} * 2 + \frac{1}{6} * 3 + \frac{1}{6} * 4 + \frac{1}{6} * 5 + \frac{1}{6} * 6 + \frac{1}{6} * 1 = 3.666$$

Expectation and mean value of a discrete random variable

In more general term, the expectation or mean of a discrete random variable is:

$$E[X] = \sum_{i=1}^{n} x_i * P(X = x_i) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} x_i * f(x_i)$$

where x_i is an occurence of the variable X and $f(x_i)$ is the probability mass function (the probability that x_i will occur).

Note that, since the set of all x_i is the set of all possible values for X, then

$$E[X] = \sum_{i=1}^{n} P(X = x_i) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} f(x_i) = 1$$

Expectation and mean value of a discrete random variable

Example: (Made-up) survey with 2000 respondents in 2014 Brazilian presidential elections.

Candidate (x)	# of respondents	$P(X = x)$
Dilma	800	0.40
Aécio	500	0.25
Marina	400	0.20
Other/Null/DK	500	0.25
Total	2000	1.00

Can we calculate $E[X]$?

Expectation and mean value of a discrete random variable

When all $P(X = x_i)$ is the same for every x_i, we can simplify the expression of $E[X]$ to:

$$E[X] = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} x_i = \frac{x_1 + x_2 + ... + x_n}{n}$$

which is what we normally do to calculate avareges in daily life.

Expectation and mean value of a discrete random variable

Some properties of the mean:

$$E[a * X] = a * E[X]$$

$$E[X + b] = E[X] + b$$

So what? Well, if you multiply a variable by a number (a) to generate a new variable, the mean of the new variable is the mean of the old variable times a.

Also, if you sum a quantity b to a random variable, the mean of the result variable will be the mean of the original variable plus b.

Let's try it later on an statistical software!

Expectation and variance of a discrete random variable

Another important quantity of a random variable is the variance. The name is self-explanatory: the variance measures how spread-out a variable is.

Expectation and variance of a discrete random variable

The variance of a random variable is also an expectation:

$$Var[X] = \sum_{i=1}^{n} [x_i - E[X]]^2 * P(X = x_i) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} [x_i - E[X]]^2 * f(x_i)$$

where x_i is an occurence of the variable X, E[X] is the expected value of X and $f(x_i)$ is the probability mass function (the probability that x_i will occur).

Expectation and variance of a discrete random variable

Coin game (where heads pays off \$1 and tails pays off \$0):

$$Var[X] = \sum_{i=1}^{n} [x_i - E[X]]^2 * f(x_i) = [0.5 - 0.5]^2 * 0 + 0.5 * 1 = 0.5$$

Expectation and variance of a discrete random variable

Some properties of the variance:

$$Var[a * X] = a^2 * E[X]$$

$$Var[X + b] = Var[X]$$

So what? Well, if you multiply a variable by a number (a) to generate a new variable, the variance of the new variable is the variance of the old variable times a^2.

Also, if you sum a quantity b to a random variable, the variance of the result variable will equal to the variance of the original variable.

Let's try it later on an statistical software!

Expectation and variance of a discrete random variable

Some properties of the variance:

$$Var[a * X] = a^2 * E[X]$$

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Expectation, mean, variance and standard deviation

Notation:

$$E[X] = \mu[X] = \mu$$

$$Var[X] = \sigma^2[X] = \sigma^2$$

The standard deviation (σ) of a variable is

$$\sigma = \sqrt{Var[X]} = \sqrt{\sigma^2}$$

Another way to calculate the variance is simply doing:

$$Var[X] = E[X^2] - (E[X])^2$$