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Statistics 154

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Project 2 Final Report

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to conduct detailed data exploration and modeling of cloud detection based on data collected through MISR sensor. The primary goal of such analysis is to develop a classification model that can effectively distinguish the clouds and ice / snow surfaces using given features.

The paper consists of four major components: data collection and exploration, data cleaning, modeling, and diagnostics. In data collection the background and source of data was explained and explorative data analysis was carried out. In data cleaning, the information was split into multiple sets and particular features were chosen for later analysis. In modeling, different classification methods were used and their fit was assessed through cross validation and other techniques. In the diagnostics section, the best classifier from the previous part was assessed for its accuracy in predicting the response variables.

1. Data Collection and Exploration

2.1 Summary of Paper

The purpose of this study is to develop a new operational Arctic cloud detection algorithm using Multiangle Imaging SpectroRadiometer (MISR) imagery. In the contemporary world, the effect of the amount of atmospheric carbon dioxide is of great scientific interest to researchers. Arctic appears to be an ideal area for investigations in this field as it displays the strongest dependences of surface air temperatures on increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. However, a major issue is that accurate Arctic-wide measurements are often difficult to obtain--it is hard to detect clouds over other surface types, such as liquid and ice-water cloud particles that have similar scattering properties. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a set of algorithms that accurately characterize the properties of clouds over the daylight Arctic.

The data used throughout the study were collected from 10 MISR orbits of path 26 over the Arctic, northern Greenland, and Baffin Bay through a time span of approximately 144 days. Each MISR pixel covers a 275 m x 275 m region on the ground. Six data units from each orbit are included in the observations. In addition to the key parameters such as correlation, NDAI index, standard deviation, and information from the six data units, the dataset also includes a column of expert label values, which represents the experts’ hand-labeled data indicating whether a particular patch of image pixels signify cloudy or clear scenes: all of which that are based on highly-confident domain knowledge were marked as clear or cloudy and those with ambiguity were unlabeled.

The data also suggests that the ELCM algorithm is more accurate and provides more comprehensive spatial information than the existing MISR operational algorithm. The conclusions from this research is significant in that it provides a better understanding of the polar cloud properties and its potential effect to the changes in the Arctic region brought about by increasing concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide.  Another key aspect of this research is that it shows the power of statistical thinking and the key role that statistics play in contributing to modern scientific problems.

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2.2 Data Summary

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Description automatically generatedWhen exploring the relationships between different variables, we purposely combined rows of datasets from all three images so that we could observe the overall relationships across all images. In addition, we stored a data frame in which we omitted all data with an expert label of zero (no information) as they, at this stage, does not contribute to the investigation. It will also make the classification process later easier as most of the classification methods used only support binary response variables. The original data is still stored under a different name just in case it is needed in later analysis.

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Description automatically generatedAs shown by the plots of the three images on the left, the region of ice/snow surfaces and cloudy areas are clustered without obvious patterns. For this reason, we deduce that there are spatial correlations between pixels. Therefore, the independent and identical distribution assumption is not valid in this dataset.

The top left figure on the following page displays the pairwise plots for NDAI, SD, and CORR, which allows us to observe the pairwise relationship between the three variables. However, no significant pattern was found between the features except for NDAI plotted against SD, which seems to suggest a wider range of SD values as the value of NDAI index increases. Nevertheless, such correlation does not appear to be very strong. Such observations are similar across all three images. The top right figure on the following page shows the correlation values between different radiance angles and all values are highly correlated with each other. This may be because the data for the radiance angles are collected at around the same region with the same set of tools, just with slightly different angles. Relationships between NDAI, CORR, and the different radiance angle were observed by plotting the angles against NDAI or CORR. It was discovered that when CORR was plotted against the radiance angles AF, AN, and BF, there exists a negative, approximately linear relationship, as displayed in the three figures in the following page. This confirms the calculation of CORR used AF, AN, and BF in Bin’s paper (2008).

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2.3 Data Exploration

Histograms displaying the distributions of SD, CORR, NDAI, and a selection of radiance angles were also plotted, color-coded by the expert label. It is obvious from such histograms that the distributions of SD and CORR for both categories (cloudy and clear) are approximately the same, while the count for clear is significantly higher than the count for cloudy. The histogram for NDAI (shown on the right above) for all three images suggest that the lower range of NDAI index corresponds to a high number of “clear” labels, while all the “cloudy” labels were made at higher NDAI indices: the distributions for the two labels are relatively distinct from each other. This indicates that NDAI may be a good feature for predicting if a particular part of the images is cloudy or not. The other histograms, on the other hand, show that the distributions of the cloudy and clear labeled data have very similar distributions. The abundance of overlap suggest that it can be difficult to distinguish the two labels using the features.

1. Data Cleaning and Preparation

3.1 Data Splitting

In order to build and evaluate the model, we decided to separate data for each image into training, validation, and test set independently and then combine the sets for each image.

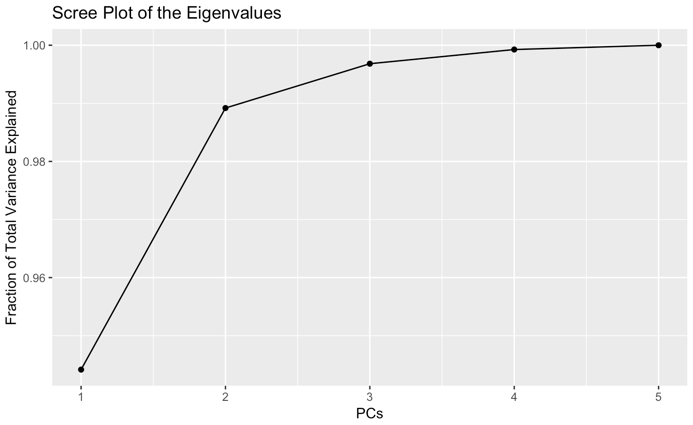
Taking the spatial relationship between adjacent pixels into account, we know that the data points are not independent and identically distributed. A naive splitting approach might cause the training dataset to consist of all cloudy or clear pixels. This will lead to a misrepresentation of the original data and thus negative affect the model performance. For example, if our training dataset has 99 out of 100 pixels as cloudy, then a trivial classifier will get 99% training accuracy.  In order to keep the balance in our three datasets as well as preserve local spatial correlation, we proposed two ways of splitting to avoid the issues. In the first method, we partition each image into n x n rectangular boxes, and then, viewing each box as an independent entity, we randomly sample training, validation and testing set among the boxes.

The second method is similar to the first one but slightly different.  Instead of choosing an entire box, we randomly sample from the data within each box into training, validation and testing sets. Then, we combine all training, validation and testing from each box into our final training, validation and testing sets. The second method may damage spatial relationship, but can still manage to ensure a balance. It can also serve as a comparison against the first method. Our conjecture at this point is that our first method can do better as it also preserves the spatial relationships. However, such conjecture can only be assessed in the later modeling and diagnostics sections.

3.2 Baseline Accuracy

A trivial classifier that automatically sets all labels to be -1 was created. The accuracies of such classifier on the validation set and test set were then calculated in comparison to the actual expert label: they are 60.85% and 60.82%, respectively. This sets a minimal requirement for our research  by implying that any model created should obtain an accuracy that is at least as high as the baseline accuracy, as such baseline model is the most basic and simple model one can possibly create.

3.3 Variable Selection

To investigate on the predictive power of the raw features, we implemented PCA on all five radiance angle features. As shown by the screeplot below, the first three PCs capture about 99.7% of the overall variance, which means the first three features are almost capable of explaining the entire dataset. Therefore, we decided to use the first three principal components as our features.

To see if our choice is reasonable, we performed a quick and simple logistic regression and tested it on validation set. We got an accuracy around 84.5%, which is higher than SDCM, ASCM, and Offline SVM methods mentioned in Bin’s paper (shown on the left). The coverage is also 100%.

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1. Data Modeling
2. Diagnostics