GT-DPAM: Game-Theoretic Dynamic Programming Association Miner for Interpretable Pattern Discovery

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Abstract. Association Rule Mining (ARM) is fundamental in knowledge discovery, with Apriori (Agrawal and Srikant, 1994) and FP-Growth (Han et al., 2000) representing two dominant algorithmic approaches. Apriori minimizes memory overhead through level-wise candidate generation but requires multiple database scans, while FP-Growth eliminates scans through compact tree structures but incurs significant construction costs. Apriori uses a breadth-first, candidate generation strategy, while FP-Growth employs a depth-first, divide-and-conquer approach using frequent-pattern trees. Hybrid-AFP Algorithm synthesizes the methods of both Apriori and FP-Growth to achieve superior performance. Hybrid-AFP results in significant performance improvements for medium-support threshold scenarios. However, Hybrid-AFP is not without its limitations which will be discussed in the below section and for future work direction. ARM has evolved through distinct methodological paradigms, each optimizing different aspects of pattern discovery. This research presents and empirically compares three approaches: (1) throughput-optimized Vanilla Apriori, (2) balance-optimized Hybrid-AFP, and (3) interpretability-optimized Game-Theoretic Dynamic Programming Association Miner (GT-DPAM). Our experiments on breast cancer diagnostic data demonstrate that Vanilla Apriori achieves maximum throughput (197,288 rules/second), Hybrid-AFP provides the best speed-quality balance (1.2$\times$ faster than Vanilla with 68.7% high-confidence rules), while GT-DPAM uniquely enables interpretable pattern discovery through Shapley value-based feature importance quantification. GT-DPAM identifies concavity features as most predictive for malignancy (Shapley value = 1.000), discovers 574 synergistic patterns with game theory values > 0.3, and generates clinically actionable insights unavailable from traditional methods. Results establish a framework for method selection based on application requirements, with GT-DPAM particularly valuable for medical domains where interpretability and clinical relevance are paramount.

Source Code: GitHub Repository

Dataset: `https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/uciml/breast-cancer-wisconsin-data` (Wolberg, 1993)

Keywords: Association Rule Mining (ARM), Apriori, FP-Growth, Game Theory, Shapley Values, Medical Pattern Discovery, Interpretable Machine Learning, Breast Cancer Diagnosis

1 INTRODUCTION

ARM has become a fundamental technique for discovering interesting relationships in large datasets. Traditional approaches have focused primarily on computational efficiency and pattern completeness, leading to algorithms like Apriori and FP-Growth that optimize for throughput. However, in domains such as healthcare, finance, and scientific discovery, interpretability and actionable insights often outweigh computational efficiency. The proliferation of rules generated by traditional methods—often numbering in the tens of thousands—creates analysis paralysis and obscures meaningful patterns among statistical correlations.

This research addresses three fundamental limitations of current ARM approaches: (1) the rule explosion problem that overwhelms human analysts, (2) the inability to quantify feature importance in discovered patterns, and (3) the focus on statistical correlation rather than clinically meaningful relationships. We propose and evaluate three distinct methodological paradigms:

1. Throughput-optimized paradigm: Traditional methods prioritizing complete pattern discovery

2. Balance-optimized paradigm: Hybrid approaches balancing speed and quality

3. Interpretability-optimized paradigm: Game theory-enhanced methods focusing on actionable insights

Our primary contribution is the introduction of GT-DPAM, which applies cooperative game theory con-

cepts—specifically Shapley values—to association rule mining. This enables quantifiable feature importance assessment, synergistic pattern discovery, and clinically interpretable insights previously unavailable in ARM.

2 RELATED WORK

2.1 TRADITIONAL ASSOCIATION RULE MINING

The Apriori algorithm introduced the downward closure property for efficient candidate generation, while FP-Growth improved efficiency through pattern tree construction. Subsequent optimizations have focused primarily on computational efficiency (Borgelt, 2003) (Zaki, 2000), with limited attention to pattern interpretability.

2.2 QUALITY METRICS AND RULE FILTERING

Research on rule quality metrics has explored various measures including confidence, lift, conviction, and interestingness (Tan, 2004). However, these metrics evaluate individual rules rather than providing insight into feature importance or synergistic interactions.

2.3 GAME THEORY IN MACHINE LEARNING

Shapley values from cooperative game theory (Shapley, 2017) have recently been applied to explainable AI (Lundberg, 2017) but have not been integrated into association rule mining. Our work represents the first application of game theory concepts to ARM for feature importance quantification.

2.4 MEDICAL PATTERN DISCOVERY

In medical domains, ARM has been applied to various diagnostic tasks (Sarıyer, 2019), but existing approaches suffer from the same interpretability limitations as general ARM methods. Our GT-DPAM addresses this gap specifically for clinical applications.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 VANILLA APRIORI (THROUGHPUT-OPTIMIZED)

Algorithm 1 Apriori Algorithm for Association Rule Mining

Require: Transactions T, minimum support s, minimum confidence c
Ensure: Frequent itemsets F, Association rules R

$F_1 \leftarrow \{1\text{-itemsets with support} \geq s\}$
$k \leftarrow 2$
while $F_{k-1} \neq \emptyset$ **do**
    $C_k \leftarrow$ candidate generation from F_{k-1}
    for each transaction $t \in T$ **do**
        for each candidate $c \in C_k$ **do**
            if $c \subseteq t$ **then**
                support$(c) \leftarrow$ support$(c) + 1$
            end if
        end for
    end for
    $F_k \leftarrow \{c \in C_k \mid \text{support}(c) \geq s\}$
    $F \leftarrow F \cup F_k$
    $k \leftarrow k + 1$
end while
$R \leftarrow$ generate rules from F with confidence $\geq c$
return F, R

We implement a baseline Vanilla Apriori using mlxtend library (Raschka, 2018) with standard candidate generation and pruning strategies. This represents the throughput-optimized paradigm, aiming for complete pattern discovery without quality filtering.

3.2 HYBRID-AFP (BALANCE-OPTIMIZED)

Our Hybrid-AFP combines Apriori's candidate generation with intelligent pruning and quality-based filtering:

Algorithm 2 Enhanced Association Rule Mining Algorithm

Require: Transactions T, minimum support s, minimum confidence c, maximum size m
Ensure: Frequent itemsets F, High-quality rules R

$F \leftarrow$ frequent 1-itemsets
for $k \leftarrow 2$ **to** m **do**
  $C_k \leftarrow$ generate candidates from F with quality pruning
  CountSupportWithTransactionClustering(C_k, T)
  $F_k \leftarrow$ filter by adaptive support threshold
  $F \leftarrow F \cup F_k$
end for
for each itemset $I \in F$ **do**
  rules $\leftarrow$ generate rules with single consequents from I
  for each rule $r \in$ rules **do**
    score$(r) \leftarrow 0.35 \times$ confidence$(r) + 0.25 \times$ support(r)
      $+0.25 \times$ lift$(r) + 0.15 \times$ size_penalty(r)
  end for
  $R \leftarrow R \cup$ top rules by score with diversity filtering
end for
return F, R

3.3 GAME-THEORETIC DP ASSOCIATION MINER (GT-DPAM)

GT-DPAM introduces and applies (cooperative) game theory concepts through three innovations:

1. **Shapley Value Calculation:**
   - Items as players in cooperative game
   - Value function based on pattern support
   - Efficient approximation via coalition sampling
2. **Synergy Quantification:**
   - Game theory value $V(S) =$ combined value $- \sum_{i \in S}$ individual value(i)
   - Identifies when features interact positively
   - Filters additive co-occurrences in favor of synergistic patterns
3. **Dynamic Programming Optimization:**
   - Value-based candidate selection (not just support-based)
   - Maximizes pattern utility: support $\times$ uniqueness $\times$ synergy
   - Polynomial complexity $\mathcal{O}(m^4)$ vs exponential traditional approaches

ALGORITHMIC FRAMEWORK

The GT-DPAM framework operates in three phases:

Phase 1: Shapley Value Computation Given a transaction database T with items $I = \{i_1, i_2, \ldots, i_m\}$, we define a cooperative game (I, v) where the characteristic function $v : 2^I \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ measures the value of item coalitions. The Shapley value $\Phi(i)$ for item i represents its marginal contribution across all possible

coalitions:

$$\Phi(i) = \sum_{S \subseteq I \setminus \{i\}} \frac{|S|!(m - |S| - 1)!}{m!} [v(S \cup \{i\}) - v(S)]$$

In practice, we use Monte Carlo approximation with $\mathcal{O}(m^2)$ complexity rather than the exact $\mathcal{O}(2^m)$ computation.

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Phase 2: Value-Based Pattern Mining Traditional association mining uses support thresholding: $F = \{X \subseteq I \mid \text{support}(X) \geq s\}$. GT-DPAM introduces a value-based criterion:

$$F = \left\{ X \subseteq I \mid \sum_{i \in X} \Phi(i) \times \text{synergy}(X) \geq \tau_v \right\}$$

where $\text{synergy}(X) = \frac{v(X)}{\sum_{i \in X} v(\{i\})}$ quantifies non-additive interactions. The dynamic programming approach uses the recurrence:

$$V[k][S] = \max_{\substack{X \subseteq S \\ |X|=k}} \left\{ \text{support}(X) \times \prod_{i \in X} \Phi(i) \times \text{synergy}(X) \right\}$$

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Phase 3: Multi-Objective Rule Generation Rules are scored using a composite metric balancing multiple objectives:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{score}(A \to B) = \lambda_1 \cdot \text{confidence}(A \to B) \\ + \lambda_2 \cdot \text{lift}(A \to B) \\ + \lambda_3 \cdot \text{synergy}(A, B) \\ - \lambda_4 \cdot |A \cup B| \end{aligned}$$

where $\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + \lambda_3 + \lambda_4 = 1$ and typically $\lambda_1 = 0.4$, $\lambda_2 = 0.3$, $\lambda_3 = 0.2$, $\lambda_4 = 0.1$.

COMPLEXITY ANALYSIS

GT-DPAM achieves polynomial time complexity through two key optimizations:

- **Shapley approximation**: $\mathcal{O}(m^2 \cdot n)$ for m items and n samples vs. exact $\mathcal{O}(2^m)$
- **DP mining**: $\mathcal{O}(m^4)$ through memoization vs. Apriori's $\mathcal{O}(2^m)$
- **Space complexity**: $\mathcal{O}(m^2)$ for storing intermediate Shapley values

THEORETICAL PROPERTIES

Theorem 1 (Synergy Monotonicity)**.** *For any itemsets $A \subseteq B$, if synergy$(B) >$ synergy(A), then B represents a genuinely synergistic combination beyond additive effects.*

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Theorem 2 (Value Preservation)**.** *GT-DPAM preserves the efficiency axioms of Shapley values: efficiency, symmetry, dummy, and additivity, ensuring fair attribution of value to individual items.*

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Now we shall look at the **Algorithm** implementation (**Algorithms 3 and 4**) for Game-Theoretic elements within GT-DPAM and Synergy Computation between Itemsets below.

Algorithm 3 Game-Theoretic DP Association Miner (GT-DPAM)

Require: Transactions T, minimum support s, minimum confidence c, synergy threshold τ
Ensure: High-quality itemsets F, Association rules R, Shapley values Φ

$\Phi \leftarrow$ COMPUTESHAPLEYVALUES(T) ▷ Efficient coalition sampling
$F \leftarrow$ VALUEBASEDDPMINING(T, s, Φ) ▷ Dynamic programming with value optimization
$R \leftarrow \emptyset$
for each itemset $I \in F$ **do**
  for each rule $r : A \rightarrow B$ generated from I **do**
    conf$(r) \leftarrow$ support(I)/support(A)
    if conf$(r) \geq c$ **then**
      synergy$(r) \leftarrow$ COMPUTESYNERGY(A, B, Φ)
      score$(r) \leftarrow \lambda_1 \cdot$ conf$(r) + \lambda_2 \cdot$ lift$(r)+$
        $\lambda_3 \cdot$ synergy$(r) - \lambda_4 \cdot |I|$
      if synergy$(r) \geq \tau$ **then**
        $R \leftarrow R \cup \{(r,$ score$(r))\}$
      end if
    end if
  end for
end for
Sort R by descending score
return F, R, Φ

Algorithm 4 Compute Synergy Between Itemsets

function COMPUTESYNERGY(A, B, Φ)
  $\phi_A \leftarrow \sum_{i \in A} \Phi(i)$
  $\phi_B \leftarrow \sum_{j \in B} \Phi(j)$
  $\phi_{AB} \leftarrow \sum_{i \in A \cup B} \Phi(i)$
  expected $\leftarrow \phi_A + \phi_B$
  actual $\leftarrow \phi_{AB}$
  return $\frac{\text{actual} - \text{expected}}{\max(|\text{expected}|, 1)}$ ▷ Normalized synergy measure
end function

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

The GT-DPAM implementation includes several practical optimizations:

1. Coalition Sampling Strategy: Instead of enumerating all 2^m coalitions, we use stratified sampling:

- Sample coalitions of size k with probability proportional to $1/\binom{m}{k}$
- Use early stopping when Shapley estimates stabilize (relative change ¡ 0.01%)
- Employ antithetic variates to reduce variance

2. DP Memoization Structure: The dynamic programming table stores:

$$\text{DP}[k][mask] = (\text{value}, \text{support}, \text{synergy})$$

where $mask$ is a bitset representation of itemsets, enabling $\mathcal{O}(1)$ lookups.

3. Pruning Strategies:

- **Value pruning**: Discard candidates with $\sum \Phi(i) < \tau_v$
- **Synergy pruning**: Eliminate itemsets with negative synergy
- **Support projection**: Use projected databases for support counting

4. Parallel Computation: GT-DPAM parallelizes three components:

- Shapley value computation across different coalitions
- Support counting across transaction partitions

- Rule generation across different itemsets

3.4 APRIORI ALGORITHM OUTLINE

The Apriori algorithm first discovers all frequent single items (1-itemsets) by scanning all transactions and counting individual item occurrences. The Apriori iteration then grows itemsets from size k to k+1 using the Apriori Property: "All subsets of a frequent itemset must be frequent." We perform this in Python using:

1) Transaction Scanning: Iterates through each transaction and each item within.

2) Support Counting: Using Python's Counter for efficient frequency tracking.

3) Threshold Filtering: Only keeps items meeting minimum support threshold.

4) Frozenset Usage: Immutable sets for hashability in dictionaries.

5) Database Scan and Subset Testing: For each candidate, checks if it's contained in each transaction, uses candidate.issubset(transaction) for efficient containment checks.

4 HYBRID-AFP OUTLINE AND PYTHON CODE SNIPPETS

4.1 FEATURE 1: DUAL-PHASE ARCHITECTURE

```
def _apriori_itemset_mining(self, transactions):
    """Apriori algorithm for frequent itemset mining."""
```

Figure 1: Python Dual-Phase Functions (Apriori-style Itemset Mining)

```
def _fp_growth_rule_generation(self, transactions, frequent_itemsets):
    """FP-Growth style efficient rule generation."""
```

Figure 2: Python Dual-Phase Functions (FP-Growth-style Rule Generation)

Phase 1: Apriori-style itemset mining; Phase 2: FP-Growth-style rule generation

*More details of Phase 2 can be found in Section 4. – FP-Growth Inspired Rule Generation

4.2 FEATURE 2: CONDITIONAL PATTERN BASES

For each frequent item, we pre-compute transactions containing that item, enabling rapid confidence calculations without full database scans. More specifically, the conditional bases act as a pre-computed index that transforms rule generation from a database-scanning problem to a pattern-matching problem, providing the performance advantages observed in the below experimental results. Constructs a header table that maps each item to its maximum support across all itemsets containing it. Item-Centric Indexing: Creates a reverse mapping from items to their containing itemsets. Support Propagation: Tracks the highest support value for each item. Header Table: Serves as the entry point for conditional pattern access.

```python
def _build_conditional_pattern_bases(self, transactions, frequent_itemsets):
    """Build conditional pattern bases for efficient confidence calculation."""
    # Create header table (item -> support)
    header_table = {}
    for itemset, support in frequent_itemsets.items():
        for item in itemset:
            if item not in header_table:
                header_table[item] = 0
            header_table[item] = max(header_table[item], support)

    # Build FP-tree like structure for efficient lookups
    conditional_bases = {}

    for item in header_table:
        conditional_bases[item] = []
        for transaction in transactions:
            if item in transaction:
                # Add transaction without the current item
                conditional_transaction = transaction - {item}
                if conditional_transaction:
                    conditional_bases[item].append(conditional_transaction)

    return conditional_bases
```

Figure 3: Python Conditional Pattern Bases Implementation

For each frequent item, pre-computes all transactions containing that item, but stores them without the item itself (creating ”conditional transactions”). Conditional Database: For item X, stores all transactions containing X, but with X removed. Transaction Projection: Creates item-specific sub-databases. Memory Trade-off: Pre-computes and stores conditional patterns to avoid runtime scanning. Below is an example:

Original Transactions: $\{A, B, C\}, \{A, B\}, \{A, C\}, \{B, C\}$

Conditional Base for A: $\{B, C\}, \{B\}, \{C\}$ (transactions containing A, with A removed)

4.3 FEATURE 3: CONFIDENCE CALCULATION

For single-item consequents, uses the pre-computed conditional bases to efficiently calculate confidence$(A \rightarrow \{c\})$ without scanning the entire database.

- **Optimized Path:** Special handling for single-item consequents (most common case)
- **Base Scanning:** Iterates only through transactions containing the consequent item

```python
def _calculate_confidence(self, antecedent, consequent, conditional_bases, n_transactions):
    """Calculate rule confidence using conditional pattern bases."""
    # For items in consequent, use conditional bases to quickly find support
    if len(consequent) == 1:
        consequent_item = list(consequent)[0]
        if consequent_item in conditional_bases:
            # Count how many transactions containing antecedent also contain consequent
            antecedent_count = 0
            both_count = 0

            for base in conditional_bases[consequent_item]:
                if antecedent.issubset(base.union({consequent_item})):
                    both_count += 1
                if antecedent.issubset(base):
                    antecedent_count += 1

            if antecedent_count > 0:
                return both_count / antecedent_count

    # Fallback: calculate normally
    return self._calculate_confidence_fallback(antecedent, consequent, n_transactions)
```

Figure 4: Python Confidence Calculation Implementation

Two Counts Simultaneously:

- both_count: Transactions containing both antecedent AND consequent
- antecedent_count: Transactions containing just the antecedent

Mathematical Insight:

- confidence$(A \to \{c\}) = \dfrac{\text{count}(A \cup \{c\})}{\text{count}(A)}$
- Using conditional base for item c:
  - count$(A \cup \{c\})$ = number of bases where $A \subseteq (\text{base} \cup \{c\})$
  - count(A) = number of bases where $A \subseteq$ base

```python
def _calculate_confidence_fallback(self, antecedent, consequent, n_transactions):
    """Fallback method for confidence calculation."""
    # This would scan transactions - in practice you'd use the FP-tree structure
    # For simplicity, we'll use the frequent itemsets (less efficient but works)
    combined = antecedent.union(consequent)
    combined_support = self.frequent_itemsets.get(combined, 0) / n_transactions
    antecedent_support = self.frequent_itemsets.get(antecedent, 0) / n_transactions

    if antecedent_support > 0:
        return combined_support / antecedent_support
    return 0
```

Figure 5: Python Confidence Calculation (Fallback) Implementation

Provides fallback mechanism for complex consequents (multiple items) or when conditional bases aren't available. Standard confidence calculation using pre-computed frequent itemset supports. Support Lookup: Uses the frequent itemsets dictionary for $O(1)$ support retrieval. Normalization: Converts absolute counts to relative support values. For Division Guard: Prevents division by zero for non-existent antecedents.

4.4 FP-GROWTH INSPIRED RULE GENERATION

```
def _fp_growth_rule_generation(self, transactions, frequent_itemsets):
    """FP-Growth style efficient rule generation."""
```

Figure 6: Python Code Snippet of Rule Generation Function

Initializes the rule generation process by building data structures that enable fast confidence calculations without repeated database scans. For each frequent itemset, generates all possible association rules by considering every possible split into antecedent and consequent.

- **Rule Enumeration:** Uses combinations to generate all possible antecedent-consequent splits
- **Itemset Decomposition:** Splits itemset I into $A \rightarrow (I - A)$ for all non-empty $A \subset I$
- **Combinatorial Generation:** For n-item itemset, generates $(2^n - 2)$ possible rules

Afterwards, calculates rule confidence using pre-computed conditional bases and applies the minimum confidence threshold to filter meaningful rules.

- **Confidence Calculation:** $\text{confidence}(A \rightarrow C) = \dfrac{\text{support}(A \cup C)}{\text{support}(A)}$
- **Quality Metrics:** Computes support, confidence, and lift for each valid rule
- **Threshold Filtering:** Only retains rules meeting minimum confidence requirements

4.5 EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

Hybrid-AFP achieves around 47.4% speedup over best traditional algorithms like Apriori and FP-Growth. Which translates to Feature creation acceleration: 1262 items/s vs 244 items/s (5.2x faster). Interesting to note is how Hybrid-AFP faces slower itemset mining, and rules generation time, overall pipeline optimization dominates. This is likely due to Hybrid-AFP optimized feature-creation structure rapidly computes rule applications quickly using conditional bases, and FP-Growth inspired rule generation . Therefore, overcoming the initial computational overhead through superior memory access patterns.

(min_support=0.35, min_confidence=0.7) – Generate Top 20,000 rules

Algorithm	Frequent itemsets Time Taken (s)	Rules Generation Time (s)	Total Execution Time (s)
Apriori	0.0315	0.3453	87.9724
FP-Growth	1.5051	0.3290	83.5109
Hybrid-AFP	14.1109	1.1086	31.2769

Figure 7: Apriori vs FP-Growth vs Hybrid-AFP (Conditional Bases)

Below is the performance on Random Forest Model Accuracy and Cross-Validation Scores after we used Apriori vs FP-Growth vs Hybrid-AFP for Feature Engineering:

Algorithm	Test Accuracy	Cross-Validation Score
Apriori	0.9825	0.9403
FP-Growth	0.9825	0.9385
Hybrid-AFP (Conditional Bases)	0.9825	0.9297
Hybrid-AFP (FP-Growth Tree)	0.9825	0.9314

Figure 8: Random Forest Model Accuracy and Cross-Validation Scores

We can see that Hybrid-AFP Feature Engineering for Random Forest Model for Test Accuracy perform similarly to traditional algorithms like Apriori and FP-Growth. As for Cross-Validation Scores, Hybrid-AFP perform very slightly less than Apriori and FP-Growth which may be insignificant considering its significant improvements in time complexity.

4.5.1 DATASET

We use the Wisconsin Breast Cancer Diagnostic dataset (Wolberg, 1993) with 569 instances and 30 features. Features are binarized using median thresholds for ARM compatibility.

4.5.2 ABLATION STUDY

In this study, we aim to understand how Hybrid-AFP (Conditional Bases) faces slower itemset mining, and rules generation time, yet overall pipeline optimization dominates Apriori and FP-Growth.

Hybrid-AFP (FP-Growth Tree) which utilizes traditional FP-Growth Tree structure instead of Conditional Bases was created as well and it had a 9.8% performance improvement over Hybrid-AFP (Conditional Bases). The FP-tree's header table and node linkages enable direct support counting without transaction reconstruction, while conditional bases require rebuilding transaction contexts for each confidence calculation.

We first perform and obtain the Test Accuracy and Cross-Validation Scores of Random Forest Model Without Association Rule Mining (ARM) Feature Engineering which will be used as Baseline Performance Comparisons.

```
(A) RANDOM FOREST WITHOUT APRIORI FEATURE ENGINEERING
Accuracy: 0.9649
Cross-validation Score: 0.9578
Time taken: 1.03 seconds
```

Figure 9: Random Forest Model Without Association Rule Mining (ARM) Feature Engineering

As we can see below, when we use the more traditional FP-Growth Tree, rules generation time reduces by a lot as well, but its total execution time reduces much less than expected. This shows that although certain data structures help boost rule generation or itemset generation time, Hybrid-AFP slower rule generation creates more optimized features that: Process faster in downstream feature engineering and have better memory layout.

(A) We see this similar finding when we compare FP-Growth and Apriori:

(min_support=0.35, min_confidence=0.7) – Generate Top ~26,000 rules

Algorithm	Frequent itemsets Time Taken (s)	Rules Generation Time (s)	Total Execution Time (s)
FP-Growth	2.2420	0.1113	217.6549
Apriori	0.0767	0.5522	230.8160

Figure 10: FP-Growth vs Apriori on around 26,000 rules

As we can see above, despite FP-Growth's slower itemset generation compared to Apriori, its total pipeline execution is faster likely also due to the similar reason that the rule generation advantage created by FP-Growth directly benefits the feature engineering phase.

(B) Hybrid-AFP (Conditional Bases) vs Hybrid-AFP (FP-Growth Tree):

(min_support=0.35, min_confidence=0.7)

Algorithm	Frequent itemsets Time Taken (s)	Rules Generation Time (s)	Total Execution Time (s)
Hybrid-AFP (Conditional Bases)	14.1109	1.1086	28.4368
Hybrid-AFP (FP-Growth Tree)	13.6930	0.0971	31.2769

Figure 11: Hybrid-AFP (Condtional Bases) vs Hybrid-AFP (FP-Growth Tree) Performance

Hybrid-AFP (FP-Growth Tree) provides 11.4x faster rule generation (0.0971s vs 1.1086s) and faster frequent itemsets generation as well, but overall, there was a less than expected 9.8% performance improvement over Hybrid-AFP (Conditional Bases). This may be due to Hybrid-AFP having longer itemset and rule generation time

but its overall pipeline in the later stages of feature creation due to conditional base pattern structure offering more efficient data processing.

4.5.3 HYBRID-AFP PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

1. **Apriori Phase:** Efficiently finds all frequent itemsets using the downward closure property
2. **Conditional Bases:** Pre-computes transaction projections to avoid $O(n)$ database scans during rule generation
3. **Fast Confidence:** For common single-consequent rules, achieves near $O(1)$ confidence calculations using pre-computed bases

Complexity Analysis:

- **Traditional (Apriori, FP-Growth):** $O(n \times m \times r)$ where $n =$ Transactions, $m =$ itemsets, $r =$ Rules
- **Hybrid-AFP:** $O(n \times m + r \times k)$ where $k =$ Average Transactions per conditional base ($k \ll n$)

4.6 LIMITATIONS AND BOUNDARY ANALYSIS

For higher support threshold (min_support $= 0.4$, min_confidence $= 0.7$), Apriori: 0.4709s, FP-Growth: 0.7780s, Hybrid-AFP: 0.4842s. With only 141 itemsets, all algorithms perform well. Hybrid-AFP's initial computational overhead isn't justified for sparse itemset spaces.

Itemset Explosion Problem:

- For lower support threshold (min_support $= 0.32$, min_confidence $= 0.7$), Hybrid-AFP: > 8 minutes (vs 75–82s for traditional Apriori and FP-Growth)
- Similarly, for (min_support $= 0.30$, min_confidence $= 0.7$), Hybrid-AFP: > 12 minutes (vs 95–105s for traditional Apriori and FP-Growth)
- For min_support $= 0.32$: 3,596 itemsets $\rightarrow$ 138,634 rules
- For min_support $= 0.3$: 9,919 itemsets $\rightarrow$ 696,733 rules

This translates to memory hierarchy limitations for Hybrid-AFP created in Python which likely led to Interpreted language overhead vs C++ implementations of Apriori and FP-Growth in Python's mlxtend library, Garbage collection pressure from object creation and missing low-level optimizations (cache alignment, SIMD). This may therefore explain why Hybrid-AFP only wins significantly in the "sweet spot".

4.6.1 "SWEET SPOT" OF ANALYSIS

This "sweet spot" represents where the theoretical advantage is large enough to overcome Python's inherent performance limitations and where the following conditions are met: 1) number of itemsets generated is manageable (100-1,000 itemsets) and 2) number of rules generated is manageable (700-27,000 rules). Only when these conditions are met, will Hybrid-AFP (Python implementation) overall pipeline performance be revealed despite initial computational overhead. Future work can further explore having a full FP-Growth inspired algorithm – Hybrid-AFP algorithm which implements both conditional bases pattern and FP-Growth Tree. Moreover, more research can explore the limitations of Hybrid-AFP and see whether having it implemented on C++ truly improve performance.

5 GT-DPAM EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

5.1 DATASET

We use the Wisconsin Breast Cancer Diagnostic dataset (Wolberg, 1993) with 569 instances and 30 features. Features are binarized using median thresholds for ARM compatibility.

5.2 EVALUATION METRICS

- **Performance:** Execution Time, rules per second
- **Quality:** Average confidence, lift, high-confidence percentage

- **Interpretability:** Feature importance scores, synergy values
- **Clinical Relevance:** Medical interpretation alignment

5.3 GT-DPAM RESULTS AND PERFORMANCE COMPARISON

Algorithm	Time (s)	Itemsets	Rules	Rules/sec	(Top 20) Avg Conf	(Top 20) Avg Lift	(Top 20) Avg Support	High-Conf (%)
Vanilla Apriori (mlxtend)	0.200	988	26,042	130,455	0.963	2.619	0.355	58.3
Vanilla FP-Growth (mlxtend)	1.158	988	26,042	22,487	0.963	2.619	0.355	58.3
Hybrid-AFP (Conditional Bases)	9.861	988	26,042	2,640	0.808	1.621	0.403	58.3
Hybrid-AFP (FP-Tree)	10.498	988	26,042	2,480	0.808	1.621	0.403	58.3
Hybrid-AFP (Optimized)	0.075	621	1,881	24,997	0.808	1.621	0.403	68.7
Hybrid-AFP (Bitmask Efficient)	0.652	621	3,984	6,112	0.986	2.057	0.463	32.3
GT-DPAM	0.322	379	1,000	3,105	0.977	1.974	0.430	53.3
Medical-GT-DPAM (Domain-Aware)	0.419	379	729	1,790	0.972	1.964	0.382	36.5

Figure 12: GT-DPAM and Medical-GT-DPAM (Domain Aware) Performance Comparison

We evaluated four association rule mining algorithms on the Wisconsin Breast Cancer Dataset (569 instances, 32 features):

- **Vanilla Apriori:** Traditional breadth-first search with support-confidence pruning
- **Hybrid-AFP (Optimized):** Adaptive pattern growth with heuristic optimization
- **Original GT-DPAM:** Game-theoretic dynamic programming approach
- **Medical GT-DPAM:** Domain-aware extension that integrates clinical knowledge

All methods used consistent thresholds: minimum support = 0.35, minimum confidence = 0.7. Experiments were conducted with fixed random seeds (42) and isolated random state management to ensure reproducibility.

Vanilla Apriori demonstrated maximum throughput (26,042 rules, 190,234 rules/second) but suffered from pattern explosion. Hybrid-AFP provided balanced performance with 92.8% fewer rules than Vanilla while maintaining high average confidence (0.918). Original GT-DPAM showed intermediate performance, generating 1,000 rules with competitive quality metrics.

Comparison	T-Statistic	P-Value	Cohen's d	Significance (True / False)
Vanilla Apriori vs GT-DPAM	-18.004826	1.450189e-43	2.559095	True
Vanilla Apriori vs Medical-GT-DPAM (Domain-Aware)	-12.853740	6.835297e-28	1.826951	True
Hybrid-AFP vs GT-DPAM	-17.246911	2.671600e-41	2.451369	True
Hybrid-AFP vs Medical-GT-DPAM (Domain-Aware)	-12.286668	3.689794e-26	1.746351	True
Vanilla Apriori vs Hybrid-AFP	-0.247453	8.048144e-01	0.035171	False

Figure 13: Statistical Analysis of Models

Statistical Analysis: T-tests revealed Original GT-DPAM produces statistically distinct rule quality distributions compared to both Vanilla ($p < 10^{-43}$) and Hybrid methods ($p < 10^{-41}$). However, Vanilla and Hybrid methods were not statistically different from each other ($p = 0.351$), suggesting GT-DPAM represents a fundamentally different mining approach.

Furthermore, our uniqueness breakdown analysis reveals a critical insight: 100% of GT-DPAM's patterns exist within Vanilla's 26,042 patterns. This complete overlap (729/729 patterns) demonstrates GT-DPAM's fundamental nature as a curation algorithm.

5.4 THE CURATION-DISCOVERY FRAMEWORK

We propose a new framework for evaluating medical pattern mining:

- **Two-Dimensional Assessment:**
  - *Discovery Axis:* Traditional uniqueness (pattern novelty)
  - *Curation Axis:* Clinical relevance (pattern value)
- **Algorithm Classification:**
  - *Vanilla Apriori:* High discovery (91.2%), low curation
  - *Medical GT-DPAM:* Low discovery (0%), high curation (27.0% MU)
  - *Optimal Quadrant:* High curation with sufficient discovery (GT-DPAM's position)

5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDICAL DATA MINING

- **Rethink evaluation metrics:** Confidence and lift insufficient for medical applications
- **Value curation over discovery:** Finding existing meaningful patterns $>$ discovering novel trivial ones
- **Integrate domain knowledge:** Essential for filtering clinically irrelevant patterns
- **Quantify synergy:** Game theory provides missing dimension in pattern evaluation
- **Accept intentional trade-offs:** Lower traditional metrics can indicate better clinical alignment

5.6 THE CURATION IMPERATIVE

The uniqueness paradox reveals a fundamental insight for medical pattern mining: In healthcare applications, intelligent curation of existing knowledge provides more value than novel discovery of statistical artifacts.

Medical GT-DPAM demonstrates this principle by:

- Curating $2.8\% - 3.8\%$ of possible patterns with maximal clinical relevance
- Achieving 27.0% meaningful uniqueness through novel feature combinations
- Increasing game values by 243% $(0.166 \rightarrow 0.570)$ via domain integration
- Reducing trivial correlations by 51.3% through medical knowledge

This establishes a new paradigm where zero traditional uniqueness with high meaningful uniqueness represents the optimal outcome for medical pattern mining - prioritizing clinical actionability over mathematical novelty.

We propose new evaluation metrics over traditional evaluation metrics for medical applications. More details can be found in GitHub Source Code Repository.

Aspect	Vanilla Apriori	Medical GT-DPAM	TRUE Advantage
Traditional Quality	28.2% percentile	21.3% percentile	Vanilla: Mathematical superiority
Clinical Relevance	Low (size focus)	High (shape focus)	GT-DPAM: Medical superiority ✓
Game Theory Value	Not applicable	0.570 mean	GT-DPAM: Exclusive feature ✓
Trivial Rules	High prevalence	22% (reduced)	GT-DPAM: -51.3% improvement ✓
Meaningful Patterns	Few (mathematical)	27.0% meaningful uniqueness	GT-DPAM: Clinical discovery ✓
Feature Focus	Size metrics	Shape features	GT-DPAM: Diagnostic alignment ✓

Figure 14: Analysis of Evaulation Metrics

The Calculation:

```
Curation efficiency analysis shows:
"Average percentile in Vanilla's quality distribution: 21.3%"
```

This means:

- GT-DPAM's patterns are BETTER than only 21.3% of Vanilla's patterns
- Or: GT-DPAM's patterns are WORSE than 78.7% of Vanilla's patterns

However:
Vanilla's "quality" is measured by: confidence $\times$ lift

5.6.1 REASONS FOR TRADITIONAL METRICS INCOMPATIBILITY WITH MEDICINE

Example Breakdown:

Vanilla's "High Quality" Pattern:

```
{area_mean, perimeter_mean} → {radius_mean}
Confidence: 1.000, Lift: 2.004
Quality Score: 1.000 × 2.004 = 2.004 (VERY HIGH)
```

What this actually is:
Mathematical tautology: $radius = \frac{perimeter}{2\pi} = \sqrt{\frac{area}{\pi}}$ This is **simple mathematical geometry deductions**, not

medical insight. This is mathematically perfect (confidence 1.000) but clinically may not be useful.

GT-DPAM's "Lower Quality" Pattern:

```
{concavity_mean, area_worst} → {concave_points_mean}
Confidence: 0.991, Lift: 1.985
Quality Score: 0.991 × 1.985 = 1.967 (slightly lower)
Game Value: 0.953 (HIGH medical synergy)
```

What this actually is:

```
Clinical insight:
Tumor shape irregularity (concavity) combined with size progression
(area_worst) predicts indentation severity (concave_points).
```

This is **potentially more clinically valuable** for cancer diagnosis.

5.6.2 THE QUALITY METRIC PARADOX

Traditional metrics reward WRONG things:

```
High Score = High Confidence × High Lift
```

What gets high scores?

- Mathematically guaranteed relationships (radius→perimeter)
- Statistically obvious correlations (size metrics)
- Redundant feature relationships

What gets low scores?

- Complex medical insights (multiple interacting factors)
- Novel feature combinations
- Clinically meaningful but statistically imperfect patterns

Real Example from Our Experiment:

Vanilla's Top 5 "Highest Quality" Patterns:

```
1. {area_mean, perimeter_mean} → {radius_mean}       (Score: 2.004)
2. {radius_mean, concavity_mean} → {perimeter_mean}  (Score: 2.004)
3. {radius_mean, concavity_mean} → {area_mean}       (Score: 2.004)
4. {area_mean, concave_points_mean} → {radius_mean}  (Score: 2.004)
5. {radius_mean, area_se} → {area_mean}              (Score: 2.004)
```

What do these have in common?

- All involve size metrics (radius, area, perimeter)
- Most are mathematical relationships (geometry)
- None provide novel clinical insight

5.6.3 GAME THEORY BASED EVALUATION METRICS ALTERNATIVE

GT-DPAM's Superior Metric:

```
Game Value = Synergy between features
Range: 0.0 (no interaction) to 1.0 (perfect synergy)
```

- Medical GT-DPAM: Mean game value = 0.570
- Original GT-DPAM: Mean game value = 0.166
- **Improvement: +243%**

What High Game Values Mean:

```
Game Value 0.953: {concavity_mean, area_worst} → {concave_points_mean}
Interpretation: These features work together BETTER than individually
Clinical value: Combined shape+size assessment improves diagnosis

Game Value 1.000: {area_worst, concavity_worst} → {concave_points_worst}
Interpretation: PERFECT synergistic interaction
Clinical value: Advanced tumor assessment pattern
```

. .

The Traditional Quality Paradox: While Medical GT-DPAM shows lower traditional quality scores (21.3rd percentile vs. Vanilla's 28.2nd), this represents intentional rejection of mathematically optimal but clinically trivial patterns. Vanilla's "high-quality" patterns predominantly comprise geometric tautologies (e.g., `radius` $\rightarrow$ `perimeter`, confidence: 1.000) that, while statistically perfect, offer no diagnostic insight.

Medical GT-DPAM prioritizes clinically meaningful patterns with high synergistic value (mean game theory: 0.570) over mathematically perfect correlations, aligning with medical rather than statistical optimization criteria.

5.6.4 RETHINKING QUALITY METRICS FOR MEDICAL APPLICATIONS

Our findings reveal a critical flaw in traditional association rule evaluation: confidence and lift reward mathematical relationships over clinical insights. This creates a **quality metric paradox** where algorithms optimizing for traditional metrics inevitably select clinically irrelevant patterns.

Medical GT-DPAM's intentionally lower traditional quality scores (21.3rd percentile) demonstrate this trade-off: rejecting mathematically perfect patterns (`radius` $\rightarrow$ `perimeter`, quality: 2.004) in favor of clinically meaningful ones (`concavity` $\rightarrow$ `concave_points`, game: 0.953).

This necessitates new evaluation frameworks for medical pattern mining that prioritize:

1. **Clinical actionability** over statistical perfection
2. **Feature synergy** over individual metric optimization
3. **Domain relevance** over mathematical novelty

6 CONCLUSION

This research presents and empirically compares three distinct paradigms for association rule mining: throughput-optimized (Vanilla Apriori), balance-optimized (Final Hybrid Miner), and interpretability-optimized (GT-DPAM). Our results demonstrate that:

- **Different objectives require different methods**: No single approach dominates all metrics. Vanilla Apriori maximizes throughput ($\sim 130k - 197k$ rules/s), Final Hybrid Miner optimizes speed-quality balance (1.2-2.4$\times$ faster with 68.7% high-confidence), while GT-DPAM enables interpretable pattern discovery through game theory.
- **GT-DPAM provides unique interpretability benefits**: By applying Shapley values from cooperative game theory, GT-DPAM quantifies feature importance (perimeter_worst = 1.000), discovers synergistic patterns (Mean game_value: 0.551, Max game_value: 1.000, 430 Rules with game_value $>$ 0.5), and generates clinically actionable insights unavailable from traditional methods.
- **Clinical relevance validated**: GT-DPAM's discoveries can be made domain-aware (Medical-GT-DPAM) such that rules are align with medical requirements, identifying shape features as most predictive for breast cancer malignancy and generating specific clinical recommendations for monitoring and diagnosis.
- **No single best method for all use-cases**: We provide a practical method selection framework, clear guidelines for selecting methods based on application requirements, with GT-DPAM particularly valuable for domains where interpretability and actionable insights are paramount.

The introduction of game theory concepts to association rule mining represents a significant methodological advancement, shifting focus from quantity of patterns to quality of insights. GT-DPAM demonstrates that interpretability-focused approaches can provide unique value in applications like medical diagnosis, where

understanding *why* patterns matter is as important as discovering them.

Future work should focus on hybrid approaches combining GT-DPAM's interpretability with the efficiency of other methods, scalability improvements for larger datasets, and integration with causal discovery techniques for stronger clinical validation.

APPENDIX: IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

A.1 DATA PREPROCESSING

Features binarized using median thresholds. Missing values handled via median imputation. All implementations, output and results available at [https://github.com/choyang002/GT-DPAM].

A.2 STATISTICAL TESTS

All p-values calculated using two-tailed t-tests with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Effect sizes reported using Cohen's d.

A.3 REPRODUCIBILITY

Random seeds fixed for all experiments. Complete experimental setup and parameter configurations provided in supplementary materials.

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