FAULT LOCALIZATION IN COMPUTER NETWORKS USING END-TO-END MEASUREMENTS

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Literature Review

This chapter briefly describes three projects (Argus [1], NetNorad [2] and CEM [3]) that use end-to-end QoS to localize faults in computer networks.

2.1 Argus

In [1] is presented Argus, a system to detect and localize problems in ISP's networks. To achieve this goal, Argus uses network global information, and also passively collected data from the ISP's viewpoint to infer end-to-end QoS, such as traffic to/from end-users to estimate achievable download speed [4].

The system's analytics pipeline is illustrated in Figure 2.1.
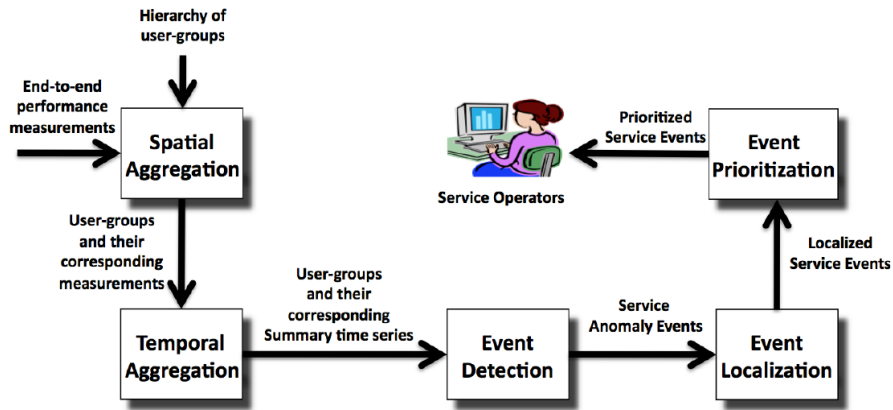
Figure 2.1: Argus pipeline. [1]

The analysis starts with the Spatial Aggregation procedure, in which end-users are clustered into user-groups. This step improves the system's scalability, since avoids keeping track the performance of all individual end-users. Each user-group is characterized by a set of end-users that share some common attributes, such as AS or BGP prefix. The used features imposes the possible fault locations to be inferred. An example of a spatial aggregation is depicted in Figure 2.2.
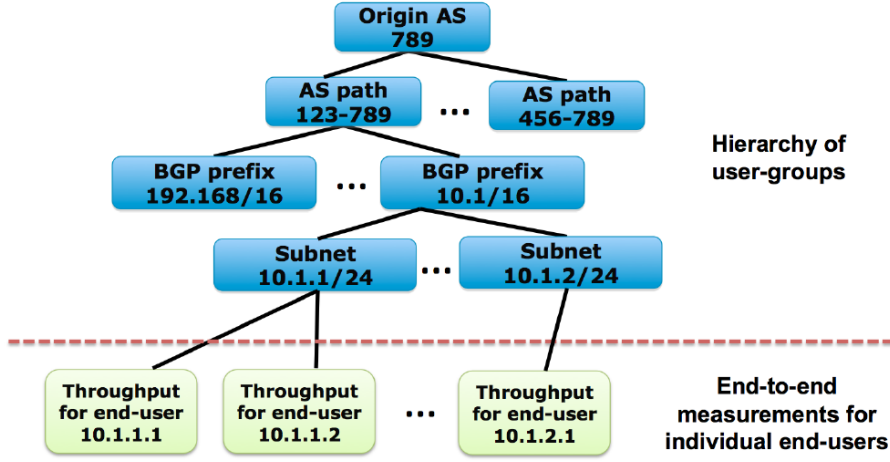
Figure 2.2: Argus spatial aggregation. [1]

The Temporal Aggregation phase determines how data from different end-users of an end-group are combined. For each user-group, the measurements of all end-users are grouped in time-bins, and for each time-bin a summary statistic, such as median or mean, is selected. Each type of fault can be better tracked by a specific statistic. As an example, the minimum of the RTTs can capture the physical propagation delay, while the average can be related with network congestion. Argus uses median as the default transformation, since it was empirically identified as effective to track network flaws, and also robust to individual end-users variability caused by their local infrastructure.

The Event Detection procedure identifies anomalies in the summary time series. Argus uses a Holt-Winters variation, which consists of an online method with low run time and memory complexities.

The responsibility of the Event Localization step is to infer fault locations using spatial and events times correlations. However, the detailed description of how this process is implemented was not published.

Finally, the detected problems are sorted according with their significance, which considers metrics obtained through the event detection algorithm, and also the number of affected end-users.

Argus was evaluated using RTT measurements of a CDN hosted in a tier-1 ISP. During an one month, 2909 anomalous events were detected. In general, lower level user-groups were more responsible for those events than the higher level groups, and only a small fraction of the end-users caused the end-group anomaly. Also, 90% of the events lasted for at most 1 hour, which was the used time-bin granularity.

Although not investigated by the Argus's authors, the fact that only a small number of end-users are responsible for the end-groups events, is an indication that fault localization can achieve higher precision with finer spatial aggregation granularity. Besides, the system accuracy was not studied.

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2.2 NetNorad

NetNorad [2] consists of a Facebook's internal project to automate the analysis of faults in the Facebook's network. Previous deployed techniques by Facebook exhibit several disadvantages, for instance, human-driven investigation may take hours. Also, cases known as gray failures cannot be detected only collecting devices information through SNMP or command line interface. For example, some devices cannot report it's own malfunctioning, or some problems can be related with the global network structure.

Facebook's network is structured hierarchically. At the lowest level there are servers in racks, which are organized in clusters. A set of clusters in the same building and attached to the same network characterize a data center. Data centers are grouped through a network that interconnects them within the same region, and appends to the Facebook global backbone. Figure 2.3 presents an example of this architecture.
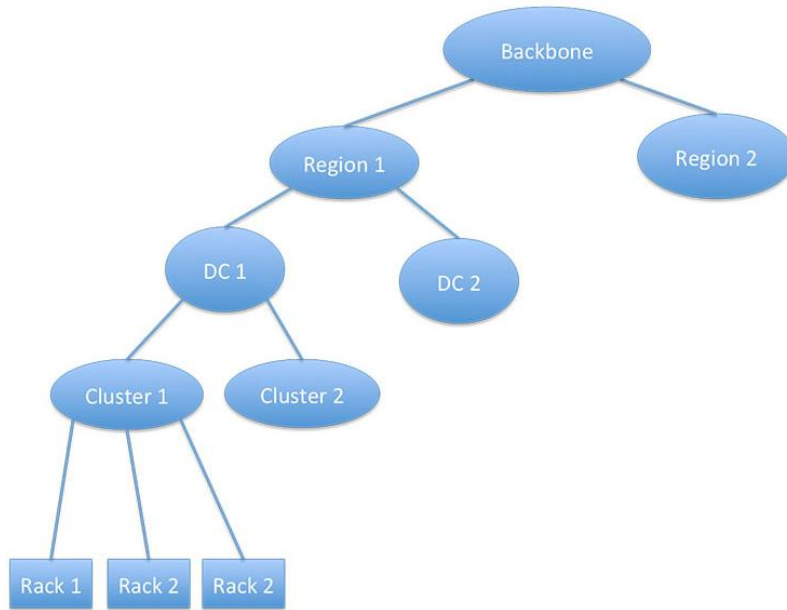
Figure 2.3: Facebook's network architecture. [2]

Unlike Argus, NetNorad uses active probing to assess loss and RTT statistics. Facebook's servers ping each other, in which a pinger sends UDP packets to responders, and the latter send the packets back. The process happens in turns, each pinger sends packets to all targets, collects the responses, and then repeats the procedure. A small number of pingers are placed in each cluster, and the responders are deployed on all machines. All pingers share a target list, which includes at least two machines of every rack.

As with Argus, NetNorad applies spatial aggregation techniques. The pingers group the responses of machines that belong to the same cluster during a round, and

tags them according with their relative location. Tags are defined by the following patterns: "DC" if the target cluster is in the pinger's data center; "Region" if the target cluster is outside the pinger's data center but within the same region; "Global" if the target cluster is outside the pinger's region.

With the tagging process, each cluster have three time series reflecting different spatial viewpoints, which are tracked through distinct percentiles over 10-minute intervals, enabling a fault mitigation reasoning. For instance, a packet loss spike at the 50th percentile means that probably there is a failure affecting the majority of machines, while a peak at the 90th and not at 50th percentile can indicate a small fraction of anomalous servers. For each combination of proximity tag and percentile is defined two thresholds, one for trigger and another for clear an alarm.

Considering the three tags, if a high loss is detected in a cluster, then the fault is probably located at the cluster's data center. Also, if all clusters in a data center identify a QoS degradation, then the fault is likely to be placed a layer above the clusters. Although these simple inferences can reduce the set of possible fault locations, they are unable to exactly isolate them. However, a Facebook tool called fbtracert can improve this analysis, exploring multiple paths between two endpoints, and checking the packet loss levels at every hop. However, fbtracert exhibits several limitations.

When automatic investigation is unable to find the failure, then there is a human involvement to find it. A detailed accuracy analysis is not presented, however, the infrastructure allows alarms to be raised about 30 seconds far from the network events.

2.3   CEM

In [3] is proposed a framework called Crowdsourcing Event Monitoring (CEM), in which a monitoring software that runs inside or alongside applications is placed at the end-hosts, enabling the detection of service level events within seconds or minutes.

In CEM, each end-host passively collects performance metrics related with a specific service, such as a VOD application. Through these data, and to increase the system's scalability, the end-host itself identifies local problems as potential network events, and pushes them to a distributed storage to further analysis. The framework doesn't specifies how events should be detected, however, they must be associated with service level problems.

To spatially isolate network flaws, locally detected events and spatial information are centrally correlated. The first subproblem of this step is to check if concurrent events of different end-users are caused by a network fault. There are several rea-

sons to different hosts identify simultaneous events not caused by the network. For example, a high volume of requests in a web service can impact the end-hosts service performance. Also, it is possible that simultaneous events occur only by chance, for instance, users can suffer signal interference on separate wireless routers. Therefore, through service specific dependencies and the empirical rate of simultaneous events, CEM provides a statistical model to determine if concurrent problems are a coincidence. In this model, the confidence of a network fault increases with the number of hosts that detect the event, and also with the number of affected metrics. The detailed method indicating how to realize spatial and temporal correlations to localize problems is not specified.

CEM was deployed and evaluated in a P2P system, using traces collected from users of the Ono plugin in the Vuze BitTorrent client. The system's output was contrasted with ISPs public available reports. In general, CEM provides a high level system abstraction, lacking several important deployment issues.

Chapter 3

Change Point Detection

A change point detection algorithm seeks to identify points in time where the statistical properties of a time series changes. This problem has a broad application in different knowledge areas, and in general, an algorithm's performance is closely related with the time series characteristics. Further, if the latent information of the procedures that generated the time series is missing, the target statistical properties can be considered subjective, bringing difficulties not only in the detection phase but also in the problem formalization.

In this context, this chapter studies the problem and briefly discusses several change point detection algorithms. The literature of this area is extensive, and it is common to find methods that presents a poor performance due to a variety of reasons, such as being too specific to the application area, or because the mechanisms were only analyzed through theoretical aspects. Therefore, it were selected a set of techniques with a good level of theoretical formalism, and flexibility to adapt, in order to handle specifities of the problem domain. Furthermore, this chapter exposes several challenges when dealing with real data, and some adopted solutions which are not described in the literature.

3.1   Problem Definition

The problem can be offline or online. In the offline version, to decide if a specific point at time t is a change point, the solver has available the whole time series, including past and future information w.r.t. t. On the other hand, in the online version, the information is available up to time t. The choice between these options is defined by the application domain. In some cases data are processed in real time, and change points should be detected as soon as possible. But in other applications changes are identified by historical purposes, and offline algorithms can be used.

It is intuitive that the offline case is more robust, since there is more information to analyze. In practice, to increase the statistical confidence of a decision, the online

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definition is relaxed, and to decide if a point in time is a change point it is possible to use data up to a small window in the future, which in real time processing means that the application should wait until additional data is available. Hence, there is a trade-off between minimizing the time to detect a change and correctly classify a point. Therefore, in some cases, the online version can be transformed in offline by minor modifications.

In this work it is considered the following input and change points attributes, which were defined considering the final application scenario:

- Univariate time series. However, it is possible to extend several methods presented here to deal with multivariate data.

- Unevenly spaced time series, that is, data is not regularly sampled in time.

- Time series with different lengths.

- Unknown number of change points.

- Different number of points between change points.

- Focus on changes in the underlying mean and distribution, disregarding other kinds of changes, such as in periodicity.

- Outliers are not considered statistical changes.

- There is no latent information of the time series.

- It is considered the online and offline options.

3.2 Notation

An univariate time series composed of n points is defined by two vectors, $\mathbf{x} = (x_1, \ldots, x_n)$ and $\mathbf{y} = (y_1, \ldots, y_n)$. The value y_i indicates the i-th sampled value, and x_i indicates the associated sample time. It is assumed that the points are sorted by time, that is, $x_{i-1} < x_i$ for $i = 2, \ldots, n$. Since unevenly spaced time series is considered, $x_i - x_{i-1}$ can be different for different i values. For $s \leq t$ the following notation is adopted: $\mathbf{y}_{s:t} = (y_s, \ldots, y_t)$.

The presence of k change points implies that data is split into $k + 1$ segments, also called windows. Let τ_i indicates the i-th change point for $i = 1, \ldots, k$. Also let $\tau_0 = 0$, $\tau_{k+1} = n$ and $\boldsymbol{\tau} = (\tau_0, \ldots, \tau_{k+1})$. Then, the i-th segment is defined by $\mathbf{y}_{\tau_{i-1}+1:\tau_i}$, assuming that $\tau_{i-1} < \tau_i$ for $i = 1, \ldots, k + 1$.

Through the previous definitions, change point detection algorithms mainly aim to find both k and $\boldsymbol{\tau}$.

3.3   Preprocessing

To reduce noise and remove outliers, the time series are preprocessed before being presented to a change point detection algorithm. Several filters were tested, such as moving averages, sliding windows percentiles, wavelet thresholding [5], optimal 1D clustering [6], and Savitzky-Golay filter [7]. This chapter's plots present time series filtered by a centered median sliding windows procedure, in which given a parameter w, y_i is set to be the median of the raw samples with indexes in $[i - w, i + w]$. In Figure 3.1 is presented two examples of this preprocessing.
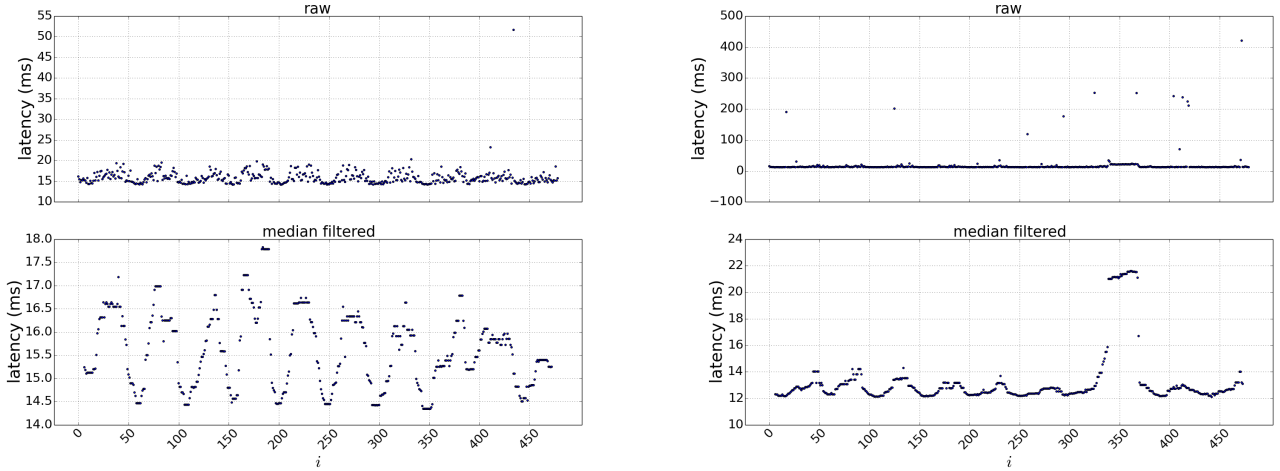

Figure 3.1: Median filter. $w = 13$.

3.4   Sliding Windows

Sliding windows techniques use two sliding windows over the time series, and reduce the problem of detecting change points to the problem of testing whether data from the segments were generated by different distributions. One approach is to consider a distance metric between two empirical distributions as the base to infer the change points. Letting $d(\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b})$ be the distance between two empirical distributions defined by the windows $\mathbf{a}$ and $\mathbf{b}$, and considering windows of length m, the Algorithm 1 presents a simple sliding windows method.

Algorithm 1 Sliding Windows

1:   $i \leftarrow 1$
2: **while** $i + 2m - 1 \leq n$ **do**
3:     **if** $d(\mathbf{y}_{i:i+m-1}, \mathbf{y}_{i+m:i+2m-1}) > \alpha$ **then**
4:         Report $i + m - 1$ as a change point
5:         $i \leftarrow i + m$
6:     **else**
7:         $i \leftarrow i + 1$
8:     **end if**
9: **end while**

In this mechanism, when the distance between the distributions is above some threshold α a change point is reported. This is a common approach for an online application, however, it is possible to increase the classification accuracy in offline cases. As an example, the top plot of Figure 3.2 shows the latency over time, and in the bottom plot, the (i, D_i) point represents the distance between $\mathbf{y}_{i-20:i-1}$ and $\mathbf{y}_{i:i+19}$.
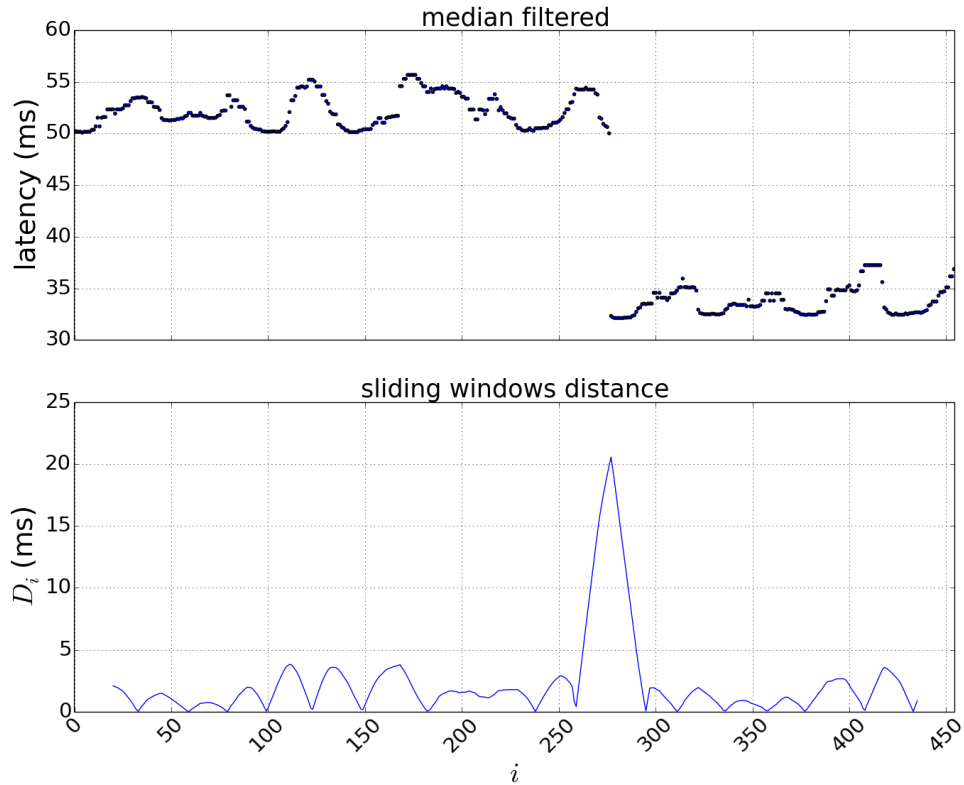

Figure 3.2: Sliding windows example.

It can be observed that there is a distance peak, that reaches around 20 ms, in the exact location where a mean shift happens in the latency data strean. However,

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using only the threshold method it is possible to prematurely infer the position of the change point. Therefore, an alternative is to also use a peak detection algorithm.

The distance function choice has a direct impact on the classification accuracy. Several distance measures where tested, such as mean, hellinger [20], Kolmogorov-Smirnov, and Earth Mover's Distance [21]

As stated in [8], a performance improvement can be achieved concurrently executing the same sliding windows algorithm with different windows lengths. This change which facilitates the detection of segments with distinct number of points.

3.5   Optimization Model

Given a fixed value of k, one approach is to define a cost function that measures the homogeneity of a window, and therefore, choose the change points that globally optimize this homogeneity. Let the cost of the i-th segment be defined as $C(\mathbf{y}_{\tau_{i-1}+1:\tau_i})$, then the cost of a segmentation is the sum of all segments costs.

A common choice for the function C is the MSE (Mean Squared Error), which can capture changes in the mean. Another usual approach is to consider distribution changes through negative maximum log-likelihood functions, considering that data within a window is iid.

Therefore, given a fixed k, the optimal segmentation is obtained through the following optimization problem, which is called the constrained case [9]:

$$\min_{\boldsymbol{\tau}_{1:k}} \sum_{i=1}^{k+1} C(\mathbf{y}_{\tau_{i-1}+1:\tau_i}) \tag{3.1}$$

This problem can be solved using dynamic programming with $O(kn^2 f(n))$ time complexity, where $f(n)$ is related with the cost function evaluation. Several segment cost functions can be evaluated in $O(1)$ after a $O(n)$ preprocessing phase, implying in an overall $O(kn^2)$ complexity. It is possible to prove that MSE, negative maximum log-likelihood functions of normal, exponential, poisson and binomial distributions have this characteristic. Also, the formulation can consider a minimum value of a window length.

Modeling segments with distributions can lead to practical difficulties. One of them is the fact that segments can form degenerate distributions, that is, the data of a window can have zero variance, which is always the case of unitary length windows. In these scenarios the negative maximum log-likelihood can be undefined. Despite this issue has not been described in the literature, this work followed two approaches to overcome this situation. The first one tries to avoid degenerate segments adding a white noise with small variance to the data stream. The second one considers that the cost of any degenerate distribution is equal to a constant.

When the number of change points is unknown, an usual way is to introduce a non decreasing penalty function $g(k)$. Then, the new optimization problem, called penalized case [9], is:

$$\min_{k,\boldsymbol{\tau}_{1:k}} \sum_{i=1}^{k+1} C(\mathbf{y}_{\tau_{i-1}+1:\tau_i}) + g(k) \tag{3.2}$$

This problem can be solved in $O(Kn^2 f(n))$. However, if the penalty function is linear in k, the problem can be formulated more efficiently and solved in $O(n^2 f(n))$.

Also, there are several pruning algorithms to speedup the computation [9–11], in general trying to reduce the $\boldsymbol{\tau}$ search space but maintaining optimality.

When a negative maximum log-likelihood is used, the cost of a segment with an outlier can be orders of magnitude greater than the cost of a window without anomalies. Therefore, in this case, the method is sensible to outliers.

3.6   HMM (Hidden Markov Model)

The idea that each segment is associated with a specific latent configuration has a direct interpretation to a HMM model [12–14]. In this context, each window is related to a hidden state of a HMM, and the observation distribution of this state represents the distribution of that segment. Therefore, the mechanism models the time series using a HMM, and through the hidden state path, assesses the times when a transition between different hidden states occur.

There are several approaches in the detection and training phases. For example, given a trained HMM, the most probable hidden state path can be checked through the Viterbi algorithm. Also, it is possible to evaluate the probability of a transition between different hidden states at time t, and then apply a threshold and peak detection methods, as well as in sliding windows techniques. For the training step, it is possible to use several time series to train a single HMM, and then use this model to detect change points in all time series. Another way is to, for each data stream, train a single model using only the target time series.

It is important to note that the structure of the hidden state graph has a large impact on the performance. Using a fully connected graph, the number of states defines the maximum number of distribution configurations. Employing a left to right structure, the number of hidden states will impact the maximum number of segments.

In [14] is stated that when using a fully connected structure, the time interval that a time series stays in the same hidden state is low, which can not reflect real data. To overcome this problem, [14] suggests to increase the time that a time series stands in the same hidden state using a dirichlet prior regularization.

3.7 Bayesian Inference

There are several Bayesian methods which aims to assess the probability that a point is a change point. Following an offline fashion, the work of [15] recursively calculates, for each i, the probability of $\mathbf{y}_{i:n}$ given a change point at i. With these probabilities is possible to simulate the time of the first change point, and then, compute the conditional distribution of the time of the second change given the first, and so on. To achieve this, the mechanism assumes that observations are independents, and that each segment is modeled by conjugate priors. Also, the procedure considers priors to model the number of changes and the time between two consecutive change points. The overall complexity of this method is $O(n^2)$, considering that the likelihood of a segment can be evaluated in $O(1)$.

In [16] it is also considered that parameters of different segments are independents, and that data within a window is iid. However, through an online mode, the procedure is concerned with the estimation of the distribution of the length of the current time since the last change point, called run length, given the data so far observed. To achieve this, the method assumes the probability of current run length given the last run length as a prior. Assuming exponential-family likelihoods to model a segment, the time complexity to process a point is linear in the number of points already observed.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Chapter 5

Results

Chapter 6

Conclusions

Future work:

- collect datailed topology from the ISP which will enable more precise localizations

- previous problems database and end-users reclamations to the ISP call center. This can enable the problem be interpreted as a supervised problem.

- model the system as a reinforcement learning procedure, in which operators can feedback the system with correct/mistakes in the detection and localization of problems, then the system can be able to adapt automatically chossing the best algorithms and hyperparameters.

- active increase mesuremet frequency in locations with potential problems, avoiding incorrect classifications and decreasing the detection time.

- choose best network metrics that can increase the system performance

- if a more data is available try space aggregation techniques, as in Argus

- correlate path change in traceroute with changes in end-to-end metrics

- the proposed mechanism can also be expanded to detect attacks on networks

- is possible to detect and localize problems only with data collected passively?

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