Selecting the number of clusters with silhouette analysis on KMeans clustering

Silhouette analysis can be used to study the separation distance between the resulting clusters. The silhouette plot displays a measure of how close each point in one cluster is to points in the neighboring clusters and thus provides a way to assess parameters like number of clusters visually. This measure has a range of [-1, 1].

Silhouette coefficients (as these values are referred to as) near +1 indicate that the sample is far away from the neighboring clusters. A value of 0 indicates that the sample is on or very close to the decision boundary between two neighboring clusters and negative values indicate that those samples might have been assigned to the wrong cluster.

In this example the silhouette analysis is used to choose an optimal value for n\_clusters. The silhouette plot shows that the n\_clusters value of 3, 5 and 6 are a bad pick for the given data due to the presence of clusters with below average silhouette scores and also due to wide fluctuations in the size of the silhouette plots. Silhouette analysis is more ambivalent in deciding between 2 and 4.

Also from the thickness of the silhouette plot the cluster size can be visualized. The silhouette plot for cluster 0 when n\_clusters is equal to 2, is bigger in size owing to the grouping of the 3 sub clusters into one big cluster. However when the n\_clusters is equal to 4, all the plots are more or less of similar thickness and hence are of similar sizes as can be also verified from the labelled scatter plot on the right.









