Mushrooms Edibility Analysis

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# Abstract

A problem that has persisted since the dawn of human evolution has been the ability to discern naturally occurring resources as safe or harmful for consumption. Our ancestors have had to rely on instinct, observation and most dangerously, trial and error. The consequences of ingesting toxic or poisonous substances could be severe, ranging all the way from mild sickness to loss of life. Early humans likely passed down knowledge and observed animal behaviours in mitigating the risk of this process (Rozin, 1990). As we progress to today, this collective knowledge has been passed down through traditional wisdom and now generally, food choices should be safer. Nevertheless, mistakes and accidental poisonings occur, contributing to the ongoing challenge of discerning safe foods (Wennig et al., 2020).

Of these food sources, a particularly interesting species is the mushroom. They offer an assortment of textures and flavours for the potential gourmand however at the same time, many varieties can carry toxins and chemicals with adverse side effects (Wennig et al., 2020). While we have access to detailed databases of toxic fungi, certain scenarios will hinder that knowledge from being readily available. A person in a survival situation coming across a batch of wild mushrooms would welcome a guide that determines if the fungi are safe to eat based on the organism’s features. Therefore, correlating mushroom features to its edibility would prove as a worthwhile venture to the general public.

The theme of this task will explore classification and regression. These themes are both machine learning techniques that can be used to predict categorical or continuous target variables. Classification and regression can be used in a wide range of applications and can utilize the power of decision trees and logistic regressions to arrive at a conclusion.

The problem we wish to solve is to determine what features in mushrooms are the most important for determining the toxicity of that species and conclusively advise if the fungus is safe to ingest with a certain level of confidence. Below are some research questions to consider:

* What are the key characteristics that differentiate a toxic mushroom from a non-toxic one?
* Are there specific patterns or variations that serve as strong indicators of mushroom toxicity?
* How can spores, gills and other reproductive structures aid in identifying poisonous species?
* Can machine learning or AI algorithms assist in the automated identification of toxic mushrooms?
* Are there geographic features that can be incorporated into identification protocols?

By answering these questions, we aim to acknowledge if there is a relationship between various features of a mushroom and its edibility. By creating a predictive model, we can isolate the most important characteristics in determining if a mushroom is safe to eat and draw some conclusions from the results.

The dataset to be utilized will be the “Secondary Mushroom Dataset Data Set’ available in the UCI Machine Learning Repository: <http://archive.ics.uci.edu/ml/datasets/Secondary+Mushroom+Dataset>

Entries have 20 attributes that consist of the cap, gill, stem, coloring and veil features, bruising, spore color, habitat and season. Each example is also classified in an acceptability level that is either edible or poisonous, with the latter category including unknown edibility. With over 8100 instances, the recordings provide a robust and diverse dataset that can be used to analyze what key factors contribute to a mushroom’s toxicity levels.

Some techniques and tools we are proposing to solve the stated problem include a correlation analysis, principal component analysis (PCA) and predictive models such as a decision trees or the Naïve Bayes test.

# Literature Review

## Topic Analysis

The mushroom is type of fungi that encompasses a vast array of the category. There is a huge variety of fungi estimated to range from 500,000 to 9.9 million species. Of this value, only a relatively small fraction of approximately 74,000 to 120,000 have been identified and formally named (Hawksworth, 2001). This diverse number of species highlights the inevitable challenge in creating an all-encompassing guide for mushroom identification and information. To tackle this demand, the proposed solution will focus around creating a model that identifies key characteristics of a mushroom and conclude if that organism is safe for consumption. Mushroom anatomy is informally associated by two parts, its cap and stem. However, as every species of the fungus is unique, mycologists define the mushroom with several other identifiable features. These features can include the presence and arrangement of gills, the existence of a skirt or volva, complexity of the mycelium (the fungal network, similar to the roots of a tree), the inclusion of a veil and presence of scales, among other physical traits. Moreover, mushroom knowledge extends beyond visual identification and involves understanding the habitats and ecosystems in which different species thrive. Knowing the specific regions, seasons of growth, and environmental conditions favourable for certain mushrooms can greatly assist in their identification and minimize the risk of unintentionally consuming toxic varieties. Through the analysis of some of these existing features into comprehensive models, researchers can evaluate the safety and suitability of specific mushrooms for consumption. As an important source of nutritional value, mushroom knowledge carries increased importance when venturing into discerning its edibility. Several species have evidence of preventing cancer, increasing metabolism and improving brain function (Roncero-Ramos & Delgado-Andrade, 2017). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that mushroom identification is a complex and intricate field. Even with knowledge and experience, accurately identifying mushrooms can be challenging, and there is always a degree of risk involved. Therefore, it is crucial to exercise caution, verify information from reliable sources, and when uncertain, seek guidance from expert mycologists or experienced foragers before consuming wild mushrooms. By expanding our knowledge about mushrooms, their characteristics, habitats, and cultural significance, we can confidently navigate the realm of mushroom foraging, ensuring a safer and more gratifying journey. The proposed model will analyze the specific combination of characteristics exhibited by each mushroom and provide a level of valuable insight into its edibility or toxicity. By developing robust models and integrating insights from mycology and related fields, we can effectively enhance our ability to classify and evaluate mushrooms for both safety and enjoyment.

Existing research focusing on identifying mushroom edibility is prevalent. Some works already exist and utilize machine learning to answer several research topics important to the study of mushroom edibility. These answers include the identification of which key features are the most prominent in toxic and non-toxic mushrooms. Secondly, another focus is the labelling of specific patterns or variations that can serve as strong indicators of mushroom toxicity. Thirdly, is how can the spores, gills and other reproductive structures occur in mushrooms can aid in identifying poisonous species. Fourthly, is if machine learning or AI algorithms can assist in the automated identification of toxic mushrooms. Lastly, the topic asks if there are geographic features that can be incorporated into identification protocols.

A notable paper is the “Prediction of Whether Mushroom is Edible or Poisonous Using Back-propagation Neural Network.,” Alkronz et al. (2019) asks and answers similar questions to the prior discussed. In this report, the goal is to train a neural network model using a back-propagation algorithm. In this report, an alternative dataset to the proposed UCI dataset is used to create the model. Analogous attributes occur under the categories of cap features, gill features, stalk/stem features, veil features, ring features, bruising, spore colour and habitat. The divergence of similarity arises when the Alkronz et al. report includes odour and mushroom population density attributes whereas the proposed does not. In replacement of the absent features, the UCI dataset includes a column for the season in which the mushroom was observed and harvested. The key difference is that the Alkronz et al. paper’s goal is the usage of Back-propagation neural networks (BPNN).

BPNN are similar to familiar models such as decision trees and regression models. They are all forms of machine learning with each method having its own set of strengths and weaknesses that we will briefly explore. BPNN can be referred to as the "backward propagation of errors," and is widely utilized algorithm in the training of artificial neural networks. It serves as a fundamental technique for modifying the network's weights and biases based on the disparity between predicted and desired outputs (Dai & Macbeth, 1997). By iteratively applying forward propagation, error calculation, and backward propagation, the neural network gradually learns to adjust its weights and biases to minimize the error between predicted and actual outputs. This process allows the network to effectively learn from the training data and make more accurate predictions over time. In comparison to the proposed methods of using decision trees and regression models, the BPNN creates several differences to take note of. BPNNs excel at capturing intricate patterns and non-linear relationships between input features and output labels. In contrast, the other techniques, may struggle to capture non-linear relationships effectively, often relying on simpler approximations. Importantly for our target audience of the general public, decision trees and regression models, offer interpretability when presenting decision rules or feature coefficients that can be easily understood. Whereas neural networks, are considered more opaque and interpreting the relationships learned in hidden layers can be challenging. An advantage that the simpler models possess is the offering of explicit measures of feature importance. This reveals influential features based on metrics such as information gain or coefficients. On the other hand, determining feature contributions in neural networks can be more complex and less straightforward. Selecting the appropriate model depends on specific problem requirements, available data, interpretability needs, computational resources, and performance objectives. It is beneficial to experiment with different approaches, assess their performance using appropriate evaluation metrics, and choose the most suitable model for a given task.

The resulting conclusion derived from the Alkronz et al. paper finds that gill size is the most relatively important feature that determines toxicity in mushrooms. Additionally, mushroom population density, the feature absent from our UCI dataset, scored relatively high over the 75th percentile on most important features. Odour however, did not perform nearly as well sitting at the bottom 33rd percentile. This will be interesting to note as we will place some level of importance on how the season attribute will perform in consideration to these missing attributes.

Another existing piece of research can be found in the International Journal of Advanced Trends in Computer Science and Engineering titled “Classification of Mushroom Fungi Using Machine Learning Techniques,” Ottom et al., (2019). This work covers the effectiveness of using a variety of machine learning algorithms in order to classify if a mushroom is edible or poisonous. Utilizing a dataset differing from the proposed, attributes cover features such as family, location, dimensions and edibility. Evaluation of each model is then scrutinized with accuracy, precision, recall and F1-score. In this instance, support vector machines (SVM) achieve the highest accuracy followed closely by the random forest method. Based on the findings presented in the paper, it is determined that certain machine learning approaches, including SVM and random forests, exhibit effectiveness in precisely categorizing mushroom fungi as either safe or harmful using their distinctive characteristics. These techniques possess the capability to support mushroom identification and facilitate the differentiation between non-toxic and poisonous varieties.

A Support Vector Machine (SVM) is a popular machine learning algorithm used for classification and regression tasks (Noble, 2006). It excels in solving binary classification problems, where data points are divided into two distinct groups. The main concept behind SVM is to find an optimal separation boundary, known as a hyperplane, in a high-dimensional space. This boundary effectively separates the data points of different classes. Support vectors, which are the nearest data points to the separation boundary, are crucial in defining this optimal hyperplane. The goal of SVM is to maximize the margin, the distance between the separation boundary and the closest support vectors, for optimal class separation. When a linear separation boundary is insufficient, SVM employs the kernel trick. This technique projects the data into a higher-dimensional space, enabling a linear boundary to separate the classes effectively. Common kernel functions, like linear, polynomial, radial basis function (RBF), and sigmoid, are employed for this purpose. SVM offers advantages, such as handling high-dimensional data, being resistant to over fitting, and capturing non-linear relationships through the kernel trick. It finds applications in diverse domains, including image classification, text categorization, and bioinformatics.

The findings from the Ottom et al. paper conclude that SVM and random forest algorithms exhibit notable accuracy in distinguishing between the two categories of mushrooms. This research underscores the potential of machine learning techniques in mushroom classification and offers valuable insights into algorithmic performance of this specific task.

The venture of this paper will attempt to replicate the effectiveness of BPNN and SVM algorithms using logistic regression and decision tree models. By analyzing the suitability of logistic regression models, this research seeks to unveil their potential in precisely classifying mushrooms as either edible or poisonous based on their distinctive characteristics. Moreover, the study will delve into the role of decision trees and consider their capacity to effectively capture complex relationships and handle categorical attributes. Due to the use of secondary data and differing analysis models, this paper will supplement the aforementioned works and seeks to add to the ongoing conversation. Through a comprehensive comparison of the performance of logistic regression models alongside other approaches, this research intends to reveal any unique strengths or limitations of this particular methodology. The results obtained will contribute valuable insights into identifying the most appropriate machine learning techniques for mushroom classification and shed light on the practicality of leveraging logistic regression models and decision trees in this specific domain.

## Description of the Dataset

The dataset, accessible through the provided link, <http://archive.ics.uci.edu/ml/datasets/Secondary+Mushroom+Dataset>, offers an expanded collection of information and attributes pertaining to mushroom fungi. It serves as a complementary resource to the primary mushroom dataset, aiming to augment the comprehension and exploration of mushroom characteristics. Within this secondary dataset, a range of features is included, encompassing diverse aspects such as cap diameter, cap shape, cap surface, cap color, bruise/bleed characteristics, gill attachment, gill spacing, gill color, stem height, stem width, stem root, stem surface, stem colour, veil type, veil colour, ring presence, ring type, spore colour, habitat and finally, the season of observation/harvest.

By delving into the nuanced intricacies of cap diameter, shape, and surface, researchers can unravel distinctive traits that set apart individual mushroom species. The incorporation of features like gill attachment, spacing, and color lends further discernment into the structural and visual attributes of mushrooms. Moreover, the inclusion of stem height, width, and root details enriches our comprehension of the overall morphology exhibited by diverse mushroom species.

The dataset also encompasses attributes encompassing the veil, ring, and spore color, which play a pivotal role in precise identification and classification endeavours. By delving into these features, researchers can delve into the presence or absence of veils, the diverse types of rings encircling the stems, and the unique hues exhibited by spores, all of which contribute significantly to species differentiation. Furthermore, the dataset captures valuable insights into the habitats favored by specific mushroom species, unravelling their preferences for thriving in distinct environments, be it lush forests, verdant grasslands, or even bustling urban areas.

To enhance the depth of analysis, the dataset incorporates the recorded season of observation or harvest, offering researchers a valuable lens to explore potential patterns in mushroom growth and availability across different times of the year. This temporal dimension empowers the investigation of how environmental factors and climatic conditions interplay with the development and distribution of diverse mushroom species throughout the annual cycle. By considering the seasonal aspect, researchers can unravel the intricate relationships between nature's rhythms and the fascinating world of mushrooms, uncovering hidden insights into their lifecycle and ecological dynamics.

Each of these features contributes valuable insights into the various attributes of mushroom species, thereby facilitating further analysis and classification endeavours. The primary purpose of this dataset is to support researchers and practitioners in their investigations and studies concerning the manifold attributes and properties of mushroom fungi. By incorporating this supplementary dataset into their analyses, researchers can unlock enhanced insights into the intricate characteristics and classification of mushroom fungi, thereby fostering advancements in this domain.

## GitHub Repository Link

<https://github.com/k1cheng/CIND820-Big-Data-Analytics-Project-2023>

## Methodology

The following steps and graph details the methodology this report will follow:

1. The Secondary Mushroom Dataset Data Set is downloaded from the UCI Repository
2. The data set is cleaned and appropriate pre-processing methods are applied
3. The data will is visualized and exploratory analysis created
4. Application of the data to the models and validating the accuracies
5. Predictions and recommendations made based off results

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