

Moments and Characteristic Functions

Instructor's Notes

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Contents

1	Moments	2
1.1	Definition of Moments	2
1.2	Description of Moments	2
2	Characteristic Functions	3
2.1	Moment Generating Functions	3
2.2	Characteristic Function	3
2.2.1	Basic information about complex numbers	3
2.2.2	Definition of Characteristic Functions	3
2.2.3	Basic Properties [1]	4
2.3	Common Distributions and Their Characteristic Functions	4
3	Examples and Applications of Characteristic Functions	4

1 Moments

1.1 Definition of Moments

Generally, in math, the n -th moment of a real-valued continuous function about center c is: [2]

$$\mu_n = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} (x - c)^n f(x) dx$$

In particular, for probability density functions f (or cumulative density function F), the moments are given by

$$\mu'_n = E[X^n] = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} x^n dF(x) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} x^n f(x) dx$$

Also we have the definition of the central moment [3]:

$$\mu_n = E[(X - E[X])^n] = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} (x - \mu)^n f(x) dx$$

Generally central moments are more useful. Not to be confused with mean μ .

1.2 Description of Moments

The first moment is the mean of a random variable, i.e.

$$\mu = E[X]$$

The second moment is related to the variance of a random variable:

$$\text{Var}[X] = E[X^2] - E[X]^2$$

In fact the variance is just the second central moment:

$$\text{Var}[X] = \mu_2 = E[(X - E[X])^2]$$

As for the third central moment, a related concept is skewness. Below shows two random variables with the same mean variance however different in skewness[4]:

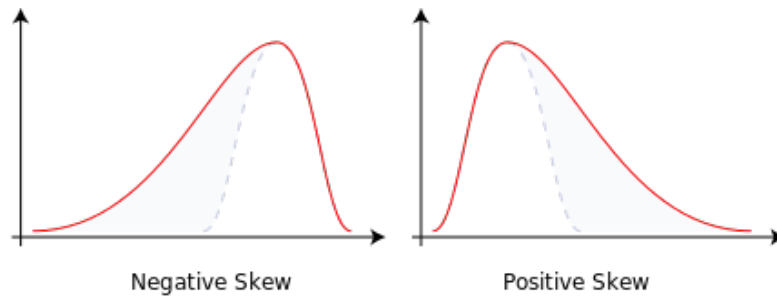


Figure 1: Negative and Positive Skew Diagrams

With all moments up to the order of infinity we can describe the **characteristics** of a probability distribution.

2 Characteristic Functions

2.1 Moment Generating Functions

Definition 2.1 Let X be a random variable with probability density function $f(x)$. If there is a positive number h such that

$$\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} e^{tx} f(x) dx$$

exists and is finite for $h < t < h$, then the function defined by

$$M(t) = E[e^{tX}]$$

is called the moment-generating function of X (or of the distribution of X). [5]

The r -th moment about the origin can be achieved from the moment generating function by evaluating the r -th derivative[6]:

$$M^{(r)}(0) = E[X^r]$$

Also notice the relation between the Taylor Expansion and the moments.

2.2 Characteristic Function

Notice that e^{tx} is not a "good" function in the sense that it is not bounded and may not converge under some circumstances. Before going to characteristic functions, we first get acquainted with knowledge of complex numbers:

2.2.1 Basic information about complex numbers

Let $z = a + bi$, where $a, b \in \mathbb{R}$, and $i = \sqrt{-1}$ is the imaginary unit. z is then called a complex number and a, b are called the real and imaginary parts of z , denoted by $a = \text{Re}(z), b = \text{Im}(z)$ respectively. (Consider i as rotation by $\frac{\pi}{2}$ counterclockwise in the complex plane)

The conjugate of a complex number $z = a + bi, a, b \in \mathbb{R}$ is $\hat{z} = a - bi$, we also define the modulus (or length) of z to be $|z| = z\hat{z}$. Notice that $|z|$ is a non-negative real number. Euler's formula:

$$e^{i\theta} = \cos \theta + i \sin \theta$$

The formula comes from Taylor's Series. It also gives rise to the polar representation of a complex number, i.e. $z = re^{i\theta}$, where r is the modulus and θ is the phase.

From this we also have that $|e^{i\theta}| = 1$ for any θ .

2.2.2 Definition of Characteristic Functions

Definition 2.2 Let X be a random variable and denote by F the cumulative distribution function of X . The characteristic function $\varphi = \varphi_X$ of X (or of F , in which case we also write φ_F) is defined by [1]

$$\varphi_X(t) := E[e^{itX}] = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} e^{itx} dF(x), t \in \mathbb{R}$$

2.2.3 Basic Properties [1]

Theorem 2.1 *If X and Y are independent random variables then the characteristic function of their sum is*

$$\varphi_{X+Y}(t) = \varphi_X \cdot \varphi_Y.$$

Corollary 2.1.1 *The product of two characteristic functions is a characteristic function.*

Remark If X and Y are random variables such that $\varphi_{X+Y} = \varphi_X \cdot \varphi_Y$, then in general we do not conclude X and Y are independent. (See page 13 in [1])

Theorem 2.2 *For any $a, b \in \mathbb{R}$,*

$$\varphi_{aX+b}(t) = e^{ibt} \varphi_X(at).$$

Theorem 2.3 *Every characteristic function φ has the following properties:*

- (i) $f(0) = 1$,
- (ii) $|f(t)| \leq 1$,
- (iii) $f(-t) = \overline{f(t)}$
- (iv) f is continuous on \mathbb{R}

2.3 Common Distributions and Their Characteristic Functions

Table 1: Characteristic Functions for Common Distributions[7]

Distribution	PMF/PDF	Characteristic Function
Constant $X \equiv a$	-	$\phi_X(t) = e^{iat}$.
Binomial $X \sim \text{Binomial}(m, p)$	$p_X(n) = \binom{m}{n} p^n (1-p)^{m-n}$	$\phi_X(t) = (pe^{it} + (1-p))^m$
Poisson $X \sim \text{Poisson}(\lambda)$	$p_X(n) = \frac{\lambda^n}{n!} e^{-\lambda}$	$\phi_X(t) = e^{\lambda(e^{it}-1)}$
Normal $X \sim N(0, 1)$	$f_X(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{x^2}{2}}$	$\phi_X(t) = e^{-\frac{t^2}{2}}$
Normal $Y \sim N(\mu, \sigma^2)$	$f_Y(y) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma} e^{-\frac{(y-\mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}}$	$\phi_Y(t) = e^{it\mu - \frac{\sigma^2 t^2}{2}}$

3 Examples and Applications of Characteristic Functions

To be continued...

References

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