



# Multivariate Random Variables



# Multivariate Random Variables

Often, a single random variable is not sufficient to describe a physical problem. This may, for example, be the case when we are interested in the effect of one random quantity on another. In such a case we consider two (or more) random variables together.

Formally, we then define a “vector” of which each component is itself a (“scalar”) random variable.

We call such a vector a **random vector** or a **multi-variate random variable** or an  **$n$ -dimensional random variable**. The components can be discrete or continuous random variables, and even mixtures of the two.

In this section we will for the most part focus on bivariate (two-dimensional) random variables where either both components are discrete or both components are continuous random variables.



# Discrete Multivariate Random Variables

8.1. Definition. Let  $S$  be a sample space and  $\Omega$  a countable subset of  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . A **discrete multivariate random variable** is a map

$$\mathbf{X}: S \rightarrow \Omega$$

together with a function  $f_{\mathbf{X}}: \Omega \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  with the properties that

- (i)  $f_{\mathbf{X}}(x) \geq 0$  for all  $x = (x_1, \dots, x_n) \in \Omega$  and
- (ii)  $\sum_{x \in \Omega} f_{\mathbf{X}}(x) = 1$ .

The function  $f_{\mathbf{X}}$  is called the **joint density function** of the random variable  $\mathbf{X}$ .



## Discrete Multivariate Random Variables

We consider the multivariate random variable  $\mathbf{X}$  to have  $n$  components, i.e.,

$$\mathbf{X} = (X_1, \dots, X_n).$$

We often write

$$f_{\mathbf{X}}(x_1, \dots, x_n) = f_{X_1 \dots X_n}(x_1, \dots, x_n)$$

The joint density function  $f_{\mathbf{X}}$  gives the probability that the tuple  $(X_1, \dots, X_n)$  assumes a given value  $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ , i.e.,

$$f_{\mathbf{X}}(x_1, \dots, x_n) = P[X_1 = x_1 \text{ and } X_2 = x_2 \text{ and } \dots \text{ and } X_n = x_n].$$

Given two random variables, we may write  $(X, Y)$  instead of  $(X_1, X_2)$  and use similar notation for three or larger numbers of components.



## Discrete Bivariate Random Variables

8.2. **Example.** Suppose we roll two six-sided dice, obtaining results  $(i, j)$  with  $j = 1, \dots, 6$ . Let us define

$$X := i + j \bmod 5, \qquad Y = i - j \bmod 5.$$

Then we can find the values of the probability density function by Cardano's rule. The number of outcomes leading to each event  $(X, Y)$  is

$x/y$	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	1	4	1	1
1	1	2	1	2	1
2	2	1	1	1	2
3	2	1	1	1	2
4	1	2	1	2	1

so each number in the table must be divided by 36 to obtain the corresponding probability. For example,  $P[X = 1 \text{ and } Y = 1] = 1/18$ .



## Marginal Density

While each element of the table gives us  $36 \cdot P[X = x \text{ and } Y = y]$ , we can find the probability of the event  $X = x$  by adding up all relevant probabilities:

$$P[X = x] = \sum_{y=0}^4 P[X = x \text{ and } Y = y]$$

$x/y$	0	1	2	3	4
0	1	1	4	1	1
1	1	2	1	2	1
2	2	1	1	1	2
3	2	1	1	1	2
4	1	2	1	2	1

For example,

$$P[X = 0] = (1 + 1 + 4 + 1 + 1)/36 = 8/36.$$

This procedure can be justified by considering the corresponding event in the sample space.

By summing in this way, we can determine  $P[X = x]$  for all  $x$ . This is called the **marginal density** for  $X$ .



## Marginal Density of a Discrete Random Variable

8.3. Definition. Let  $(\mathbf{X}, f_{\mathbf{X}})$  be a discrete multivariate random variable. We define the **marginal density**  $f_{X_k}$  for  $X_k$ ,  $k = 1, \dots, n$ , by

$$f_{X_k}(x_k) = \sum_{x_1, \dots, x_{k-1}, x_{k+1}, \dots, x_n} f_{\mathbf{X}}(x_1, \dots, x_n).$$

8.4. Example.

$x/y$	0	1	2	3	4	$f_{\mathbf{X}}(x)$
0	1	1	4	1	1	8/36
1	1	2	1	2	1	7/36
2	2	1	1	1	2	7/36
3	2	1	1	1	2	7/36
4	1	2	1	2	1	7/36
$f_Y(y)$	7/36	7/36	8/36	7/36	7/36	1



## Independence of two Random Variables

Question. Considering the table:

$x/y$	0	1	2	3	4	$f_X(x)$
0	1	1	4	1	1	8/36
1	1	2	1	2	1	7/36
2	2	1	1	1	2	7/36
3	2	1	1	1	2	7/36
4	1	2	1	2	1	7/36
$f_Y(y)$	7/36	7/36	8/36	7/36	7/36	1

Do you think that  $X$  and  $Y$  are independent?

- Yes
- No
- It's not possible to tell from the table.





## Independence of Random Variables

If  $(\mathbf{X}, f_{\mathbf{X}})$  is a discrete **bivariate** random variable, i.e.,  $\mathbf{X} = (X_1, X_2)$ , we say that  $X_1$  and  $X_2$  are **independent** if

$$P[X_1 = x_1 \text{ and } X_2 = x_2] = P[X_1 = x_1] \cdot P[X_2 = x_2].$$

In other words, if

$$f_{\mathbf{X}}(x_1, x_2) = f_{X_1}(x_1) \cdot f_{X_2}(x_2).$$

(The joint density is the product of the marginal densities.)

It is possible to generalize this in the obvious (but notationally cumbersome) way to  $n$ -variate random variables.

We will mostly be interested in cases where  $\mathbf{X} = (X_1, \dots, X_n)$  and all the components are independent, i.e.,

$$f_{\mathbf{X}}(x_1, \dots, x_n) = f_{X_1}(x_1) \cdots f_{X_n}(x_n).$$



# Independence of two Random Variables

## 8.5. Example.

$x/y$	0	1	2	3	4	$f_X(x)$
0	1	1	4	1	1	$8/36$
1	1	2	1	2	1	$7/36$
2	2	1	1	1	2	$7/36$
3	2	1	1	1	2	$7/36$
4	1	2	1	2	1	$7/36$
$f_Y(y)$	$7/36$	$7/36$	$8/36$	$7/36$	$7/36$	1

The variables  $X$  and  $Y$  are not independent since, for example,

$$P[X = 1 \text{ and } Y = 1] = 1/18$$

but

$$P[X = 1] \cdot P[Y = 1] = \frac{7}{36} \cdot \frac{7}{36}$$

and the two expressions are not equal.



## Conditional Density

Suppose that  $(\mathbf{X}, f_{\mathbf{X}})$  is a discrete bivariate random variable, i.e.,  $\mathbf{X} = (X_1, X_2)$ , and that  $X_2$  is known to have taken on a certain value.

Then, applying elementary probability laws,

$$P[X_1 = x_1 \mid X_2 = x_2] = \frac{P[X_1 = x_1 \text{ and } X_2 = x_2]}{P[X_2 = x_2]} = \frac{f_{X_1 X_2}(x_1, x_2)}{f_{X_2}(x_2)}.$$

We hence define the *conditional density*

$$f_{X_1|X_2}(x_1) := \frac{f_{X_1 X_2}(x_1, x_2)}{f_{X_2}(x_2)} \quad \text{whenever } f_{X_2}(x_2) > 0,$$

where  $f_{X_2}$  is the marginal density of  $X_2$ .



## Continuous Random Variables

8.6. Definition. Let  $S$  be a sample space. A **continuous multivariate random variable** is a map

$$\mathbf{X}: S \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$$

together with a function  $f_{\mathbf{X}}: \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  with the properties that

- (i)  $f_{\mathbf{X}}(x) \geq 0$  for all  $x = (x_1, \dots, x_n) \in \mathbb{R}^n$  and
- (ii)  $\int_{\mathbb{R}^n} f_{\mathbf{X}}(x) dx = 1$ .

The function  $f_{\mathbf{X}}$  is called the **joint density function** of the random variable  $\mathbf{X}$ .



## Continuous Random Variables

The integral of  $f_{\mathbf{X}}$  is interpreted as the probability that  $\mathbf{X}$  assumes values in a given domain  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^n$ ,

$$P[\mathbf{X} \in \Omega] = \int_{\Omega} f_{\mathbf{X}}(\mathbf{x}) d\mathbf{x}.$$

For example, if  $\mathbf{X} = (X_1, X_2)$ ,

$$P[a \leq X_1 \leq b \text{ and } c \leq X_2 \leq d] = \int_a^b \int_c^d f_{X_1 X_2}(x_1, x_2) dx_1 dx_2$$

for  $a \leq b, c \leq d$ .

But of course non-rectangular domains can be considered as well.

We now make definitions for continuous random variables that are completely analogous to those for the discrete case.



## Continuous Multivariate Random Variables

We define the **marginal density** of  $X_k$ ,  $k = 1, \dots, n$ , by

$$f_{X_k}(x_k) = \int_{\mathbb{R}^{n-1}} f_{\mathbf{X}}(\mathbf{x}) dx_1 \dots dx_{k-1} dx_{k+1} \dots dx_n.$$

We say that two continuous random variables are **independent** if

$$f_{\mathbf{X}}(x_1, x_2) = f_{X_1}(x_1) \cdot f_{X_2}(x_2).$$

and we are often interested in the case where a full set of  $n$  components of a multivariate random variable is independent:

$$f_{\mathbf{X}}(x_1, \dots, x_n) = f_{X_1}(x_1) \cdots f_{X_n}(x_n).$$

The **conditional density** for continuous bivariate random variables is similarly

$$f_{X_1|X_2}(x_1) := \frac{f_{X_1 X_2}(x_1, x_2)}{f_{X_2}(x_2)} \quad \text{whenever } f_{X_2}(x_2) > 0.$$



## Expectation

We define the *expected value* or *expectation* for  $\mathbf{X}$  as the vector

$$\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}] = \begin{pmatrix} \mathbb{E}[X_1] \\ \vdots \\ \mathbb{E}[X_n] \end{pmatrix}$$

where  $\mathbb{E}[X_k]$  is calculated using the marginal density of  $X_k$ ,  $k = 1, \dots, n$ ,

$$\mathbb{E}[X_k] = \sum_{x_k} x_k f_{X_k}(x_k) = \sum_{\mathbf{x} \in \Omega} x_k f_{\mathbf{X}}(\mathbf{x})$$

and

$$\mathbb{E}[X_k] = \int_{\mathbb{R}} x_k f_{X_k}(x_k) dx_k = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} x_k f_{\mathbf{X}}(\mathbf{x}) d\mathbf{x}$$

for discrete and continuous random variables, respectively.



# Expectation for Discrete Bivariate Random Variables

## 8.7. Example.

$x/y$	0	1	2	3	4	$f_X(x)$
0	1	1	4	1	1	$8/36$
1	1	2	1	2	1	$7/36$
2	2	1	1	1	2	$7/36$
3	2	1	1	1	2	$7/36$
4	1	2	1	2	1	$7/36$
$f_Y(y)$	$7/36$	$7/36$	$8/36$	$7/36$	$7/36$	1

$$E[X] = \sum_{(x,y) \in \Omega} x \cdot f_{XY}(x,y) = \sum_{x=0}^4 x \cdot f_X(x) = \frac{70}{36}$$

$$E[Y] = \sum_{(x,y) \in \Omega} y \cdot f_{XY}(x,y) = \sum_{y=0}^4 y \cdot f_Y(y) = 2$$





## Expectation for Functions of Random Vectors

Suppose  $\varphi: \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  is a continuous function. Then

$$\varphi \circ \mathbf{X}: S \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$$

defines a scalar random variable. It is possible to prove that in this case,

$$E[\varphi \circ \mathbf{X}] = \sum_{x \in \Omega} \varphi(x) f_{\mathbf{X}}(x), \quad \text{or} \quad E[\varphi \circ \mathbf{X}] = \int_{\mathbb{R}^n} \varphi(x) f_{\mathbf{X}}(x) dx.$$

For  $\varphi(x_1, \dots, x_n) = x_k$  we regain the definition of  $E[X_k]$ .



## Expectation for the Sum of Two Random Variables

8.8. Remark. If  $(X, Y)$  is a discrete bivariate random variable and  $\varphi(x, y) = x + y$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} E[X + Y] &= \sum_{(x,y) \in \Omega} (x + y) \cdot f_{XY}(x, y) \\ &= \sum_{(x,y) \in \Omega} x \cdot f_{XY}(x, y) + \sum_{(x,y) \in \Omega} y \cdot f_{XY}(x, y) \\ &= E[X] + E[Y]. \end{aligned}$$

This establishes the addition property of the expectation that we introduced earlier.

An analogous calculation may be used for continuous random variables.



## Variance and Covariance for Bivariate Random Variables

Let us calculate the variance of the sum of two random variables:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Var}[X + Y] &= E[((X + Y) - E[X + Y])^2] \\ &= E[((X - E[X]) + (Y - E[Y]))^2] \\ &= E[(X - E[X])^2 + (Y - E[Y])^2 + 2(X - E[X])(Y - E[Y])] \\ &= \text{Var}[X] + \text{Var}[Y] + 2 E[(X - E[X])(Y - E[Y])] \quad (8.1)\end{aligned}$$

In general,

$$\text{Var}[X + Y] \neq \text{Var}[X] + \text{Var}[Y].$$

We define the **covariance of**  $(X, Y)$ ,

$$\text{Cov}[X, Y] = E[(X - \mu_X)(Y - \mu_Y)],$$

where we have used  $\mu$  to denote the expectations. Note that

$$\text{Cov}[X, Y] = \text{Cov}[Y, X] \quad \text{and} \quad \text{Cov}[X, X] = \text{Var}[X].$$



## The Covariance Matrix

For a multivariate random variable  $\mathbf{X}$  we define the *covariance matrix*

$$\text{Var}[\mathbf{X}] = \begin{pmatrix} \text{Var}[X_1] & \text{Cov}[X_1, X_2] & \dots & \text{Cov}[X_1, X_n] \\ \text{Cov}[X_1, X_2] & \text{Var}[X_2] & \ddots & \vdots \\ \vdots & \ddots & \ddots & \text{Cov}[X_{n-1}, X_n] \\ \text{Cov}[X_1, X_n] & \dots & \text{Cov}[X_{n-1}, X_n] & \text{Var}[X_n] \end{pmatrix}.$$

It is possible to prove (through tedious calculation) that

$$\text{Var}[C\mathbf{X}] = C \text{Var}[\mathbf{X}] C^T$$

where  $C \in \text{Mat}(n \times n; \mathbb{R})$  is a constant  $n \times n$  matrix with real coefficients.



## Covariance and Independence

Just as for the variance, a direct calculation yields

$$\text{Cov}[X, Y] = E[XY] - E[X] E[Y].$$

Furthermore, if two continuous random variables  $X$  and  $Y$  are independent, then  $f_{XY}(x, y) = f_X(x)f_Y(y)$  and

$$\begin{aligned} E[XY] &= \iint_{\mathbb{R}^2} xy \cdot f_{XY}(x, y) \, dx \, dy \\ &= \iint_{\mathbb{R}^2} xy \cdot f_X(x)f_Y(y) \, dx \, dy \\ &= \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}} x \cdot f_X(x) \, dx \right) \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}} y \cdot f_Y(y) \, dy \right) \\ &= E[X] E[Y] \end{aligned}$$



## Covariance and Independence

An analogous calculation works for discrete random variables. We have hence proved:

- ▶ If  $X$  and  $Y$  are independent, then  $\text{Cov}[X, Y] = 0$ .

However, the converse is not true:

- ▶ If  $\text{Cov}[X, Y] = 0$ , then  $X$  and  $Y$  are *not necessarily independent*.

We note that we have also established that

$$\text{Var}[X + Y] = \text{Var}[X] + \text{Var}[Y]$$

*if the random variables are independent.*

The covariance is hence related to the independence of  $X$  and  $Y$ . However, it is not a measure for dependence, since two dependent variables can still have a vanishing covariance.

So we ask: what does the covariance actually measure?



## Standardizing Random Variables

We note that the covariance scales with  $X$  and  $Y$ , i.e., if  $X$  and  $Y$  take on numerically large values, then the covariance will be large, while if  $X$  and  $Y$  take on small values, the covariance will be small. Therefore, by itself it does not serve very well as a measure of any fundamental properties of  $X$  and  $Y$ .

The solution is to standardize the random variables,

$$\tilde{X} := \frac{X - \mu_X}{\sigma_X}$$

is the standardized variable for  $X$  (assuming that both mean and variance of  $X$  exist and  $\sigma_X \neq 0$ ).

Recall that

$$E[\tilde{X}] = 0,$$

$$\text{Var}[\tilde{X}] = 1.$$

# The Pearson Correlation Coefficient



*Karl Pearson (1857-1936) in 1912.* File:Karl Pearson, 1912.jpg. (2018, January 17). Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository.

Instead of  $\text{Cov}[X, Y]$  we now consider

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Cov}[\tilde{X}, \tilde{Y}] &= E[\tilde{X}\tilde{Y}] - E[\tilde{X}]E[\tilde{Y}] \\ &= \frac{\text{Cov}[X, Y]}{\sqrt{\text{Var}[X]\text{Var}[Y]}}\end{aligned}$$

The right-hand side is now scale-independent and unit-less (if  $X$  and  $Y$  have units).

This quotient is known as the ***Pearson coefficient of correlation*** of  $(X, Y)$  and denoted

$$\rho_{XY} := \frac{\text{Cov}[X, Y]}{\sqrt{\text{Var}[X]\text{Var}[Y]}}.$$





## Properties of the Correlation Coefficient

It can be shown that  $\rho_{XY}$  has the following properties

- (i)  $-1 \leq \rho_{XY} \leq 1$ ,
- (ii)  $|\rho_{XY}| = 1$  if and only if there exist numbers  $\beta_0, \beta_1 \in \mathbb{R}$ ,  $\beta_1 \neq 0$ , such that

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X$$

almost surely.

The proof is best performed in a vector-space setting, which we omit here.

The above properties give us a clue as to how the correlation coefficient might be interpreted: if it has modulus one, then  $X$  and  $Y$  are in a deterministically linear relationship. Let us therefore start from that angle.



## Measuring Linearity of $X$ and $Y$

Suppose that  $X$  and  $Y$  are related in a linear fashion, say

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X, \quad (8.2)$$

with  $\beta_1 \neq 0$ . Then

$$\mu_Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mu_X$$

and  $\text{Var}[Y] = \beta_1^2 \text{Var}[X]$ , so

$$\sigma_Y = |\beta_1| \sigma_X.$$



## Measuring Linearity of $X$ and $Y$

Using the standardized variables, we find that

$$\begin{aligned}\tilde{Y} &= \frac{Y - \mu_Y}{\sigma_Y} \\ &= \frac{\beta_0 + \beta_1 X - (\beta_0 + \beta_1 \mu_X)}{|\beta_1| \sigma_X} \\ &= \frac{\beta_1}{|\beta_1|} \frac{X - \mu_X}{\sigma_X} \\ &= \frac{\beta_1}{|\beta_1|} \tilde{X}.\end{aligned}$$

We conclude that  $X$  and  $Y$  are in a linear relationship if and only if the standardized variables are either equal or the negative of each other.



## Measuring Linearity of $X$ and $Y$

We now know that  $X$  and  $Y$  are deterministically linearly related if and only if

$$\tilde{X} + \tilde{Y} = 0 \quad \text{or} \quad \tilde{X} - \tilde{Y} = 0.$$

In order to measure in how far  $X$  and  $Y$  are not linearly related, it makes sense to consider the standard deviation of  $\tilde{X} + \tilde{Y}$  and  $\tilde{X} - \tilde{Y}$ . If either of these were zero, the relationship would be deterministically linear.

We calculate

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Var}[\tilde{X} + \tilde{Y}] &= \text{Var}[\tilde{X}] + \text{Var}[\tilde{Y}] + 2 \text{Cov}[\tilde{X}, \tilde{Y}] = 2 + 2\rho_{XY}, \\ \text{Var}[\tilde{X} - \tilde{Y}] &= \text{Var}[\tilde{X}] + \text{Var}[\tilde{Y}] - 2 \text{Cov}[\tilde{X}, \tilde{Y}] = 2 - 2\rho_{XY}.\end{aligned}$$

If either of these two variances is small, then  $\tilde{X}$  and  $\tilde{Y}$  are “nearly proportional” and so  $X$  and  $Y$  are “nearly linearly” related.

# The Fisher Transformation

In order to capture both of these positive quantities in a single manner, let us consider their quotient,

$$\sqrt{\frac{\text{Var}[\tilde{X} + \tilde{Y}]}{\text{Var}[\tilde{X} - \tilde{Y}]}} = \sqrt{\frac{1 + \rho_{XY}}{1 - \rho_{XY}}} \in (0, \infty)$$

If  $X$  and  $Y$  are linearly related, then this quotient will be either very small or very large.

It is “mathematically nicer” to take the logarithm:

$$\ln \left( \sqrt{\frac{\text{Var}[\tilde{X} + \tilde{Y}]}{\text{Var}[\tilde{X} - \tilde{Y}]}} \right) = \frac{1}{2} \ln \left( \frac{1 + \rho_{XY}}{1 - \rho_{XY}} \right) = \text{Artanh}(\rho_{XY}) \in \mathbb{R}.$$

This is known as the **Fisher transformation** of  $\rho_{XY}$ .



**Ronald Fisher (1890-1962) in 1913**  
File:Youngronaldfisher2.JPG. (2018, July 7).  
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## Positive and Negative Correlation

It follows that

$$\rho_{XY} = \tanh\left(\ln\left(\frac{\sigma_{\tilde{X}+\tilde{Y}}}{\sigma_{\tilde{X}-\tilde{Y}}}\right)\right).$$

- ▶ If  $\rho_{XY} > 0$ , then  $\text{Var}[\tilde{X} + \tilde{Y}] > \text{Var}[\tilde{X} - \tilde{Y}]$ , which implies that the relationship between  $X$  and  $Y$  is closer to  $\tilde{X} = \tilde{Y}$  than to  $\tilde{X} = -\tilde{Y}$ . Hence, if  $X$  is large,  $Y$  tends to be large also.

We say that  $X$  and  $Y$  are **positively correlated**.

- ▶ If  $\rho_{XY} < 0$ , then  $\text{Var}[\tilde{X} + \tilde{Y}] < \text{Var}[\tilde{X} - \tilde{Y}]$  and the situation is reversed. If  $X$  is large,  $Y$  tends to be small.

We say that  $X$  and  $Y$  are **negatively correlated**.

Since  $X$  and  $Y$  are still *random* variables, a large value of  $X$  only indicates a tendency for  $Y$  to be large/small but doesn't guarantee this. The closer  $\rho_{XY}$  is to  $\pm 1$ , the more pronounced these effects are.



# The Bivariate Normal Distribution

**8.9. Example.** Suppose two random variables  $X$  and  $Y$  should each follow a (marginal) normal distribution, but are not independent.

The most common model is the so-called **bivariate normal distribution**, with density function

$$f_{XY}(x, y) = \frac{1}{2\pi\sigma_X\sigma_Y\sqrt{1-\varrho^2}} e^{-\frac{1}{2(1-\varrho^2)} \left[ \left( \frac{x-\mu_X}{\sigma_X} \right)^2 - 2\varrho \left( \frac{x-\mu_X}{\sigma_X} \right) \left( \frac{y-\mu_Y}{\sigma_Y} \right) + \left( \frac{y-\mu_Y}{\sigma_Y} \right)^2 \right]}$$

where  $-1 < \varrho < 1$ .

The marginal distributions can be shown to be normal,  $\mu_X = E[X]$ ,  $\sigma_X^2 = \text{Var } X$  (and similarly for  $Y$ ) and  $\varrho = \rho_{XY}$  is indeed the correlation coefficient of  $X$  and  $Y$ .

Furthermore,  $X$  and  $Y$  are independent if and only if  $\varrho = 0$ .

This distribution will be discussed in detail in the assignments.