

Article

# Combining K-Means and XGBoost Models for Anomaly Detection Using Log Datasets

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**Abstract:** Computing and networking systems traditionally record their activity in log files, which have been used for multiple purposes, such as troubleshooting, accounting, post-incident analysis of security breaches, capacity planning and anomaly detection. In earlier systems those log files were processed manually by system administrators, or with the support of basic applications for filtering, compiling and pre-processing the logs for specific purposes. However, as the volume of these log files continues to grow (more logs per system, more systems per domain), it is becoming increasingly difficult to process those logs using traditional tools, especially for less straightforward purposes such as anomaly detection. On the other hand, as systems continue to become more complex, the potential of using large datasets built of logs from heterogeneous sources for detecting anomalies without prior domain knowledge becomes higher. Anomaly detection tools for such scenarios face two challenges. First, devising appropriate data analysis solutions for effectively detecting anomalies from large data sources, possibly without prior domain knowledge. Second, adopting data processing platforms able to cope with the large datasets and complex data analysis algorithms required for such purposes. In this paper we address those challenges by proposing an integrated scalable framework that aims at efficiently detecting anomalous events on large amounts of unlabeled data logs. Detection is supported by clustering and classification methods that take advantage of parallel computing environments. We validate our approach using the well known NASA Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) logs datasets. Fourteen features were extracted in order to train a k-means model for separating anomalous and normal events in highly coherent clusters. A second model, making use of the XGBoost system implementing a gradient tree boosting algorithm, uses the previous binary clustered data for producing a set of simple interpretable rules. These rules represent the rationale for generalizing its application over a massive number of unseen events in a distributed computing environment. The classified anomaly events produced by our framework can be used, for instance, as candidates for further forensic and compliance auditing analysis in security management.

**Keywords:** anomaly detection; clustering; k-means; gradient tree boosting; XGBoost

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## 1. Introduction

Hosts and network systems typically record their detailed activity in log files with specific formats, which are valuable sources for anomaly detection systems. The growing number of hosts per organization and the growing complexity of infrastructures result in an increasingly massive amount of recorded logs available—requiring simpler and cheaper anomaly detection methods. While classic log management applications based on manual or preset rule-based analysis still hold value, they do not scale well with the large volumes of data that are currently available. Moreover, they are limited in

terms of exploratory analysis: they fail to detect anomalies not predefined in the rules (i.e., based on prior knowledge) and/or require considerable operator expertise to reach their full potential. This opens the way for the introduction of new approaches, which are less dependent on prior knowledge and human-guided workflows and are able to extract knowledge from large volumes of log data in a scalable and (semi)automated way. Moreover, taking advantage of the available computational resources may also contribute to achieving performance and accuracy for identifying anomalies and retrieving forensic and compliance auditing evidence.

Over the past years, several automated log analysis methods for anomaly detection have been proposed. However, most of those proposals are not suitable to the scale needed for identifying unknown anomalies from the growing high-rate amount of logs being produced and their inherent complexity. In the scope of the ATENA H2020 Project [1,2], we faced this challenge while building a Forensics and Compliance Auditing (FCA) tool able to handle all the logs produced by a typical energy utility infrastructure.

To address such challenges, we researched novel integrated anomaly detection methods employing parallel processing capabilities for improving detection accuracy and efficiency over massive amounts of log records. These methods combine the k-means clustering algorithm [3] and the gradient tree boosting classification algorithm [4] to leverage the filtering capabilities over normal events, in order to concentrate the efforts on the remaining anomaly candidates. Such an approach may greatly contribute to reducing the involved computational complexity.

The characteristics of abnormal system behaviors were obtained by extracting 14 statistical features containing numerical and categorical attributes from the logs. Then, the k-means clustering algorithm was employed to separate anomalous from normal events into two highly coherent clusters. The previous binary clustered data serve as labeled input to produce a gradient tree boosting algorithm implemented by the XGBoost system [5]. Its role is to produce a set of simple rules with the rationale for generalizing the classification of anomalies of a large number of unseen events in a distributed computing environment. K-means, XGBoost and Dask [6] provide the tools for building scalable clustering and classification solutions to find out the candidate events for forensic and compliance auditing analysis.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses background concepts and related work. Section 3 describes the proposed framework. Section 4 presents the validation work and discusses the achieved results, and Section 5 concludes the paper.

## 2. Background and Related Work

This section starts by providing the reader with the key base concepts related with the scope of our approach. Next, we discuss related work (Section 2.2). Finally, we present the algorithms and tools we adopted in our work, namely k-means (Section 2.3), decision trees (Section 2.4), gradient tree boosting on XGBoost (Section 2.5) and Dask (Section 2.6).

### 2.1. Base Concepts

By definition, an anomaly is an outlying observation that appears to deviate markedly from other members [7]. Anomalies are typically classified into three types: point anomalies, contextual anomalies and collective anomalies. A point anomaly in data significantly deviates from the average or normal distribution of the rest of the data [8]. A contextual anomaly is identified as anomalous behavior constrained to a specific context, and normal according to other contexts [8]. Collection of data instances may reveal collective anomalies while anomalous behavior may not be depicted when analyzed individually. [9]. Time series data include a significant amount of chronologically ordered sequence data sample values retrieved at different instants. Their features include high-dimensionality, dynamicity, high levels of noise, and complexity. Consequently, in the data mining research area, time series data mining was classified as one of the ten most challenging problems [10].

Anomaly detection for application log data faces important challenges due to the inherent unstructured plain text contents, the redundant runtime information and the existence of a significant amount of unbalanced data. Application logs are unstructured and stored as plain text, and their format varies significantly between applications. This lack of structure presents important barriers to data analysis. Moreover, runtime information, such as server IP addresses, may change during execution. Additionally, application log data are designed to record all changes to an application and hence contain data that are significantly unbalanced in comparison to non-anomalous execution. The size and unbalanced nature of log data thus complicate the anomaly detection process.

## 2.2. Related Work

Various anomaly detection methods have been proposed for applying clustering algorithms to detect unknown abnormal behaviors or potential security attacks.

Some of those proposals have addressed the usage of log analysis as one of the input sources for anomaly detection. Chen and Li [11], for instance, proposed an improved version of the DBSCAN algorithm for detecting anomalies from audit data while updating the detection profile along its execution. Syarif et al. [12] compared five different clustering algorithms and identified those providing the highest detection accuracy. However, they also concluded that those algorithms are not mature enough for practical applications. Hoglund et al. [13], as well as Lichodzijewski et al. [14], constructed host-based anomaly detection systems that applied a self-organizing maps algorithm to evaluate if a user behavior pattern is abnormal.

Clustering techniques, such as the k-means algorithm, are often used by intrusion detection systems for classifying normal or anomalous events. Münz et al. [15] applied the k-means clustering algorithm to feature datasets extracted from raw records, where training data are divided into clusters of time intervals for normal and anomalous traffic. Li and Wang [16] improved a clustering algorithm supported by a traditional means clustering algorithm, in order to achieve efficiency and accuracy when classifying data. Eslamnezhad and Varjani [17] proposed a new detection algorithm to increase the quality of the clustering method based on a MinMax k-means algorithm, overcoming the low sensitivity to initial centers in the k-means algorithm. Ranjan and Sahoo [18] proposed a modified k-medoids clustering algorithm for intrusion detection. The algorithm takes a new approach in selecting the initial medoids, overcoming the means in anomaly intrusion detection and the dependency on initial centroids, number of clusters and irrelevant clusters.

Other authors have used hybrid solutions for log analysis, combining the use of the k-means algorithm with other techniques for improving detection performance. They realized that despite the inherent complex structure and high computational cost, hybrid classifiers can contribute to improving accuracy. Tokanju et al. [19], for instance, took advantage of an integrated signature-based and anomaly-based approach to propose a framework based on frequent patterns. Asif-Iqbal et al. [20] correlated different logs from different sources, supported by clustering techniques, to identify and remove unneeded logs. Hajamydeen et al. [21] classified events in two different stages supported by the same clustering algorithm. Initially, it uses a filtering process to identify the abnormal events, and then it applies it for detecting anomalies. Varuna and Natesan [22] introduced a new hybrid learning method integrating k-means clustering and Naive Bayes classification. Muda et al. [23] proposed k-means clustering and Naive Bayes classifiers in a hybrid learning approach, by using the KDD Cup'99 benchmark dataset for validation. In their approach, instances are separated into potential attacks and normal clusters. Subsequently, they are further classified into more specific categories. Elbasiony et al. [24] used data mining techniques to build a hybrid framework for identifying network misuse and detecting intrusions. They used the random forests algorithm to detect misuses, with k-means as the clustering algorithm for unsupervised anomaly detection. The hybrid approach is achieved by combining the random forests algorithm with the weighted k-means algorithm.

Some research focused on detecting which outliers constitute an anomaly when applying clustering methods [25,26]. Liao and Vemuri [26] computed the membership of data points to a

given cluster, supported by the use of Euclidean distance. Breunig et al. [27] stated that some detection proposals weight data points as outliers.

Hybrid approaches have indeed proven quite interesting. However, in general, proposed solutions still take considerable amounts of time to generate models for particular datasets, aggravated by the growth patterns normally associated with log sources in production systems. This situation calls for alternative strategies that are able to improve speed (as well as accuracy and efficiency) by taking advantage of innovative algorithmic approaches together with improved parallelism.

Our work focuses on scalability and interpretability, since the aim is to use it in the forensics and audit compliance contexts already discussed in Section 1. The goal is to be able to sift through data to select candidates for a more detailed analysis or inspection.

Similarly to other works, we also take a hybrid approach for identifying anomalies for log analysis. However, unlike other works, we specifically target speed, agility and interpretability. Our approach allows training and classifying out-of-core datasets in scenarios involving the computation of very large datasets with limited computing resources, parallelizing their processing by distributing them across the available nodes. Therefore, our approach is supported by clustering and classification algorithms that are able to scale and produce interpretable results. Our method works in two stages: first, it starts with the unlabelled dataset, implementing a binary anomalous event classifier through the use of unsupervised learning algorithms; the second stage produces a set of simple rules by considering the previously classified data through the use of supervised learning algorithms. It combines the k-means algorithm for clustering anomalies and gradient tree boosting to produce a simple set of interpretable rules to be parallelized in a distributed environment on classifying a large amount of data.

Next, we present the already existing techniques used by our approach in more detail.

### 2.3. K-Means

K-means remains one of the most popular clustering methods and one of the most relevant algorithms in data mining [3]. The main advantage of k-means is its simplicity. By starting with a set of randomly chosen initial centers, one procedure assigns each input point to its nearest center and then recomputes the centers given the point assignment [28].

Scaling k-means to massive data is relatively easy, due to its simple iterative nature. Given a set of cluster centers, each point can independently decide which center is closest to it, and given an assignment of points to clusters, computing the optimum center can be performed by simply averaging the points. Indeed, parallel implementations of k-means are readily available [28].

From a theoretical standpoint, k-means is not a good clustering algorithm in terms of efficiency or quality. Thus, the running time can grow exponentially in the worst case [29,30] and even though the final solution is locally optimal, it can be very far away from the global optimum (even under repeated random initializations). Nevertheless, in practice, the speed and simplicity of k-means are attractive. Therefore, recent work has focused on improving its initialization procedure performance in terms of quality and convergence [28].

### 2.4. Decision Trees

Decision trees is a popular supervised machine learning method that produces regression or classification models in the form of a tree structure containing decisions as nodes, resulting in a set of leaves containing the solution. Decision trees are suitable to be applied to any data without much effort when compared with algorithms such as neural networks. Trees are built top-down from the root node and involve recursive binary splitting. In neural networks, the initial dataset is partitioned into smaller subsets according to their features, while an associated decision tree is incrementally built. Such a splitting process is driven by a greedy algorithm evaluating the best solution at each of those steps and evaluating the maximum loss reduction from the cost function in order to make a split on features. To regulate the complexity of a given model and increase the performance of a given tree, pruning processes are available. Notwithstanding, decision tree learning does not generally provide the best

performance in terms of prediction. Some approaches exist in learning decision forests, including bagging [31], random forests [32] and boosted trees [33].

Tree boosting overcomes the above performance problem by the use of an additive model that iteratively builds decision trees to learn decision forests by applying a greedy algorithm (boosting) on top of a decision tree base learner [33–35]. Tree boosting is regarded as one of the most effective off-the-shelf nonlinear learning methods for a wide range of application problems [34]. It is also highly effective and widely used for achieving state-of-the-art results on many machine learning challenges hosted by the machine learning competition site Kaggle [36].

Regularized greedy forest is an algorithm that can handle general loss functions with a wider range of applicability, which directly learns decision forests while taking advantage of the tree structure itself, while other methods employ specific loss functions, such as exponential loss function in the case of the Adaboost algorithm [34].

## 2.5. XGBoost

XGBoost is a scalable system that implements gradient tree boosting and the regularized model so as to prevent overfitting, and simplifies the objective function—for parallelization of the regularized greedy forest algorithm [34]. It is suitable for the development of parallel computing solutions applicable to larger datasets or faster training. Besides processors and memory, it uses disk space to handle data that do not fit into the main memory. To enable out-of-core computation, the data are divided into multiple blocks [5]. The system includes cache access patterns, data compression, and sharding. Its performance relies on a tree learning algorithm, which is able to handle sparse data, and on a weighted quantile sketch procedure. This procedure enables handling instance weights in approximate tree learning and is able to solve real-world scale problems using a minimal amount of resources. Besides the penalty from regularizing the objective function, two techniques prevent overfitting: shrinkage, introduced by Friedman [37], and feature subsampling retrieved from random forests to speed up computations. XGBoost works well in practice and has won several machine learning competitions, such as Kaggle [36], running faster than other popular solutions on a single machine and scaling in distributed or out-of-core settings. It can be easily interpreted, given the tools it provides for finding the important features from the XGBoost model.

## 2.6. Dask

The Dask parallel computing framework leverages the existing Python ecosystem, including relevant libraries such as "numpy" or "pandas". Dask capabilities are supported by executing graphs to be run by the scheduler component, potentially scaling execution to millions of nodes. Those features are suitable to be applied to out-of-core scenarios (not fitting in memory) on a single machine [6].

Dask is a Python specification representing the computation of directed acyclic graphs of tasks with data dependencies to encode parallel task graph schedules. It extends the easy to adopt NumPy library for leveraging parallel computation over modern hardware. It allows scaling large datasets by using disks that extend the physical memory as out-of-core and parallelize and linearly speedup the code by taking advantage of several cores. The main objective is to parallelize the existing Python software stack without triggering a full rewrite. A Dask cluster includes a central scheduler and several distributed workers. It starts up a XGBoost scheduler and a XGBoost worker within each of the Dask workers sharing the same physical processes and memory spaces.

Dask enables parallel and out-of-core computation by including collections such as arrays, bags and dataframes. It couples blocked algorithms with dynamic and memory-aware task scheduling to achieve a parallel and out-of-core popular NumPy clone [6]. Sharing distributed processes with multiple systems allows usaging of specialized services easily and avoiding large monolithic frameworks.

Dask is often compared with other distributed machine learning libraries, such as H2O [38] or Spark's Machine Learning Library (MLLib) [39]. XGBoost is available in Dask to provide users with a

fully featured and efficient solution. The Dask parallel computing approach can handle problems that are more complicated than the map-reduce problem at a lower cost and complexity when compared to solutions such as MLLib, given that most of the problems can be resolved in a single machine. Any function is able to be parallelized by the use of delayed function decorators. Additionally, Dask is substantially lightweight when compared to Spark.

### 3. Proposed Framework

Motivated by the related work, we propose an integrated method with filtering mechanisms to improve detection accuracy and efficiency in scenarios involving large amounts of logs. This method is supported by the k-means clustering and the gradient tree boosting classification algorithms, as implemented by the XGBoost system. To overcome the limitations of existing anomaly detection methods that spend a significant amount of time building the models for the whole dataset, we built three different tools for improving detection accuracy and efficiency.

This section starts with a formal presentation of the algorithm of the model, followed by a discussion of the three compounding tools used for implementing the proposed approach.

#### 3.1. Description of the Algorithm

The proposed approach is formalized in Algorithm 1, which describes how to combine k-means and XGBoost. The algorithm is implemented as a function that takes as input a set of events  $E$  and returns the identification of the anomaly  $anomalycluster$ , the classified events  $ypred^1$ , total classified events  $totalevents$  and the total of those events classified as anomalies  $totalanomalies$ .

It starts by initializing the cluster  $S$  and activating the client connection  $C$  to the cluster  $S$ . Then the distributed array  $G$  is prepared from the received events in  $E$ . The next step is to initialize the k-means model  $Km$  for binary classification in the cluster ( $k = 2$ ) from the distributed array  $G$  to separate events into two distinct clusters in  $Y$ . Then, the XGBoost model  $X$  is initialized with the previously predicted events  $Y$  being provided as an input for training in the cluster through the use of the client connection  $C$ . The final prediction  $ypred$  is achieved from the XGBoost model  $X$ . In the next stage, each of those predictions ( $i \in ypred$ ) is classified according to the cluster they belong to in  $ypred^1$ . Such a classification will be determined by evaluating the total number of events in clusters  $k1$  and  $k2$ , so as to decide which corresponds to the anomaly cluster. To that aim, 0.5 was considered as the threshold to classify events as belonging to clusters 1 or 2 ( $ypred_i > 0.5$ ).

After all events have been classified, the cluster including the fewer number of events ( $k1 > k2$ ) will correspond to the anomaly cluster, and such decision will stored in  $anomalycluster$ .

#### 3.2. Tools

The framework encompasses three tools that may be independently combined in a cooperative way for normalizing raw data and for producing a model able to achieve evidence for forensic and compliance auditing analysis. The "fca\_normalization" tool is used to normalize the raw data, "fca\_model" produces the model and "fca\_analysis" provides the pieces of evidence for forensic and compliance auditing analysis.

The normalization tool takes as input HTTP raw data logs and normalizes data into a new file. Optionally, the encoded features may also be specified. In case encoding is not provided or in the case of missing feature values, the tool automatically applies an encoding label. The tool can be invoked, for example, by using the following command:

```
python fca_normalization
    -in NASA_access_log_Jul95
    -in_encoding in_encoding.data
    -out logs_NASA.csv
    -out_encoding out_encoding.data
```

**Algorithm 1** Proposed Algorithm**INPUT:**  $E$ , Event Set

```

 $S \leftarrow \text{CLUSTER}()$ 
 $C \leftarrow \text{CLIENT}(S)$ 
 $G \leftarrow \text{DISTRIBUTEDARRAY}(E)$ 
 $k \leftarrow 2$ 
 $km \leftarrow \text{KMEANS}(C, k)$ 
 $km.\text{TRAIN}(G)$ 
 $Y \leftarrow km.\text{PREDICT}(G)$ 
 $X \leftarrow \text{XGBOOST}(X)$ 
 $X.\text{TRAIN}(Y, Y)$ 
 $ypred \leftarrow X.\text{PREDICT}(G)$ 
for all  $i \in ypred$  do
    if  $ypred_i > 0.5$  then
         $ypred^1_i \leftarrow 1$ 
         $k2 \leftarrow k2 + 1$ 
    else
         $ypred^1_i \leftarrow 0$ 
         $k1 \leftarrow k1 + 1$ 
    end if
end for
if  $k1 > k2$  then
     $anomalycluster \leftarrow 1$ 
     $totalanomalies \leftarrow k2$ 
else
     $anomalycluster \leftarrow 0$ 
     $totalanomalies \leftarrow k1$ 
end if
 $totalevents \leftarrow k1 + k2$ 

```

**OUTPUT:**  $ypred^1$ , Cluster Predictions**OUTPUT:**  $anomalycluster$ , Identification of the anomaly cluster**OUTPUT:**  $totalevents$ , Total number of events**OUTPUT:**  $totalanomalies$ , Total number o anomalies

In this example, "fca\_normalization" receives the raw HTTP log data file "NASA\_access\_log\_Jul95" along with the optional encoding file "encoding.data". The output normalized file is saved as "logs\_NASA.csv". Finally, the tool optionally defines the encoding table in the "out\_encoding.data" file.

The modeling tool takes as input the previously normalized data and builds the XGBoost classification model by making use of the gradient tree boosting algorithm after applying the k-means clustering algorithm. In the example invocation provided next, the input file "logs\_NASA.csv" contains the HTTP raw log data and the output model is saved as "fca\_xgboost.pkl".

```
python fca_model
    -in logs_NASA.csv
    -out fca_xgboost.pkl
```

The forensic and compliance auditing analysis tool takes as input the model and the normalized events in order to identify the anomalies. In the invocation example provided next, the input model is read from 'fca\_xgboost.pkl', and the normalized data is read from 'logs\_NASA.csv'. The final output containing the anomaly events is saved on 'outlier\_events.csv'.

```
python fca_analysis
    -in_model fca_xgboost.pkl
    -in_data logs_NASA.csv
    -out outlier_events.csv
```

Table 1 summarizes the inputs and outputs for each tool.

**Table 1.** Tools' inputs and outputs.

Tool	Input	Output
Normalization	HTTP raw logs data, encoding	Normalized data, encoding
Modelling	Normalized data	Model
Analysis	Model, normalized data	Anomaly events

#### 4. Discussion and Evaluation

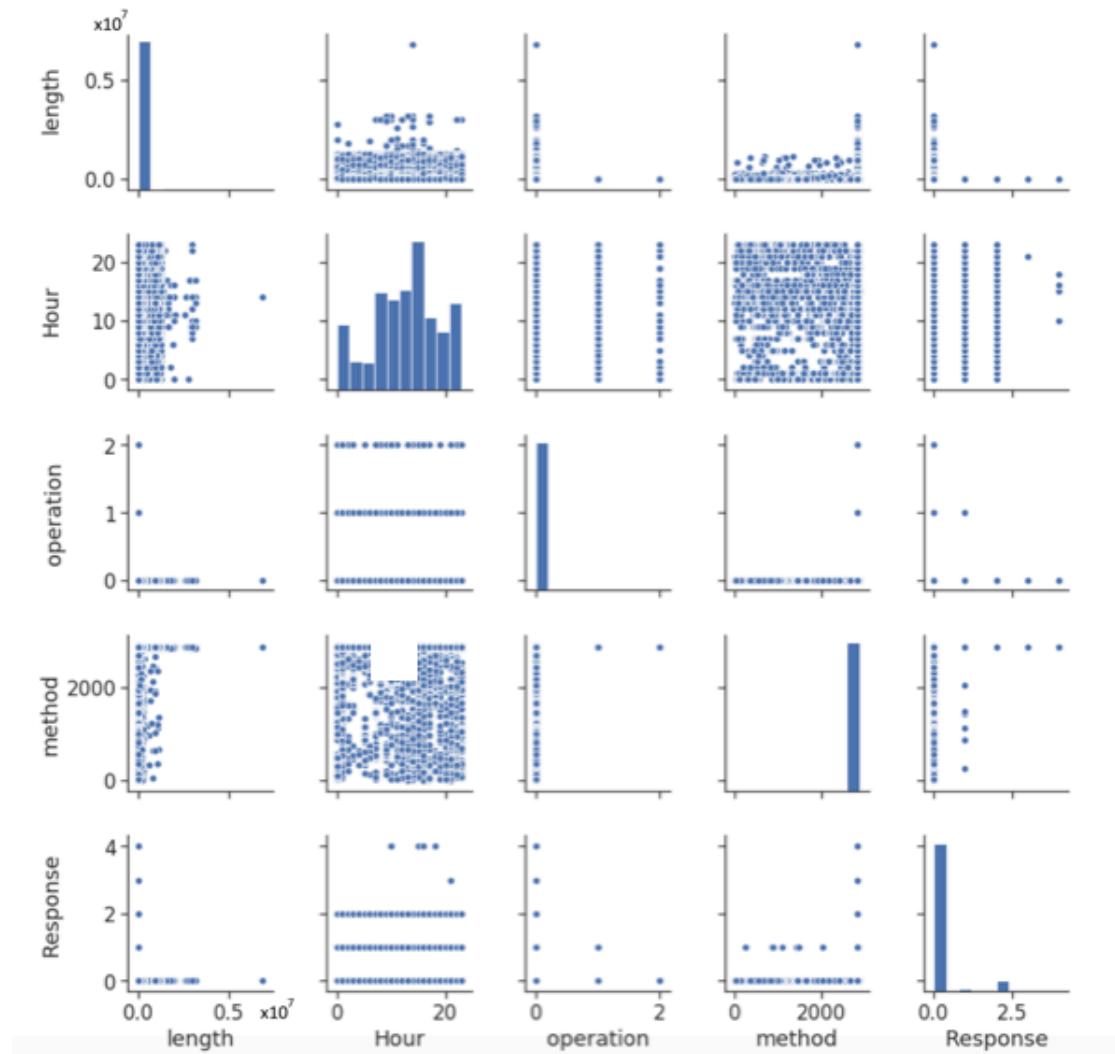
This section addresses the validation of the proposed framework. First, we discuss feature extraction. Next, based on the extracted features, we describe the initial application of the k-means clustering algorithm for dividing the dataset into two different clusters. Finally, we discuss how to use the previous clustered data for training a scalable gradient tree boosting implemented by the XGBoost system.

For the sake of readability, throughout this section we extensively use as reference a set of well-known, publicly available datasets [40]. These datasets consist of traces containing two months' worth of all HTTP requests to the NASA Kennedy Space Center WWW server, involving 1,871,988 logged events. This dataset was selected because it is probably the largest log-based dataset publicly available, allowing us to assess our scalability claims.

##### 4.1. Feature Extraction and Data Exploration

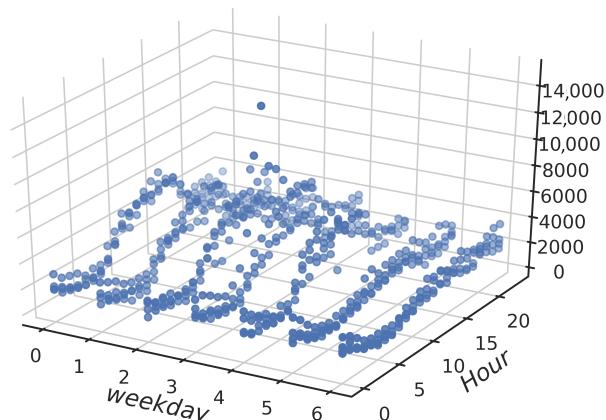
To capture the characteristics of the system behaviors, 14 features were extracted, containing both numeric and categorical attributes from the raw log records. The original features in the raw HTTP log records are "IP", "Date", "Request", "Response" and "length". By making use of regular expressions, the most relevant time-related components were extracted from the "date" feature, including "Day", "Month", "Year", "Hour", "Minute" and "Second". From the "Request" field, the "operation", "page" and "method" features were extracted. Then, "Month" names were encoded. Therefore "Year", "Month" and "Day" were composed in the temporary "date" feature in order to retrieve the day of the week ("weekday") and "weekend" features. Next, "Request" and other temporary features were removed from the dataset. Finally, categorical features such as "IP", "page", "operation", "method" and "Response" were encoded, and the dataset was saved in a file.

By exploring the dataset we can achieve the first insights. Figure 1 depicts the covariance of the most representative features, including "length", "Hour", "operation", "method" and "Response". This figure shows an interesting covariance between length and other features.



**Figure 1.** Feature covariance.

Figure 2 provides a three-dimensional analysis of the number of events that occurred along the day (from 0 to 24 hs) and along each weekday (0 to 6), where days 5 and 6 correspond to Saturday and Sunday, respectively.



**Figure 2.** HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) events over time.

#### 4.2. Clustering

Based on the extracted features, we employed the k-means clustering algorithm for grouping log events into two different clusters. The larger cluster gathers the normal events, while the smaller holds the deviations from normal behavior. Therefore, the latter cluster should correspond to the set grouping the anomaly events. In addition, sparse clusters are possibly caused by anomalous activities, which can be labeled as anomaly candidates for further analysis.

Our framework model takes advantage of the initialization k-means|| algorithm (largely inspired by k-means++) to obtain a nearly optimal solution after a logarithmic number of steps. In practice, a constant number of passes suffices [28].

After training this model with 90% of the total number of records and using just the remaining 10% for testing, the model produces a normal cluster containing 185,897 events while the anomaly cluster includes 1301 events, corresponding to 0.06% of the total number of events in the normal cluster.

The computed centroids for the two clusters, separating the normal and anomaly events, are the following:

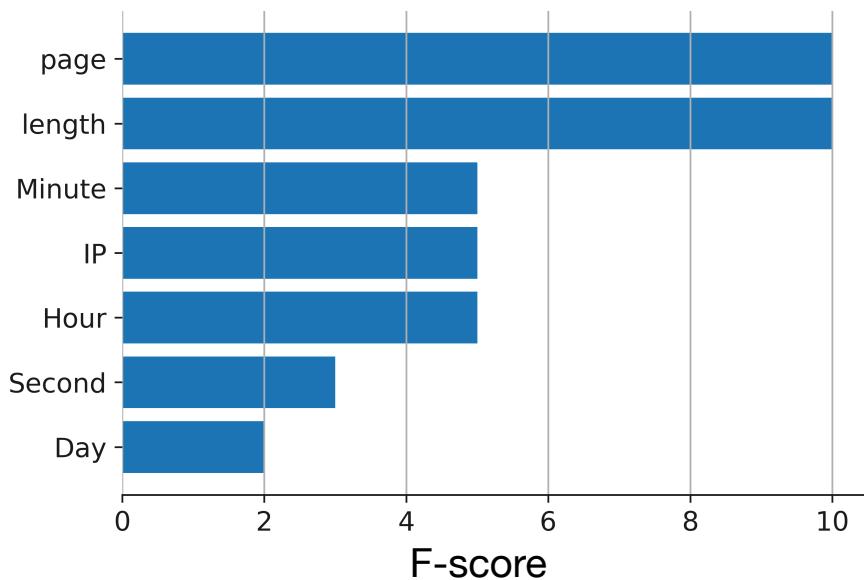
```
[4.41534608e+04, 0.00000000e+00, 8.12115012e+05, 1.14495884e+01,
0.00000000e+00, 0.00000000e+00, 1.26692042e+01, 2.96762857e+01,
2.94179871e+01, 0.00000000e+00, 1.75010380e+04, 2.84859910e+03,
2.82322741e+00, 2.23245109e-01]

[4.27877328e+04, 1.63161125e-01, 1.53047043e+04, 1.24323538e+01,
0.00000000e+00, 0.00000000e+00, 1.26856431e+01, 2.95910303e+01,
2.94991093e+01, 2.22648078e-03, 1.47567972e+04, 2.84883391e+03,
2.68136168e+00, 1.93607622e-01]
```

#### 4.3. Classification

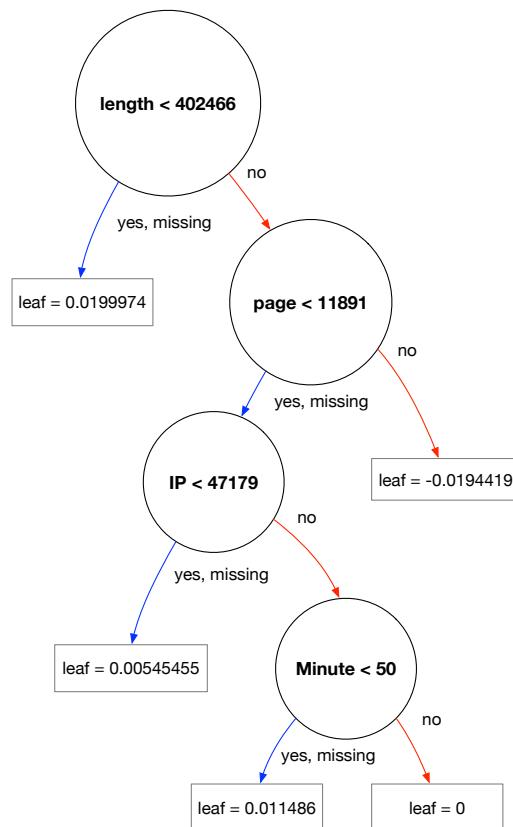
Classification results from the application of the gradient tree boosting algorithm implemented by the XGBoost system, which is the second and final stage of our model. The resulting tree can be linearized into decision rules, where the outcome is the content of the leaf node, and the conditions along the path form a conjunction in the if clause.

The results of this stage were validated by comparing if the number of events classified as anomalies is equal to the number of events belonging to the anomaly cluster. This condition was verified for 1301 events. The predict function for XGBoost outputs probabilities by default and not actual class labels. To calculate accuracy we converted them to 0 and 1 labels, where a 0.5 probability corresponds to the threshold. XGBoost is able to correctly classify all the test data according to the k-means clustering algorithm. Figure 3 depicts the importance of the XGBoost features, according to the F-score metric.



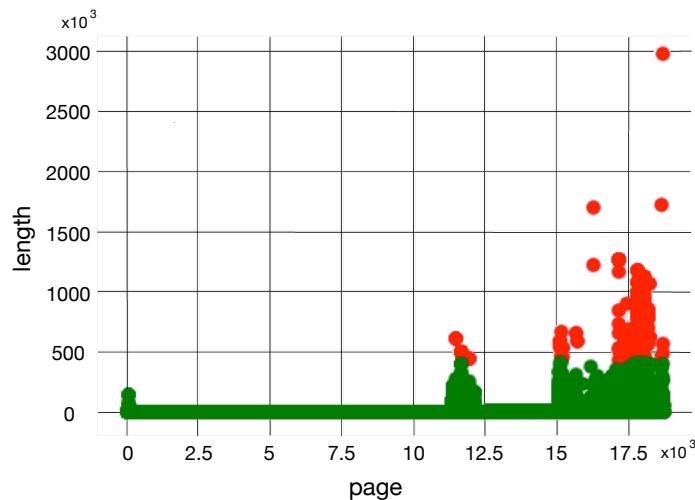
**Figure 3.** Features importance.

This classification model produces a set of rules providing the rationale for generalizing to unseen events, as shown in Figure 4. The leaf values depicted in the figure are converted into probabilities by applying the logistic function.



**Figure 4.** Decision tree.

Figure 5 depicts the covariance of "length" and "page", which are the two most important features computed by the final model. The events tagged as anomalous are highlighted in red color.

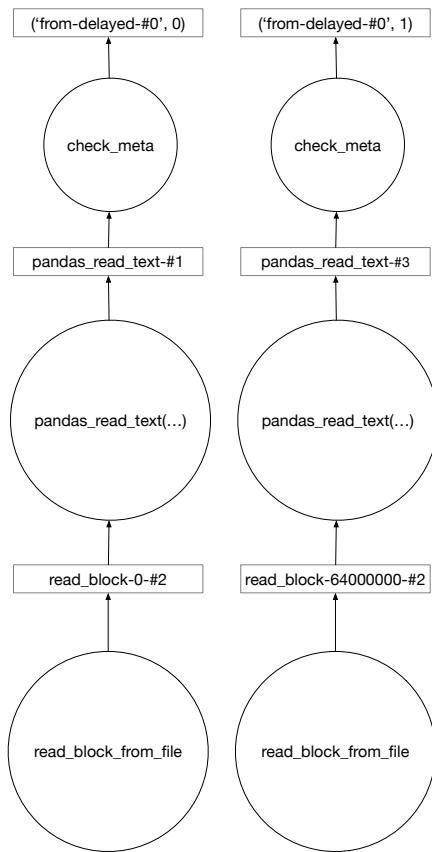


**Figure 5.** Page and length covariance.

#### 4.4. Parallelization

The proposed framework makes use of the k-means algorithm and the XGBoost system, which are designed to scale in a distributed environment supported by available parallel computing capabilities. Such an approach comes in line with a Big Data scenario.

Our approach is supported by the use of parallel computing capabilities available in the Python "Dask" library. More specifically, the "dataframe" component is able to manage out-of-core datasets along the execution pipeline, since the features are extracted until the clustering and classification models are implemented. Figure 6 provides an example of the kind of graphs Dask is able to produce when reading and splitting a dataset. The Dask libraries "dask\_ml" and "dask\_xgboost" provide the implementation of popular machine learning algorithms, such as k-means and XGBoost, which support the framework models.

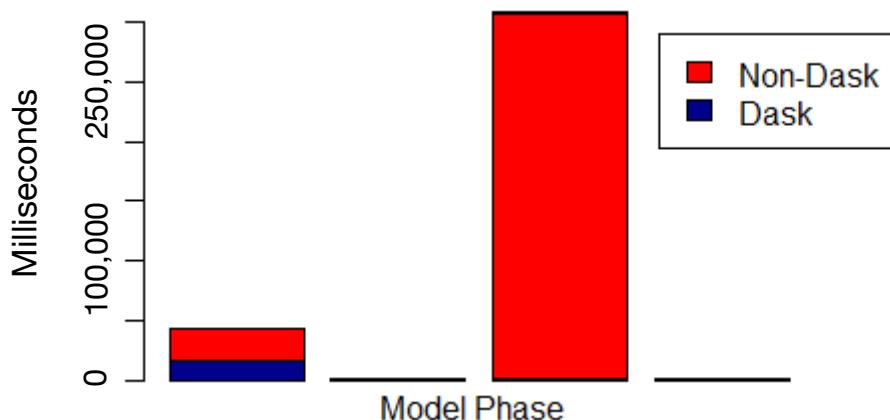


**Figure 6.** Paralellized Dask graphs.

Our experiment involved a simple cluster formed by just two workers in a single node with two cores while the total available memory was 13.66 GB.

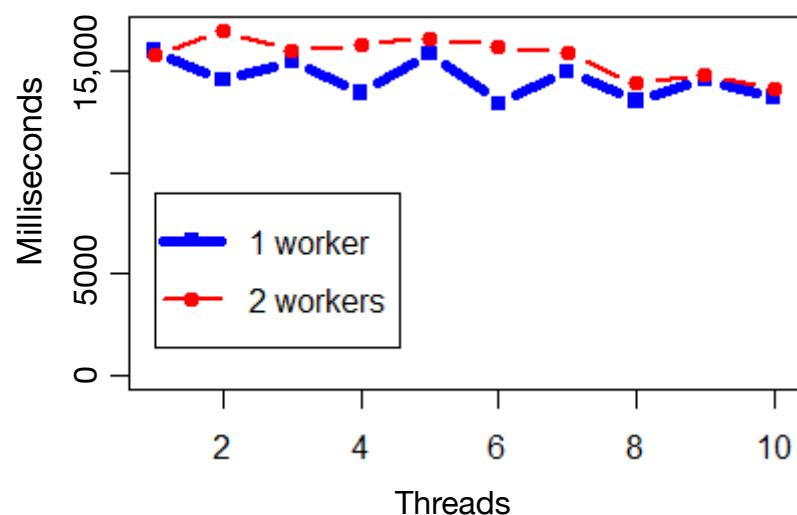
To study the framework model’s ability to scale in order to cope with large datasets in a reasonable time, two experiments were performed using the parsed NASA HTTP logs dataset. Due to constrained laboratory resources, those experiments were limited to the use of two cores in a single node. As a setup configuration, the Dask chunk size was set to 50,000 events. The model’s ability to scale was assessed by comparing its performance under different configurations. To determine the model performance, running time (in milliseconds) was considered throughout the training and predict steps for both k-means and XGBoost stages in accordance with the model topology.

The first experiment aimed at determining the parallel approach performance, compared with the sequential approach—considering non-Dask sklearn as the sequential approach and Dask as the parallel approach. As a setup configuration, the Dask framework included a single worker and two threads. The running time was measured along the four steps previously defined for the two stages. Those sequential steps include the train (1) and predict (2) steps for the k-means stage, followed by the train (3) and predict (4) steps for XGBoost stage. The running time for each framework, along those running steps, is provided in Figure 7. The achieved results show that the Dask framework outperforms the non-Dask sklearn framework, especially in the case of the training steps.



**Figure 7.** Sequential (non-Dask) vs. parallel (Dask) comparison.

The second experiment evaluated the parallelization capability of the Dask framework under different configurations, such as the number of workers and threads per worker, by measuring the aggregated running time along the topological steps. Figure 8 compares the performance for one and two running workers, while increasing the number of threads per worker from one to ten. Measurements showed that one worker outperforms two workers. Increasing the number of workers did not improve performance, while increasing the number of threads contributes to improved performance until a given threshold is reached. Finally, it was also possible to depict higher performance running over an even number of threads in comparison to the odd ones—due to the less optimal parallelization gains that occur when splitting an odd number of threads into two cores.



**Figure 8.** Dask parallel comparison.

#### 4.5. Discussion

The presented framework method relies on two stages. The clustering model is the output of the first stage and serves as the input for the classification stage. Therefore, this approach allows starting from initial unlabelled data for obtaining the interpretable meaningful rules with the rationale for classifying unseen events. Those rules are simple to understand, interpret and visualize, requiring relatively little data preparation effort. Additionally, the described algorithms can easily handle heterogeneous data containing different features produced by different sources. Although the initial nature of our problem is not a classification problem, this approach may be adapted to different scenarios where labeled data are not available. This way, it becomes possible to convert

an unsupervised into a supervised learning scenario and take advantage of the use of classification algorithms.

The decision to select the k-means algorithm and XGBoost system, both supported by the Dask library for parallel processing, was driven by requirements in terms of scaling and interpretability when working with limited resources. This decision enabled the application of this framework to larger datasets in order to highlight the anomalous events. Given the inherent nature of the problem being addressed through the use of the unsupervised learning approach, it is not trivial to evaluate the framework model's accuracy in the scope of this paper. An alternative option would be to compare the achieved results with those provided in the existing literature. However, to the best of our knowledge, there are no anomaly detection research works addressing the NASA HTTP logs.

The obtained results highlight the obviously normal events in highly coherent clusters, with a minor subset of events being classified as anomalies for further forensic and compliance auditing analysis. The model interpretability is indirectly validated by the produced decision rule set already provided in Figure 4, which implicitly shows how the model identifies classes. Figure ?? also shows the performance of the parallel approach compared with the sequential approach, and Figure 8 highlights the parallelization capabilities of the Dask library in processing out-of-core datasets.

Designing the framework with independent tools makes it possible to reuse them over different scenarios. For example, the same modeling tool can be combined with a different normalization tool for processing a different data source. Additionally, these framework tools can be applied to the context of the aforementioned ATENA project in order to identify anomaly events from massive logs. This approach can be independently applied to different datasets in a first stage, allowing to correlate them as heterogeneous sources in a second stage.

The achieved results demonstrate the capability of the proposed method in terms of finding a set of interpretable rules that can parallelized and applied in scale.

## 5. Conclusions and Future Work

In this paper we proposed a framework that takes a parallel computing approach for identifying anomaly events in massive log files. In its first stage, our method uses the k-means algorithm to separate anomalies from normal events. In the second stage, a gradient tree boosting classification model, implemented using the XGBoost system, produces the interpretable meaningful rationale rule set for generalizing its application to a massive number of unseen events. This approach is suitable for application in the context of out-of-core datasets in cases where log sources are so massive that it becomes impossible to use more traditional approaches.

The proposed method was presented, and the achieved results demonstrated its applicability to producing simple and interpretable rules for highlighting anomalies in application log data to scale and in a distributed environment. Such an approach makes it suitable to be applied in the fields of forensics and audit compliance.

Regarding future work, we plan to explore the application of collective anomaly detection over time series summarized data logs and the application of Bayesian networks as the classification model component, and evaluate the method's capability of producing scalable and interpretable models. We also plan to explore the map-reduce model as a way to achieve higher parallelism performance on data preparation.

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