

Semiparametric robust mean estimations based on the orderliness of quantile averages

Tuban Lee

This manuscript was compiled on May 20, 2023

As one of the most fundamental problems in statistics, robust location estimation has many prominent solutions, such as the symmetric trimmed mean, symmetric Winsorized mean, Hodges–Lehmann estimator, Huber M -estimator, and median of means. Recent studies suggest that their maximum biases concerning the mean can be quite different in asymmetric distributions, but the underlying mechanisms and average performance remain largely unclear. In this article, similar to the mean-median-mode inequality, it is proven that within the context of nearly all common unimodal distributions, there is an orderliness of symmetric quantile averages with varying breakdown points. Further deductions explain why the Winsorized mean and median of means typically have smaller biases compared to the trimmed mean. Building on the U -orderliness, the superiority of the median Hodges–Lehmann mean is discussed.

semiparametric | mean-median-mode inequality | asymptotic | unimodal
| Hodges–Lehmann estimator

In 1823, Gauss (1) proved that for any unimodal distribution with a finite second moment, $|m - \mu| \leq \sqrt{\frac{3}{4}}\omega$, where μ is the population mean, m is the population median, and ω is the root mean square deviation from the mode, M . This pioneering work revealed that despite potential bias with respect to the mean in robust estimates, the deviation remains bounded in unit of a scale parameter under certain assumptions. Bernard, Kazzi, and Vanduffel (2020) (2) further derived asymptotic bias bounds of any quantile for unimodal distributions with finite second moments by reducing this optimization problem to a parametric one, which can be solved analytically. They showed that the population median, m , has the smallest maximum distance to the population mean, μ , among all symmetric quantile averages (SQA $_{\epsilon}$). Daniell, in 1920, (3) analyzed a class of estimators, linear combinations of order statistics, and identified that ϵ -symmetric trimmed mean (STM $_{\epsilon}$) belongs to this class. Another popular choice, the ϵ -symmetric Winsorized mean (SWM $_{\epsilon}$), named after Winsor and introduced by Tukey (4) and Dixon (5) in 1960, is also an L -estimator. Bieniek (2016) derived exact bias upper bounds of the Winsorized mean based on Danielak and Rychlik's work (2003) on the trimmed mean for any distribution with a finite second moment and confirmed that the former is smaller than the latter (6, 7). In 1963, Hodges and Lehmann (8) proposed a class of nonparametric location estimators based on rank tests and, from the Wilcoxon signed-rank statistic (9), deduced the median of pairwise means as a robust location estimator for a symmetric population. Both L -statistics and R -statistics achieve robustness essentially by removing a certain proportion of extreme values. In 1964, Huber (10) generalized maximum likelihood estimation to the minimization of the sum of a specific loss function, which measures the residuals between the data points and the model's parameters. Some L -estimators are also M -estimators, e.g., the sample mean is an M -estimator with a squared error loss function, while the sample median is

an M -estimator with an absolute error loss function (10). The Huber M -estimator is obtained by applying the Huber loss function that combines elements of both squared error and absolute error to achieve robustness against gross errors and high efficiency for contaminated Gaussian distributions (10). Sun, Zhou, and Fan (2020) examined the concentration bounds of Huber M -estimator (11). Mathieu (2022) (12) further derived the concentration bounds of M -estimators and demonstrated that, by selecting the tuning parameter which depends on the variance, Huber M -estimator can also be a sub-Gaussian estimator. The concept of median of means (MoM $_{k,b} = \frac{n}{k}$, k is the number of size in each block, b is the number of blocks) was implicitly introduced several times in Nemirovsky and Yudin (1983) (13), Jerrum, Valiant, and Vazirani (1986), (14) and Alon, Matias and Szegedy (1996) (15)'s works. Given its good performance even for distributions with infinite second moments, MoM has received increasing attention over the past decade (16–18).

Data Availability. Data for Figure ?? are given in SI Dataset S1. All codes have been deposited in [GitHub](#).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. I sincerely acknowledge the insightful comments from the editor which considerably elevated the lucidity and merit of this paper.

1. CF Gauss, *Theoria combinationis observationum erroribus minimis obnoxiae*. (Henricus Dieterich), (1823).
2. C Bernard, R Kazzi, S Vanduffel, Range value-at-risk bounds for unimodal distributions under partial information. *Insur. Math. Econ.* **94**, 9–24 (2020).
3. P Daniell, Observations weighted according to order. *Am. J. Math.* **42**, 222–236 (1920).
4. JW Tukey, A survey of sampling from contaminated distributions in *Contributions to probability and statistics*. (Stanford University Press), pp. 448–485 (1960).
5. WJ Dixon, Simplified Estimation from Censored Normal Samples. *The Annals Math. Stat.* **31**, 385–391 (1960).
6. M Bieniek, Comparison of the bias of trimmed and winsorized means. *Commun. Stat. Methods* **45**, 6641–6650 (2016).
7. K Danielak, T Rychlik, Theory & methods: Exact bounds for the bias of trimmed means. *Aust. & New Zealand J. Stat.* **45**, 83–96 (2003).

Significance Statement

In 1964, van Zwet introduced the convex transformation order for comparing the skewness of two distributions. This paradigm shift played a fundamental role in defining robust measures of distributions, from spread to kurtosis. Here, rather than examining the stochastic ordering between two distributions, the orderliness of quantile averages within a distribution is investigated. By classifying distributions through the signs of derivatives, a series of sophisticated robust mean estimators are deduced. Nearly all common nonparametric robust location estimators are found to be special cases thereof.

T.L. designed research, performed research, analyzed data, and wrote the paper.

The author declares no competing interest.

¹To whom correspondence should be addressed. E-mail: tl@biomathematics.org

8. J Hodges Jr, E Lehmann, Estimates of location based on rank tests. *The Annals Math. Stat.* **34**, 598–611 (1963).
9. F Wilcoxon, Individual comparisons by ranking methods. *Biom. Bull.* **1**, 80–83 (1945).
10. PJ Huber, Robust estimation of a location parameter. *Ann. Math. Stat.* **35**, 73–101 (1964).
11. Q Sun, WX Zhou, J Fan, Adaptive huber regression. *J. Am. Stat. Assoc.* **115**, 254–265 (2020).
12. T Mathieu, Concentration study of m-estimators using the influence function. *Electron. J. Stat.* **16**, 3695–3750 (2022).
13. AS Nemirovskij, DB Yudin, *Problem complexity and method efficiency in optimization*. (Wiley-Interscience), (1983).
14. MR Jerrum, LG Valiant, VV Vazirani, Random generation of combinatorial structures from a uniform distribution. *Theor. computer science* **43**, 169–188 (1986).
15. N Alon, Y Matias, M Szegedy, The space complexity of approximating the frequency moments in *Proceedings of the twenty-eighth annual ACM symposium on Theory of computing*. pp. 20–29 (1996).
16. PL Bühlmann, Bagging, subbagging and bragging for improving some prediction algorithms in *Research report/Seminar für Statistik, Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH)*. (Seminar für Statistik, Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH), Zürich), Vol. 113, (2003).
17. L Devroye, M Lerasle, G Lugosi, RI Oliveira, Sub-gaussian mean estimators. *The Annals Stat.* **44**, 2695–2725 (2016).
18. P Laforge, S Cléménçon, P Bertail, On medians of (randomized) pairwise means in *International Conference on Machine Learning*. (PMLR), pp. 1272–1281 (2019).