
Review of Probability: Part 1

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Outline: Review of Probability - Part 1

■ Review of Probability - Part 1:

- ① Random variables (RVs) and probability distributions
- ② Expected values and moments
- ③ Two random variables: Joint, marginal and conditional distributions
- ④ Covariance, correlation and independence

■ Readings:

- ① Stock and Watson (2020, Chapter 2).
- ② Hanck et al. (2021, Chapter 2).

Random variables

- Consider a random process (experiment): for example, your letter grade from this course, Türkiye's GDP in 2023, the unemployment rate in 2023Q3, and so on.

Definition 1

An experiment is the process by which an outcome (or observation) is obtained.

- The mutually exclusive potential results of a random process are called the **outcomes**.

Definition 2

The **sample space** associated with an experiment is the set consisting of all possible outcomes. A sample space will be denoted by S (or Ω).

- The sample space may or may not be countable.

Definition 3

A subset of sample space, that is, a collection of possible outcomes, is called an **event**.

Random variables

- For example, consider the following random process (experiment): the sex of the next new person you meet.
- The sample space consists of two outcomes: $S = \{F, M\}$.
- What are the subsets (events) of the sample space?

$$\{\phi, \{F\}, \{M\}, S\}.$$

- What is the event then when the subset is the empty set? You do not meet anyone new?

Definition 4

The **probability of an outcome** is the proportion of the time that the outcome occurs in the long run.

- If $S = \{F, M\}$, then $P(M) = P(F) = 1/2$.

Random variables

- For example, consider the following random process (experiment): the number of times your wireless network connection fails while you are writing a term paper.
- Then, the sample space consists of infinite (but countable) outcomes, $S = \{0, 1, 2, \dots\}$.
- What are the subsets of the sample space? We cannot list all the subsets.
- What is the event then when the subset is $\{0, 1, 2\}$? Connection fails at most twice.

Definition 5

A random variable (RV) is a numerical summary of the sample space of a random process.

Example 1

Define an experiment as tossing two coins and observing the results. Let Y be a random variable that equals the number of heads obtained. Identify S and the values Y can take. Compute the probabilities for each value of Y .

Solution 1 (Solution of Example 1)

The sample space is

$$S = \{HH, HT, TH, TT\}$$

Y can take three values, $Y = 0, 1$, and 2 , which are events defined by specific collections of sample points:

$$\{Y = 0\} = \{TT\}, \quad \{Y = 1\} = \{HT, TH\}, \quad \{Y = 2\} = \{HH\}.$$

Then,

$$P(Y = 0) = P(\{TT\}) = 1/4, \quad P(Y = 1) = P(\{HT, TH\}) = 1/2,$$

$$P(Y = 2) = P(\{HH\}) = 1/4.$$

Random variables

- There are 3 types of RVs:
 - **Discrete RVs**: takes a countable set of values,
 - **Continuous RVs**: takes an uncountable set of values,
 - **Mixed RVs**: a combination of discrete and continuous.
- An example for the discrete type would be: the number of times your wireless network connection fails while you are writing a term paper.
- An example for the continuous type would be: your salary in your new job after graduation.

Probability distribution of the RV

- One way to characterize the RV is through its probability distribution.

Definition 6

The **probability distribution** of a discrete random variable is the list of all possible values of the variable and the probability that each value will occur.

Definition 7

The **cumulative probability distribution** (CDF) is the probability that the random variable is less than or equal to a particular value.

- Let Y be the number of times your wireless network connection fails while you are writing a term paper.
- Then, we can characterize the probability distribution and CDF of Y as

$$\begin{array}{ll}
 P(Y = 0) = 0.80 & P(Y \leq 0) = 0.80 \\
 P(Y = 1) = 0.10 & P(Y \leq 1) = 0.90 \\
 P(Y = 2) = 0.06 & \text{and } P(Y \leq 2) = 0.96 \\
 P(Y = 3) = 0.03 & P(Y \leq 3) = 0.99 \\
 P(Y = 4) = 0.01 & P(Y \leq 4) = 1
 \end{array}$$

Probability distribution of the RV

- We can use a table to characterize the probability distribution and the CDF of Y :

Table 1: The pdf and cdf of Y

	number of failures				
	0	1	2	3	4
probability distribution	0.80	0.10	0.06	0.03	0.01
cumulative probability distribution	0.80	0.90	0.96	0.99	1.00

- The probability of an event can be computed from the probability distribution.
- For example, the probability of the event of at least one failure is the sum of the probabilities of the constituent outcomes.

$$\begin{aligned}
 P(Y \geq 1) &= P(Y = 1 \text{ or } Y = 2 \text{ or } Y = 3 \text{ or } Y = 4) \\
 &= 1 - P(Y = 0) = 1 - 0.80 = 0.20.
 \end{aligned}$$

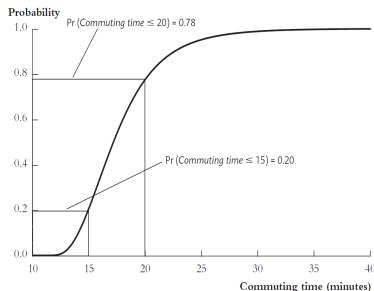
Probability distribution of the RV

- An important special case of a discrete random variable is when the random variable is binary; that is, the outcome is 0 or 1.
- A binary random variable is called a **Bernoulli random variable**.
- For example, let G be the sex of the next new person you meet: 1 for female and 0 for male.
- Then, the probability distribution of G is

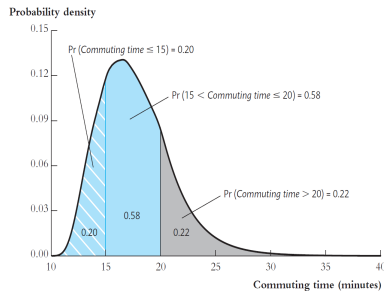
$$G = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{with probability } p \\ 0 & \text{with probability } 1 - p \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

Probability distribution of the RV

- For a continuous RV, it makes no sense to list all outcomes and associated probabilities, because the range of values it takes is not countable.
- But, the CDF for a continuous variable is defined just as it is for a discrete random variable: the probability that the RV is less than or equal to a particular value.
- From the CDF, under some suitable scenarios, we can derive what is called, the **probability density function** (PDF).
- The pdf summarizes the probability of the RV taking on an interval of values.
- For example, consider the commuting time of a student from home to school. Figure 1 shows the cdf and the pdf of commuting times.



(a) Cumulative probability distribution function of commuting times



(b) Probability density function of commuting times

Figure 1: The cdf and pdf of commuting time

- From the cdf and the pdf, we can compute $P(\text{Commuting time} \leq 15) = 0.20$ and $P(15 < \text{Commuting time} \leq 20) = 0.58$.

Moments of a RV

- Another way to characterize a RV is through its **moments**.

Definition 8

The expected value of a random variable Y , denoted by $E(Y)$, is the average value of the random variable over many repeated trials or occurrences.

- Let Y be a discrete random variable that can take on k values, y_1, y_2, \dots, y_k . Then,

$$E(Y) = \mu_Y = \sum_{j=1}^k y_j \times P(Y = y_j). \quad (2)$$

- For $r > 1$, the **r 'th central moment** of Y is defined by

$$E(Y - \mu_Y)^r = \sum_{j=1}^k (y_j - \mu_Y)^r \times P(Y = y_j). \quad (3)$$

- Setting $r = 2$, we will get the **variance** of Y : $\sigma_Y^2 = E(Y - \mu_Y)^2$.
- The positive square root of the variance is the **standard deviation**, denoted often as σ_Y .

Moments of a RV

Example 2

Let Y be the number of times your wireless network connection fails while you are writing a term paper. Use Table 1 to compute μ_Y and σ_Y^2 .

■ Using definitions, we have

$$\begin{aligned} E(Y) = \mu_Y &= \sum_{j=1}^5 y_j \times P(Y = y_j) = (0 \times 0.80) + (1 \times 0.10) + (2 \times 0.06) \\ &\quad + (3 \times 0.03) + (4 \times 0.01) = 0.35 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{var}(Y) = \sigma_Y^2 &= \sum_{j=1}^5 (y_j - \mu)^2 \times P(Y = y_j) = (0 - 0.35)^2 \times 0.80 \\ &\quad + (1 - 0.35)^2 \times 0.10 + (2 - 0.35)^2 \times 0.06 + (3 - 0.35)^2 \times 0.03 \\ &\quad + (4 - 0.35)^2 \times 0.01 = 0.6475 \end{aligned}$$

Exercise 1

Consider the Bernoulli random variable G in (1). Determine its mean and variance.

Moments of a RV

- Using central moments, we can also characterize the probability distribution of random variables.
- The skewness of the distribution of Y is

$$\text{Skewness} = \frac{E((Y - \mu_Y)^3)}{\sigma_Y^3}. \quad (4)$$

- 1 Skewness = 0 means that the distribution is symmetric around μ_Y ,
 - 2 Skewness > 0 means the distribution has long right tail,
 - 3 Skewness < 0 means the distribution has long left tail,
 - 4 Skewness is unit free, i.e., changing the units of Y does not change its skewness.
- The kurtosis of a distribution is a measure of how much mass is in its tails:

$$\text{Kurtosis} = \frac{E((Y - \mu_Y)^4)}{\sigma_Y^4}. \quad (5)$$

- 1 Kurtosis = 3: normal distribution,
 - 2 Kurtosis > 3 means the distribution has heavy (fat) tails (leptokurtotic).
- Figure 2 shows four distributions that have a mean of 0 and a variance of 1. The distributions in (a) and (b) are symmetric while those in (c) and (d) are not.

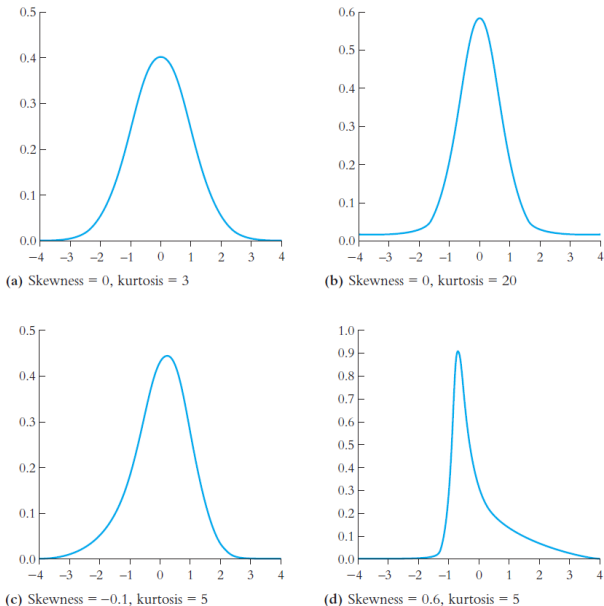


Figure 2: Distributions with different skewness and kurtosis

Moments of a RV

- Let Y be a **continuous random variable** that take values on a subset of $D \subset \mathbb{R}$. Let $f_Y(y)$ be the density of Y . Then, the expectation of Y is defined by

$$\mu_Y = E(Y) = \int_D y f_Y(y) dy.$$

- For $r > 1$, the r 'th central moment Y is

$$E(Y - \mu_Y)^r = \int_D (y - \mu_Y)^r f_Y(y) dy.$$

Example 3

Consider Y with PDF $f_Y(y) = 3/y^4$ for $y > 1$. We will show that this is a proper density.

$$\int_1^{\infty} \frac{3}{z^4} dz = -\frac{3}{3} z^{-3} \Big|_{z=1}^{\infty} = -z^{-3} \Big|_{z=1}^{\infty} = -\left(\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{t^3} - 1 \right) = 1.$$

Moments of a RV

- R and Python provides functions for numerical integration methods. The integral in Example 3 can be computed in the following way.

Listing 1: Numerical integration in R

```
fun = function(z) {  
  return(3/z^4)  
}  
integrate(fun, lower=1, upper=Inf)
```

Listing 2: Numerical integration in Python

```
from scipy.integrate import quad  
import numpy as np  
  
# Define the function  
def fun(z):  
    return 3 / z**4  
  
# Perform the integration  
result, error = quad(fun, 1, np.inf)  
  
print("Integration result:", result)  
print("Estimated error:", error)
```

Moments of a RV

Example 4

Consider the random variable in Example 3. Find $\mu_Y = E(Y)$ and σ_Y^2 .

$$E(Y) = \int_1^{\infty} y \frac{3}{y^4} dy = \int_1^{\infty} \frac{3}{y^3} dy = -\frac{3}{2} y^{-2} \Big|_{y=1}^{\infty} = -\frac{3}{2} \left(\lim_{y \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{y^2} - 1 \right) = \frac{3}{2}.$$

$$E(Y^2) = \int_1^{\infty} y^2 \frac{3}{y^4} dy = \int_1^{\infty} \frac{3}{y^2} dy = -3y^{-1} \Big|_{y=1}^{\infty} = -3 \left(\lim_{y \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{y} - 1 \right) = 3.$$

Note that

$$\begin{aligned} \sigma^2 &= E((Y - \mu_Y)^2) = E(Y^2 - 2Y\mu_Y + \mu_Y^2) \\ &= E(Y^2) - 2E(Y)\mu_Y + \mu_Y^2 = E(Y^2) - 2\mu_Y\mu_Y + \mu_Y^2 \\ &= E(Y^2) - \mu_Y^2. \end{aligned}$$

Then, $\sigma^2 = E(Y^2) - \mu_Y^2 = 3 - \left(\frac{3}{2}\right)^2 = \frac{3}{4}$.

■ Example 4 shows that $\sigma_Y^2 = E((Y - \mu_Y)^2) = E(Y^2) - \mu_Y^2$.

Two RVs

- In this course, except for Chapters 2 and 3, you will deal with scalar RVs on occasion. Often, you will encounter vectors containing scalar RVs.
- Suppose we are dealing with two RVs. One way to characterize these two RVs is using what we call their **joint probability distribution**.
- From the joint distribution, one can calculate the **marginal probability distribution** for each RV.
- From the joint and the marginal distributions, we can calculate the **conditional probability distribution** for one RV conditional on the other RV.

Definition 9

The **joint probability distribution** of two discrete random variables X and Y is the probability that the random variables simultaneously take on certain values, say x and y . The joint probability distribution is written as $P(X = x, Y = y)$.

Two RVs

- Let Y be a binary random variable that equals 1 if the commute to school is short (less than 20 minutes) and that equals 0 otherwise, and let X be a binary random variable that equals 0 if it is raining and 1 if not.
- Assume that the joint probability distribution of Y and X is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Joint probability distribution of Y and X

	Rain ($X = 0$)	No Rain ($X = 1$)	Total
Long commute ($Y = 0$)	0.15	0.07	0.22
Short commute ($Y = 1$)	0.15	0.63	0.78
Total	0.30	0.70	1.00

- According to the table, the likelihood of short commute on a rainy day is 15%, i.e., $P(Y = 1, X = 0) = 0.15$.
- These four possible outcomes are mutually exclusive and constitute the sample space, so four probabilities sum to 1:

$$\sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{j=1}^l P(Y = y_i, X = x_j) = 1.$$

Two RVs

- The **marginal probability distribution** of Y can be computed from the joint distribution of X and Y by adding up the probabilities of all possible outcomes for which Y takes on a specified value.
- If X can take on l different values x_1, \dots, x_l , then the marginal probability that Y takes on the value y is

$$P(Y = y) = \sum_{i=1}^l P(Y = y, X = x_i). \quad (6)$$

- In Table 2, the row sums give the marginal probability distribution of Y , while the column sums give the marginal probability distribution of X .

Example 5

Consider Table 2. What is the probability of a long commute, i.e., $P(Y = 0)$?

$$P(Y = 0) = P(Y = 0, X = 0) + P(Y = 0, X = 1) = 0.15 + 0.07 = 0.22.$$

Two RVs

- Use the following formula to calculate the **conditional probabilities** when you are dealing with two discrete RVs.

$$P(Y = y|X = x) = \frac{P(Y = y, X = x)}{P(X = x)}. \quad (7)$$

- In other words, $P(Y = y|X = x)$ refers to the likelihood of the event that Y takes the value y given that $X = x$ has happened.

Example 6

Consider the RVs in Table 2. What is the likelihood of a short commute given that it is raining outside?

$$P(Y = 1|X = 0) = \frac{P(Y = 1, X = 0)}{P(X = 0)} = 0.15/0.30 = 0.50.$$

What is the likelihood of no rain outside given that it has been a short commute?

$$P(X = 1|Y = 1) = \frac{P(X = 1, Y = 1)}{P(Y = 1)} = 0.63/0.70 = 0.90.$$

Two RVs

- Using the conditional distribution (the list of conditional probabilities), one can calculate the **conditional moments**.
- For example, conditional expectation of Y given X , also called the conditional mean of Y given X , is the mean of the conditional distribution of Y given X .
- We use the following notation $E(Y|X)$ to denote the conditional mean of Y given X .
- If you do not specify the value X takes on then $E(Y|X)$ becomes random.
- If you specify the value X takes on, say $X = x$ then $E(Y|X = x)$ is not random.
- Suppose both Y and X are discrete and Y takes on k values, y_1, y_2, \dots, y_k . Then,

$$E(Y|X = x) = \sum_{j=1}^k y_j P(Y = y_j|X = x).$$

(8)

Two RVs

- A similar argument applies to higher moments of Y given X . For example, we can construct the conditional variance of Y given X .

$$\text{var}(Y|X = x) = \sum_{j=1}^k (y_j - E(Y|X = x))^2 P(Y = y_j|X = x). \quad (9)$$

Example 7

Consider the RVs in Table 2. What is the expected value of commute given that it is not a rainy day? What is the variance of commute given that it is not a rainy day?

$$E(Y|X = 1) = 1 \times P(Y = 1|X = 1) + 0 \times P(Y = 0|X = 1) = 0.63/0.70 = 0.9.$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{var}(Y|X = 1) &= (1 - 0.9)^2 \times P(Y = 1|X = 1) + (0 - 0.9)^2 \times P(Y = 0|X = 1) \\ &= (0.1)^2 \times 0.9 + (-0.9)^2 \times 0.1 = 0.09. \end{aligned}$$

Two RVs

- Indeed, the unconditional expectation of Y , i.e., $E(Y)$, is the weighted average of the conditional expectations of Y given X , where the weights come from the marginal distribution of X .

$$E(Y) = \sum_{i=1}^l E(Y|X = x_i)P(X = x_i) = E(E(Y|X)). \quad (10)$$

where the outer expectation is with respect to the marginal distribution of X .

- This result in (10) is known as the **law of iterated expectations** (LIE).
 - 1 The LIE implies that if $E(Y|X) = 0$, then $E(Y) = E(E(Y|X)) = E(0) = 0$.
 - 2 The LIE also holds for multiple RVs. Let X , Y and Z be RVs that are jointly distributed. Then

$$E(Y) = E(E(Y|X, Z)). \quad (11)$$

where the outer expectation is with respect to the joint distribution of X and Z .

Two RVs: Independence

- Two random variables X and Y are **independently distributed**, or **independent**, if knowing the value of one of the variables provides no information about the other.
- In other words, X and Y are independently distributed if, for all values of x and y , we have
$$P(Y = y|X = x) = P(Y = y) \text{ or } P(Y = y, X = x) = P(Y = y)P(X = x).$$
- In econometric analysis, we will often be interested in the extent to which two random variables move together (i.e., a measure of linear association).
- The **covariance** between X and Y is simply given by

$$\begin{aligned}\text{cov}(X, Y) &= \sigma_{XY} = E((X - \mu_X)(Y - \mu_Y)) \\ &= E(XY) - \mu_X \mu_Y.\end{aligned}\tag{12}$$

- 1 Note that the covariance of X with its self is its variance, i.e., $\text{cov}(X, X) = \sigma_X^2$.
- 2 If X and Y are independent, then $\text{cov}(X, Y) = 0$, because $\text{cov}(X, Y) = E(XY) - \mu_X \mu_Y = E(X)E(Y) - \mu_X \mu_Y = 0$.

Two RVs: Covariance

- Suppose again both Y and X are discrete and Y takes on k values and X takes on l values. Then,

$$\text{cov}(X, Y) = \sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{j=1}^l (x_j - \mu_X)(y_i - \mu_Y)P(X = x_j, Y = y_i).$$

- Since the covariance is the product of X and Y , deviated from their respective means, its units are the units of X multiplied by the units of Y .
- This can make the interpretation of covariance difficult. To get around this problem, we introduce the **correlation** measure:

$$\text{corr}(X, Y) = \frac{\text{cov}(X, Y)}{\sqrt{\text{var}(X) \text{var}(Y)}} = \frac{\sigma_{XY}}{\sigma_X \sigma_Y}. \quad (13)$$

- The correlation measure is unit free and always $-1 \leq \text{corr}(X, Y) \leq 1$.

Two RVs: Covariance

Example 8

If the conditional mean of Y does not depend on X , then $\text{cov}(Y, X) = \text{corr}(Y, X) = 0$, i.e., if $E(Y|X) = \mu_Y$, then $\text{cov}(Y, X) = \text{corr}(Y, X) = 0$.

Proof of Example 8.

First, suppose that Y and X have mean 0 so that $\text{cov}(X, Y) = E(YX)$. Then, by LIE,

$$E(YX) = E(E(YX|X)) = E(E(Y|X)X) = \mu_Y \times E(X) = 0,$$

because $E(X) = 0$. Thus, $\text{cov}(X, Y) = E(YX) = 0$. Also, from (13), we have $\text{corr}(Y, X) = 0$. If X and Y do not have mean 0, subtract off their means, and then the preceding proof applies. \square

Sums of RVs

- Let X , Y , and V be scalar random variables and let a , b and c be constants. Then, the following results hold:

- ❶ $E(a + bX + cY) = a + b\mu_X + c\mu_Y$,
- ❷ $\text{var}(a + bY) = b^2\sigma_Y^2$,
- ❸ $\text{var}(aX + bY) = a^2\sigma_X^2 + b^2\sigma_Y^2 + 2ab\sigma_X\sigma_Y$,
- ❹ $E(Y^2) = \sigma_Y^2 + \mu_Y^2$,
- ❺ $\text{cov}(a + bX + cY, V) = b\sigma_{XV} + c\sigma_{YV}$,
- ❻ $E(XY) = \sigma_{XY} + \mu_X\mu_Y$,
- ❼ $|\text{corr}(X, Y)| \leq 1$ and $|\sigma_{XY}| \leq \sigma_X\sigma_Y$.

Example 9

Let X and Y be discrete random variables. Table 3 presents the joint probabilities. For example, $P(X = 1, Y = 14) = 0.02$, and so forth.

Table 3: Joint distribution of X and Y

		Value of Y				
		14	22	30	40	65
Value of X	1	0.02	0.05	0.10	0.03	0.01
	5	0.17	0.15	0.05	0.02	0.01
	8	0.02	0.03	0.15	0.10	0.09

- 1 Calculate the probability distribution, mean and variance of Y .
- 2 Calculate the probability distribution, mean and variance of Y given $X = 8$.
- 3 Calculate the covariance and correlation between X and Y .

Solution of Example 9

- Using $P(X = x_i) = \sum_{j=1}^l P(X = x_i, Y = y_j)$ and $P(Y = y_j) = \sum_{i=1}^k P(Y = y_j, X = x_i)$, we obtain the marginal distributions given in Table 4.

Table 4: Marginal distributions of Y and X

	14	22	30	40	65		1	5	8
Marginal distribution of Y	0.21	0.23	0.30	0.15	0.11	Marginal distribution of X	0.21	0.40	0.39

- Part 1: Using the marginal distribution of Y :

$$E(Y) = 14 \times 0.21 + 22 \times 0.23 + 30 \times 0.30 + 40 \times 0.15 + 65 \times 0.11 = 30.15$$

$$E(Y^2) = 14^2 \times 0.21 + 22^2 \times 0.23 + 30^2 \times 0.30 + 40^2 \times 0.15 + 65^2 \times 0.11 = 1127.23$$

$$\Rightarrow \text{Var}(Y) = E(Y^2) - (E(Y))^2 = 218.21.$$

- Part 2: Using $P(Y = y_j | X = 8) = \frac{P(Y=y_j, X=8)}{P(X=8)}$, we obtain

Table 5: Distribution of $Y|X = 8$

Distribution of $Y X = 8$				
14	22	30	40	65
0.02/0.39	0.03/0.39	0.15/0.39	0.10/0.39	0.09/0.39

Solution of Example 9 continue...

■ Part 2:

$$\begin{aligned} E(Y|X=8) &= 14 \times (0.02/0.39) + 22 \times (0.03/0.39) + 30 \times (0.15/0.39) \\ &\quad + 40 \times (0.10/0.39) + 65 \times (0.09/0.39) = 39.21, \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} E(Y^2|X=8) &= 14^2 \times (0.02/0.39) + 22^2 \times (0.03/0.39) + 30^2 \times (0.15/0.39), \\ &\quad + 40^2 \times (0.10/0.39) + 65^2 \times (0.09/0.39) = 1778.7 \end{aligned}$$

$$\Rightarrow \text{Var}(Y|X=8) = E(Y^2|X=8) - (E(Y|X=8))^2 = 1778.7 - (39.21)^2 = 241.65.$$

■ Part 3: We need to first compute $E(XY) = \sum_j^k \sum_i^l x_i y_j P(X=x_i, Y=y_j)$:

$$E(XY) = (1 \times 14 \times 0.02) + (1 \times 22 \times 0.05) + \dots + (8 \times 65 \times 0.09) = 171.7,$$

$$\text{cov}(X, Y) = E(XY) - E(X)E(Y) = 171.7 - 5.33 \times 30.15 = 11.0,$$

$$\text{corr}(X, Y) = \text{cov}(X, Y) / (\sigma_X \sigma_Y) = 11.0 / (2.60 \times 14.77) = 0.286.$$

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