

Learning Discrete-valued Bayesian Network from Mixed Data

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Received: date / Accepted: date

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Keywords Discretization · Bayesian Network · More

1 Introduction

Bayesian networks (Pearl 1988; Koller and Friedman 2009) are an increasingly popular methods for modeling uncertainty and causality in science and engineering. They provide an efficient factorization of the joint probability distribution over a set of random variables. Bayesian networks first emerge from artificial intelligence research and have been applied to a wide variety of problems, ranging from decision-making systems (Kochenderfer 2015) to medical diagnoses. In most cases, we assume that all random variables in Bayesian networks are discrete, since many algorithms on Bayesian networks are unable to deal with continuous variables efficiently. However, this assumption is often too restrictive. For example, in the decision-making system of autonomous cars, it is inevitable to deal with continuous variables such as position and velocity.

There are two solutions around this assumption. The first one is to model conditional probability density of each continuous variable by specific families of parametric distributions, then redesign algorithms on Bayesian networks based on these parameters. One successful example is the belief propagation

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in Gaussian graphical models (Weiss and Freeman 2001). Nevertheless, for other shapes of particles (Ihler and McAllester 2009) or non-linear functions, algorithms are computationally expensive and do not perform well.

The second solution is to discretize continuous variables. Discretization that learns from data has developed well and discussed (Dougherty et al. 1995) in the fields of machine learning and statistics for many year. Most of these discretization methods are designed for classification problems. They search the best discretization of a continuous attribute by considering its interaction with the class variable of interest. However, these discretization methods do not apply to continuous variables in Bayesian network. In Bayesian network, interactions and dependencies between variables are determined by graph structure. Therefore, if a discretization method only uses the interaction between a continuous variable and its class variable of interest, instead of considering the graph structure, then it is not an appropriate discretization method for Bayesian networks. There are some research on discretizing continuous variables in naive Bayesian network and tree augmented network (Friedman et al. 1997). Nevertheless, only few discretization methods on general Bayesian network have been proposed (Friedman and Goldszmidt 1996; Kozlov and Koller 1997; Monti and Cooper 1998).

The discretization technique proposed by N. Friedman and M. Goldszmidt (Friedman and Goldszmidt (1996)) is the most successful and practical one among these methods. It is based on minimum description length principle (MDL): optimal discretization policy minimizes the description length of Bayesian network and data information. If there is only one continuous variable in Bayesian network and other variables are discrete, MDL discretization method takes running time $O(N^3 + n_c v_{max}^{(n_p^p)_{max}} \cdot N^2 + v_{max}^{n_p} \cdot N^2)$, where N is the number of data instances for learning the discretization, n_p and n_c are the numbers of parent and children variables for the continuous variable, v_{max} is the largest cardinality number over all variables in Markov blanket, and $(n_c^p)_{max}$ is the largest number of parent variables of the continuous variable's children.

In this paper, we propose a new discretization method for continuous variables in Bayesian network by learning from mixed data. This method is a generalized version of Boull   (2006) and Lustgarten et al. (2011), which are both discretization methods of a continuous attribute with one class variable. We begin our method with the situation that only one variable in a given Bayesian network is continuous and other variable are discrete. Under this situation, we look for the most possible discretization policy M given the data on other discrete variables. That is to say, the desired policy is $\arg_M P(M|D)$. With Bayes rule, $P(M|D) = P(M) \cdot P(D|M)/P(D) \propto P(M) \cdot P(D|M)$. Usually, $P(D|M)$ increases as number of discretized intervals increases, since more intervals can provide more accuracy. Therefore, we design probability priors of $P(M)$ to decrease as number of intervals rises. As a result, we obtain a nature trade-off to determine the number of intervals after discretization. Besides, the $P(D|M)$ can be factorized according to Bayesian network structure. On the other hand, with the proposed priors, we are able to restrict the number of

discretized intervals not exceeding the largest cardinality number of variable in Markov blanket too much. This is important, since for most algorithms on Bayesian network, their running times exponentially depend on the cardinality of variables. Another advantage of our algorithm is running time. If there is only one continuous variable, the running time is $O(n_c v_{max} \cdot N^2 + v_{max}^{n_p} \cdot N^2)$, which beats the running time of MDL principle discretization (Friedman and Goldszmidt 1996). With an effective approximation proposed in this paper, we can further reduce running time to $O(v_{max}(n_p + n_c)N^2)$.

For a Bayesian network with multiple continuous variables, we apply the discretization method discussed above iteratively. In the beginning, we discretize each continuous variable by equal-width method. Number of intervals for equal-width discretization is equal to largest cardinality of discrete variables. Then we iterate the one-variable discretization on each continuous variable by the following order: from the variable with highest topological order (leaves) to the variable with lowest topological order (root). Everytime when we finish a discretization procedure on one variable, we store the discretization result and this discretization result will be used for later discretization on another variable. Experiments on real data show that with same iteration order, our discretization provides better discretization result than MDL principle method in terms of likelihood. The latter is easily caught by local minima and thus produce non-necessarily low number of intervals after discretization.

Finally, we can combine the new discretization method with K2 structure learning algorithm (Cooper and Herskovits 1992). We first prediscritize all continuous variables before K2 learning, since K2 algorithm requires all variables are discrete. Everytime when an edge is added by K2 algorithm procedure, we rediscritize the relevant variables in Bayesian network and store the result for next K2 algorithm iteration. By this principle, we are able to learn a discrete-valued Bayesian network from mixed data.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: we prepare the preliminaries and notations of Bayesian network in Section 2. Related work, including MDL principle discretization (Friedman and Goldszmidt 1996) and MODL discretization by Boullé (2006), are summarized in Section 3. In Section 4, we introduce the new discretization method, including formulation of objective function and algorithms. One continuous variable case and multiple continuous variable case are also included in this section. Finally, in Section 5, we apply the new discretization method to real-world data and show the result.

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