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Non-parametric lower bounds and unbiased estimators

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Abstract

We introduce the notion of the *information index* and present a non-parametric generalisation of the Rao–Cramér inequality.

We show that unbiased estimators do not exist if the information index is larger than two.

For a typical non–parametric class $\mathcal{P}$ of distributions **neither** estimator is asymptotically normal with the optimal rate *uniformly* over $\mathcal{P}$.

Key words: non-parametric lower bounds, information index, information function, uniform convergence.

1 Introduction

Typical estimation problem: given a sample $X_1, ..., X_n$ of i.i.d. observations from an unknown distribution $P \in \mathcal{P}$, estimate a **quantity of interest** a_P .

Hellinger distance: d_H^2, χ^2 distances: d_χ^2.

A typical regularity condition:

$$d_H^2(P_\theta;P_{\theta+h}) \sim \|h\|^2 I_\theta/8 \text{ or } d_\chi^2(P_\theta;P_{\theta+h}) \sim \|h\|^2 I_\theta \quad (1)$$

as $h \to 0$ for every $\theta \in \Theta, \theta + h \in \Theta$, where I_θ is "Fisher's information".

If (1) holds and estimator $\hat{\theta}_n$ is unbiased, then

$$\sup_{\theta\in\Theta} I_\theta \mathbb{E}_\theta \|\hat{\theta}_n - \theta\|^2 \geq 1/n. \quad (2)$$

This is the celebrated Fréchet–Rao–Cramér inequality.

If unbiased estimators with a finite second moments exist, then the optimal unbiased estimator is the one that turns a lower bound into equality.

Barankin [1]: a parametric estimation problem where **NO** unbiased estimator with $\mathbb{E}_\theta \|\hat{\theta}_n - \theta\|^2 < \infty$.

We argue: in typical *non-parametric situations* – **NO** unbiased estimators with a finite 2nd moment.

2 Information index

We extend the notion of regularity of a parametric family $\mathcal{P} = \{P_\theta, \theta \in \Theta\}$ of distributions.

Definition. *Parametric family $\mathcal{P}$ obeys the regularity condition (R_H) if there exists number $\nu > 0$*

and function $I_{\cdot,H}>0$ *such that as* $h\to 0$,

$$d_H^2(P_t;P_{t+h})\sim I_{t,H}\|h\|^\nu \quad (t\in\Theta, t+h\in\Theta). \qquad (R_H)$$

Similarly we define (R_χ)–regular parametric family.

We call ν the *"information" index*.
We call $I_{\cdot,H}$ the *"information" function*.

Information index ν indicates how "rich" or "poor" the class $\mathcal{P}$ is.

Regular parametric family of distributions: $\nu=2$.

(R_H)–**regular** parametric families: $\nu<2$.

Non–parametric classes: (R_H) with $\nu>2$.

Example 1. Let $P_t = \mathbf{U}[0;t]$, $\mathcal{P} = \{P_t, t>0\}$. Then

$$d_H^2(P_{t+h};P_t) \sim h/2t \quad (t\geq h\searrow 0).$$

Family $\mathcal{P}$ is not regular in the traditional sense (cf. (1)). Yet (R_H) holds with

$$\nu = 1\,,\ I_{t,H} = 1/2t.$$

Non–uniform lower bound: for any estimator $\hat{t}_n$

$$\sup_{t>0} t^{-1}\mathbb{E}_t^{1/2}(\hat{t}_n - t)^2 \geq 0.8/(n-1.6) \qquad (3)$$

as $n \geq 2$, while the *uniform* bound is

$$\sup_t \mathbb{E}_t^{1/2}(\hat{t}_n - t)^2 = \infty.$$

The optimal estimator $t_n^* = \max\{X_1, ..., X_n\}(n+1)/n$ is unbiased;

$$\mathbb{E}_t(t_n^* - t)^2 = t^2/n(n+2).$$

Lower bound indicates: the accuracy of estimation is determined by the *information index* and the *information function*.

Any *unbiased estimators* with finite second moment if (R_H) holds with $\nu > 2$?

We say set Θ obeys property (A_ε) if for every $t \in \Theta$ there exists $t' \in \Theta$ such that $\|t' - t\| = \varepsilon$. Property (A) holds if (A_ε) is in force for all small enough $\varepsilon > 0$.

Estimator $\hat{\theta}$ has "regular" bias if for every $t \in \Theta$ there exists $c_t > 0$ such that

$$\|\mathbb{E}_{t+h}\hat{\theta} - \mathbb{E}_t\hat{\theta}\| \sim c_t\|h\| \qquad (h \to 0). \tag{4}$$

We write $a_n \gtrsim b_n$ if $a_n \geq b_n(1+o(1))$ as $n \to \infty$.

Theorem 1 *Assume (R_χ) and (A), and suppose that estimator $\hat{t}_n$ has "regular" bias* [obeys (4)].

If $\nu \in (0;2)$, then

$$\sup_{t\in\Theta} I_{t,\chi}^{2/\nu} \mathbb{E}_t \|\hat{t}_n - t\|^2 / c_t^2 \gtrsim n^{-2/\nu} y_\nu^{2/\nu} / (e^{y_\nu} - 1) \qquad (5)$$

as $n \to \infty$, where y_ν is the positive root of the equation $\nu y = 2(1 - e^{-y})$.

If $\nu > 2$, then $\mathbb{E}_t \|\hat{t}_n\|^2 = \infty \ (\exists t \in \Theta)$.

Thus, if $\nu \in (0;2)$, then the accuracy of estimation for regular–bias estimators is $n^{-1/\nu}$.

Example 2. Parametric family $\mathcal{P}$ with densities

$$f_\theta(x) = \varphi(x - \theta)/2 + \varphi(x + \theta)/2 \,,$$

where φ is the standard normal density; $a_{P_\theta} = \theta$,

$$d_H(P_0; P_h) \sim h^2/4 \,.$$

Thus, (R_H) holds with

$$\nu = 4, \ I_{t,H} = 1/16;$$

the accuracy of estimation cannot be better than $n^{-1/4}$.

General problem: estimate a quantity of interest a_P.

Corollary 2 *If* (R_H) *or* (R_χ) *holds with* $\nu > 2$ *and* $\sup_{P\in\mathcal{P}} \mathbb{E}_P \|\hat{a}_n - a_P\|^2 < \infty$, *then estimator* $\hat{a}_n$ *is biased.*

3 Continuity moduli

Let a_P be an element of a metric space $(\mathcal{X}, d)$. For any $\varepsilon > 0$ we denote by

$$\mathcal{P}_H(P, \varepsilon) = \{Q \in \mathcal{P} : d_H(P; Q) \leq \varepsilon\}$$

the *neighborhood* of $P \in \mathcal{P}$. We call

$$w_H(P, \varepsilon) = \sup_{Q \in \mathcal{P}_H(P,\varepsilon)} d(a_P; a_Q)/2,$$
$$w_H(\varepsilon) = \sup_{P \in \mathcal{P}} w_H(P, \varepsilon)$$

the *moduli of continuity* of $\{a_P : P \in \mathcal{P}\}$.

Similarly we define $\mathcal{P}_\chi(P, \varepsilon)$, $\mathcal{P}_{TV}(P, \varepsilon)$, $w_\chi(\cdot)$, $w_{TV}(\cdot)$.

Continuity moduli describe how the "closeness" of a_Q to a_P reflects the "closeness" of Q to P.

The "richer" class $\mathcal{P}$, the poorer the accuracy of estimation.

Lemma 3 *Assume that for any $c > 0$ there exists $C \in (0; \infty)$ such that $w_.(c\varepsilon) \leq C w_.(\varepsilon)$. For any estimator $\hat{a}_n$ and every $P_0 \in \mathcal{P}$,*

$$\sup_{P \in \mathcal{P}_H(P_0,\varepsilon)} P(d(\hat{a}_n; a_P) \geq w_H(P_0, \varepsilon)) \geq (1-\varepsilon^2)^{2n}/4, \qquad (6)$$

$$\sup_{P \in \mathcal{P}_\chi(P_0,\varepsilon)} P(d(\hat{a}_n; a_P) \geq w_\chi(P_0, \varepsilon)) \geq [1+(1+\varepsilon^2)^{n/2}]^{-2}.$$

For example, (6) and Chebyshev's inequality yield

$$\sup_{P \in \mathcal{P}_H(P_0,\varepsilon)} \mathbb{E}_P d(\hat{a}_n; a_P) \geq w_H(P_0, \varepsilon)(1-\varepsilon^2)^n/2. \qquad (7)$$

Maximize $w_H(P,\varepsilon)(1-\varepsilon^2)^n$ in ε.

If for some $J_{H,P} > 0$

$$w_H(P,\varepsilon) \gtrsim J_{H,P}\varepsilon^{2r} \qquad (\exists P \in \mathcal{P}) \tag{8}$$

then the rate of estimation cannot be better than n^{-r}.

If (R_H) holds for a parametric subfamily of $\mathcal{P}$, then

$$2w_H(P_t,\varepsilon) \sim (\varepsilon^2/I_{t,H})^{1/\nu} \tag{9}$$

If (R_χ) holds, then

$$2w_\chi(P_t,\varepsilon) \sim (\varepsilon^2/I_{t,\chi})^{1/\nu}.$$

Thus, (R_H) and/or (R_χ) yield (8) with

$$r = 1/\nu;$$

the accuracy of estimation cannot be better than $n^{-1/\nu}$.

If (8) holds for all small enough ε and $J_{H,\cdot}$ is uniformly continuous on $\mathcal{P}$, then

$$\sup_{P\in\mathcal{P}} J_{H,P}^{-1}\mathbb{E}_P^{1/2}d(\hat{a}_n;a_P)^2 \gtrsim (r/e)^r n^{-r}/2\,. \tag{10}$$

Calculating *continuity moduli* is not easy.

Example 3. Let $\mathcal{P} = \{P_t, t \in \mathbb{R}\}$, where $P_t = \mathcal{N}(t;1)$, and let $a_{P_t} = t$ and $d(t;s) = |t-s|$. Then

$$w_H(P_t,\varepsilon) = \sqrt{\ln(1-\varepsilon^2)^{-2}} \geq \sqrt{2}\,\varepsilon$$

for every t. Hence (8) and (10) hold with $J_{_{H,P}} = \sqrt{2}$ and $r = 1/2$.

4 Uniform convergence

The rate of the accuracy of estimation cannot be better than $w_{_H}(P, 1/\sqrt{n}\,)$. If a_P is linear and class $\mathcal{P}$ of distributions is convex, then there exists an estimator $\hat{a}_n$ attaining this rate [2].

In typical non–parametric situations **neither** estimator converges *locally uniformly* with the optimal rate.

More information: [2, 3, 4].

Let $\mathcal{P}'$ be a subclass of $\mathcal{P}$. Estimator $\hat{a}_n$ converges weakly to a_P with the rate v_n *uniformly* in $\mathcal{P}'$ if there exists a non–degenerate distribution P_0 such that

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} \sup_{P\in\mathcal{P}'} |P\left((\hat{a}_n - a_P)/v_n \in A\right) - P_0(A)| = 0 \qquad (11)$$

for every measurable set $A \subset \mathcal{X}$ with $P_0(\partial A) = 0$.

Theorem 4 *Assume that* $\mathcal{X} = \mathbb{R}$, *and let* $P \in \mathcal{P}$. *If* $w_{_H}(P, \varepsilon) \sim J_{_{H,P}} \varepsilon^{2r}$, *where* $r < 1/2$, *and*

$$\sup_{P_* \in \mathcal{P}_{_H}(P, 1/\sqrt{n})} |J_{H,P_*}/J_{H,P} - 1| \to 0$$

as $n \to \infty$, *then* **neither** *estimator converges to* a_P *with the rate* n^{-r} *uniformly in* $\mathcal{P}_{_H}(P, 1/\sqrt{n}\,)$.

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