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The role of Statistics in the era of big data: crucial, critical and under-valued

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Abstract

What is the role of Statistics in the era of big data, or is Statistics still relevant? I will start this rather personal view with my answer.

Statistics remains highly relevant irrespective of 'bigness' of data, its role remains what it has always been, but is even more important now. As a community, we need to improve our explanations and presentations to make more visible our relevance.

Keywords: data, sampling, variability, inference, uncertainty

Introduction

I am a statistician, but does that mean I cannot be a data scientist or a data analyst and claim expertise and knowledge that are highly relevant in this era of big data? Does a data scientist have different skills? Should I feel threatened professionally, and is my discipline becoming irrelevant? We are all part of the “information ecosystem” (Al Gore, *The Assault on Reason*, 2017). We have moved from systems of rather clunky data acquisition, taking days, weeks, months to now the internet of things, social media, and the citizen scientist—with data arriving at unprecedented rates, where everyone may have access but may not have the skills needed to make sense of the data. Who checks the quality, who understands

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