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Efficient Mining of Frequent Item Sets on Large Uncertain Databases

Liang Wang, David Wai-Lok Cheung, Reynold Cheng, Member, IEEE, Sau Dan Lee, and Xuan S. Yang

Abstract—The data handled in emerging applications like location-based services, sensor monitoring systems, and data integration, are often inexact in nature. In this paper, we study the important problem of extracting frequent item sets from a large uncertain database, interpreted under the Possible World Semantics (PWS). This issue is technically challenging, since an uncertain database contains an exponential number of possible worlds. By observing that the mining process can be modeled as a Poisson binomial distribution, we develop an approximate algorithm, which can efficiently and accurately discover frequent item sets in a large uncertain database. We also study the important issue of maintaining the mining result for a database that is evolving (e.g., by inserting a tuple). Specifically, we propose incremental mining algorithms, which enable Probabilistic Frequent Item set (PFI) results to be refreshed. This reduces the need of re-executing the whole mining algorithm on the new database, which is often more expensive and unnecessary. We examine how an existing algorithm that extracts exact item sets, as well as our approximate algorithm, can support incremental mining. All our approaches support both tuple and attribute uncertainty, which are two common uncertain database models. We also perform extensive evaluation on real and synthetic data sets to validate our approaches.

Index Terms—Frequent item sets, uncertain data set, approximate algorithm, incremental mining

1 INTRODUCTION

The databases used in many important and novel applications are often uncertain. For example, the locations of users obtained through RFID and GPS systems are not precise due to measurement errors [22], [28]. As another example, data collected from sensors in habitat monitoring systems (e.g., temperature and humidity) are noisy [17]. Customer purchase behaviors, as captured in supermarket basket databases, contain statistical information for predicting what a customer will buy in the future [3], [6]. Integration and record linkage tools also associate confidence values to the output tuples according to the quality of matching [16]. In structured information extractors, confidence values are appended to rules for extracting patterns from unstructured data [31]. To meet the increasing application needs of handling a large amount of uncertain data, uncertain databases have been recently developed [10], [16], [19], [20], [27].

Fig. 1 shows an online marketplace application, which carries probabilistic information. Particularly, the purchase behavior details of customers Jack and Mary are recorded. The value associated with each item represents the chance that a customer may buy that item in the near future. These probability values may be obtained by analyzing the users’ browsing histories. For instance, if Jack visited the marketplace 10 times in the previous week, out of which video products were clicked five times, the marketplace may conclude that Jack has a 50 percent chance of buying videos.

This attribute-uncertainty model, which is well studied in the literature [6], [10], [20], [28], associates confidence values with data attributes. It is also used to model location and sensor uncertainty in GPS and RFID systems.

To interpret uncertain databases, the Possible World Semantics (PWS) is often used [16]. Conceptually, a database is viewed as a set of deterministic instances called possible worlds, each of which contains a set of tuples. A possible world $w$ for Fig. 1 consists of two tuples, {food} and {clothing}, for Jack and Mary, respectively. Since {food} occurs with a probability of $(1 - \frac{1}{2}) \times 1 = \frac{1}{2}$, and {clothing} has a probability of $1 \times (1 - \frac{1}{2}) = \frac{1}{2}$, the probability that $w$ exists is $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2}$, or $\frac{1}{4}$. Any query evaluation algorithm for an uncertain database has to be correct under PWS. That is, the results produced by the algorithm should be the same as if the query is evaluated on every possible world [16].

Although PWS is intuitive and useful, querying or mining under this notion is costly. This is because an uncertain database has an exponential number of possible worlds. For example, the database in Fig. 1 has $2^3 = 8$ possible worlds. Performing data mining under PWS can, thus, be technically challenging. In fact, the mining of uncertain data has recently attracted research attention [3]. For example, in [23], efficient clustering algorithms were developed for uncertain objects; in [21] and [32], naive Bayes and decision tree classifiers designed for uncertain data were studied. Here, we develop scalable algorithms for finding frequent item sets (i.e., sets of attribute values that appear together frequently in tuples) for uncertain databases. Our algorithms can be applied to two important uncertainty models: attribute uncertainty (e.g., Fig. 1); and tuple uncertainty, where every tuple is associated with a probability to indicate whether it exists [15], [16], [19], [27], [34].

The frequent item sets discovered from uncertain data are naturally probabilistic, in order to reflect the confidence placed on the mining results. Fig. 2 shows a probabilistic...
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Frequent Item set (PFI) extracted from Fig. 1. A PFI is a set of attribute values that occurs frequently with a sufficiently high probability. In Fig. 2, the support probability mass function (s-pmf) for the PFI \{video\} is shown. This is the pmf for the number of tuples (or support count) that contain an item set. Under PWS, a database induces a set of possible worlds, each giving a (different) support count for a given item set. Hence, the support of a frequent item set is described by a pmf. In Fig. 2, if we consider all possible worlds where item set \{video\} occurs twice, the corresponding probability is \( \frac{1}{2} \).

A simple way of finding PFIs is to mine frequent patterns from every possible world, and then record the probabilities of the occurrences of these patterns. This is impractical, due to the exponential number of possible worlds. To remedy this, some algorithms have been recently developed to successfully retrieve PFIs without instantiating all possible worlds [6], [30], [35]. These algorithms can verify whether an item set is a PFI in \( O(n^2) \) time (where \( n \) is the number of tuples contained in the database). However, our experimental results reveal that they can require a long time to complete (e.g., with a 300k real data set, the dynamic programming algorithm in [6] needs 30.1 hours to find all PFIs). We observe that the s-pmf of a PFI can be captured by a Poisson binomial distribution, for both attribute- and tuple-uncertain data. We make use of this intuition to propose a method for approximating a PFI’s pmf with a Poisson distribution, which can be efficiently and accurately estimated. This model-based algorithm can verify a PFI in \( O(n) \) time, and is thus more suitable for large databases. We demonstrate how our algorithm can be used to mine threshold-based PFIs, whose probabilities of being true frequent item sets are larger than some user-defined threshold [6]. Our algorithm only needs 9.2 seconds to find all PFIs [33], which is four orders of magnitudes faster than the method in [6].

Mining evolving databases. We also study the important problem of maintaining mining results for changing, or evolving, databases. The type of evolving data that we address here is about the appending, or insertion of a batch of tuples to the database. Tuple insertion is common in the applications that we consider. For example, a GPS system may have to handle location values due to the registration of a new user; in an online marketplace application, information about new purchase transactions may be appended to the database for further analysis. Fig. 3 shows a new database, which is the result of appending the purchase information of Tony, a new customer, to the database in Fig. 1. Notice that these new tuples may induce changes to the mining result. For example, if the new database (Fig. 3) is considered, the s-pmf of the PFI \{video\} (Fig. 2) becomes the one shown in Fig. 4. Hence, we need to derive the PFIs for the new database. A straightforward way of refreshing the mining results is to re-evaluate the whole mining algorithm on the new database. This can be costly, however, when new tuples are appended to the database at different time instants. In fact, if the new database \( D^+ \) is similar to its older version, \( D \), it is likely that most of the PFIs extracted from \( D \) remain valid for \( D^+ \). Based on this intuition, we develop incremental mining algorithms, which use the PFIs of \( D \) to derive the PFIs of \( D^+ \), instead of finding them from scratch. In this paper, we propose an incremental mining algorithm for the method studied in [6], which discovers exact PFIs. We also examine how our model-based algorithm, which discovers approximate PFIs, can be extended to handle evolving data. As our experiments show, when the change of the database is small, running our incremental mining algorithms on \( D^+ \) is much faster than finding PFIs on \( D^+ \) from scratch. In an experiment on a real data set, our model-based, incremental mining algorithm addresses a fivefold performance improvement over its nonincremental counterpart.

To summarize, we develop a model-based algorithm, which can reduce the amount of effort of scanning the database for mining threshold-based PFIs. We also develop two incremental mining algorithms, for extracting exact and approximate PFIs. All our algorithms can support both attribute and tuple uncertainty models. We study the time complexity of our approaches. Experiments on both real and synthetic data sets reveal that our methods significantly improve the performance of PFI discovery, with a high degree of accuracy.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: in Section 2, we review the related works. Section 3 defines the problems to be studied. Section 4 describes efficient and accurate methods for computing s-pmf. In Section 5, we present our algorithm for discovering threshold-based PFIs. The exact and approximate algorithms for maintaining PFIs on evolving databases are, respectively, presented in Sections 6 and 7. Section 8 reports our experimental results. We conclude in Section 9.
2 Related Work

Mining frequent item sets is an important problem in data mining, and is also the first step of deriving association rules [4]. Hence, many efficient item set mining algorithms (e.g., Apriori [4] and FP-growth [18]) have been proposed. While these algorithms work well for databases with precise values, it is not clear how they can be used to mine probabilistic data. Here we develop algorithms for extracting frequent item sets from uncertain databases. Although our algorithms are developed based on the Apriori framework, they can be considered for supporting other algorithms (e.g., FP-growth) for handling uncertain data.

For uncertain databases, Aggarwal et al. [2] and Chiu et al. [14] developed efficient frequent pattern mining algorithms based on the expected support counts of the patterns. However, Bernecker et al. [6], Sun et al. [30], and Yiu et al. [35] found that the use of expected support may render important patterns missing. Hence, they proposed to compute the probability that a pattern is frequent, and introduced the notion of PFI. In [6], dynamic-programming-based solutions were developed to retrieve PFIs from attribute-uncertain databases. However, their algorithms compute exact probabilities, and verify that an item set is a PFI in \( O(n^2) \) time. Our model-based algorithms avoid the use of dynamic programming, and are able to verify a PFI much faster (in \( O(n) \) time). In [35], approximate algorithms for deriving threshold-based PFIs from tuple-uncertain data streams were developed. While Zhang et al. [35] only considered the extraction of singletons (i.e., sets of single items), our solution discovers patterns with more than one item. Recently, Sun et al. [30] developed an exact threshold-based PFI mining algorithm. However, it does not support attribute-uncertain data considered in this paper. In a preliminary version of this paper [33], we examined a model-based approach for mining PFIs. Here, we study how this algorithm can be extended to support the mining of evolving data.

Other works on the retrieval of frequent patterns from imprecise data include: [9], which studied approximate frequent patterns on noisy data; [24], which examined association rules on fuzzy sets; and [26], which proposed the notion of a “vague association rule.” However, none of these solutions are developed on the uncertainty models studied here.

For evolving databases. A few incremental mining algorithms that work for exact data have been developed. For example, in [11], the Fast Update algorithm (FUP) was proposed to efficiently maintain frequent item sets, for a database to which new tuples are inserted. Our incremental mining framework is inspired by FUP. In [12], the FUP\(_2\) algorithm was developed to handle both addition and deletion of tuples. ZIGZAG [1] also examines the efficient maintenance of maximal frequent item sets for databases that are constantly changing. In [13], a data structure, called CATS Tree, was introduced to maintain frequent item sets in evolving databases. Another structure, called CanTree [25], arranges tree nodes in an order that is not affected by changes in item frequency. The data structure is used to support mining on a changing database. To our best knowledge, maintaining frequent item sets in evolving uncertain databases has not been examined before. We propose novel incremental mining algorithms for both exact and approximate PFI discovery. Our algorithms can also support attribute and tuple uncertainty models.

Table 1 summarizes the major work done in PFI mining. Here, “Static Algorithms” refer to algorithms that do not handle database changes. Hence, any change in the database necessitates a complete execution of these algorithms.

3 Problem Definition

We now discuss the uncertainty models used in this paper, in Section 3.1. The problem of mining threshold-based PFIs is then described in Section 3.2.

3.1 Attribute and Tuple Uncertainty

Let \( V \) be a set of items. In the attribute uncertainty model [6], [10], [20], [28], each attribute value carries some uncertain information. Here, we adopt the following variant [6]: a database \( D \) contains \( n \) tuples, or transactions. Each transaction, \( t_j \), is associated with a set of items taken from \( V \). Each item \( v \in V \) exists in \( t_j \) with an existential probability \( Pr(v \in t_j) \in (0, 1) \), which denotes the chance that \( v \) belongs to \( t_j \). In Fig. 1, for instance, the existential probability of \( \text{video} \) in \( t_{\text{Jack}} \) is \( Pr(\text{video} \in t_{\text{Jack}}) = 1/2 \). This model can also be used to describe uncertainty in binary attributes. For instance, the item \( \text{video} \) can be considered as an attribute, whose value is one, for Jack’s tuple, with probability \( 1/2 \), in tuple \( t_{\text{Jack}} \).

Under the Possible World Semantics, \( D \) generates a set of possible worlds \( W \). Table 2 lists all possible worlds for Fig. 1. Each world \( w_i \in W \), which consists of a subset of attributes from each transaction, occurs with probability \( Pr(w_i) \). For example, \( Pr(w_2) \) is the product of: 1) the probability that Jack purchases \( \text{food} \) but not \( \text{video} \) (equal to \( 1/2 \)); and 2) the probability that Mary buys \( \text{clothing} \) and \( \text{video} \) (equal to \( 1/5 \)). As shown in Table 2, the sum of possible world
probabilities is one, and the number of possible worlds is exponentially large. Our goal is to discover frequent patterns without expanding $D$ into possible worlds.

In the tuple uncertainty model, each tuple or transaction is associated with a probability value. We assume the following variant [15], [34]: each transaction $t_j \in D$ is associated with a set of items and an existential probability $Pr(t_j) \in [0, 1]$, which indicates that $t_j$ exists in $D$ with probability $Pr(t_j)$. Again, the number of possible worlds for this model is exponentially large. Table 3 summarizes the symbols used in this paper.

### 3.2 Probabilistic Frequent Item Sets

Let $I \subseteq V$ be a set of items, or an item set. The support of $I$, denoted by $Pr(I)$, is the number of transactions in which $I$ appears in a transaction database [4]. In precise databases, $Pr(I)$ is a single value. This is no longer true in uncertain databases, because in different possible worlds, $Pr(I)$ can have different values. Let $S(w_i, I)$ be the support count of $I$ in possible world $w_i$. Then, the probability that $s(I)$ has a value of $i$, denoted by $Pr^I(i)$, is

$$Pr^I(i) = \sum_{w_i \in W, S(w_i, I) = i} Pr(w_i).$$

Hence, $Pr^I(i)(i = 1, \ldots, n)$ form a probability mass function (pmf) of $s(I)$, where $n$ is the size of $D$. We call $Pr^I$ the support pmf (or s-pmf) of $I$. In Table 2, $Pr^{\text{video}}(2) = Pr(w_6) + Pr(w_8) = \frac{1}{3}$, since $s(I) = 2$ in possible worlds $w_6$ and $w_8$. Fig. 2 shows the s-pmf of [video].

Now, let $\minsup \in (0, 1]$ be a percentage value, which is generally used to define minimal support in a deterministic database. An item set $I$ is said to be frequent in a database $D$ if $s(I) \geq \minsup \times n$, where $\minsup = \text{minsup} \times n$ is called the minimal support count of $D$ [4]. For uncertain databases, the frequentness probability of $I$, denoted by $Pr_{freq}(I)$, is the probability that an item set is frequent [6]. Notice that $Pr_{freq}(I)$ can be expressed as

$$Pr_{freq}(I) = \sum_{i \geq \minsup} Pr^I(i).$$

In Fig. 2, if $\minsup = 1$, then $\minsup = 2$. Thus, $Pr_{freq}(\{\text{video}\}) = Pr^{\text{video}}(1) + Pr^{\text{video}}(2) = \frac{2}{3}$.

Using frequentness probabilities, we can determine whether an item set $I$ is frequent. In this paper, we adopt the definition in [6]: $I$ is a Threshold-based PFI if its frequentness probability is larger than some user-defined threshold [6]. Formally, given a real value $minprob \in (0, 1]$, $I$ is a threshold-based PFI, if $Pr_{freq}(I) \geq minprob$. We call $minprob$ the frequentness probability threshold.

Here, we would like to mention the following theorem, which was discussed in [6].

**Theorem 1 (Antimonotonicity).** Let $S$ and $I$ be two item sets. If $S \subseteq I$, then $Pr_{freq}(S) \geq Pr_{freq}(I)$.

This theorem will be used in our discussions.

We derive efficient s-pmf computation methods in Section 4. Then, Section 5 examines how these methods facilitate efficiency discovery of approximate threshold-based PFIs. We examine the maintenance of exact and approximate PFIs on evolving data, in Sections 6 and 7.

### 4 EVALUATING S-PMF

From the last section, we can see that the s-pmf $s(I)$ of item set $I$ plays an important role in determining whether $I$ is a PFI. However, directly computing $s(I)$ (e.g., using the dynamic programming approaches of [6] and [35]) can be expensive. We now investigate an alternative way of computing $s(I)$. In Section 4.1, we study some statistical properties of $s(I)$. Section 4.2 exploits these results by approximating $s(I)$ in a computationally efficient manner.

#### 4.1 Statistical Properties of s-pmf

An interesting observation about $s(I)$ is that it is essentially the number of successful Poisson trials [29]. To explain, we let $X_j^f$ be a random variable, which is equal to one if $I$ is a subset of the items associated with transaction $t_j$ (i.e., $I \subseteq t_j$), or zero otherwise. Notice that $Pr(I \subseteq t_j)$ can be easily calculated in our uncertainty models.

- For attribute-uncertainty,
  $$Pr(I \subseteq t_j) = \prod_{v \in I} Pr(v \in t_j).$$

- For tuple-uncertainty,
  $$Pr(I \subseteq t_j) = \begin{cases} Pr(t_j), & \text{if } I \subseteq t_j, \\ 0, & \text{otherwise}. \end{cases}$$

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$D$</td>
<td>An uncertain database of $n$ tuples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$V$</td>
<td>The set of items that appear in $D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$v$</td>
<td>An item, where $v \in V$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t_j$</td>
<td>The $j$-th tuple in $D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$W$</td>
<td>The set of all possible worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$w_i$</td>
<td>A possible world $w_i \in W$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$I$</td>
<td>An itemset, where $I \subseteq V$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\minsup$</td>
<td>A real value between $[0, 1]$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\minprob$</td>
<td>The minimal support count in $D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$s(I)$</td>
<td>The support count of $I$ in $D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Pr^I(i)$</td>
<td>Support probability that $I$ has a support count of $i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Pr_{freq}(I)$</td>
<td>Frequentness probability of $I$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\mu^I$</td>
<td>Expected value of $X^I$ in $D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\mu^I_i$</td>
<td>Expected value of $X^I$, for the $i$'th tuple in $D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$d$</td>
<td>The number of $n$ tuples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$D^+$</td>
<td>New database with one tuple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$D^+$</td>
<td>New database with more than one tuple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F^D$</td>
<td>Set of all PFI's in $D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F^D_k$</td>
<td>Set of $k$-PFI's in $D$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F^D_k$</td>
<td>Set of $k$-PFI's in $D^+$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F^D_k$</td>
<td>Set of $k$-PFI's in $D^+$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$DB$</td>
<td>A database, can be $D$, $d$, or $D^+$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Pr_{freq}(I)$</td>
<td>The frequentness probability of $I$ in $DB$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\mu^I(DB)$</td>
<td>The expected value of $X^I$ in $DB$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given a database of size \( n \), each \( I \) is associated with random variables \( X^I_1, X^I_2, \ldots, X^I_n \). In both uncertainty models considered in this paper, all tuples are independent. Therefore, these \( n \) variables are independent, and they represent \( n \) Poisson trials. Moreover, \( X^I = \sum_{j=1}^{n} X^I_j \) follows a Poisson binomial distribution.

Next, we observe an important relationship between \( X^I \) and \( \Pr^I(i) \) (i.e., the probability that the support of \( I \) is \( i \))

\[
\Pr^I(i) = \Pr(X^I = i).
\]

This is simply because \( X^I \) is the number of times that \( I \) exists in the database. Hence, the \( s \)-pmf of \( I \), i.e., \( \Pr^I(i) \) is the pmf of \( X^I \), a Poisson binomial distribution.

Using (5), we can rewrite (2), which computes the frequentness probability of \( I \), as

\[
\Pr_{freq}(I) = \sum_{i \geq \text{msc}(D)} \Pr(X^I = i) = \Pr(X^I \geq \text{msc}(D)).
\]

(7)

Therefore, if the cumulative distribution function (cdf) of \( X^I \) is known, \( \Pr_{freq}(I) \) can also be evaluated. Next, we discuss an approach to approximate this cdf, in order to compute \( \Pr_{freq}(I) \) efficiently.

### 4.2 Approximating \( s \)-pmf

From (7), we can express \( \Pr_{freq}(I) \) as

\[
\Pr_{freq}(I) = 1 - \Pr(X^I \leq \text{msc}(D) - 1).
\]

(8)

For notational convenience, let \( p^I_j \) be \( \Pr(I \leq t_j) \). Then, the expected value of \( X^I \) in \( D \), denoted by \( \mu^I \), can be computed by

\[
\mu^I = \sum_{j=1}^{n} p^I_j.
\]

(9)

Since a Poisson binomial distribution can be well approximated by a Poisson distribution [8], (8) can be written as

\[
\Pr_{freq}(I) \approx 1 - F(\text{msc}(D) - 1, \mu^I),
\]

(10)

where \( F \) is the cdf of the Poisson distribution with mean \( \mu^I \), i.e., \( F(\text{msc}(D) - 1, \mu^I) = 1 - \frac{\Gamma(\text{msc}(D) - 1, \mu^I)}{\Gamma(\text{msc}(D) - 1)} \), expressed using the incomplete gamma function \( \Gamma(s,x) = \int_x^\infty t^{s-1}e^{-t}dt \). Empirical results (see Appendix A which can be found on the Computer Society Digital Library at http://doi.ieeecomputersociety.org/10.1109/TKDE.2011.165) show that the errors introduced by this approximation is small in practice.

To estimate \( \Pr_{freq}(I) \), we can first compute \( \mu^I \) by scanning \( D \) once and summing up \( p^I_j \)'s for all tuples \( t_j \) in \( D \). Then, \( F(\text{msc}(D) - 1, \mu^I) \) is evaluated, and (10) is used to approximate \( \Pr_{freq}(I) \).

We have also observed an important property of the frequentness probability:

**Theorem 2.** \( \Pr_{freq}(I) \), if approximated by (10), increases monotonically with \( \mu^I \).

**Proof.** The cdf of a Poisson distribution, \( F(i, \mu) \), can be written as

\[
F(i, \mu) = \frac{\Gamma(i + 1, \mu)}{i!} = \frac{\int_0^\infty (i + 1 - 1)e^{-t}dt}{i!}.
\]

Since \( \minsup \) is fixed and independent of \( \mu \), let us examine the partial derivative w.r.t. \( \mu \)

\[
\frac{\partial F(i, \mu)}{\partial \mu} = \frac{\partial}{\partial \mu} \left( \frac{\int_0^\infty (i + 1 - 1)e^{-t}dt}{i!} \right)
\]

\[
= \frac{1}{i!} \frac{\partial}{\partial \mu} \left( \int_0^\infty t^i e^{-t}dt \right)
\]

\[
= \frac{1}{i!} (-\mu^i e^{-\mu})
\]

and

\[
- f(i, \mu) \leq 0.
\]

Thus, the cdf of the Poisson distribution \( F(i, \mu) \) is monotonically decreasing w.r.t. \( \mu \), when \( i \) is fixed. Consequently, \( 1 - F(i - 1, \mu) \) increases monotonically with \( \mu \). Theorem 2 follows immediately by substituting \( i = \text{msc}(D) \).

Intuitively, Theorem 2 states that the higher value of \( \mu^I \), the higher is the chance that \( I \) is a PFI. Next, we will illustrate how this theorem avoids the costly computations of \( F \), and improves the efficiency of finding threshold-based PFIs.

### 5 Mining Threshold-Based PFIs

Can we quickly determine whether an item set \( I \) is a threshold-based PFI? Answering this question is crucial, since in typical PFI mining algorithms (e.g., [6]), candidate item sets are first generated, before they are tested on whether they are PFIs. In Section 5.1, we develop a simple method of testing whether \( I \) is a threshold-based PFI, without computing its frequentness probability. We then enhance this method in Section 5.2. We demonstrate an adaptation of these techniques in an existing PFI-mining algorithm, in Section 5.3.

#### 5.1 PFI Testing

Given the values of \( \minsup \) and \( \minprob \), we can test whether \( I \) is a threshold-based PFI, in three steps.

**Step 1.** Find a real number \( \mu_m \) satisfying the equation:

\[
\minprob = 1 - F(\text{msc}(D) - 1, \mu_m).
\]

(11)

The above equation can be solved efficiently by employing numerical methods, thanks to Theorem 2.

**Step 2.** Use (9) to compute \( \mu^I \). Notice that the database \( D \) has to be scanned once.

**Step 3.** If \( \mu^I \geq \mu_m \), we conclude that \( I \) is a PFI. Otherwise, \( I \) must not be a PFI.

To understand why this works, first notice that the right side of (11) is the same as that of (10), an expression of frequentness probability. Essentially, Step 1 finds out the value of \( \mu_m \) that corresponds to the frequentness probability threshold (i.e., \( \minprob \)). In Steps 2 and 3, if \( \mu^I \geq \mu_m \), Theorem 2 allows us to deduce that \( \Pr_{freq}(I) \geq \minprob \). Hence, these steps together can test whether an item set is a PFI.

In order to verify whether \( I \) is a PFI, once \( \mu_m \) is found, we do not have to evaluate \( \Pr_{freq}(I) \). Instead, we compute \( \mu^I \) in Step 2, which can be done in \( O(n) \) time. This is a more
scalable method compared with solutions in [6] and [35], which evaluate \( Pr_{freq}(I) \) in \( O(n^3) \) time. Next, we study how this method can be further improved.

5.2 Improving the PFI Testing Process

In Step 2 of the last section, \( D \) has to be scanned once to obtain \( \mu^1 \), for every item set \( I \). This can be costly if \( D \) is \( \mu \)-large, and if many item sets need to be tested. For example, in the Apriori algorithm [6], many candidate item sets are generated first before testing whether they are PFIs. We now explain how the PFI testing can still be carried out without scanning the whole database.

We next show the following.

**Lemma 1.** Let \( i \in (0, n] \). If \( \mu^1 \geq \mu_m \), then \( I \) is a threshold-based PFI.

**Proof.** Notice that \( \mu^1 \) monotonically increases with \( i \). If there exists a value of \( i \) such that \( \mu^1 \geq \mu_m \), we must have \( \mu^1 = \mu^1_n \geq \mu^1_i \geq \mu_m \), implying that \( I \) is a PFI.

Using Lemma 1, a PFI can be verified by scanning only a part of the database. We next show the following.

**Lemma 2.** If \( I \) is a threshold-based PFI, then

\[
\mu^1_{n-i} \geq \mu_m - i \quad \forall i \in (0, [\mu_m]).
\]

**Proof.** Let \( D_t \) be a set of tuples \( \{t_1, \ldots, t_i\} \). Then,

\[
\mu^1 = \sum_{j=1}^{n} Pr(I \subseteq t_j),
\]

\[
\mu^1_i = \sum_{j=1}^{i} Pr(I \subseteq t_j).
\]

Since \( Pr(I \subseteq t_j) \in [0,1] \), based on the above equations, we have

\[
i \geq \mu^1 - \mu^1_{n-i}.
\]

If item set \( I \) is a PFI, then \( \mu^1 \geq \mu_m \). In addition, \( \mu^1_{n-i} \geq 0 \). Therefore,

\[
i \geq \mu^1 - \mu^1_{n-i} \geq \mu_m - \mu^1_{n-i} \quad \text{for} \quad 0 < i \leq [\mu_m]
\]

This lemma leads to the following corollary.

**Corollary 1.** An item set \( I \) cannot be a PFI if there exists \( i \in (0, [\mu_m]) \) such that

\[
\mu^1_{n-i} < \mu_m - i.
\]

We use an example to illustrate Corollary 1. Suppose that \( \mu_m = 1.1 \) for the database in Fig. 1. Also, let \( I = \{\text{clothing, video}\} \). Using Corollary 1, we do not have to scan the whole database. Instead, only the tuple \( t_{Jack} \) needs to be read. This is because

\[
\mu^1_1 = 0 < 1.1 - 1 = 0.1.
\]

Since (15) is satisfied, we confirm that \( I \) is not a PFI without scanning the whole database.

We use the above results to improve the speed of the PFI testing process. Specifically, after a tuple has been scanned, we check whether Lemma 1 is satisfied; if so, we immediately conclude that \( I \) is a PFI. After scanning \( n - [\mu_m] \) or more tuples, we examine whether \( I \) is not a PFI, by using Corollary 1. These testing procedures continue until the whole database is scanned, yielding \( \mu^1 \). Then, we execute Step 3 (Section 5.1) to test whether \( I \) is a PFI.

5.3 Case Study: The Apriori Algorithm

The testing techniques just mentioned are not associated with any specific threshold-based PFI mining algorithms. Moreover, these methods support both attribute- and tuple-uncertainty models. Hence, they can be easily adopted by existing algorithms. We now explain how to incorporate our techniques to enhance the Apriori [6] algorithm, an important PFI mining algorithms.

The resulting procedure (Algorithm 1) uses the “bottom-up” framework of the Apriori: starting from \( k = 1 \), size- \( k \) PFIs (called \( k \)-PFIs) are first generated. Then, using Theorem 1, size-(\( k + 1 \)) candidate item sets are derived from the \( k \)-PFIs, based on which the \( (k + 1) \)-PFIs are found. The process goes on with larger \( k \), until no larger candidate item sets can be discovered.

**Algorithm 1.** Apriori-based PFI Mining

**Input:** Uncertain database \( D, \minsup, \minprob \)

**Output:** All PFI: \( F = \{F_1, F_2, \ldots, F_m\} \) // \( F_k \) is set of \( k \)-PFIs

begin
1. \( \mu_m = \text{MinExpSup}(\minsup, \minprob, D) \);
2. \( C_1 \) : GenerateSingleItemCandidates(D);
3. \( k = 1; j = 0; \)
4. while \( |C_k| \neq 0 \) do
5.   for each \( I \in C_k \), do
6.     if \( \mu \geq \mu_m \)
7.       then \( F_k, \text{push}(I) \);
8.     else \( |C_k| = 0 \)
9.   end
10. end
11. return \( F_k \);
end

The main difference of Algorithm 1 compared with that of Apriori [6] is that all steps that require frequentness probability computation are replaced by our PFI testing methods. In particular, Algorithm 1 first computes \( \mu_m \) (Line 2). Then, for each candidate item set \( I \) generated on Lines 3 and 17, we scan \( D \) and compute its \( \mu^1 \) (Line 10). If Lemma 1 is satisfied, then \( I \) is put to the result (Lines 11-13). However, if Corollary 1 is satisfied, \( I \) is pruned from the candidate item sets (Lines 14-16). This process goes on until no more candidates item sets are found.

**Complexity.** In Algorithm 1, each candidate item needs \( O(n) \) time to test whether it is a PFI. This is much faster than the Apriori [6], which verifies a PFI in \( O(n^2) \) time. Moreover, since \( D \) is scanned once for all \( k \)-PFI candidates \( C_k \), at most a total of \( n \) tuples is retrieved for each \( C_k \).
(instead of \(|C_k| \cdot n\)). The space complexity is \(O(|C_k|)\) for each candidate set \(C_k\), in order to maintain \(\mu^k\) for each candidate.

Next, we examine how to maintain PFIs in a database that is constantly evolving.

### 6 Exact Incremental Mining

We now examine how to efficiently maintain a set of PFIs in an evolving database, where new tuples, or transactions, are constantly appended to it. We assume that every tuple has a timestamp attribute, which indicates the time that it is created. This timestamp is not used for mining; it is only used to differentiate new tuples from existing ones. Let \(D\) be the “old” database that contains \(n\) tuples, and \(d\) be a delta database of \(n^*\) tuples, whose timestamps are larger than those of tuples in \(D\). Let \(D^+\) be a “new” database, which is a concatenation of the tuples in \(D\) and \(d\), and has a size of \(n^* = n + n^*\). Given the set of PFIs and their s-pmfs in \(D\), our goal is to discover PFIs on \(D^+\), under the same minsup and minprob values used to mine the PFIs of \(D\). We use \(s^{DB}(I)\) and \(P_{PFI}^{DB}(I)\) to respectively denote the support count and the frequent probability of item set \(I\) in some database \(DB\), where \(DB\) is any of \(\{D, d, D^+\}\).

Before we go on, we would like to remark that the incremental mining problem described above can be treated as a special case of stream mining, which refers to the maintenance of mining results for stream data. Particularly, we can view the database \(d\) as the arrival of \(|d|\) data units from a stream source. Moreover, we assume that the sliding window initially contains \(D\), which then expands to incorporate new stream units. Mining \(D^+\) is then equivalent to updating the mining results for the arrival of \(|d|\) stream units. In Section 8.3, we study an adaptation of a stream algorithm in [35] for use in incremental mining.

A simple way of obtaining PFIs from \(D^+\) is to simply rerun a PFI-mining algorithm on it. However, this approach is not very economical, since 1) running a PFI algorithm on a large database is not trivial; and 2) the same algorithm has to be frequently executed if a lot of update activities occur. In fact, if only a few tuples in \(d\) are appended to \(D\), it may not be necessary to compute all PFIs on \(D^+\) from scratch. This is because the PFIs found in \(D^+\) should not be very different from those discovered in \(D\). Based on this intuition, we design an incremental mining algorithm that finds PFIs in \(D^+\), without rerunning a complete PFI algorithm. This algorithm works the best when the size of \(d\) is very small compared with that of \(D\); nevertheless, it works with any size of \(d\). We next discuss the framework of our solution, which discovers exact PFIs in \(D^+\), based on the PFIs found in \(D\). We extend this solution to discover approximate PFIs in Section 7. Table 3 summarizes the symbols used in these sections.

#### 6.1 Algorithm uFUP

The design of our uncertain Fast UUpdate algorithm (or uFUP), is inspired by FUP [11]. That algorithm maintains frequent item set results in an evolving database, whose attribute values are exact. The uFUP algorithm extracts frequent item sets in an “Apriori” fashion: it utilizes a bottom-up approach, where \((k+1)\)-PFIs are generated from \(k\)-PFIs. Moreover, it supports both attribute and tuple uncertainty models. As shown in Fig. 5, uFUP undergoes three phases in the \(k\)th iteration, starting from \(k = 1\).

1. **Candidate generation.** In the first iteration, size-1 item sets that can be 1-PFIs are obtained, using the PFIs discovered from \(D\), as well as the delta database \(d\). In subsequent iterations, this phase produces size-\((k+1)\) candidate item sets, based on the \(k\)-PFIs found in the previous iteration. If no candidates are found, uFUP halts.

2. **Candidate pruning.** With the aid of \(d\) and the PFIs found from \(D\), this phase filters the candidate item sets that must not be a PFI.

3. **PFI testing.** For item sets that cannot be pruned, they are tested to see whether they are the true PFIs. This involves the use of database \(D^+\), as well as the s-pmfs of PFIs on \(D\).

Notice that in Phases 1 and 2, only \(d\) and the PFIs of \(D\) are needed. Since these pieces of information are relatively small in size (compared with \(D\) or \(D^+\)), they are usually not very expensive to evaluate. Phase 3 involves deriving the s-pmfs of item sets, with the use of \(D^+\), and is thus more expensive than other phases. If Phase 2 successfully removes a lot of candidates from consideration, the cost of executing Phase 3 can be reduced. This solution framework can also be used to extract approximate PFIs, which will be revisited in Section 7.

The above discussion is formalized in Algorithm 2, which uses the databases \(D\) and \(d\), as well as the set of exact PFIs \(F^D\) collected from \(D\) (e.g., using the method of [6]). The output of uFUP is a set \(F^+\) of PFIs for \(D^+\), where \(F^+ = \{F^+_1, F^+_2, \ldots, F^+_k\}\), and \(F^+_k\) is the set of \(k\)-PFIs for \(D^+\).

Let \(C^+_k\) be a set of size-\(k\) candidates found from \(D^+\). Initially, \(k = 1\). Line 3 generates \(C^+_1\) (Phase 1). In the \(k\)th iteration (Lines 5-11), we first remove candidate item sets that cannot be \(k\)-PFIs, from \(C^+_k\) (Line 5; Phase 2). If \(C^+_k\) is not empty, we perform testing on these candidates, in order to find out the true \(k\)-PFIs (i.e., \(F^+_k\)), in Line 7 (Phase 3). Line 10 then generates size \((k+1)\)-candidate item sets by using the \(k\)-PFIs. The whole process is repeated until no more candidates are found. Line 12 returns the set of PFIs of different sizes.

#### Algorithm 2. uFUP

**Input:** \(D\), \(d\), \(F^D\), minsup, minprob

**Output:** Exact PFIs of \(D^+\): \(F^+ = \{F^+_1, F^+_2, \ldots, F^+_k\}\) // \(F^+_k\) is set of \(k\)-PFIs

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \text{begin} \\
2 & \quad F^+ = \emptyset; \\
3 & \quad C^+_1 \geq \text{GenerateSingleton}(d, F^D); \\
4 & \quad k = 1; \quad \text{while} \ |C^+_k| \neq 0 \text{ do} \\
5 & \quad \{C^+_k \geq \text{Prune}(d, F^+_k, \text{minsup})\}; \\
6 & \quad \text{if} \ |C^+_k| \neq 0 \text{ then} \\
7 & \quad \{F^+_k \leftarrow C^+_k \geq \text{Test}(D, d, F^D, \text{minsup}, \text{minprob})\}; \\
8 & \quad \text{else} \\
9 & \quad \quad \text{break;}; \\
10 & \quad \quad C^+_{k+1} \geq \text{GenerateCandidate}(F^+_k); \\
11 & \quad \quad k = k + 1; \\
12 & \quad \text{return} \ F^+ = \{F^+_1, F^+_2, \ldots, F^+_k\}\}; \\
13 & \text{end}
\end{align*}
\]
We next discuss the details of Phase 1, in Section 6.2. Then, Sections 6.3 and 6.4 present Phases 2 and 3, respectively. We discuss other issues of \texttt{uFUP} in Section 6.5.

### 6.2 Phase 1: Candidate Generation

We consider two cases of generating size-k candidate item sets in this phase: 1) \(k = 1\) and 2) \(k > 1\).

**Case 1:** \(k = 1\). We invoke \texttt{GenerateSingleton}, in Line 3 of Algorithm 2. This subroutine simply returns the union of all single items in \(d\) and the 1-PFIs of \(D\) (i.e., \(F_1^D\)), as the set of size-1 candidate item sets (\(C^*_1\)).

To understand why \texttt{GenerateSingleton} covers all possible size-1 candidates, first notice that if an item set is a 1-PFI in \(D\), it should naturally be considered as a candidate item set in \(D^+\). We then claim that it suffices to include all single items of \(d\) to \(C^*_1\), using the following lemma.

**Lemma 3.** Suppose item set \(I\) is not a PFI of \(D\). If \(I\) does not exist in any tuple of \(d\), \(I\) is not a PFI of \(D^+\).

**Proof.** Since \(I\) is not a PFI in \(D\), we have

\[
Pr^{D}_{\text{freq}}(I) = Pr[s^D(I) \geq \text{msc}(D)] < \text{minprob}. \tag{16}
\]

If \(I\) does not exist in \(d\), its s-pmf will not be changed in \(D^+\). Thus,

\[
Pr[s^D(\hat{I}) \geq \text{msc}(D')] = Pr[s^D(I) \geq \text{msc}(D)]. \tag{17}
\]

Moreover, since \(\text{msc}(D') \geq \text{msc}(D)\), we obtain

\[
Pr[s^D(I) \geq \text{msc}(D') \leq Pr[s^D(I) \geq \text{msc}(D)]. \tag{18}
\]

Using Inequalities 16, 18 and (17), we can deduce that \(Pr^{D}_{\text{freq}}(I) < \text{minprob}\). Thus, \(I\) cannot be a PFI in \(D^+\).

Using Lemma 3, if a singleton \(I\) is not a 1-PFI in \(D\), and does not appear in \(d\), \(I\) must not be a 1-PFI in \(D^+\). Thus, by including \(F_1^D\) and all singletons in \(d\) as members of \(C^*_1\), we will not miss any true size-1 candidate for \(D^+\).

**Case 2:** \(k > 1\). We use the typical \texttt{Apriori-gen} method [4] to generate size-\(k\) candidates from \((k-1)\)-PFIs. Particularly, subroutine \texttt{GenerateCandidate} (Line 10 in Algorithm 2) performs the following: for any two \((k-1)\)-PFIs, \(I\) and \(I'\), if there is only one item that differentiates \(I\) from \(I'\), a candidate item set \(I \cup I'\) is produced. Using Lemma 1 (antimonotonicity), we can easily show that \texttt{GenerateCandidate} produces all size-\(k\) candidates.

Next, we examine how some of the candidates generated in this phase can be pruned.

### 6.3 Phase 2: Candidate Pruning

The goal of this phase is to remove infrequent item sets from a set of size-\(k\) candidates. In Line 5 of Algorithm 2, \texttt{Prune} is used to remove item sets from \(C^*_k\). To understand how \texttt{Prune} works, we first present the following.

**Lemma 4.** Any item set \(I\) in \(D^+\) satisfies

\[
Pr[s^D(I) < \text{msc}(D')] \geq Pr[s^D(I) < \text{msc}(D)] \times Pr[s^d(I) \leq \text{msc}(d)]. \tag{19}
\]

This lemma, which relates the s-pmf of \(I\) in \(D^+\) to those in \(D\) and \(d\), is used to prove Lemma 5. The detailed proof of Lemma 4 can be found in Appendix B, available in the online supplemental material.

Let the number of tuples that contain \(I\) in \(d\) be \(cnt^d(I)\). We use the following lemma for candidate pruning.

**Lemma 5.** For any item set \(I \notin \text{F}^D\), if \(cnt^d(I) \leq \text{msc}(d)\), then \(I \notin \text{F}^+\).

**Proof.** Since \(I\) is not a PFI in \(D\), we have

\[
Pr[s^D(I) < \text{msc}(D)] > 1 - \text{minprob}. \tag{20}
\]

If \(cnt^d(I) \leq \text{msc}(d)\), then

\[
Pr[s^d(I) \leq \text{msc}(d)] = 1. \tag{21}
\]

Using Lemma 4, as well as (20) and (21), we have

\[
Pr[s^D(I) \geq \text{msc}(D')] = 1 - Pr[s^D(I) < \text{msc}(D')] \leq 1 - Pr[s^D(I) < \text{msc}(D)] \times Pr[s^d(I) \leq \text{msc}(d)] < 1 - (1 - \text{minprob}) = \text{minprob}.
\]

Thus, \(I\) is not a PFI in \(D^+\).

Given an item set \(I \in C^*_k\), \texttt{Prune} first checks if \(I\) is a frequent item set in \(D\) (i.e., \(I \in \text{F}^D\)). If this is false, and if \(cnt^d(I)\) does not exceed \(\text{msc}(d)\), then \(I\) cannot be a PFI in \(D^+\) (Lemma 5), and \(I\) can be pruned. Notice that \texttt{Prune} does not test \(I\) on \(D^+\), which can be expensive. Instead, it only computes \(cnt^d(I)\), which can be obtained by scanning \(d\) once. If \(n'\), the size of \(d\), is small, then getting \(cnt^d(I)\) incurs a low cost. In this phase, pruning an item set not in \(F^D\) costs \(O(n')\) times.

### 6.4 Phase 3: PFI Testing

Given a set of candidate item sets in \(C^*_k\) not pruned in Phase 2, the objective of this phase is to verify whether these candidates are really \(k\)-PFIs. In particular, the subroutine \texttt{Test} (Line 7, Algorithm 2) is invoked to compute the s-pmf of these item sets on \(D^+\). Once this is obtained, we can easily verify whether these candidates are true \(k\)-PFIs, as discussed in the previous sections.

Although the approach of [6] can be used to compute the s-pmf of an item set \(I\), this can be expensive, especially if the size of \(D^+\) is large. However, if we know that \(I\) is a PFI in \(D\), as well as its s-pmf in \(D\), it is possible to derive the s-pmf of \(I\) in \(D^+\) without computing it from scratch. The main idea is to modify the approach of [6], as outlined below: for every tuple \(t_j\) scanned from \(d\), we evaluate the probability \(Pr(I \subseteq t_j)\), and then use this to update the s-pmf of \(I\) through the use of the dynamic programming method in [6]. This process goes on, until all tuples in \(d\) are examined. Hence, the s-pmf of any item set \(I \in \text{F}^D\) can be obtained by scanning \(d\) once. This method is effective, since if \(I\) is a PFI of \(D\), it is highly likely that \(I\) will also be a PFI of \(D^+\). Although the time complexity of this phase is still upper bounded by the algorithm in [6] (i.e., \(O(n'^2)\)), its performance is practically improved, since the s-pmfs of some candidates can be obtained faster.
6.5 Discussions

The $uFUP$ algorithm supports both tuple and attribute uncertainty models. First, the solutions presented in Phases 1 and 2 are not designed for any specific uncertainty model. Second, Phase 3 computes the s-pmf of an item set $I$ by using the probability value $P_r(I \subseteq t_j)$. As explained before, this quantity can be obtained through (3) (for attribute uncertainty) and (4) (for tuple uncertainty). Hence, $uFUP$ can be used in both models.

Our experiments reveal that for mining exact PFIs on evolving data, $uFUP$ outperforms the algorithm mentioned in [6]. However, testing an item set in $uFUP$ still requires $O(n^2)$ time. Moreover, Phase 3 needs the s-pmf information of all PFIs found in $D$. Since storing a s-pmf needs a cost of $O(n)$, the space cost consumed by Phase 3 can be enormous if there are many PFIs in $D$. We next examine how these problems can be alleviated.

7 APPROXIMATE INCREMENTAL MINING

As discussed before, our model-based algorithm enables PFIs to be accurately and quickly discovered. We now investigate how to extend it to retrieve PFIs from evolving data. We call this extension the approximate uncertain Fast Update algorithm (or $uFUP_{app}$ in short).

The $uFUP_{app}$ algorithm adopts the framework of $uFUP$, as illustrated in Fig. 5. Algorithm 3 describes the details. In Line 3, the candidates in $C_1^+$ are generated (Phase 1). In Lines 5-7, the parameter values used for pruning are computed. (We will explain this later.) In the $k$th iteration (Lines 8-15), some candidates in the set $C_k^+$ are pruned (Phase 2; Line 9), while the remaining ones are tested (Phase 3; Line 11). In Line 14, size-$(k+1)$ candidates are generated by using the $k$-PFIs found. When no more candidates are left (Line 8), the algorithm outputs $F^+$, which contains PFIs of different sizes (Line 16).

Algorithm 3. $uFUP_{app}$

Input: $D$, $d$, $F_D^0$, $minsups$, $minprob$
Output: Approximate PFIs in $D$: $F^+ = \{F_1^+, F_2^+, \ldots, F_m^+\}$
begin
1. $F^+ = \emptyset$;
2. $C_1^+ = GenerateSingleton(d, F_D^0)$;
3. $k = 1$;
4. $\mu_m(D^+) = \text{MinExpSup}(minsups, minprob, D^+)$;
5. $\mu_m(D) = \text{MinExpSup}(minsups, minprob, D)$;
6. $\mu_m = \mu_m(D^+) - \mu_m(D)$;
while $|C_k^+| \neq 0$ do
7. if $|C_k^+| \neq 0$ then
8. $F_k^+ \leftarrow C_k^+.\text{Test}(D, d, F_D^0, \mu_m(D^+))$;
9. else
10. break;
11. $C_k^+ = GenerateCandidate(F_k^+)$;
12. $k = k + 1$;
13. return $F^+ = \{F_1^+, F_2^+, \ldots, F_m^+\}$;
end

Phase 1 of $uFUP_{app}$ is the same as that of $uFUP$; particularly, the details of GenerateSingleton and GenerateCandidate can be found in Section 6.2. In the rest of this section, we focus on Phase 2 (candidate pruning) and Phase 3 (PFI testing). Sections 7.1 and 7.2 present the details of these phases. We address other issues of $uFUP_{app}$ in Section 7.3.

7.1 Phase 2: Candidate Pruning

To facilitate our discussions, let $\mu^i(DB)$ be the expected value of random variable $X$ in $DB$, where $DB$ is any of the database $D$, $d$, or $D^+$. Also, let $\mu_m(DB)$ be a real value that satisfies (11) in $DB$. We first present the following theorem.

Theorem 3. Consider an item set $I$ that is not a PFI in $D$. Then $I$ is a PFI in $D^+$ only if $\mu^i(d) > \mu_m^i$ where $\mu_m = \mu_m(D^+) - \mu_m(D)$.

Proof. Since $I$ is not a PFI, we have $\mu^i(D) < \mu_m(D)$, i.e., $\mu_m(D) - \mu^i(D) > 0$.

From (9), we have

$$\mu^i(D^+) \geq \mu_m(D^+)$$
$$\mu^i(D) + \mu^i(d) \geq \mu_m + \mu_m(D)$$
$$\mu^i(d) - \mu_m \geq \mu_m(D) - \mu^i(D) > 0$$

Therefore, $\mu^i(d) > \mu_m$.

This theorem is used by Phase 2. In Algorithm 3, lines 5-7 compute the value of $\mu_m$. (The subroutine MinExpSup evaluates (11)). Then, in Line 9, subroutine Prune uses Theorem 3 to remove candidates that are not PFIs in $D$, and whose $\mu^i(d)$ values do not exceed $\mu_m$. Since Prune needs to scan $d$ once to obtain $\mu^i(d)$, the cost of pruning an item set is $O(n)$.

7.2 Phase 3: PFI Testing

The objective of this phase is to verify whether an item set in $C_k^+$ is a true $k$-PFI. In particular, subroutine Test (Line 11, Algorithm 3) is invoked to perform this task: for each item set $I$, it first computes $\mu^i(D^+)$. If this value is not less than $\mu_m(D^+)$, $I$ is judged to be a PFI of $D^+$. The rationale behind this process can be found in Section 5.1.

A simple way of computing $\mu^i(D^+)$ is to scan the tuples in $D^+$ once. This can be costly, if many candidates need to be tested. Similar to the Phase 3 of $uFUP$, it is possible to improve the performance of this process, by using the PFI information of $D$. Suppose we know the $\mu^i(D)$ value of an item set $I$, which is a PFI of $D$. We first evaluate $\mu^i(d)$, by scanning $d$ once. The value of $\mu^i(D^+)$ can be then obtained by adding these two values together (based on (22)). If $d$ is small, scanning tuples in $d$ is fast, and so computing $\mu^i(D^+)$ can be more efficient. In $uFUP_{app}$, we save the $\mu^i(D)$ values of all the PFIs discovered in $D$, so that they can later be used to derive PFIs for $D^+$.

7.3 Discussions

Since the model-based approach supports both tuple and attribute uncertainty (Section 4), the $uFUP_{app}$ algorithm, which adopts the model-based approach, can also be used in both data models. We also remark that $uFUP_{app}$ is generally faster than $uFUP$, since less time is needed to test
approximate PFIs than exact PFIs. Moreover, in Phase 3, while \( uFUP \) has to store the complete s-pmf for every PFI found from \( D \), \( uFUP_{app} \) only stores a single value, \( \mu^I (D) \), for every PFI \( I \). Hence, \( uFUP_{app} \) needs less space than \( uFUP \). Our experiments, described next, show that \( uFUP_{app} \) is highly efficient and accurate.

**Tuple deletion.** We now discuss briefly how tuple deletion can be handled in evolving databases. Suppose that a set of tuples \( \delta \subseteq D \) is removed from \( D \), resulting in database \( D^- \). Inspired by Cheung et al. [12], we notice that an analogy to Theorem 3 can be deduced, with a similar proof.

**Theorem 4.** Consider an item set \( I \) that is not a PFI in \( D \). Then, \( I \) is a PFI in \( D^- \) only if \( \mu^I (\delta) < \mu^I_m \), where \( \mu^I_m = \mu^I_m (D) - \mu^I_m (D^-) \).

This can be used to handle tuple deletions efficiently, in a way analogous to the application of Theorem 3 in algorithm \( uFUP_{app} \).

### 8 Results

We now present the experimental results on two data sets. The first one, called *accidents*, comes from the Frequent Item set Mining (FIMI) Data Set Repository. \(^1\) This data set is obtained from the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) for the region of Flanders (Belgium), for the period of 1991-2000. The data are obtained from the “Belgian Analysis Form for Traffic Accidents,” which are filled out by a police officer for each traffic accident occurring on a public road in Belgium. The data set contains 3,40,184 accident records, with a total of 572 attribute values. On average, each record has 45 attributes. We use the first 10k tuples as our default data set. The default value of \( \text{minsup} \) is 20 percent. To test the incremental mining algorithms, we use the first 10k tuples as the old database \( D \), and the subsequent tuples as the delta database \( d \). The default size of \( d \) is 5 percent of \( D \).

The second data set, called \( T10h4D100k \), is produced by the IBM data generator. \(^2\) The data set has a size \( n \) of 100k transactions. On average, each transaction has 10 items, and a frequent item set has four items. Since this data set is relatively sparse, we set \( \text{minsup} \) to 1 percent. For the experiments on incremental mining algorithms, we use the first 90k tuples as \( D \), and the remaining 10k tuples as \( d \).

For both data sets, we consider both attribute and tuple uncertainty models. For attribute uncertainty, the existential probability of each attribute is drawn from a Gaussian distribution with mean 0.5 and standard deviation 0.125. This same distribution is also used to characterize the existential probability of each tuple, for the tuple uncertainty model. The default value of \( \text{minprob} \) is 0.4. In the results presented, \( \text{minsup} \) is shown as a percentage of the data set size \( n \). Notice that when the values of \( \text{minsup} \) or \( \text{minprob} \) are large, no PFIs can be returned; we do not show the results for these values. Our experiments were carried out on the Windows XP operating system, on a machine with a 2.66 GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor and 2 GB memory. The programs were written in C and compiled with Microsoft Visual Studio 2008.

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#### Table 4

<table>
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<tr>
<th>( \text{minsup} )</th>
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<th>0.3</th>
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</table>

(a) Recall & Precision vs. \( \text{minsup} \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( \text{minprob} )</th>
<th>0.1</th>
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<th>0.9</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>0.985</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(b) Recall & Precision vs. \( \text{minprob} \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( n )</th>
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<th>4k</th>
<th>10k</th>
<th>50k</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>0.987</td>
<td>0.988</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

(c) Recall & Precision vs. \( n \)

<table>
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<th>0.25</th>
<th>( \sqrt{1/12} )</th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>1.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(d) Recall & Precision vs. Standard Deviation

---

We first present the results on the real data set. Section 8.1 describes the results for mining threshold-based PFIs for attribute-uncertain data. In Section 8.2, we present the results for incremental mining algorithms. We summarize the results for tuple-uncertain data and synthetic data, in Section 8.3.

#### 8.1 Results on Threshold-Based PFI Mining

We now compare the performance of three PFI mining algorithms mentioned in this paper: 1) \( \text{DP} \), the Apriori algorithm used in [6]; 2) \( \text{MB} \), the modified Apriori algorithm that employs the PFI testing method (Section 5.1); and 3) \( \text{MBP} \), the algorithm that uses the improved version of the PFI testing method (Section 5.2).

1. **Accuracy.** Since \( \text{MB} \) approximates s-pmf by a Poisson distribution, we first examine its accuracy with respect to \( \text{DP} \), which yields PFIs based on exact frequenst probabilities. Here, we use the standard recall and precision measures [7], which quantify the number of negatives and false positives. Specifically, let \( F_{DP} \) be the set of PFIs generated by \( \text{DP} \), and \( F_{MB} \) be the set of PFIs produced by \( \text{MB} \). The recall and the precision of \( \text{MB} \), relative to \( \text{DP} \), are defined as follows:

\[
\text{recall} = \frac{|F_{DP} \cap F_{MB}|}{|F_{DP}|},
\]

\[
\text{precision} = \frac{|F_{DP} \cap F_{MB}|}{|F_{MB}|}.
\]

In these formulas, both recall and precision have values between 0 and 1. Also, a higher value reflects a better accuracy.

Table 4 shows the recall and the precision of \( \text{MB} \), for a wide range of \( \text{minsup} \), \( n \), and \( \text{minprob} \) values. As we can see, the precision and recall values are always higher than 98 percent. Hence, the PFIs returned by \( \text{MB} \) are highly similar to those returned by \( \text{DP} \). Since \( \text{MBP} \) returns the same PFIs as \( \text{MB} \), it is also highly accurate.

2. **\( \text{MB} \)** versus \( \text{DP} \). Next, we compare the performance (in log scale) of \( \text{MB} \) and \( \text{DP} \), in Fig. 6a. Observe that \( \text{MB} \)'s about two orders of magnitude faster than \( \text{DP} \), over a wide range of \( \text{minsup} \). This is because \( \text{MB} \) does not compute exact
frequentness probabilities as \( \text{DP} \) does; instead, \( \text{MB} \) only computes the \( \mu^i \) values, which can be obtained faster. We also notice that the running times of both algorithms decrease with a higher minsup. This is explained by Fig. 6b, which shows that the number of PFIs generated by the two algorithms, |PFI|, decreases as minsup increases. Thus, the time required to compute the frequentness probabilities of these item sets decreases. We can also see that |PFI| is almost the same for the two algorithms, reflecting that the number of PFIs generated by the two algorithms is faster than \( \text{DP} \). We then examine the benefit of using the improved PFI testing method (\( \text{MBP} \)) over the basic one (\( \text{MB} \)). Fig. 7a shows that \( \text{MP} \) runs faster than \( \text{MB} \) over different minsup values. For instance, when minsup = 0.5, \( \text{MBP} \) addresses an improvement of 25 percent. Moreover, as minsup increases, the performance gap increases. This can be explained by Fig. 7b, which presents the fraction of the database scanned by the two algorithms. When minsup increases, \( \text{MBP} \) examines a smaller fraction of the database. For instance, at minsup = 0.5, \( \text{MBP} \) scans about 80 percent of the database. This reduces the I/O cost and the effort for interpreting the retrieved tuples. Thus, \( \text{MBP} \) performs better than \( \text{MB} \).

4. Scalability. Fig. 8a examines the scalability of the three algorithms. Both \( \text{MB} \) and \( \text{MBP} \) scale well with \( n \). The performance gap between \( \text{MBP} \) and \( \text{DP} \) also increases with \( n \). At \( n = 20 \), \( \text{MB} \) and \( \text{DP} \) need 0.62 and 657.7 seconds, respectively; at \( n = 100 \), \( \text{MB} \) finished in 3.1 seconds while \( \text{DP} \) spends 10 hours. Hence, the scalability of our approaches is better than that of \( \text{DP} \).

5. Existential probability. We also examine the effect of using different distributions to characterize an attribute's probability, in Fig. 8b. We use \( U_n \) to denote a uniform distribution, and \( G_i \) (\( i = 0, \ldots, 5 \)) to represent a Gaussian distribution. The details of these distributions are shown in Table 5. We observe that \( \text{MB} \) and \( \text{MBP} \) perform consistently better than \( \text{DP} \) over different distributions. All algorithms run comparatively slower on \( G_0 \). This is because \( G_0 \) has high mean (0.8) and low standard deviation (0.125), which generates high existential probability values. As a result, many candidates and PFIs are generated. Also note that \( G_3 \) and \( U_n \), which have the same mean and standard deviation, yield similar performance. Table 4d gives the accuracy for \( G_1, \ldots, G_5 \), which are Gaussian distributions with mean 0.5 and various standard deviations. We see that \( \text{MB} \) shows little variation in accuracy, which remains high (>98%), over the various distributions. We also found that the precision and recall of \( \text{MB} \) and \( \text{MBP} \) over these distributions are the same, and are close to 1. Hence, the PFIs retrieved by our methods closely resemble those returned by \( \text{DP} \).

8.2 Results on Incremental PFI Mining

We now examine the performance of our incremental mining algorithms on attribute-uncertain data. For these algorithms, we assume that the PFIs for the old database \( D \) have already been obtained by some PFI mining algorithm, which can be used to discover the PFIs for the new database \( D' \). We compare them with the nonincremental counterparts, \( \text{DP} \) and \( \text{MB} \). These algorithms are run directly on \( D' \) to obtain PFIs.

**Table 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( G_0 )</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( G_1 ) (default)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( G_3 )</td>
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<td>0.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>( G_5 )</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>( \sqrt{1/12} \approx 0.289 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( G_4 )</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( G_5 )</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( U_n )</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>( \sqrt{1/12} \approx 0.289 )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. **uFUP versus DP**. We first compare the performance of uFUP and DP. Notice that both methods produce exact threshold-based PFIs on $D^+$. Fig. 9a illustrates the result over different $\text{minsup}$ values. We observe that uFUP is faster than DP. For example, at $\text{minsup} = 0.2$, the improvement is 37.5 percent. This is because uFUP does not generate PFIs from scratch; instead, it uses the PFIs of $D$ to derive the new PFIs in $D^+$. Since most of the PFIs for $D$ and $D^+$ are similar, only a few candidates need to be tested. Fig. 9b shows the performance of these algorithms over different sizes of the delta database ($d$), from 1 to 10 percent of the size of $D$. Their running times increase with $d$, since more effort needs to be spent on retrieving candidates from $d$. As we can see, uFUP is consistently better than DP; for instance, when $n'$ is 5 percent of $n$, the improvement is 33 percent.

7. **uFUP app versus MB**. We next compare uFUP app and MB, which both yield approximate PFIs. Fig. 10a shows that uFUP app is faster than MB over different $\text{minsup}$ values. For instance, at $\text{minsup} = 0.2$, uFUP app finished in only 0.078 seconds, giving an almost fivefold improvement over that of MB, which completes in 0.378 seconds. As we can see in Fig. 10b, uFUP app outperforms MB over different sizes of $d$. Fig. 10c examines the algorithms under a wide range of $\text{minprob}$ values. Again, uFUP app runs faster than MB. Fig. 10d examines the effect of using different probability distributions on the attribute uncertainty model. The details are of these distributions are listed in Table 5. We can see that uFUP app performs better than MB over different types of distributions. The consistently high performance gain demonstrated by uFUP app can be explained by 1) the pruning method used by uFUP app removes many candidate item sets, so that only a few of them need to be tested; and 2) the old PFI results of $D$ are effectively used, so that the time for scanning $D^+$ is significantly reduced.

8. **uFUP app versus uFUP**. Fig. 11 compares uFUP app and uFUP over different values of $\text{minsup}$ and $n'/n$. We can see that uFUP app performs better than uFUP, by two to three orders of magnitude. This shows that our way of adapting MB to devise an incremental mining algorithm (uFUP app) is highly effective.

9. **Accuracy**. Table 6 compares the recall and precision of uFUP app relative to that of uFUP. Here, we use (23) and (24); in particular, DP and MB are substituted by uFUP app and uFUP, respectively. We can see that the recall and precision values are always higher than 98 percent. We have also compared the accuracies for different existential probability distributions given in Table 5 and found that the standard deviation of Gaussian distribution has little effect on the accuracy. Hence, uFUP app can accurately maintain PFIs for evolving data.

8.3 **Other Experiments**

We have also performed experiments on the tuple uncertainty model and the synthetic data set. Since they are similar to the results presented above, we only describe the most representative ones. For the accuracy aspect, the recall and precision values of approximate results on these data sets are still higher than 98 percent. Thus, our model-based approaches can return accurate results.

**Tuple uncertainty.** We compare the performance of DP, TODIS, MB, and MBP in Fig. 12a. Here, TODIS is proposed...

---

**TABLE 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$\text{minsup}$</th>
<th>0.1</th>
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<th>0.3</th>
<th>0.4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>0.998</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Recall & Precision vs. $\text{minsup}$

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<tr>
<th>$\text{minprob}$</th>
<th>0.1</th>
<th>0.3</th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>0.7</th>
<th>0.9</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>0.986</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Recall & Precision vs. $\text{minprob}$

<table>
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<tr>
<th>$n$</th>
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<th>10k</th>
<th>50k</th>
<th>100k</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.985</td>
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</table>

(c) Recall & Precision vs. $n$

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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(d) Recall & Precision vs. $n'$

---

![Fig. 9. Efficiency of uFUP versus DP.](image-url)

![Fig. 10. Efficiency of uFUP app versus MB.](image-url)

![Fig. 11. Efficiency of uFUP app versus uFUP.](image-url)

![Fig. 12. Efficiency of MB versus uFUP app.](image-url)
in [30], for retrieving exact threshold-based PFIs from tuple-uncertain data. We can see that both MB and MBP perform much better than DP and TODIS, under different minsup values. When minsup = 0.3, MB needs 1.6 seconds, but DP and TODIS complete in 581 and 81 seconds, respectively. Fig. 12b compares the algorithms under different sizes of d. Similar to the results for attribute uncertainty, uFUP (uFUP_app) performs better than DP (respectively MB). Moreover, uFUP_app outperforms uFUP by more than three orders of magnitude. Hence, our algorithms also work well for tuple-uncertain databases.

In [35], an algorithm for finding heavy hitters from probabilistic data streams was proposed. We develop a variant of that algorithm, which we call STREAM, as another exact incremental mining algorithm for finding 1-PFIs. Fig. 12c studies the performance of incremental mining algorithms for finding 1-PFIs. STREAM performs better than uFUP, because STREAM maintains the s-pmfs for all candidate 1-PFIs, which can be updated easily upon the arrival of new transactions. On the other hand, uFUP only keeps the s-pmfs of 1-PFIs of D. For new candidate PFIs that appear in D⁺ but not D, uFUP has to compute their s-pmfs by scanning D⁺, which can be costly. Observe that uFUP_app is much faster than STREAM, since it does not compute the exact s-pmf information. We further found that the 1-PFIs returned by uFUP_app are the same as those generated by STREAM. We remark that while STREAM only returns 1-PFIs, both uFUP and uFUP_app can generate PFIs of any size.

Therefore, we have designed STREAM+DP, which first finds 1-PFIs with STREAM and then feeds the 1-PFIs to DP to find all other PFIs. Fig. 12d shows that STREAM+DP is not as efficient as uFUP nor uFUP_app. The reason is that finding 1-PFIs constitutes only a small portion of time in finding all PFIs. Although STREAM performs well in finding 1-PFIs, having to find the remaining PFIs with DP makes STREAM+DP inefficient.

Synthetic data set. Finally, we test our algorithms on a synthetic data set. Fig. 13a compares the performance of MB, MBP, and DP, for the attribute uncertainty model. We found that MB and MBP outperform DP. Fig. 13b compares the performance of DP, MB, uFUP, and uFUP_app for tuple uncertainty. We can see that the incremental mining algorithms perform better than their nonincremental counterparts. We also observe that uFUP_app runs faster than uFUP, by more than one order of magnitude. Hence, our model-based incremental mining algorithm also works well for this data set.

9 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we propose a model-based approach to extract threshold-based PFIs from large uncertain databases. Its main idea is to approximate the s-pmf of a PFI by some common probability model, so that a PFI can be verified quickly. We also study two incremental mining algorithms for retrieving PFIs from evolving databases. Our experimental results show that these algorithms are highly efficient and accurate. They support both attribute- and tuple-uncertain data. We will examine how to use the model-based approach to develop other mining algorithms (e.g., clustering and classification) on uncertain data. It is also interesting to study efficient mining algorithms for handling tuple updates and deletion. Another interesting work is to investigate PFI mining algorithms for probability models that capture correlation among attributes and tuples.

REFERENCES

WANG ET AL.: EFFICIENT MINING OF FREQUENT ITEM SETS ON LARGE UNCERTAIN DATABASES


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