




AutoImpute: An Autonomous Web Tool for Data Imputation Based on Extremely Randomized Trees

Mustafa Alabadla¹^a, Fatimah Sidi^{1,*}^b, Iskandar Ishak¹^c, Hamidah Ibrahim¹^d,
Hazlina Hamdan¹^e, Shahril Iskandar Amir² and Appak Yessirkep Nurlankyzy³^f

¹Department of Computer Science, Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor D. E., Malaysia

²Infocomm Development Centre, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor D. E., Malaysia

³Department of Computer Science, Faculty of Information Technologies, L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan

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Abstract: Missing values is one of the main reasons that causes performance degradation, among other things. An inaccurate prediction might result from incorrect imputation of missing variables. A critical step in the study of healthcare information is the imputation of uncertain or missing data. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the development of software tools designed to assist machine learning users in completing their data sets prior to entering them into training algorithms. This study fills the gap by proposing an autonomous imputation application that uses the Extremely Randomised Trees Imputation method to impute mixed-type missing data. The proposed imputation tool provides public users the option to remotely impute their data sets using either of two modes: standard or autonomous. As pointed out in the experimental part, the proposed imputation tool performs better than traditional methods for imputation of missing data on various missing ratios and achieved accurate results for autonomous imputation.


1 INTRODUCTION


Machine learning is a fast-developing area of artificial intelligence that has grown in importance in recent years due to its capacity to analyse massive quantities of data and identify trends that humans would find difficult, if not impossible, to discern (M. I. Jordan & T. M. Mitchell, 2015). Machine learning algorithms' capacity to learn from data without being explicitly taught has made them a valuable tool in a variety of sectors, including healthcare, finance, marketing, and robotics (Gandomi & Haider, 2015). As a result, machine learning has emerged as an


essential driver of innovation, with the potential to change the way we live and work (Topol, 2019).


To increase the quality of training and testing data sets in machine learning applications, data editing and imputation approaches have been widely employed. Data editing is the process of identifying and correcting errors in data, whereas imputation is the process of replacing missing or incorrect data points with estimated values (Little & Rubin, 2019). These methods are particularly helpful for dealing with missing data, which is a prevalent problem in many machine learning applications (Schafer, 1999).


Imputation methods can be based on statistical models such as regression or decision trees, or on


^a <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7561-7978>

^b <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9556-9045>

^c <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8874-1417>

^d <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9900-0531>

^e <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1271-4257>

^f <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2168-7704>

* Corresponding author

machine learning algorithms such as k-nearest neighbours or deep learning (van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011). These methods have been found to improve the accuracy and reliability of machine learning models. As a result, there is an important drive to develop novel and accessible software solutions that enable machine learning users to easily fill in their datasets.

This study introduces AutoImpute (Autonomous Imputation), a web-based solution for addressing the missing data problem under different missing ratios. To efficiently predict missing data, the proposed web-tool AutoImpute embeds an ensemble supervised learning technique named Extra Trees, presented by (Geurts et al., 2006).

Thanks to its user-friendly online interface, AutoImpute is accessible to everyone, regardless of technical expertise. As a consequence, the end user may start a missing data imputation remotely and receive the results once the procedure is done. The outcomes of the imputation data technique for AutoImpute is presented on the web page and may be exported for the standard imputation. Few software tools exist in the literature for implementing missing data imputation processes. These include R packages as well as generalised machine learning tools like KEEL (Triguero et al., 2017).

However, unlike other literature software solutions, AutoImpute makes a missing data imputation technique open to a diverse scientific community by requiring no programming expertise or software installation. The effectiveness of the imputation technique, on the other hand, is demonstrated in an experimental session in which AutoImpute outperforms four software tools in handling missing data on a healthcare dataset.

This paper is organised as follows. The problem of missing values imputation is discussed in Section 2. The main part of the study is Section 3, which describes the architecture of AutoImpute. Section 4 reports on the experimental setup and results before concluding in Section 5.

2 MISSING VALUES PROBLEM

Missing data is a common challenge faced by machine learning practitioners when analyzing real-world data (Bertsimas et al., 2018). Missing data can occur for a variety of reasons, including incomplete replies, equipment failure, and attrition (Dhindsa et al., 2018). These problems can arise at any time and are often difficult to control. Missing values are unavoidable, even if a specific metric was performed

throughout the data collecting procedure. Moreover, failure to manage missing data correctly can result in biased estimates, reduced statistical power, and inaccurate conclusions, making it critical to treat the issue correctly (Groenwold & Dekkers, 2020).

The handling of missing data during data pre-processing has a substantial impact on the quality and reliability of data analysis. Imputation is a common data pre-processing approach that includes replacing missing or incorrect information with predicted values using various logical and statistical methodologies (AZUR et al., 2011). In principle, imputation allows researchers to make informed guesses to fill in gaps in the data, hence improving the dataset's accuracy and completeness (van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011). The aim of this study is to present a new machine learning-based technique that replaces missing values or inaccurate data automatically with an accurate approximation.

Rubin (1976) states that there are three basic mechanisms for missing values, each with a unique pattern of missing values. The first form is missing completely at random (MCAR); as the name implies, missing values in this type have no dependency and the likelihood of missing data is fully random. Because all missing data has no relationship to observed, unobserved, or even missing data, it almost never produces bias. The second form is missing at random (MAR), which shows that the missing values are connected to the observed data and that the missingness is determined by the available values. Both MCAR and MAR are useful for a variety of approaches, including multiple imputation and maximum likelihood (Gelman & Hill, 2010). The third and most difficult form is missing not at random (MNAR); in this mechanism, none of the other types are relevant, and assumptions must be made explicitly in order to grasp this process. This mechanism is divided into two parts: (1) missingness linked to unobserved predictors (MRUP), and (2) missingness related to missing value itself (MRMVI) (Ford, 1983).

Starting with this examination, AutoImpute aims to address the missing values in all scenarios having the highest accuracy at MAR mechanism where the missing values are related to observed values. However, in the experiment section, the missing values are artificially generated following the MCAR mechanism with different missing ratios.

3 THE IMPUTATION TOOL

AutoImpute is a web tool that provides standard and autonomous imputation of a given dataset without requiring any additional information from the user using Extra Trees from the ensemble machine learning. In standard imputation, the user uploads a dataset and initiates a new imputation via the application interface. The dataset is transferred to the backend, where the imputation process is run independently of the frontend. When the imputation process is complete, the backend returns the dataset to the frontend. The user will then be able to download the entire dataset through the application's graphical interface.

The autonomous imputation concept is to listen for any stream changes in the cloud dataset, particularly insert operations from users, and examine the inserted record for any missing values. If there are missing values in the entered record, the web-tool will attempt to impute them autonomously using Extra Trees method without user intervention. The imputed data is shown in real-time in the web application's graphical user interface. Furthermore, the user has the ability to start and stop the autonomous imputation at any time.

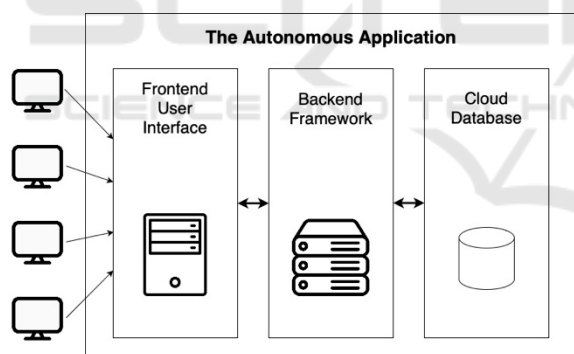


Figure 1: System Architecture of the Autonomous Application.

The autonomous application can be accessed by any web browser and the way it manages the imputation request is shown in Figure 1. In depth, the frontend layer was developed to provide the best user experience possible, and different browsers were also considered to assure the application's reliability across all platforms. As a result, users will be able to access the application using their favourite browser. The backend server handles requests sent by the frontend application. When a user uploads a dataset and clicks the Impute button, the dataset is sent to the backend server, where the Extra Trees algorithm is

applied to the incomplete dataset to estimate the missing values. Following the completion of the imputation process, the entire dataset is sent to the frontend, where the user can download it by clicking the Export to CSV button. Finally, the application system database is presented in the last layer, which is responsible for holding all the information connected to the users, imputation process, and outcomes that are required for assessment reasons. Following that, the main architecture layers of the autonomous application will be explained.

3.1 Frontend User Interface

AutoImpute is accessible at the following link: <https://autoimputex.upm.edu.my>. The main screen of the autonomous application is shown in Figure 2. As mentioned below, the suggested application is divided into many tabs that include various choices:

- Options: This tab provides certain settings that may be modified to enhance the imputation results, such as sampling process, feature scaling method, number of trees, optimal split strategy, training set and test set percentages;
- Description: This page shows details about the uploaded dataset, such as the number of features, the number of instances, the missing ratio, the type of data, the size of the data, and the file format;
- Advanced: This page has some additional options, such as a number of features field and a number of instances field, in case the user wants to choose certain rows or columns from the uploaded dataset. In addition, several performance indicators, such as NRMSE, MAE, Classification Accuracy, Precision, PFC, and F-score, are accessible for evaluation.

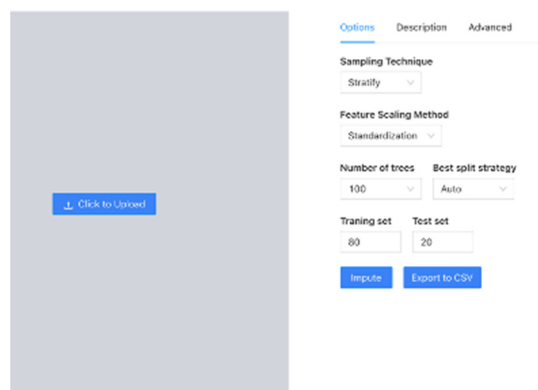


Figure 2: Standard Imputation Web Page Interface.

Once the dataset is uploaded in the autonomous web tool user interface, it will be saved in the local state waiting for the user to click on the impute button. After the imputation process is completed, the complete dataset will be available for download. On the other hand, the autonomous imputation web page provides a real-time imputation for each inserted record as shown in Figure 3. The results of the imputed records are shown in the web page interface and the user have the option to export the whole dataset as well. Records inserted are saved to a cloud database and the fields shown in Figure 3 accepts both numerical and categorical datatypes. Users have the ability to start the autonomous imputation to listen for inserted data and stop it at any time. Both the standard and autonomous web pages use the Extra Trees algorithm which is implemented in the backend for data imputation.

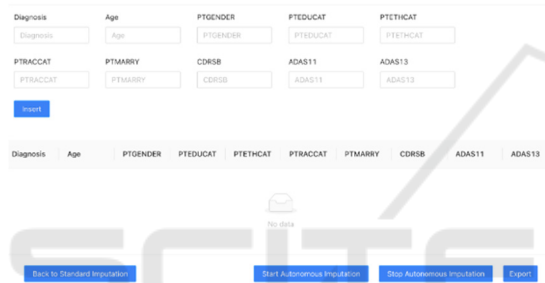


Figure 3: Autonomous Imputation Web Page Interface.

3.2 Backend Framework

The backend server receives the imputation request from the frontend and handles the missing values using the Extra Trees algorithm which is written in Python programming language. When a user uploads a dataset, the Autonomous Application's Impute button is enabled, and the imputation process involves the following steps:

- **Post Request:** The dataset is stored as a file once the user uploads it in the frontend application using the local state management. When the user hits the Impute button, an HTTP POST request is made to the backend with the stored dataset file. The backend server implemented by Flask Framework receives the dataset file, transforms it to readable csv format using Python tools, then delivers it to the Extra Trees algorithm for imputation;
- **Run Imputation:** The Extra Trees algorithm is represented by an imputation function, which accepts the dataset with missing values and predicts them using the most optimum options to provide the best outcomes. After imputation,

the entire dataset is returned to the API endpoint;

- **Deliver the Imputed Dataset:** Deliver the Imputed Dataset: When the API gets the entire dataset, it automatically returns it to the frontend application as a response. When the imputation process is complete, the user will be notified, and the file becomes ready to be saved in CSV format.

The cloud database model of AutoImpute is depicted as an Entity Relationship Diagram (ERD) in Figure 4. The autonomous application recognizes user uploads and the description of the dataset with missing values supplied to the system. This data is saved in the database for records, and each imputation attempt is stored in the imputation entity. As shown in Figure 4, the entity "dataset" provides a description of every submitted dataset. The imputation results are saved in the entity "results," which is linked to the dataset and the imputation entities.

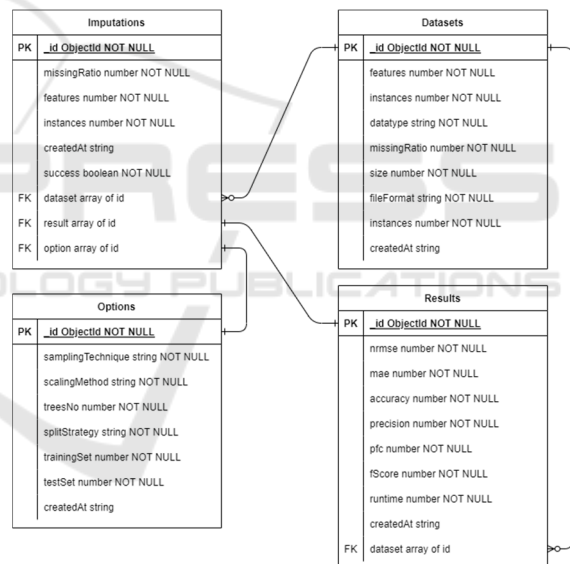


Figure 4: Entity-relationship Diagram of the Autonomous Application Cloud Database.

4 EXPERIMENTS AND RESULTS

AutoImpute allows researchers and data analysts from all domain fields to conduct data imputation on a dataset that includes missing values with ease and convenience using the graphical user interface. The AutoImpute algorithm was developed to handle any type of data even if it includes special characters that cannot be understood by machine learning models. In this section, the performance of AutoImpute web tool

using the Extra Trees is demonstrated using a set of experiments on a healthcare dataset. The proposed web tool is compared to existing software tools that have the data imputation feature such as the R software package, SPSS, Stata, and Microsoft Excel. Following that, more information about the experimental setup and results will be provided.

4.1 Experimental Set-up

The experiments conducted in this paper uses TADPOLE (The Alzheimer's Disease Prediction of Longitudinal Evolution) dataset acquired from the University of Southern California (<https://ida.loni.usc.edu>). The dataset includes 13,915 records and 99 attributes. However, from the TADPOLE dataset, a sample of 15 variables was chosen. This is consistent with the results of the experiment done by (Jabason et al., 2018). Table 1 shows a description of the features and their data type. Missing values are generated synthetically in order to evaluate the performance of data imputation for AutoImpute against existing imputation tools.

Table 1: Description of the dataset features.

Feature	Description	Data type
Diagnosis	Alzheimer disease diagnosis result	Categorical
AGE	Age at baseline	Numerical
PTGENDER	Patient's gender	Categorical
PTEDUCAT	Level of education	Numerical
PTETHCAT	Patient's ethnicity	Categorical
PTRACCAT	Patient's race	Categorical
PTMARRY	Marital status at baseline	Categorical
CDRSB	Clinical Dementia Rating scale Sum of Boxes	Numerical
ADAS11	The Alzheimer's Disease Assessment Scale-Cognitive Subscale	Numerical
ADAS13	Modified Alzheimer's Disease Assessment Scale-Cognitive Subscale	Numerical
ADASQ4	Task 4 of The Alzheimer's Disease Assessment Scale-Cognitive Subscale	Numerical
MMSE	Mini-Mental State Examination	Numerical
RAVLT_immediate	The Immediate Rey Auditory Verbal Learning Test	Numerical
RAVLT_learning	The Rey Auditory Verbal Learning Test	Numerical
RAVLT_forgetting	The Rey Auditory Verbal Learning Test for Forgetting	Numerical

The performance of AutoImpute and current imputation tools is calculated using Accuracy for classification and NRMSE for regression. The classification accuracy is calculated by dividing the total number of true positives and true negatives by the total number of cells in the dataset. Equation 1 shows the mathematical computation of Accuracy.

$$Accuracy = \frac{TP + TN}{(TP + FN + FP + TN)} \quad (1)$$

As indicated in Equation 2, NRMSE may be calculated by dividing the RMSE by the difference between the maximum and minimum values in the feature.

$$NRMSE = \frac{RMSE}{y_{max} - y_{min}} \quad (2)$$

The following is a list of selected imputation tools that have been tested and compared to the AutoImpute:

- R: R is a programming language and environment for statistical computation and graphics. It has various built-in methods for imputing missing data, notably the MICE package for multiple imputation;
- SPSS: SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is a statistical analysis software tool. It comes with a plethora of built-in functions for filling in missing information, including the MI process for multiple imputation;
- Stata: Stata (Statistical software for data science) is a data management and statistical analysis software tool. It has a number of built-in functions for filling in missing information, notably the MI command for multiple imputation;
- Microsoft Excel: Excel is a spreadsheet programme included in the Microsoft Office suite. It has a number of built-in functions for imputation of missing data, such as the AVERAGE and AVERAGEIF functions for mean imputation and the LINEST function for linear regression imputation.

The first experiment compares the standard imputation of AutoImpute to R, SPSS, Stata, and MS Excel using multiple imputation in each software programme. The imputation methods are applied to the dataset numerous times, each time with a different missing ratio varying from 10% to 90% with a step of

10, for a total of 10 runs in every scenario. Then, in addition to the execution time, the average of each performance metric for the ten runs is computed.

The second experiment aims to assess the performance of the autonomous imputation of AutoImpute in substituting missing values using data stored in the cloud database. Using the stream change listeners, the imputation process is carried out in real-time, with no user intervention required. The primary goal of these listeners is to detect changes in cloud databases, such as insert, update, and delete activities. AutoImpute looks for missing values then imputes them while maintaining the data format using various encoding strategies for each insert process. Missing values are intentionally produced using the MCAR method with a 10% missing ratio, and 300 entries from the dataset with missing values were inserted individually using AutoImpute user interface to test the autonomous imputation process. Table 2 presents the Pseudocode of the AutoImpute algorithm.

Table 2: Pseudocode of the AutoImpute algorithm for autonomous imputation.

Algorithm: AutoImpute algorithm	
1.	$C \leftarrow$ database collection to impute
2.	$D \leftarrow$ set of records fetched from C
3.	$I \leftarrow$ insert operation in C
4.	$NA \leftarrow$ missing value
5.	for I in C do
6.	if I document include “stop”
7.	break
8.	end if
9.	$L \leftarrow$ parse D to list
10.	$DF \leftarrow$ read L as a DataFrame
11.	replace ϵ with NA
12.	$D_{miss} \leftarrow$ filter NA records in D
13.	$D_{imp} \leftarrow$ impute NA in D_{miss}
14.	$ID_{miss} \leftarrow$ filter the id column in D_{miss}
15.	for ID in ID_{miss} do
16.	$R_{imp} \leftarrow D_{imp}[ID] = ID$
17.	drop $R_{imp}[ID]$
18.	update C set R_{imp} where $D[ID] = ID$
19.	end for
20.	end for

4.2 Results

Table 3 shows the average accuracy for the AutoImpute against existing imputation tools under different missing ratios on the TADPOLE dataset.

Table 3: Average accuracy of AutoImpute compared to current imputation tools at various missing ratios.

Missing Ratio	AutoImpute	R	SPSS	Stata	Excel
10%	0.984	0.982	0.958	0.972	0.962
20%	0.967	0.964	0.921	0.943	0.927
30%	0.945	0.934	0.877	0.746	0.884
40%	0.928	0.917	0.806	0.892	0.868
50%	0.901	0.886	0.762	0.724	0.830
60%	0.873	0.858	0.696	0.821	0.763
70%	0.842	0.825	NA	0.786	0.856
80%	0.620	0.598	NA	0.571	0.616
90%	0.782	0.735	NA	0.722	0.762

Table 4 presents the average NRMSE findings for datasets with varied missing ratios imputed by the most prevalent imputation tools compared to AutoImpute to investigate further in the evaluation of the predicted numerical missing values.

Table 4: Average NRMSE of AutoImpute compared to current imputation tools at various missing ratios.

Missing Ratio	AutoImpute	R	SPSS	Stata	Excel
10%	0.042	0.046	0.044	0.043	0.066
20%	0.064	0.066	0.065	0.067	0.101
30%	0.081	0.084	0.082	0.091	0.120
40%	0.095	0.099	0.096	0.096	0.096
50%	0.116	0.119	0.117	0.121	0.150
60%	0.139	0.146	0.142	0.141	0.166
70%	0.160	0.169	NA	0.165	0.184
80%	0.188	0.194	NA	0.191	0.199
90%	0.201	0.220	NA	0.233	0.227

The execution time of each imputation tool was determined for various missing ratios generated in the chosen dataset. Figure 5 shows the average runtime in seconds.

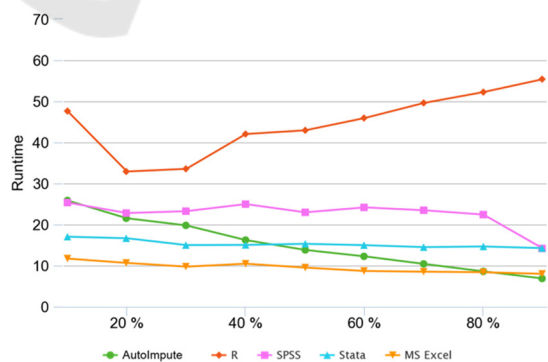


Figure 5: Average Runtime (in seconds) of AutoImpute compared to current imputation tools at various missing ratios.

According to the results, the standard imputation of AutoImpute outperformed all of the available

imputation software tools in terms of accuracy and NRMSE. As for the execution time of AutoImpute, it reduces as the missing proportion grows, eventually outperforming all known imputation techniques at 90%.

Figure 6 shows the classification accuracy for Diagnosis, PTGENDER, PTETHCAT, PTRACCAT, and PTMARRY when 50, 100, 150, 200, 250, and 300 records are inserted.

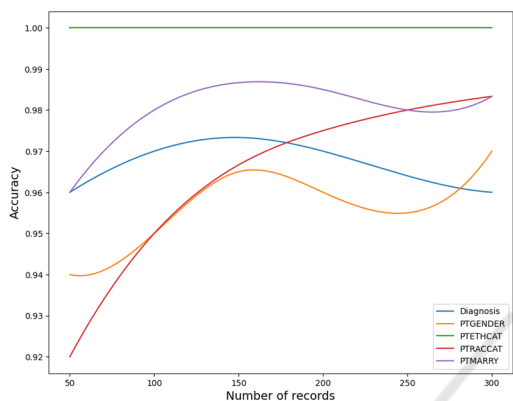


Figure 6: Accuracy on a range of records for each category characteristic.

As can be observed, for most categorical features when more records are inserted, the imputation accuracy increases. Additionally, numerous Q-Q plots are plotted to show the theoretical quantiles against ordered values on a diagonal fit line in order to evaluate the performance of numerical variables. The quantiles of the imputed values were compared to the quantiles of the actual values in Figure 7.

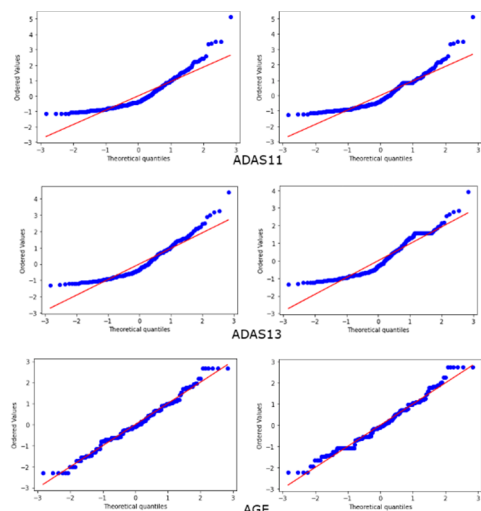


Figure 7: Q-Q Plot for the original and imputed data of ADAS11, ADAS13, and AGE features.

The results shows that the points of both plots for ADAS11, ADAS13, and AGE are on the diagonal line, with a minor variation between them. This means that the projected values are quite near to the actual values and not far from the diagonal line, indicating that the model is accurate.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper is to introduce an autonomous imputation application that works across different platforms and comes equipped with a user-friendly interface. This application is capable of imputing mixed-type missing values in two modes - the standard mode and the autonomous mode. In the standard mode, users can upload a dataset containing missing values and generate a complete dataset. On the other hand, the autonomous mode is designed to impute missing values in real-time, which are inserted into a cloud dataset. Based on the results of the performance experiments, it can be inferred that the proposed application has demonstrated superior performance compared to existing imputation software tools such as R package, SPSS, Stata, and MS Excel, with regard to accuracy, F-score, NRMSE, and MAE. Moreover, the autonomous application exhibited remarkable performance for both numerical and categorical features. These outcomes suggest that AutoImpute is a dependable imputation tool that is also easy to use.

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