

# Profiling Internet Backbone Traffic: Behavior Models and Applications

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## ABSTRACT

Recent spates of cyber-attacks and frequent emergence of applications affecting Internet traffic dynamics have made it imperative to develop effective techniques that can extract, and make sense of, significant communication patterns from Internet traffic data for use in network operations and security management. In this paper, we present a general methodology for building comprehensive behavior profiles of Internet backbone traffic in terms of communication patterns of end-hosts and services. Relying on data mining and information-theoretic techniques, the methodology consists of significant cluster extraction, automatic behavior classification and structural modeling for in-depth interpretive analyses. We validate the methodology using data sets from the core of the Internet. The results demonstrate that it indeed can identify common traffic profiles as well as anomalous behavior patterns that are of interest to network operators and security analysts.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

C.2.3 [Computer-Communication Networks]: Network Operations—*Network monitoring*

## General Terms

Algorithms, Measurement, Performance, Security

## Keywords

Behavior profiles, Traffic measurement, Network monitoring

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the Internet continues to grow in size and complexity, the challenge of effectively provisioning, managing and securing it has become inextricably linked to a deep understanding of Internet traffic. Although there has been significant progress in instrumenting data collection systems

for high-speed networks at the core of the Internet, developing a comprehensive understanding of the collected data remains a daunting task. This is due to the vast quantities of data, and the wide diversity of end-hosts, applications and services found in Internet traffic. While there exists an extensive body of prior work on traffic characterization on IP backbones – especially in terms of statistical properties (e.g., heavy-tail, self-similarity) for the purpose of network performance engineering, there has been very little attempt to build *general profiles* in terms of *behaviors*, i.e., communication patterns of end-hosts and services. The latter has become increasingly imperative and urgent in light of wide spread cyber attacks and the frequent emergence of disruptive applications that often rapidly alter the dynamics of network traffic, and sometimes bring down valuable Internet services. There is a pressing need for techniques that can extract underlying structures and significant communication patterns from Internet traffic data for use in network operations and security management.

The goal of this paper is to develop a general methodology for profiling Internet backbone traffic that i) not only automatically discovers significant behaviors of interest from massive traffic data, ii) but also provides a plausible interpretation of these behaviors to aid network operators in understanding and quickly identifying anomalous events of significance. This second aspect of our methodology is both important and necessary due to voluminous interesting events and limited human resources. For these purposes, we employ a combination of data mining and information-theoretic techniques to automatically cull useful information from largely unstructured data, and classify and build structural models to characterize host/service behaviors of similar patterns.

In our study we use packet header traces collected on Internet backbone links in a tier-1 ISP, which are aggregated into *flows* based on the well-known five-tuple - the source IP address (*srcIP*), destination IP address (*dstIP*), source port (*srcPrt*), destination port (*dstPrt*), and protocol fields. Since our goal is to profile traffic in terms of communication patterns, we start with the essential four-dimensional feature space consisting of *srcIP*, *dstIP*, *srcPrt* and *dstPrt*. Using this four-dimensional feature space, we extract clusters of significance along each dimension, where each cluster consists of flows with the same feature value (referred to as *cluster key*) in the said dimension. This leads to four collections of interesting clusters – *srcIP* clusters, *dstIP* clusters, *srcPrt* clusters, and *dstPrt* clusters. The first two represent

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a collection of host behaviors while the last two represent a collection of service behaviors. In extracting clusters of significance, instead of using a fixed threshold based on volume, we adopt an information-theoretic approach that culls interesting clusters based on the underlying feature value distribution (or *entropy*) in the fixed dimension. Intuitively, clusters with feature values (cluster keys) that are distinct in terms of distribution are considered significant and extracted; this process is repeated until the remaining clusters appear indistinguishable from each other. This yields a cluster extraction algorithm that automatically adapts to the traffic mix and the feature in consideration.

Given the extracted clusters along each dimension of the feature space, the second stage of our methodology is to discover “structures” among the clusters, and build common behavior models for traffic profiling. For this purpose, we first develop a behavior classification scheme based on observed similarities/dissimilarities in communication patterns (e.g., does a given source communicate with a single destination or with a multitude of destinations?). For every cluster, we compute an information-theoretic measure of the variability or *uncertainty* of each dimension except the (fixed) cluster key dimension, and use the resulting metrics to create *behavior classes*. We study the characteristics of these behavior classes over time as well as the dynamics of individual clusters, and demonstrate that the proposed classification scheme is robust and provides a natural basis for grouping together clusters of similar behavior patterns.

In the next step, we adopt ideas from structural modeling to develop the *dominant state analysis* technique for modeling and characterizing the interaction of features within a cluster. This leads to a compact “structural model” for each cluster based on *dominant states* that capture the most common or significant feature values and their interaction. The dominant state analysis serves two important purposes. First, it provides support for our behavior classification – we find that clusters within a behavior class have nearly identical forms of structural models. Second, it yields compact summaries of cluster information which provides interpretive value to network operators for explaining observed behavior, and may help in narrowing down the scope of a deeper investigation into specific clusters. In addition, we investigate additional features such as average flow sizes of clusters (in terms of both packet and byte counts) and their variabilities, and use them to further characterize similarities/dissimilarities among behavior classes and individual clusters.

We validate our approach using traffic data collected from a variety of links at the core of the Internet, and find that our approach indeed provides a robust and meaningful way of characterizing and interpreting cluster behavior. We show that several popular services and applications, as well as certain types of malicious activities, exhibit stable and distinctive behavior patterns in terms of the measures we formulate. The existence of such “typical” behavior patterns in traffic makes it possible to separate out a relatively small set of “atypical” clusters for further investigation. To this end, we present case studies highlighting a number of clusters with unusual characteristics that are identified by our profiling techniques, and demonstrate that these clusters exhibit malicious or unknown activities that are worth investigating further. Thus our technique can become a powerful tool for network operators and security analysts with ap-

plications to critical problems such as detecting anomalies or the spread of hitherto unknown security exploits, profiling unwanted traffic, tracking the growth of new services or applications, and so forth.

The contributions of this paper are summarized as follows:

- We present a novel adaptive threshold-based clustering approach for extracting significant clusters of interest based on the underlying traffic patterns.
- We introduce an information-theoretic behavior classification scheme that automatically groups clusters into classes with distinct behavior patterns.
- We develop structural modeling techniques for interpretive analyses of cluster behaviors.
- Applying our methodology to Internet backbone traffic, we identify canonical behavior profiles for capturing typical and common communication patterns, and demonstrate how they can be used to detect interesting, anomalous or atypical behaviors.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 1.1 briefly discusses the related work, and Section 2 provides some background. The adaptive-threshold clustering algorithm is presented in Section 3. In Section 4 we introduce the behavior classification and study its temporal characteristics. We present the dominant state analysis and additional feature exploration in Section 5, and apply our methodology for traffic profiling in Section 6. Section 7 concludes the paper.

## 1.1 Related Work

Most of the prior work has analyzed specific aspects of traffic or applied metrics that are deemed interesting *a priori* to identify significant network events of interest. For example, [1, 2] focus on efficient techniques for identifying “heavy-hitters” in one or several dimensions, and [3, 4] focus on identifying port scans. [5] studies the behavior of flash crowds, while [6, 7, 8] focus on analyzing worm and other exploit activities on the Internet. Research in [9, 10, 11] applies signal processing and statistical inference techniques for identifying traffic anomalies, mostly from the perspective of link-level traffic aggregate. Signature-based intrusion detection systems such as SNORT [12] or Bro [13] look for well-known signatures or patterns in network traffic, while several behavior-based anomaly detection systems (see, e.g., [14, 15] and references therein) have been developed using data mining techniques. In [16], information-theoretic measures are proposed for evaluating anomaly detection schemes.

Closer to our work, [17] focuses on resource consumption in network traffic, and develops a clustering algorithm that automatically discovers significant traffic patterns along one or multiple dimensions using fixed volume thresholds. The studies in [18, 19] focus on communication patterns or profiles of applications instead of broader network traffic. Concurrent with our work, [20, 21] are most similar in spirit, and in a sense are complementary, to ours. In [20], the authors study the “host behaviors” (communication patterns) at three levels, with the objective to classify traffic flows using packet header information only. Arguably, our entropy-based behavior classification and dominant state analysis provide a formal framework to analyze host behaviors at functional and application levels. As an extension to their

early work [9, 10], the authors in [21] also use entropy to characterize traffic feature distributions, with emphasis on detecting *network-wide* traffic anomalies at PoP-level OD (origin-destination) flows: the PCA-based subspace method is used to separate “anomalies” from “normal” traffic. In contrast, our objective is to build behavior profiles at host and service levels using traffic communication patterns without any presumption on what is normal or anomalous.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND DATASETS

Information essentially quantifies “the amount of uncertainty” contained in data [22]. Consider a random variable  $X$  that may take  $N_X$  discrete values. Suppose we randomly sample or observe  $X$  for  $m$  times, which induces an empirical probability distribution<sup>1</sup> on  $X$ ,  $p(x_i) = m_i/m$ ,  $x_i \in X$ , where  $m_i$  is the frequency or number of times we observe  $X$  taking the value  $x_i$ . The (empirical) *entropy* of  $X$  is then defined as

$$H(X) := - \sum_{x_i \in X} p(x_i) \log p(x_i) \quad (1)$$

where by convention  $0 \log 0 = 0$ .

Entropy measures the “observational variety” in the observed values of  $X$  [23]. Note that unobserved possibilities (due to  $0 \log 0 = 0$ ) do not enter the measure, and  $0 \leq H(X) \leq H_{max}(X) := \log \min\{N_X, m\}$ .  $H_{max}(X)$  is often referred to as the *maximum entropy* of (sampled)  $X$ , as  $2^{H_{max}(X)}$  is the maximum number of possible *unique* values (i.e., “maximum uncertainty”) that the observed  $X$  can take in  $m$  observations. Clearly  $H(X)$  is a function of the support size  $N_X$  and sample size  $m$ . Assuming that  $m \geq 2$  and  $N_X \geq 2$  (otherwise there is no “observational variety” to speak of), we define the *standardized entropy* below – referred to as *relative uncertainty* (RU) in this paper, as it provides an index of variety or uniformity regardless of the support or sample size:

$$RU(X) := \frac{H(X)}{H_{max}(X)} = \frac{H(X)}{\log \min\{N_X, m\}}. \quad (2)$$

Clearly, if  $RU(X) = 0$ , then all observations of  $X$  are of the same kind, i.e.,  $p(x) = 1$  for some  $x \in X$ ; thus observational variety is completely absent. More generally, let  $A$  denote the (sub)set of observed values in  $X$ , i.e.,  $p(x_i) > 0$  for  $x_i \in A$ . Suppose  $m \leq N_X$ . Then  $RU(X) = 1$  if and only if  $|A| = m$  and  $p(x_i) = 1/m$  for each  $x_i \in A$ . In other words, all observed values of  $X$  are different or *unique*, thus the observations have the highest degree of variety or uncertainty. Hence when  $m \leq N_X$ ,  $RU(X)$  provides a measure of “randomness” or “uniqueness” of the values that the observed  $X$  may take – this is what is mostly used in this paper, as in general  $m \ll N_X$ .

In the case of  $m > N_X$ ,  $RU(X) = 1$  if and only if  $m_i = m/N_X$ , thus  $p(x_i) = 1/N_X$  for  $x_i \in A = X$ , i.e., the observed values are *uniformly* distributed over  $X$ . In this case,  $RU(X)$  measures the degree of uniformity in the observed values of  $X$ . As a general measure of *uniformity* in the observed values of  $X$ , we consider the conditional entropy  $H(X|A)$  and *conditional relative uncertainty*  $RU(X|A)$  by conditioning  $X$  based on  $A$ . Then we have  $H(X|A) = H(X)$ ,  $H_{max}(X|A) = \log |A|$  and  $RU(X|A) =$

<sup>1</sup>With  $m \rightarrow \infty$ , the induced empirical distribution approaches the true distribution of  $X$ .

**Table 1: Multiple links used in our analysis.**

Link	Time	Util.	Duration	Packets	Trace size
$L_1$	01/28/2004	78 Mbps	24 hours	1.60 G	95 GB
$L_2$	01/28/2004	86 Mbps	24 hours	1.65 G	98 GB
$L_3$	02/06/2004	40 Mbps	3 hours	203 M	12 GB
$L_4$	02/06/2004	52 Mbps	3 hours	191 M	11 GB
$L_5$	04/07/2003	207 Mbps	3 hours	518 M	28 GB

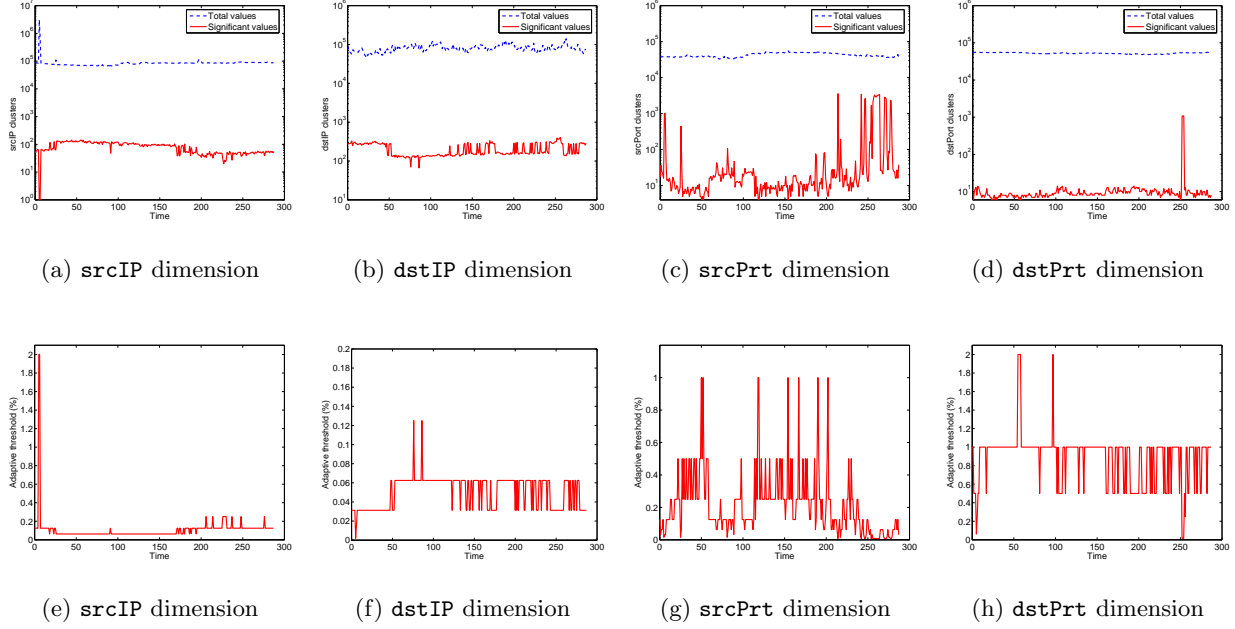
$H(X)/\log|A|$ . Hence  $RU(X|A) = 1$  if and only if  $p(x_i) = 1/|A|$  for every  $x_i \in A$ . In general,  $RU(X|A) \approx 1$  means that the observed values of  $X$  are closer to being uniformly distributed, thus less distinguishable from each other, whereas  $RU(X|A) \ll 1$  indicates that the distribution is more skewed, with a few values more frequently observed. This measure of uniformity is used in Section 3 for defining “significant clusters of interest”.

We conclude this section by providing a quick description of the datasets used in our study. The datasets consist of packet header (the first 44 bytes of each packet) traces collected from multiple links in a large ISP network at the core of the Internet (Table 1). For every 5-minute time slot, we aggregate packet header traces into *flows*, which is defined based on the well-known 5-tuple (i.e., the source IP address, destination IP address, source port number, destination port number, and protocol) with a timeout value of 60 seconds [24]. The 5-minute time slot is used as a trade-off between timeliness of traffic behavior profiling and the amount of data to be processed in each slot.

## 3. EXTRACTING SIGNIFICANT CLUSTERS

We start by focusing on each dimension of the four-feature space, **srcIP**, **dstIP**, **srcPrt**, or **dstPrt**, and extract “significant clusters of interest” along this dimension. The extracted **srcIP** and **dstIP** clusters yield a set of “interesting” host behaviors (communication patterns), while the **srcPrt** and **dstPrt** clusters yield a set of “interesting” service/port behaviors, reflecting the aggregate behaviors of individual hosts on the corresponding ports. In the following we introduce our definition of *significance/interestingness* using the (conditional) relative uncertainty measure.

Given one feature dimension  $X$  and a time interval  $T$ , let  $m$  be the total number of flows observed during the time interval, and  $A = \{a_1, \dots, a_n\}$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , be the set of distinct values (e.g., **srcIP**’s) in  $X$  that the observed flows take. Then the (induced) probability distribution  $\mathcal{P}_A$  on  $X$  is given by  $p_i := \mathcal{P}_A(a_i) = m_i/m$ , where  $m_i$  is the number of flows that take the value  $a_i$  (e.g., having the **srcIP**  $a_i$ ). Then the (conditional) relative uncertainty,  $RU(\mathcal{P}_A) := RU(X|A)$ , measures the degree of uniformity in the observed features  $A$ . If  $RU(\mathcal{P}_A)$  is close to 1, say,  $> \beta = 0.9$ , then the observed values are close to being uniformly distributed, and thus *nearly indistinguishable*. Otherwise, there are likely feature values in  $A$  that “stand out” from the rest. We say a subset  $S$  of  $A$  contains the *most significant* (thus “interesting”) values of  $A$  if  $S$  is the smallest subset of  $A$  such that i) the probability of any value in  $S$  is larger than those of the remaining values; and ii) the (conditional) probability distribution on the set of the remaining values,  $R := A - S$ , is close to being uniformly distributed, i.e.,  $RU(\mathcal{P}_R) := RU(X|R) > \beta$ . Intuitively,  $S$  contains the most significant feature values in  $A$ , while the remaining values are nearly indistinguishable from each other.



**Figure 1:** The total number of distinct values and significant clusters extracted from four feature dimensions of  $L_1$  over a one-day period (top row). The corresponding final cut-off threshold obtained by the information-based significant cluster extraction algorithm (bottom row).

To see what  $S$  contains, order the feature values of  $A$  based on their probabilities: let  $\hat{a}_1, \hat{a}_2, \dots, \hat{a}_n$  be such as  $\mathcal{P}_A(\hat{a}_1) \geq \mathcal{P}_A(\hat{a}_2) \geq \dots \geq \mathcal{P}_A(\hat{a}_n)$ . Then  $S = \{\hat{a}_1, \hat{a}_2, \dots, \hat{a}_{k-1}\}$  and  $R = A - S = \{\hat{a}_k, \hat{a}_{k+1}, \dots, \hat{a}_n\}$  where  $k$  is the smallest integer such that  $RU(\mathcal{P}_R) > \beta$ . Let  $\alpha^* = \hat{a}_{k-1}$ . Then  $\alpha^*$  is the largest “cut-off” threshold such that the (conditional) probability distribution on the set of remaining values  $R$  is close to being uniformly distributed.

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**Algorithm 1** Entropy-based Significant Cluster Extraction

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1: Parameters:  $\alpha := \alpha_0$ ;  $\beta := 0.9$ ;  $S := \emptyset$ ;
2: Initialization:  $S := \emptyset$ ;  $R := A$ ;  $k := 0$ ;
3: compute prob. dist.  $\mathcal{P}_R$  and its  $RU$   $\theta := RU(\mathcal{P}_R)$ ;
4: while  $\theta \leq \beta$  do
5:    $\alpha = \alpha \times 2^{-k}$ ;  $k++$ ;
6:   for each  $a_i \in R$  do
7:     if  $\mathcal{P}_A(a_i) \geq \alpha$  then
8:        $S := S \cup \{a_i\}$ ;  $R := R - \{a_i\}$ ;
9:     end if
10:  end for
11:  compute (cond.) prob. dist.  $\mathcal{P}_R$  and  $\theta := RU(\mathcal{P}_R)$ ;
12: end while

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Algorithm 1 presents an efficient *approximation* algorithm<sup>2</sup> (in pseudo-code) for extracting the significant clusters in  $S$  from  $A$  (thereby, the clusters of flows associated with the significant feature values). The algorithm starts with an appropriate initial value  $\alpha_0$  (e.g.,  $\alpha_0 = 2\%$ ), and searches for the optimal cut-off threshold  $\alpha^*$  from above via “exponential approximation” (reducing the threshold  $\alpha$  by an exponentially decreasing factor  $1/2^k$  at the  $k$ th step). As long as the relative uncertainty of the (conditional) probability dis-

tribution  $\mathcal{P}_R$  on the (remaining) feature set  $R$  is less than  $\beta$ , the algorithm examines each feature value in  $R$  and includes those whose probabilities exceed the threshold  $\alpha$  into the set  $S$  of significant feature values. The algorithm stops when the probability distribution of the remaining feature values is close to being uniformly distributed ( $> \beta = 0.9$ ). Let  $\hat{\alpha}^*$  be the final cut-off threshold (an approximation to  $\alpha^*$ ) obtained by the algorithm.

Our algorithm adaptively adjusts the “cut-off” threshold  $\hat{\alpha}^*$  based on the underlying feature value distributions to extract significant clusters. Fig. 1 presents the results we obtain by applying the algorithm to the 24-hour packet trace collected on  $L_1$ , where the significant clusters are extracted in every 5-minute time slot along each of the four feature dimensions. In the top row we plot both the total number of distinct feature values as well as the number of significant clusters extracted in each 5-minute slot over 24 hours for the four feature dimensions (note that the y-axis is in log scale). In the bottom row, we plot the corresponding final cut-off threshold obtained by the algorithm. We see that while the total number of distinct values along a given dimension may not fluctuate very much, the number of significant feature values (clusters) may vary dramatically, due to changes in the underlying feature value distributions. These changes result in different cut-off thresholds being used in extracting the significant feature values (clusters). In fact, the dramatic changes in the number of significant clusters (or equivalently, the cut-off threshold) also signifies major changes in the underlying traffic patterns.

To provide some specific numbers, consider the 15th time slot. There are a total of 89261 distinct **srcIP**’s, 79660 distinct **dstIP**’s, 49511 **srcPrt**’s and 50602 **dstPrt**’s. Our adaptive-threshold algorithm extracts 117 significant **srcIP**

<sup>2</sup>An efficient algorithm using binary search is also devised, but not used here.

clusters, 273 **dstIP** clusters, 8 **srcPrt** clusters and 12 **dstPrt** clusters, with the resulting cut-off threshold being 0.0625%, 0.03125%, 0.25% and 1%, respectively. We see that the number of significant clusters is far smaller than the number of feature values  $n$ , and that the cut-off thresholds  $\hat{\alpha}^*$  for the different feature dimensions also differ. This shows that *no* single *fixed* threshold would be adequate in the definition of “significant” behavior clusters.

## 4. CLUSTER BEHAVIOR CLASSIFICATION

In this section we introduce an *information-theoretic* approach to characterize the “behavior” of the significant clusters extracted using the algorithm in the previous section. We show that this leads to a natural behavior classification scheme that groups the clusters into classes with distinct behavior patterns.

### 4.1 Behavior Class Definition

Consider the set of, say, **srcIP**, clusters extracted from flows observed in a given time slot. The flows in each cluster share the same cluster *key*, i.e., the same **srcIP** address, while they can take any possible value along the other three “free” feature dimensions. Hence the flows in a cluster induce a probability distribution on each of the three “free” dimensions, and thus a *relative uncertainty* measure can be defined. For each cluster extracted along a fixed dimension, we use  $X$ ,  $Y$  and  $Z$  to denote its three “free” dimensions, using the convention listed in Table 2. Hence for a **srcIP** cluster,  $X$ ,  $Y$ , and  $Z$  denote the **srcPrt**, **dstPrt** and **dstIP** dimensions, respectively. This cluster can be characterized by an *RU vector*  $[RU_X, RU_Y, RU_Z]$ .

**Table 2: Convention of free dimension denotations.**

Cluster key	Free dimensions		
	X	Y	Z
<b>srcIP</b>	<b>srcPrt</b>	<b>dstPrt</b>	<b>dstIP</b>
<b>dstIP</b>	<b>srcPrt</b>	<b>dstPrt</b>	<b>srcIP</b>
<b>srcPrt</b>	<b>dstPrt</b>	<b>srcIP</b>	<b>dstIP</b>
<b>dstPrt</b>	<b>srcPrt</b>	<b>srcIP</b>	<b>dstIP</b>

In Fig. 2(a) we represent the RU vector of each **srcIP** cluster extracted in each 5-minute time slot over a 1-hour period from  $L_1$  as a point in a unit-length cube. We see that most points are “clustered” (in particular, along the axes), suggesting that there are certain common “behavior patterns” among them. Fig. 3 shows similar results using the **srcIP** clusters on four other links. This “clustering” effect can be explained by the “multi-modal” distribution of the relative uncertainty metrics along each of the three free dimensions of the clusters, as shown in Figs. 2(b), (c) and (d) where we plot the histogram (with a bin size of 0.1) of  $RU_X$ ,  $RU_Y$  and  $RU_Z$  of all the clusters on links  $L_1$  to  $L_5$  respectively. For each free dimension, the RU distribution of the clusters is multi-modal, with two strong modes (in particular, in the case of **srcPrt** and **dstPrt**) residing near the two ends, 0 and 1. Similar observations also hold for **dstIP**, **srcPrt** and **dstPrt** clusters extracted on these links.

As a *convenient* way to group together clusters of similar behaviors, we divide each RU dimension into three categories (assigned with a label): 0 (low), 1 (medium) and 2

(high), using the following criteria:

$$L(ru) = \begin{cases} 0(\text{low}), & \text{if } 0 \leq ru \leq \epsilon, \\ 1(\text{medium}), & \text{if } \epsilon < ru < 1 - \epsilon, \\ 2(\text{high}), & \text{if } 1 - \epsilon \leq ru \leq 1, \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

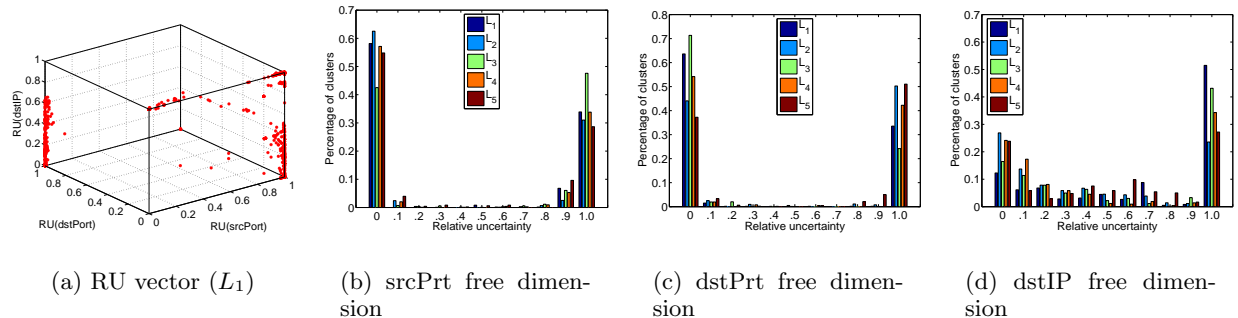
where for the **srcPrt** and **dstPrt** dimensions, we choose  $\epsilon = 0.2$ , while for the **srcIP** and **dstIP** dimensions,  $\epsilon = 0.3$ . This labelling process classifies clusters into 27 possible *behavior classes* ( $BC$  in short), each represented by a (label) vector  $[L(RU_X), L(RU_Y), L(RU_Z)] \in \{0, 1, 2\}^3$ . For ease of reference, we also treat  $[L(RU_X), L(RU_Y), L(RU_Z)]$  as an integer (in ternary representation)  $id = L(RU_X) \cdot 3^2 + L(RU_Y) \cdot 3 + L(RU_Z) \in \{0, 1, 2, \dots, 26\}$ , and refer to it as  $BC_{id}$ . Hence **srcIP**  $BC_6 = [0, 2, 0]$ , which intuitively characterizes the communicating behavior of a host using a single or a few **srcPrt**’s to talk with a single or a few **dstIP**’s on a larger number of **dstPrt**’s. We remark here that for clusters extracted using other *fixed* feature dimensions (e.g., **srcPrt**, **dstPrt** or **dstIP**), the BC labels and id’s have a different meaning and interpretation, as the free dimensions are different (see Table 2). We will explicitly refer to the BCs defined along each dimension as **srcIP** BCs, **dstIP** BCs, **srcPrt** BCs and **dstPrt** BCs. However, when there is no confusion, we will drop the prefix.

### 4.2 Temporal Properties of Behavior Classes

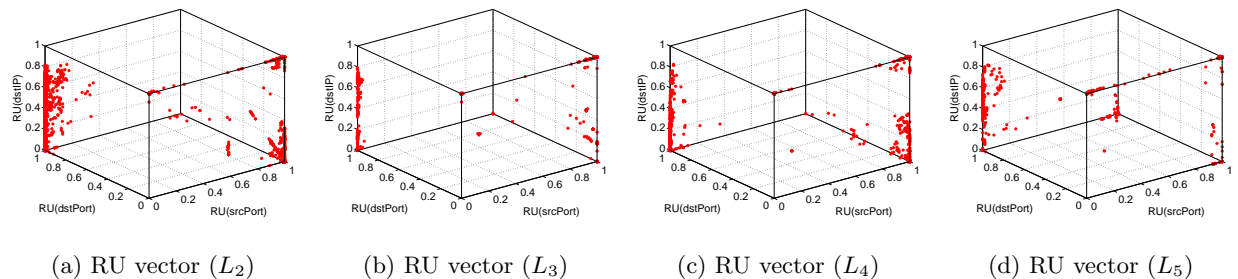
We now study the temporal properties of the behavior classes. We introduce three metrics to capture three different aspects of the characteristics of the BC’s over time: i) *popularity*: which is the number of times we observe a particular BC appearing (i.e., at least one cluster belonging to the BC is observed); ii) *average size*: which is the average number of clusters belonging to a given BC, whenever it is observed; and iii) *membership volatility*: which measures whether a given BC tends to contain the same clusters over time (i.e., the member clusters re-appear over time), or new clusters.

Formally, consider an observation period of  $T$  time slots. For each  $BC_i$ , let  $C_{ij}$  be the number of observed clusters that belong to  $BC_i$  in the time slot  $\tau_j$ ,  $j = 1, 2, \dots, T$ ,  $O_i$  the number of time slots that  $BC_i$  is observed, i.e.,  $O_i = |\{C_{ij} : C_{ij} > 0\}|$ , and  $U_i$  be the number of *unique clusters* belonging to  $BC_i$  over the entire observation period. Then the popularity of  $BC_i$  is defined as  $\Pi_i = O_i/T$ ; its average size  $\Sigma_i = \sum_{j=1}^T C_{ij}/O_i$ ; and its (membership) volatility  $\Psi_i = U_i/\sum_{j=1}^T C_{ij} = U_i/(\Pi_i O_i)$ . If a BC contains the same clusters in all time slots, i.e.,  $U_i = C_{ij}$ , for every  $j$  such that  $C_{ij} > 0$ , then  $\Psi_i = 0$ . In general, the closer  $\Psi_i$  is to 0, the less volatile the BC is. Note that the membership volatility metric is defined only for BC’s with relatively high frequency, e.g.,  $\Pi > 0.2$ , as otherwise it contains too few “samples” to be meaningful.

In Figs. 4(a), (b) and (c) we plot  $\Pi_i$ ,  $\Sigma_i$  and  $\Psi_i$  of the **srcIP** BC’s for the **srcIP** clusters extracted using link  $L_1$  over a 24-hour period, where each time slot is a 5-minute interval (i.e.,  $T = 288$ ). From Fig. 4(a) we see that 7 BC’s,  $BC_2 [0,0,2]$ ,  $BC_6 [0,2,0]$ ,  $BC_7 [0,2,1]$ ,  $BC_8 [0,2,2]$ ,  $BC_{18} [2,0,0]$ ,  $BC_{19} [2,0,1]$  and  $BC_{20} [2,0,2]$ , are most popular, occurring more than half of the time; while  $BC_{11} [2,0,2]$  and  $BC_{12} [2,1,0]$  and  $BC_{24} [2,2,1]$  have moderate popularity, occurring about one-third of the time. The remaining BC’s are either rare or not observed at all. Fig. 4(b) shows that



**Figure 2:** The distribution of relative uncertainty on free dimensions for srcIP clusters from  $L_1$  during a 1-hour period.



**Figure 3:** The distribution of relative uncertainty on free dimensions for srcIP clusters from  $L_{2,3,4,5}$  during a 1-hour period.

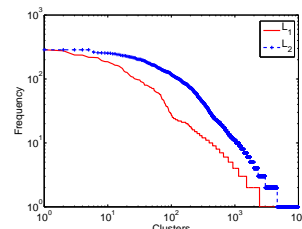
the five popular BC's,  $BC_2$ ,  $BC_6$ ,  $BC_7$ ,  $BC_{18}$ , and  $BC_{20}$ , have the largest (average) size, each having around 10 or more clusters; while the other two popular BC's,  $BC_8$  and  $BC_{19}$ , have four or fewer BC's on the average. The less popular BC's are all small, having at most one or two clusters on the average when they are observed. From Fig. 4(c), we see that the two popular  $BC_2$  and  $BC_{20}$  (and the less popular  $BC_{11}$ ,  $BC_{12}$  and  $BC_{24}$ ) are most volatile, while the other five popular BC's,  $BC_6$ ,  $BC_7$ ,  $BC_8$ ,  $BC_{18}$  and  $BC_{19}$  are much less volatile. To better illustrate the difference in the membership volatility of the 7 popular BC's, in Fig. 4(d) we plot  $U_i$  as a function of time, i.e.,  $U_i(t)$  is the total number of unique clusters belonging to  $BC_i$  up to time slot  $t$ . We see that for  $BC_2$  and  $BC_{20}$ , new clusters show up in nearly every time slot, while for  $BC_7$ ,  $BC_8$  and  $BC_{19}$ , the same clusters re-appear again and again. For  $BC_6$  and  $BC_{18}$ , new clusters show up gradually over time and they tend to re-occur, as evidenced by the tapering off of the curves and the large average size of these two BC's.

### 4.3 Behavior Dynamics of Individual Clusters

We now investigate the behavior characteristics of individual clusters over time. In particular, we are interested in understanding i) the relation between the *frequency* of a cluster (i.e., how often it is observed) and the behavior class(es) it appears in; and ii) the behavior *stability* of a cluster if it appears multiple times, namely, whether a cluster tends to re-appear in the same BC or different BC's?

We use the set of srcIP clusters extracted on links with the longest duration,  $L_1$  and  $L_2$ , over a 24-hour period as two representative examples to illustrate our findings. Fig.5 shows the frequency distribution of clusters in *log-log* scale,

where the x-axis is the cluster id ordered based on its frequency (the most frequent cluster first). The distribution is “heavy-tailed”: for example more than 90.3% (and 89.6%) clusters in  $L_1$  (and  $L_2$ ) occur fewer than 10 times, of which 47.1% (and 55.5%) occur only once; 0.6% (and 1.2%) occur more than 100 times. Moreover, the most frequent clusters all fall into the five popular but non-volatile BC's,  $BC_6$ ,  $BC_7$ ,  $BC_8$ ,  $BC_{18}$  and  $BC_{19}$ , while a predominant majority of the least frequent clusters belong to  $BC_2$  and  $BC_{20}$ . The medium-frequency clusters belong to a variety of BCs, with  $BC_2$  and  $BC_{20}$  again dominant.



**Figure 5:** Frequencies of all srcIP clusters on  $L_1$  and  $L_2$ .

Next, for those clusters that appear at least twice (2443 and 4639 srcIP clusters from link  $L_1$  and  $L_2$ , respectively), we investigate whether they tend to re-appear in the same BC or different BC's. We find that a predominant majority (nearly 95% on  $L_1$  and 96% on  $L_2$ ) stay in the same BC when they re-appear. Only a few (117 clusters on  $L_1$  and 337 on  $L_2$ ) appear in more than 1 BC. For instance, out of the 117 clusters on  $L_1$ , 104 appear in 2 BC's, 11 in 3 BC's and 1 in 5 BC's. We refer to these clusters as “multi-

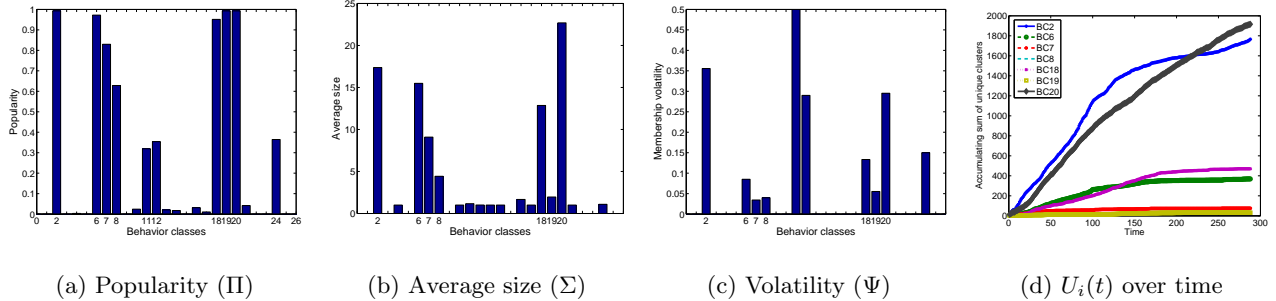


Figure 4: Temporal properties of srcIP BCs using srcIP clusters on  $L_1$  over a 24-hour period.

BC” clusters. We have performed an in-depth analysis on the “behavior transitions” of these “multi-BC” clusters in terms of their RU vectors (RUVs), the detail of which can be found in [25]. We find that most of the behavior transitions (i.e., a cluster from one BC to another BC) are between “neighboring” or “akin” BC’s (e.g., from  $BC_7$  to  $BC_8$ ), more a consequence of the choice of  $\epsilon$  in Eq.(3), rather than any significant behavioral changes. Only a very few (e.g., only 28 out of the 117 “multi-BC” clusters on  $L_1$ ) exhibit large “deviant” behavior transitions (e.g., from a BC to a “non-akin” BC) that are due to significant traffic pattern changes, and thus can be regarded as *unstable* clusters.

We conclude this section by commenting that our observations and results regarding the temporal properties of behavior classes and behavior dynamics of individual clusters hold not only for the srcIP clusters extracted on  $L_1$  but also on other dimensions and links we studied. Such results are included in [25]. In summary, our results demonstrate that the behavior classes defined by our RU-based behavior classification scheme manifest *distinct* temporal characteristics, as captured by the frequency, populonsness and volatility metrics. In addition, clusters (especially those frequent ones) in general evince consistent behaviors over time, with only a very few occasionally displaying unstable behaviors. In a nutshell, our RU-based behavior classification scheme inherently captures certain behavior similarity among (significant) clusters. This similarity is in essence measured by how varied (e.g., random or deterministic) the flows in a cluster assume feature values in the other three free dimensions. The resulting behavior classification is consistent and robust over time, capturing clusters with similar temporal characteristics.

## 5. STRUCTURAL MODELS

In this section we introduce the *dominant state analysis* technique for modeling and characterizing the interaction of features within a cluster. We also investigate additional features, such as average flow sizes of clusters and their variabilities for further characterizing similarities/dissimilarities among behavior classes and individual clusters. The dominant state analysis and additional feature inspection together provide plausible interpretation of cluster behavior.

### 5.1 Dominant State Analysis

Our dominant state analysis borrows ideas from structural modeling or reconstructability analysis in system the-

ory ([26, 27, 28]) as well as more recent graphical models in statistical learning theory [29]. The intuition behind our dominant state analysis is described below. Given a cluster, say a srcIP cluster, all flows in the cluster can be represented as a 4-tuple (ignoring the protocol field)  $\langle u, x_i, y_i, z_i \rangle$ , where the srcIP has a fixed value  $u$ , while the srcPrt ( $X$  dimension), dsrPrt ( $Y$  dimension) and dstIP ( $Z$  dimension) may take any legitimate values. Hence each flow in the cluster imposes a “constraint” on the three “free” dimensions  $X, Y$  and  $Z$ . Treating each dimension as a random variable, the flows in the cluster constrain how the random variables  $X, Y$  and  $Z$  “interact” or “depend” on each other, via the (induced) *joint* probability distribution  $\mathcal{P}(X, Y, Z)$ . The objective of dominant state analysis is to explore the interaction or dependence among the free dimensions by identifying “simpler” subsets of values or constraints (called *structural models* in the literature [26]) to represent or approximate the original data in their probability distribution. We refer to these subsets as *dominant states* of a cluster. Hence given the information about the dominant states, we can reproduce the original distribution with reasonable accuracy.

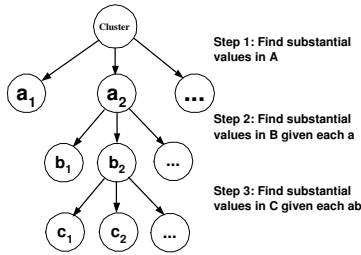
We use some examples to illustrate the basic ideas and usefulness of dominant state analysis. Suppose we have a srcIP cluster consisting mostly of scans (with a fixed srcPrt 220) to a large number of random destinations on dstPrt 6129. Then the values in the srcPrt, dstPrt and dstIP dimensions these flows take are of the form  $\langle 220, 6129, * \rangle$ , where  $*$  (wildcard) indicates random or arbitrary values. Clearly this cluster belongs to srcIP  $BC_2$   $[0, 0, 2]$ , and the cluster is dominated by the flows of the form  $\langle 220, 6129, * \rangle$ . Hence the dominant state of the cluster is  $\langle 220, 6129, * \rangle$ , which approximately represents the nature of the flows in the cluster, even though there might be a small fraction of flows with other states.

For want of space, in this paper we do not provide a formal treatment of the dominant state analysis. Instead in Fig. 6 we depict the general procedure we use to extract dominant states from a cluster. Let  $\{A, B, C\}$  be a re-ordering of the three free dimensions  $X, Y, Z$  of the cluster based on their RU values:  $A$  is the free dimension with the lowest RU,  $B$  the second lowest, and  $C$  the highest; in case of a tie,  $X$  always precedes  $Y$  or  $Z$ , and  $Y$  precedes  $Z$ . The dominant state analysis procedure starts by finding substantial values in the dimension  $A$  (step 1). A specific value  $a$  in the dimension  $A$  is substantial if the marginal probability  $p(a) := \sum_b \sum_c p(a, b, c) \geq \delta$ , where  $\delta$  is a threshold for selecting substantial values. If no such substantial value exists,

**Table 3: Dominant states for srcIP clusters on  $L_1$  in a 1-hour period:  $\delta = 0.2$ .**

srcIP BC's	No. of Clusters	Structural Models	Range of $\mu(PKT)$	Range of $CV(PKT)$	Range of $\mu(BT)$	Range of $CV(BT)$	Brief Comments	
$BC_2$ [0, 0, 2]	119	srcPrt( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ )	small	low	small	low	mostly ICMP or scanning traffic	
	114	srcPrt(0) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt(0) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\geq 99\%$	[1,2]	[0,1.6]	[72,92]	[0,8.9]	ICMP traffic	
	1	srcPrt(1026) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt(137) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\geq 100\%$	1	0	78	0	137: NetBIOS	
	3	srcPrt(1153) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt(1434) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\geq 98\%$	1	0	404	0	1434: MS SQL	
$BC_6$ [0, 2, 0]	16	srcPrt( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt( $\cdot$ )	large	high	large	high	server replying to a few hosts	
	2	srcPrt(25) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt( $\cdot$ )	[10,15]	[1041,2217]	[120,750]	[36,102]	25: Email	
	5	srcPrt(53) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt( $\cdot$ )	[1,5]	[8,6,78]	[160,380]	[111,328]	53: DNS	
	7	srcPrt(80) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt( $\cdot$ )	[3,31]	[460,1.2 * 10 <sup>4</sup> ]	[195,1.2 * 10 <sup>5</sup> ]	[16,1612]	80: Web	
$BC_7$ [0, 2, 1]	2	srcPrt(25) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt( $\cdot$ )	[14,35]	[1129,1381]	[2498,3167]	[190,640]	25: Email	
	17	srcPrt(80) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt( $\cdot$ )	[4,26]	[210,9146]	[671,1.0 * 10 <sup>4</sup> ]	[29,3210]	80: Web	
$BC_8$ [0, 2, 2]	7	srcPrt( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ (dstPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	large	high	large	high	server replying to large # of hosts	
	7	srcPrt(80) $\rightarrow$ (dstPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	[4,27]	[1282,1.1 * 10 <sup>4</sup> ]	[740, 1.5 * 10 <sup>4</sup> ]	[72, 598]	80: Web	
$BC_{18}$ [2, 0, 0]	10	dstPrt( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ ( $\cdot$ )dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ srcPrt( $\cdot$ )	medium	high	medium	high	host talking to a server on fixed dstPrt	
	3	dstPrt(53) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ srcPrt( $\cdot$ )	[2,5]	[32,1.5 * 10 <sup>9</sup> ]	[120,325]	[82,878]	53: DNS	
	7	dstPrt(80) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ srcPrt( $\cdot$ )	[3,18]	[26,6869]	[189,1728]	[87,5086]	80: Web	
$BC_{19}$ [2, 0, 1]	6	dstPrt( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ srcPrt( $\cdot$ )	medium	high	medium	high	host talking to multiple hosts on fixed dstPrt	
	2	dstPrt(53) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ srcPrt( $\cdot$ )	[2,6]	[28,875]	[116,380]	[112,456]	53: DNS	
	3	dstPrt(80) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ srcPrt( $\cdot$ )	[4,16]	[72,3356]	[220,2145]	[122,2124]	80: Web	
	1	dstPrt(7070) $\rightarrow$ dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ srcPrt( $\cdot$ )	5	462	288	261	7070: RealAudio	
$BC_{20}$ [2, 0, 2]	58	dstPrt( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	small	low	small	low	host talking to large # hosts on fixed dstPrt	
	44	dstPrt(135) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	[1,2]	[0,1.6]	[48,96]	[0,2.7]	135: Microsoft RPC	
	1	dstPrt(137) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	1	0	78	0	137: NETBIOS	
	2	dstPrt(139) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	3	0	144	0	139: NETBIOS	
	2	dstPrt(445) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	[1,3]	[0,2.2]	[48,144]	[0,3.6]	445: Microsoft-DS	
	1	dstPrt(593) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	1	0	48	0	593: http RPC	
	2	dstPrt(901) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	[1,2]	[0,1.6]	[48,96]	[0,3.9]	901: SMPNAMERES	
	3	dstPrt(3127) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	[1,3]	[0,1.8]	[48,144]	[0,2.9]	3127: myDoom worm	
	1	dstPrt(6129) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	1	0	40	0	6129: Dameware	
	1	dstPrt(17300) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	1	0	48	0	17300: unknown	
	1	dstPrt(34816) $\rightarrow$ (srcPrt( $\cdot$ ),dstIP( $\cdot$ ))	1	0.2	64	0.5	34816: unknown	
	$BC_{24}$ [2, 2, 0]	1	dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ srcPrt( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt( $\cdot$ )	-	-	-	-	two hosts chatting on random ports
		1	dstIP( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ srcPrt( $\cdot$ ) $\rightarrow$ dstPrt( $\cdot$ )	1	0	889	0	vertical scan

we stop. Otherwise, we proceed to step 2 and explore the “dependence” between the dimension  $A$  and dimension  $B$  by computing the conditional (marginal) probability of observing a value  $b_j$  in the dimension  $B$  given  $a_i$  in the dimension  $A$ :  $p(b_j|a_i) := \sum_c p(a_i, b_j, c)/p(a_i)$ . We find those substantial  $b_j$ 's such that  $p(b_j|a_i) \geq \delta$ . If no substantial value exists, the procedure stops. Otherwise, we proceed to step 3 compute the conditional probability,  $p(c_k|a_i, b_j)$ , for each  $a_i, b_j$  and find those substantial  $c_k$ 's, such that  $p(c_k|a_i, b_j) \geq \delta$ . The dominant state analysis procedure produces a set of dominate states of the following forms:  $(*, *, *)$  (i.e., no dominant states), or  $a_i \rightarrow (*, *)$  (by step 1),  $a_i \rightarrow b_j \rightarrow *$  (by step 2), or  $a_i \rightarrow b_j \rightarrow c_k$  (by step 3). The set of dominate states is an approximate summary of the flows in the cluster, and in a sense captures the “most information” of the cluster. In other words, the set of dominant states of a cluster provides a compact representation of the cluster.



**Figure 6: General procedure for dominant state analysis.**

We apply the dominant state analysis to the clusters of

four feature dimensions extracted on all links with varying  $\delta$  in  $[0.1, 0.3]$ . The results with various  $\delta$  are very similar, since the data is amenable to compact dominant state models. Table 3 (ignoring columns 4-7 for the moment, which we will discuss in the next subsection) shows dominant states of srcIP clusters extracted from link  $L_1$  over a 1-hour period using  $\delta = 0.2$ . For each BC, the first row gives the total number of clusters belonging to the BC during the 1-hour period (column 2) and the general or prevailing form of the structural models (column 3) for the clusters. The subsequent rows detail the specific structural models shared by subsets of clusters and their respective numbers. The notations  $\text{dstIP}(\cdot)$ ,  $\text{srcPrt}(\cdot \dots)$ , etc., indicate a specific value and multiple values (e.g., in  $\text{dstIP}$ ) that are omitted for clarity, and  $\geq 90\%$  denotes that the structural model captures at least 90% of the flows in the cluster (to avoid too much clutter in the table, this information is only shown for clusters in  $BC_2$ ). The last column provides brief comments on the likely nature of the flows the clusters contain, which will be analyzed in more depth in Section 6.

The results in the table demonstrate two main points. First, clusters within a BC have (nearly) identical forms of structural models; they differ only in specific values they take. For example,  $BC_2$  and  $BC_{20}$  consist mostly of hosts engaging in various scanning or worm activities using known exploits, while srcIP clusters in  $BC_6, BC_7$  and  $BC_8$  are servers providing well-known services. They further support our assertion that our RU-based behavior classification scheme automatically groups together clusters with similar behavior patterns, despite that the classification is done oblivious of specific feature values that flows in the clusters



take. Second, the structural model of a cluster presents a compact summary of its constituent flows by revealing the essential information about the cluster (substance feature values and interaction among the free dimensions). It in itself is useful, as it provides *interpretive value* to network operators for understanding the cluster behavior. These points also hold for clusters extracted from other dimensions [25].

## 5.2 Exploring Additional Cluster Features

We now investigate whether additional features (beyond the four basic features, `srcIP`, `dstIP`, `srcPrt` and `dstPrt`) can i) provide further affirmation of similarities among clusters within a BC, and in case of wide diversity, ii) be used to distinguish sub-classes of behaviors within a BC. Examples of additional features we consider are cluster sizes (defined in total flow, packet and byte counts), average packet/byte count per flow within a cluster and their variability, etc. In the following we illustrate the results of additional feature exploration using the average flow sizes per cluster and their variability.

For each flow  $f_i$ ,  $1 \leq i \leq m$ , in a cluster, let  $PKT_i$  and  $BT_i$  denote the number of packets and bytes respectively in the flow. Compute the average number of packets and bytes for the cluster,  $\mu(PKT) = \sum_i PKT_i/m$ ,  $\mu(BT) = \sum_i BT_i/m$ . We also measure the flow size variability in packets and bytes using *coefficient of variance*,  $CV(PKT) = \sigma(PKT)/\mu(PKT)$  and  $CV(BT) = \sigma(BT)/\mu(BT)$ , where  $\sigma(PKT)$  and  $\sigma(BT)$  are the standard deviation of  $PKT_i$  and  $BT_i$ .

In Table 3, columns 4-7, we present the ranges of  $\mu(PKT)$ ,  $CV(PKT)$ ,  $\mu(BT)$  and  $CV(BT)$  of subsets of clusters with the similar dominant states, using the 1-hour `srcIP` clusters on  $L_1$ . Columns 4-7 in the top row of each BC are high-level summaries for clusters within a BC (if it contains more than one cluster): small, medium or large average packet/byte count, and low or high variability. We see that for clusters within  $BC_6$ ,  $BC_7$ ,  $BC_8$  and  $BC_{18}$ ,  $BC_{19}$ , the average flow size in packets and bytes are at least 5 packets and 320 bytes, and their variabilities ( $CV(PKT)$  and  $CV(BT)$ ) are fairly high. In contrast, clusters in  $BC_2$  and  $BC_{20}$  have small average flow size with low variability, suggesting most of the flows contain a singleton packet with a small payload. The same can be said of most of the less popular and rare BCs.

Finally, Figs. 7(a)(b)(c)(d) show the average cluster sizes<sup>3</sup> in flow, packet and byte counts for all the unique clusters from the dataset  $L_1$  within four different groups of BC’s (the reason for the grouping will be clear in the next section):  $\{BC_6, BC_7, BC_8\}$ ,  $\{BC_{18}, BC_{19}\}$ ,  $\{BC_2, BC_{20}\}$ , and the fourth group containing the remaining less popular BC’s. Clearly, the characteristics of the cluster sizes of the first two BC groups are quite different from those of the second two BC groups. We will touch on these differences further in the next section. To conclude, our results demonstrate that BC’s with distinct behaviors (e.g., non-akin BC’s) often also manifest dissimilarities in other features. Clusters within a BC may also exhibit some diversity in additional features, but in general the intra-BC differences are much less pronounced than inter-BC differences.

<sup>3</sup>We compute the average cluster size for clusters appearing twice or more.

## 6. APPLICATIONS

We apply our methodology to obtain general profiles of the Internet backbone traffic based on the datasets listed in Table 1. We find that a large majority of the (significant) clusters fall into three “canonical” profiles: typical *server/service behavior* (mostly providing well-known services), typical “*heavy-hitter*” *host behavior* (predominantly associated with well-known services) and typical *scan/exploit behavior* (frequently manifested by hosts infected with known worms). The canonical behavior profiles are characterized along the following four key aspects: (i) BCs they belong to and their properties, (ii) temporal characteristics (frequency and stability) of individual clusters, (iii) dominant states, and (iv) additional attributes such as average flow size in terms of packet and byte counts and their variabilities.

Clusters with behaviors that differ in one or more aspects of the three canonical profiles automatically present themselves as more interesting, thus warrant closer examination. Generally speaking, there are two types of *interesting* or *anomalous* behaviors we find using our behavior profiling methodology: i) novel or unknown behaviors that match the typical server/service profile, heavy-hitter host profile, or scan/exploit profile, but exhibit *unusual* feature values, as revealed by analyses of their dominant states; and ii) deviant or abnormal behaviors that deviate significantly from the canonical profiles in terms of BCs (e.g., clusters belonging to rare BCs), temporal instability (e.g., unstable clusters that jump between different BCs), or additional features.

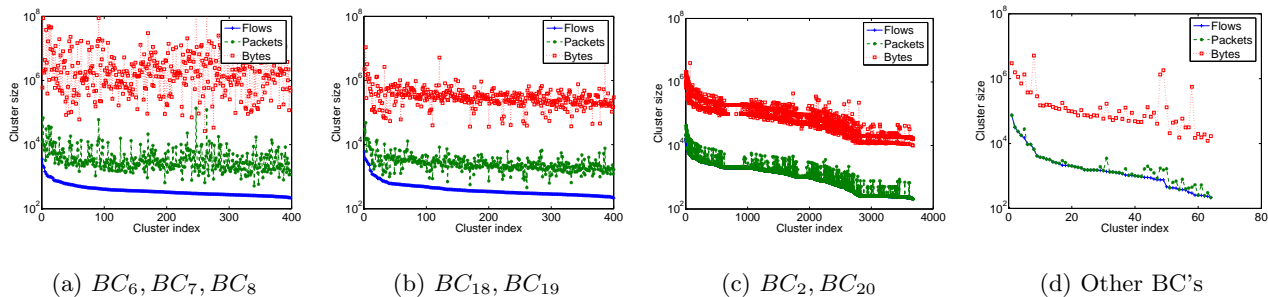
### 6.1 Server/Service Behavior Profile

Table 4: Three canonical behavior profiles.

Profile	Dimension	BCs	Examples
Servers or Services	<code>srcIP</code>	$BC_{6,7,8}$	web, DNS, email
	<code>dstIP</code>	$BC_{18,19,20}$	
	<code>srcPrt</code>	$BC_{23}$	aggregate service traffic
	<code>dstPrt</code>	$BC_{25}$	
Heavy Hitter Hosts	<code>srcIP</code>	$BC_{18,19}$	NAT boxes
	<code>dstIP</code>	$BC_{6,7}$	web proxies, crawlers
Scans or Exploits	<code>srcIP</code>	$BC_{2,20}$	scanners, exploits
	<code>dstIP</code>	$BC_{2,8}$	scan targets
	<code>dstPrt</code>	$BC_{2,5,20,23}$	aggregate exploit traffic

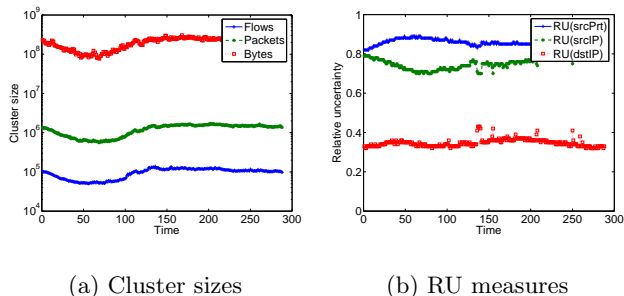
As shown in Table 4, a typical server providing a well-known service shows up in either the popular, large and non-volatile `srcIP`  $BC_6$  [0,2,0],  $BC_7$  [0,2,1] and  $BC_8$  [0,2,2], or `dstIP`  $BC_{18}$  [2,0,0],  $BC_{19}$  [2,0,1] and  $BC_{20}$  [2,0,2] (note the symmetry between the `srcIP` and `dstIP` BCs, with the first two labels (`srcPrt` and `dstPrt`) swapped). These BCs represent the behavior patterns of a server communicating with a few, many or a large number of hosts. In terms of their temporal characteristics, the individual clusters associated with servers/well-known services tend to have a relatively high frequency, and almost all of them are stable, re-appearing in the same or akin BCs. The average flow size (in both packet and byte counts) of the clusters shows high variability, namely, each cluster typically consists of flows of different sizes.

Looking from the `srcPrt` and `dstPrt` perspectives, the clusters associated with the well-known service ports almost always belong to the same BC’s, e.g., either `srcPrt`  $BC_{23}$  [2,1,2] or `dstPrt`  $BC_{25}$  [2,2,1], representing the aggregate behavior of a (relatively smaller) number of servers communicating with a much larger number of clients on a specific



**Figure 7:** Average cluster size (in flow, packet and byte count) distributions for clusters within four groups of BC's for srcIP clusters on  $L_1$ . Note that in (c) and (d), the lines of flow count and packet count are indistinguishable, since most flows in the clusters contain a singleton packet.

well-know service port. For example, Fig. 8(a) plots the *cluster* sizes (in flow, packet and byte counts) of the *dstPrt* TCP 80 cluster (representing aggregate behavior of all web servers) over the 24-hour period, whereas in Fig. 8(b) we plot the corresponding  $RU_{srcPrt}$ ,  $RU_{srcIP}$  and  $RU_{dstIP}$  of its three free dimensions over time. We see that the *dstPrt* TCP port 80 cluster is highly persistent, observed in every time slot over the 24-hour period, with the number of srcIP's (web servers) fairly stable over time. The cluster size over time shows a diurnal pattern, but otherwise does not fluctuate dramatically. In addition, the packet and byte counts of the cluster are considerably larger than the total number of flows, indicating that on the average each flow contains at least several packets and a few hundred bytes.



**Figure 8:** Cluster sizes (in flow, packet and byte counts) and RU measures of the *dstPrt* 80 cluster (aggregate web traffic) on  $L_1$  over time.

An overwhelming majority of the srcIP clusters in  $BC_{6,7,8}$  are corresponding to Web, DNS or Email servers. They share very similar behavior characteristics, belonging to the same BC's, stable with relatively high frequency, and containing flows with diverse packet/byte counts. Among the remaining clusters, most are associated with http-alternative services (e.g., 8080), https(443), real audio/video servers (7070), IRC servers (6667), and peer-to-peer (P2P) servers (4662). Most interestingly, we find three srcIP clusters with service ports 56192, 56193 and 60638. They share similar characteristics with web servers, having a frequency of 12, 9 and 22 respectively, and with diverse flow sizes both in packet and byte counts. These observations suggest that

they are likely servers running on unusual high ports. Hence, these cases represent examples of “novel” service behaviors that our profiling methodology is able to uncover.

## 6.2 Heavy Hitter Host Behavior Profile

The second canonical behavior profile is what we call the *heavy-hitter* host profile, which represents hosts (typically clients) that send a large number of flows to a single or a few other hosts (typically servers) in a short period of time (e.g., a 5-minute period). They belong to either the popular and non-volatile srcIP  $BC_{18}$  [2,0,0] or  $BC_{19}$  [2,0,1], or the dstIP  $BC_6$  [0,2,0] and  $BC_7$  [0,2,1]. The frequency of individual clusters is varied, with a majority of them having medium frequency, and almost all of them are stable. These heavy-hitter clusters are typically associated with well-known service ports (as revealed by the dominant state analysis), and contain flows with highly diverse packet and byte counts. Many of the heavy-hitter hosts are corresponding to NAT boxes (many clients behind a NAT box making requests to a few popular web sites, making the NAT box a heavy hitter), web proxies, cache servers or web crawlers.

For example, we find that 392 and 429 unique srcIP clusters from datasets  $L_1$  and  $L_2$  belong to  $BC_{18}$  and  $BC_{19}$ . Nearly 80% of these heavy hitters occur in at least 5 time slots, exhibiting consistent behavior over time. The most frequent ports used by these hosts are TCP port 80 (70%), UDP port 53 (15%), TCP port 443 (10%), and TCP port 1080(3%). However, there are heavy-hitters associated with other rarer ports. In one case, we found one srcIP cluster from a large corporation talking to one dstIP on TCP port 7070 (RealAudio) generating flows of varied packet and byte counts. It also has a frequency of 11. Deeper inspection reveals this is a legitimate proxy, talking to an Audio server. In another case, we found one srcIP cluster talking to many dstIP hosts on TCP port 6346 (Gnutella P2P file sharing port), with flows of diverse packet and byte counts. This host is thus likely a heavy file downloader. These results suggest that the profiles for heavy-hitter hosts could be used to identify these unusual heavy-hitters.

## 6.3 Scan/Exploit Profile

Behaviors of hosts performing scans or attempting to spread worms or other exploits constitute the third canonical profile. Two telling signs of typical scan/exploit behavior [30] are i) the clusters tend to be highly volatile, appearing and

disappearing quickly, and ii) most flows in the clusters contain one or two packets with fixed size, albeit occasionally they may contain three or more packets (e.g., when performing OS fingerprinting or other reconnaissance activities). For example, we observe that most of the flows using TCP protocol in these clusters are failed TCP connections on well-known exploit ports. In addition, most flows using UDP protocol or ICMP protocol have a fixed packet size that matches widely known signature of exploit activities, e.g., UDP packets with 376 bytes to destination port 1434 (Slammer Worm), ICMP packets with 92 bytes (ICMP ping probes). These findings provide additional evidence to confirm that such clusters are likely associated with scanning or exploit activities.

A disproportionately large majority of extracted clusters fall into this category, many of which are among the top in terms of flow counts (but in general not in byte counts, cf. Fig. 7). Such prevalent behavior signifies the severity of worm/exploit spread and the magnitude of infected hosts (cf. [7, 8]). On the plus side, however, these hosts manifest distinct behavior that is clearly separable from the server/service or heavy hitter host profiles: the `srcIP` clusters (a large majority) belong to  $BC_2$  [0,0,2] and  $BC_{20}$  [2,0,2], corresponding to hosts performing scan or spreading exploits to random `dstIP` hosts on a fixed `dstPrt` using either fixed or random `srcPrt`'s; the `dstIP` clusters (a smaller number) belong to  $BC_2$  [0,0,2] and  $BC_8$  [0,2,2], reflecting hosts (victims of a large number of scanners or attacks) responding to probes on a targeted `srcPrt`. Using specific `dstPrt`'s that are targets of known exploits, e.g., 1434 (used by SQL Slammer), the aggregate traffic behavior of exploits is also evidently different from that of normal service traffic behavior (e.g., web): the `dstPrt` clusters typically belong to  $BC_{23}$  [2,1,2], but sometimes to  $BC_2$  [0,0,2],  $BC_5$  [0,1,2], or  $BC_{20}$  [2,0,2], representing a relatively smaller number of `srcIP` hosts probing a larger number of `dstIP` hosts on the target `dstPrt` using either fixed or random `srcPrt`'s. This is in stark contrast with normal service traffic aggregate such as web (i.e., `dstPrt` 80 cluster), where a much larger number of clients (`srcIP`'s) talk to a relatively smaller number of servers (`dstIP`'s) using randomly generated `srcPrt`'s, thus belonging to `dstPrt`  $BC_{25}$  [2,2,1].

In addition to those `dstPrt`'s that are known to have exploits, we also find several (`srcIP`) clusters that manifest typical scan/exploit behavior, but are associated with `dstPrt`'s that *we do not know* to have known exploits. For example, we find that in one time slot a `srcIP` cluster is probing a large number of destinations on UDP port 12827, with a single UDP packet. This host could simply engage in some harmless scanning on UDP port 12827, but it could also be a new form of RATs (remote access trojans) or even a precursor of something more malicious. Further inspection is clearly needed. Nonetheless it illustrates that our profiling technique is capable of automatically picking out clusters that fit the scan/exploit behavior profile but with unknown feature values. This will enable network operators/security analysts to examine novel, hitherto unknown, or "zero-day" exploits.

## 6.4 Deviant or Rare Behaviors

We have demonstrated how we are able to identify novel or anomalous behaviors that fit the canonical profiles but contain unknown feature values (as revealed by the dominant

state analysis). We now illustrate how rare behaviors or deviant behaviors are also indicators of anomalies, and thus worthy of deeper inspection. In the following, we present a number of case studies, each of which is selected to highlight a certain type of anomalous behavior. Our goal here is not to exhaustively enumerate all possible deviant behavioral patterns, but to demonstrate that building a comprehensive traffic profile can lead to the identification of such patterns.

**Clusters in rare behavior classes.** The clusters in the rare behavior classes by definition represent atypical behavioral patterns. For example, we find three `dstPrt` clusters (TCP ports 6667, 113 and 8083) suddenly appear in the rare `dstPrt`  $BC_{15}$  [1,2,0] in several different time slots, and quickly vanish within one or two time slots. Close examination reveals that more than 94% of the flows in the clusters are destined to a single `dstIP` from random `srcIP`'s. The flows to the `dstIP` have the same packet and byte counts. This evidence suggests that these `dstIP`'s are likely experiencing a DDoS attack.

**Behavioral changes for clusters.** Clusters that exhibit unstable behaviors such as suddenly jumping between BCs (especially when a frequent cluster jumps from its usual BC to a different BC) often signify anomalies. In one case, we observe that one `srcIP` cluster (a Yahoo web server) on  $L_1$  makes a sudden transition from  $BC_8$  to  $BC_6$ , and then moves back to  $BC_8$ . Before the transition, the server is talking to a large number of clients with diverse flow sizes. After the behavior transition to  $BC_6$ , a single `dstIP` accounts for more than 87% of the flows, and these flows all have the same packet and byte counts. The behavior of the particular client is suspicious. This example illustrates how fundamental shifts in communication patterns can point a network security analyst to genuinely suspicious activities.

**Unusual profiles for popular service ports.** Clusters associated with common service ports that exhibit behaviors that do not fit their canonical profiles are of particular concern, since these ports are typically not blocked by firewalls. For example, we have found quite a few `srcIP` clusters in  $BC_2$  and  $BC_{20}$  that perform scans on `dstPrt` 25, 53, 80, etc. Similar to the clusters with known exploit ports, these `srcIP` clusters have small packet and byte counts with very low variability. Note that these common service ports are generally used by a very large number of clients, thereby making it impossible to examine the behavior of each client individually. Our profiling technique, however, can automatically separate out a handful of potentially suspicious clients that use these ports for malicious activities.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Extracting significant or interesting events from vast masses of Internet traffic has assumed critical importance in light of recent cyber attacks and the emergence of new and disruptive applications. In this paper, we have used data-mining and information-theoretic techniques to automatically discover significant behavior patterns from link-level traffic data, and to provide plausible interpretation for the observed behaviors. We have demonstrated the applicability of our profiling approach to the problem of detecting unwanted traffic and anomalies. We are currently in the process of implementing an on-line anomaly detection system based on our profiling methodology, and carefully evaluat-

ing false positives and false negatives of this methodology using trace-driven traffic simulations. In addition, we are looking into the problems of correlating anomalies on multiple links, handling changes in traffic patterns due to routing updates, and addressing “stealthy” attacks that attempt to mask their malicious activities with seemingly benign traffic. Finally, we also would like to understand the implications and potential benefits of extending our profiling approach beyond flow-level header information to application-level payload carried in IP packets.

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