An improved lower bound on the sensitivity complexity of graph properties

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A B S T R A C T

Turán (1984) [11] initiated the study of the sensitivity complexity of graph properties. He conjectured that for any non-trivial graph properties on \(n\) vertices, the sensitivity complexity is at least \(n - 1\). He proved an \(\left\lfloor \frac{n}{4} \right\rfloor\) lower bound for sensitivity in his paper: Turán (1984) [11]. Wegener (1985) [12] proved this conjecture for all monotone graph properties. In this paper we improve Turán’s lower bound to \(\frac{6}{17}n\)(\(\approx 0.35n\)). We hope that this will shed some light on the proof of Turán’s conjecture.

1. Introduction

Sensitivity complexity \(s(f)\) was first introduced by Cook, Dwork and Reischuk [4,5] (under the name critical complexity) for studying the time complexity of CRAW-PRAMs. They showed that \(\log_b s(f)\) is a lower bound for the time needed by a PRAM to compute a function \(f\) (where \(b = \left(5 + \sqrt{21}\right)/2 \approx 4.79\)). Simon [10] has shown that the sensitivity complexity of a non-degenerate \(n\)-variable Boolean function is at least \(\Omega (\log n)\). Turán [11] investigated the sensitivity complexity of graph properties (see the definition in Section 2). He proved that for any non-trivial graph properties on \(n\) vertices, the sensitivity is at least \(\left\lfloor \frac{n}{4} \right\rfloor\) (the number of variables of graph properties is \(\binom{n}{2}\)). In [11], Turán also gave an example (the “contained an isolated vertex” property) which has sensitivity complexity \(n - 1\). He further conjectured that \(n - 1\) might be the right lower bound. Wegener [12] proved this conjecture for all monotone graph properties. In this paper we improve Turán’s lower bound for general graph properties. Here is the main theorem of our paper.

**Theorem 1.** For any non-trivial graph property \(f\) on \(n\) vertices, \(s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17}n\).

Wegener’s proof relied heavily on the fact that the property is monotone. Our proof strategy is roughly like this: we show that for any two graphs \(G\) and \(H\), there always exists a sequence of graphs \(G_0, G_1, \ldots, G_t\), where \(G_0 = G, G_t = H\), such that for any \(0 \leq i \leq t - 1, G_{i+1}\) is a graph obtained by adding or deleting one edge from graph \(G_i\); more importantly, there are at least \(\alpha n\) isomorphism ways of adding or deleting this edge. Therefore, if there exists some \(i\) with \(f(G_{i+1}) \neq f(G_i)\), then \(s(f) \geq \alpha n\). So if \(s(f) < \alpha n\), then for any two graphs \(G\) and \(H, f(G) = f(H)\), which contradicts the non-trivial condition of \(f\). We can show that \(\alpha\) is at least \(\frac{6}{17}\) in this paper.

**Related work:**

Sensitivity complexity is closely related to decision tree complexity and other complexity measures of Boolean functions. Here we only list some results related to the sensitivity complexity. For more results we refer readers to the excellent survey [1] by Buhrman and de Wolf.
Nisan [8] generalized the concept of sensitivity complexity to block sensitivity complexity and demonstrated that the time complexity of CREW-PRAM is actually equal to (up to a constant factor) the logarithm of the block sensitivity. He also showed that block sensitivity, certificate complexity, and decision tree complexity are polynomially related. Nisan and Szegedy [9] further showed that the degree complexity is also polynomially related to the block sensitivity. But very little is known about sensitivity complexity except the basic fact that it is a lower bound of block sensitivity. It is conjectured that the sensitivity complexity is also polynomially related to all four of the complexity measures mentioned above. Gotsman and Linial [6] have shown that the sensitivity versus degree problem is equivalent to an induced subgraphs problem on the Boolean hypercube studied by Fan Chung et al. [3]. The best known upper bound on the block sensitivity in terms of the sensitivity complexity is still exponential (by Kenyon and Kutin [7]). In his paper [11], Turán also conjectured that for a general class of functions, the weakly symmetric functions, the sensitivity complexity has a similar lower bound. Chakraborty [2] disproved this conjecture by giving a cyclically invariant function with sensitivity $O(N^{1/3})$ ($N$ is the number of variables). It is also open whether $\Omega( N^{1/3} )$ is a lower bound for the sensitivity complexity of all weakly symmetric functions, or even all cyclically invariant functions.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: in Section 2 we introduce the definitions and some notation, in Section 3 we prove two structural lemmas which will be used in the proof of the main theorem, and then we prove our main result in Section 4.

2. Preliminaries

Let $f : \{0, 1\}^n \to \{0, 1\}$ be a Boolean function. For an input $x \in \{0, 1\}^n$, $x'$ denotes the input obtained by flipping the $i$th bit of $x$.

**Definition 2.** The sensitivity complexity of $f$ on input $x$ is defined as $s(f, x) = |\{i : f(x) \neq f(x')\}|$. The sensitivity of the function $f$ is defined as $s(f) = \max_x s(f, x)$.

**Definition 3.** A Boolean function $f$ is symmetric if for every input $x = x_1 \ldots x_n$ and every permutation $\pi \in S_n$, $f(x_1, \ldots, x_n) = f(\pi(x_1), \ldots, \pi(x_n))$.

For a symmetric function, we have the following lower bound on the sensitivity complexity:

**Lemma 4 (Turán [11]).** For every non-trivial symmetric function $f : \{0, 1\}^n \to \{0, 1\}$, $s(f) > n^2$.

A generalization of the symmetric function is the weakly symmetric function.

**Definition 5.** A Boolean function $f$ is called weakly symmetric (or transitive-invariant) if there exists a transitive group $\Gamma \leq S_n$ such that for all $\sigma \in \Gamma$ and every input $x = x_1 \ldots x_n$,

$$f(x_1, \ldots, x_n) = f(\sigma(x_1), \ldots, \sigma(x_n)).$$

In this paper, we are interested in a special class of weakly symmetric functions: graph properties – Boolean functions which are independent of the labeling of the vertices of a graph. For example, connectivity, being Hamiltonian, being triangle-free etc are graph properties. Here is the formal definition.

**Definition 6.** A Boolean function $f : \{0, 1\}^{|G|} \to \{0, 1\}$ is called a graph property if for every input $x = (x_{1(1)}, \ldots, x_{(n-1),n})$ and every permutation $\sigma \in S_n$,

$$f(x_{1(1)}, \ldots, x_{(n-1),n}) = f(x_{\sigma(1),\sigma(2)}, \ldots, x_{\sigma((n-1),\sigma(n))}).$$

For graph $G = (V, E)$, we use $I(G)$ to represent the set of isolated vertices in $G$. Let $V_d(G) = \{v \in V(G) | \deg(v) = d\}$ and $V_{\geq d}(G) = \{v \in V(G) | \deg(v) \geq d\}$. We also use the notation $I_d, V_d, V_{\geq d}$ if the graph $G$ referred to is clear from the context.

3. Two structural lemmas

We need the following two lemmas for proving the main theorem.

**Lemma 7.** Given graph property $f$ and graph $G$, if $V_1(G) \neq \emptyset$, then either $s(f) \geq |I(G)| + 1$ or, for any vertex $v \in V_1(G)$ and $w$ adjacent to $v$, $f(G) = f(G - (v, w))$.

**Proof.** Consider graph $G' = G - (w, v)$ and suppose $I(G) = \{u_1, \ldots, u_{|I|}\}$; we have

$$G' + (w, u_i) \cong G' + (w, v), \quad i = 1, \ldots, |I|,$$

and hence $f(G' + (w, u_i)) = f(G' + (w, v))$. So if $f(G') \neq f(G' + (w, v))$, then $f(G') \neq f(G' + (w, u_i)) (i = 1, \ldots, |I|)$. Therefore, $s(f, G') \geq |I(G)| + 1$. Otherwise, $f(G') = f(G' + (w, v))$, i.e. $f(G - (w, v)) = f(G)$. □

1 A group $\Gamma \leq S_n$ is transitive if for every $i < j$, there exists $\sigma \in \Gamma$ such that $\sigma(i) = j$. 
The following lemma was used implicitly in Turan’s proof [11].

**Lemma 8.** Given graph property $f$ and graph $G$, if $E(G) \neq \emptyset$, then either $s(f) \leq |I(G)|/2$ or, for all $e \in E(G)$, $f(G) = f(G - e)$.

**Proof.** Suppose $s(f) < |I(G)|/2$; we will deduce that for all $e \in E(G)$, $f(G) = f(G - e)$.

Pick any edge $(u, v)$ from $E(G)$. Suppose that in graph $G$, deg$(u) = d$ and vertex $u$ is adjacent to vertices $\{v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_d\}$, where $v_1 = v$. Suppose $I(G) = \{u_1, \ldots, u_t\}$, where $t = |I(G)|$.

Consider the $t$-variable Boolean function $g_2 : \{0, 1\}^t \to \{0, 1\}$,

$$g_2(x_1, \ldots, x_t) = f(G + x_1(v_2, u_1) + x_2(v_2, u_2) + \cdots + x_t(v_2, u_t)),$$

i.e. we add edge $(v_2, u_i)$ to graph $G$ iff $x_i = 1$ ($i = 1, \ldots, t$); see Fig. 1(a). Since $u_1, \ldots, u_t$ are isolated vertices in $G$, it is easy to see that $g_2$ is a symmetric function. By **Lemma 4**, either $s(g_2) > t/2$ or $g_2$ is a constant function. But $g_2$ is a restriction of function $f$, so $s(g_2) \leq s(f)$, and thus $s(g_2) < |I(G)|/2 = t/2$; therefore, $g_2$ is a constant on every input. In particular, $g_2(1, \ldots, 1) = g_2(0, 0, 0, 0)$, i.e. $f(G + \sum_{i=1}^{t} (v_2, u_i)) = f(G)$. Define $G_2 = G + \sum_{i=1}^{t} (v_2, u_i)$. Consider another Boolean function $g_3 : \{0, 1\}^t \to \{0, 1\}$,

$$g_3(x_1, \ldots, x_t) = f(G_2 + x_1(v_3, u_1) + x_2(v_3, u_2) + \cdots + x_t(v_3, u_t)).$$

Similarly, $g_3$ is a symmetric function, so from **Lemma 4** $s(g_3) > t/2$ or $g_3$ is a constant function. But $s(g_3) \leq s(f) < t/2$, so $g_3$ is constant, and $f(G_2) = f(G_3)$, where $G_3 = G_2 + \sum_{i=1}^{t} (v_3, u_i)$. Continuing this procedure, we can show that

$$f(G) = f(G_2) = \cdots = f(G_d),$$

where $G_d = G_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{t} (v_i, u_i)$ ($i = 3, \ldots, d$).

Now let us consider the graph $H = G_d - (u, v_1)$. Define the $(t + 1)$-variable function $h : \{0, 1\}^{t+1} \to \{0, 1\}$,

$$h(x_0, x_1, \ldots, x_t) = f(H + x_0(v_1, u) + x_1(v_1, u_1) + \cdots + x_t(v_1, u_t)).$$

See Fig. 1(b). Again $h$ is a symmetric function; using **Lemma 4**, $s(h) > (t + 1)/2$ or $h$ is a constant function. Since $s(h) \leq s(f) < t/2$, $h$ is a constant. In particular, $h(0, 0, \ldots, 0) = h(1, 0, 0, \ldots, 0)$, i.e. $f(H) = f(H + (v_1, u)) = f(G_d)$.

Next we will delete all the edges between $\{u_1, \ldots, u_t\}$ and $\{v_2, \ldots, v_d\}$ from $H$ by reversing the adding edge procedure of $G \to G_2 \to \cdots \to G_d$. More precisely, define $H_i = H$; for $i = 2, \ldots, d$, define

$$H_i = H_{i-1} - (u_i, u_1) - (v_i, u_2) - \cdots - (v_i, u_t),$$

and

$$h(y_1, \ldots, y_t) = f(H_i + y_1(v_i, u_1) + y_2(v_i, u_2) + \cdots + y_t(v_i, u_t)).$$

By **Lemma 4** and the fact $s(f) < t/2$ we can show that all the functions $h_2, \ldots, h_d$ are constant, which implies $f(H) = f(H_2) = \cdots = f(H_d)$. But if we compare graph $G$ and graph $H_d$, it is easy to see that $H_d = G - (u, v_1)$. Therefore, $f(G) = f(H_d) = f(G - (u, v))$. □

### 4. Proof of the main theorem

Without loss of generality we assume that for the empty graph $\bar{K}_n, f(\bar{K}_n) = 0$. Since $f$ is a non-trivial property, there must exist a graph $G$ such that $f(G) = 1$. Let us consider graphs in $f^{-1}(1) = \{|G| : f(G) = 1\}$ with the minimum number of edges. Define $m = \min \{|E(G)| : f(G) = 1\}$.

We claim that if $m \geq \frac{6}{17} n$, then $s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17} n$. Let $G$ be a graph in $f^{-1}(1)$ and $|E(G)| = m \geq \frac{6}{17} n$. Since $G$ has the minimum number of edges, deleting any edges from $G$ will change the value of $f(G)$, i.e. $\forall e \in E(G), f(G - e) = 0$. Therefore, $s(f, G) \geq |E(G)| = m \geq \frac{6}{17} n$. Thus $s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17} n$. 

![Fig. 1. (a) Function $g_2(x_1, \ldots, x_t)$. (b) Function $h(x_0, x_1, \ldots, x_t)$.](image-url)
In the following we assume $m < \frac{6}{17}n$. Again let $G$ be a graph in $f^{-1}(1)$ with $|E(G)| = m$. Let us consider the isolated vertices set $I$; as 
\[ \sum_{v \in V} \deg(v) = 2|E(G)| = 2m < 2 \times \frac{6}{17}n = \frac{12}{17}n, \]
we have 
\[ |I| = n - |V_{\geq 1}| \geq n - \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 1}} \deg(v) = n - \sum_{v \in V} \deg(v) \geq \frac{5}{17}n. \]

According to whether or not there exists a degree-1 vertex, we separate the proof into two parts:

**Case 1:** $V_1 \neq \emptyset$, i.e. there exists $v \in V(G)$ with $\deg(v) = 1$. We further consider two subcases here:

(a) There exist $v_1$ and $v_2 \in V_1$ such that $(v_1, v_2) \in E(G)$.
Let $G' = G - (v_1, v_2)$. Since $G$ has the minimum number of edges, $f(G') = 0$. Suppose $I(G) = \{u_1, \ldots, u_{|I|}\}$; since in graph $G$, $\deg(v_1) = \deg(v_2) = 1$, then for any $1 \leq i_1 < i_2 \leq |I|$, 
\[ f(G') + (u_1, u_2) \cong f(G) + (v_1, v_2) = G. \]
Thus 
\[ f(G') + (u_1, u_2) = f(G) = 1. \]
Similarly, we have 
\[ f(G' + (u_1, v_1)) = f(G' + (u_i, v_i)) = f(G) = 1, \] (for all $1 \leq i \leq |I|$) 
but $f(G') = 0$; therefore,
\[ s(f, G') \geq \left( \frac{|I| + 2}{2} \right) \geq \left( \frac{\frac{5}{17}n + 2}{2} \right) \geq \frac{6}{17}n. \]

(b) Consider any vertices $v_1$ and $v_2 \in V_1$ with $(v_1, v_2) \notin E(G)$. We will show that $|I(G)| \geq \frac{8}{17}n$ in this case.
\[ \sum_{v \in V} \deg(v) = 2|E(G)| = 2m < 2 \times \frac{6}{17}n = \frac{12}{17}n, \]
i.e.,
\[ \sum_{v \in V_1} \deg(v) + \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 2}} \deg(v) < \frac{12}{17}n. \quad (1) \]
Since no two vertices in $V_1$ are adjacent, i.e., all the vertices in $V_1$ are adjacent to vertices in $V_{\geq 2}$, we hence have 
\[ \sum_{v \in V_1} \deg(v) \leq \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 2}} \deg(v). \quad (2) \]
Combining Eqs. (1) and (2), we have $\sum_{v \in V_1} \deg(v) < \frac{6}{17}n$, i.e. $|V_1| < \frac{6}{17}n$.
If $|V_{\geq 2}| \leq \frac{2}{17}n$, then $|I| = n - |V_1| - |V_{\geq 2}| > n - \frac{6}{17}n - \frac{3}{17}n = \frac{8}{17}n$. Otherwise suppose that $|V_{\geq 2}| > \frac{3}{17}n$; from Eq. (1), 
\[ |V_1| + 2|V_{\geq 2}| \leq \sum_{v \in V_1} \deg(v) + \sum_{v \in V_{\geq 2}} \deg(v) < \frac{12}{17}n. \]
Hence $|V_1| + |V_{\geq 2}| < \frac{12}{17}n - \frac{3}{17}n = \frac{9}{17}n$. Therefore, $|I| = n - |V_1| - |V_{\geq 2}| > n - \frac{6}{17}n - \frac{9}{17}n = \frac{8}{17}n$.
Since $V_1 \neq \emptyset$, by **Lemma 7** either $s(f) \geq |I(G)| + 1 > \frac{8}{17}n$ or there exists an edge $e \in G$ with $f(G - e) = f(G)$. But we know that $G$ has the minimum number of edges, so $f(G - e) \neq f(G)$; thus $s(f) \geq \frac{8}{17}n$. This finishes the proof of **Case 1**.

**Case 2:** $V_1 = \emptyset$, i.e. $\forall v \in V - I$, $\deg(v) \geq 2$. In this case, 
\[ |I| = n - |V_{\geq 1}| = n - |V_{\geq 2}| \geq n - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{v} \deg(v) = n - m \geq \frac{11}{17}n. \]

(a) There exist $v$ and $w \in V_2$ such that $(v, w) \in E(G)$.
Since $\deg(v) = \deg(w) = 2$, suppose that besides vertex $w$, vertex $v$ is also adjacent to vertex $x$; similarly suppose that vertex $w$ is also adjacent to vertex $y$ ($x$ and $y$ could be the same vertex). Pick $2r$ different isolated vertices $\{v_1, \ldots, v_r, w\}$ and
Therefore, if 

\[ \forall i \in \{1, 2, \ldots, r\}, f(G_i) \neq f(G_{i-1}) \],

then by Lemma 7,

\[ s(f) \geq |I(G_i)| + 1 = |I(G)| - i + 1 \geq \frac{11}{17}n - 2\sqrt{\frac{6}{17}n} + 1 \geq \frac{6}{17}n \quad \text{(for } n \geq 9). \]

So let us assume that 

\[ f(G) = f(G_1) = \cdots = f(G_{2r}). \]

Now consider the graph 

\[ H = G_{2r} - (v, w) \] (see Fig. 2). In graph \( H \), \( \deg(v) = \deg(v_1) = \cdots = \deg(v_i) = 1 \) and they are both adjacent to \( x \); similarly \( \deg(w) = \deg(w_1) = \cdots = \deg(w_i) = 1 \) and they are both adjacent to \( y \). Thus

\[ H + (v, w) \cong H + (v_i, w_i) \cong H + (v_i, w_j) \quad (\forall i, j = 1, \ldots, r). \]

Therefore, if 

\[ f(H) \neq f(H + (v, w)) \] (i.e. \( f(G_{2r}) \), then

\[ s(f, H) \geq (r + 1)^2 = \left( \left\lfloor \frac{6}{17}n \right\rfloor + 1 \right)^2 \geq \frac{6}{17}n. \]

So we can assume that 

\[ f(H) = f(G_{2r}), \] which implies 

\[ f(H) = f(G). \]

Now we define another sequence of graphs 

\[ H_0 = H, \ H_i = H_{i-1} - (y, w_i) \] for 

\( i = 1, \ldots, r, \) and 

\[ H_i = H_{i-1} - (x, v_i) \] for 

\( i = r + 1, \ldots, 2r. \) By an argument similar to the previous one for 

\[ G_0, \ldots, G_{2r}, \] we can show that either 

\[ s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17}n \] or 

\[ f(H) = \cdots = f(H_{2r}). \] So we have 

\[ f(G) = f(H) = f(H_{2r}). \] But if we compare graphs 

\( G \) and \( H_{2r}, \) we can see that 

\[ H_{2r} = G - (v, w), \] which contradicts the minimality of \( G. \)

(b) \( \forall v_1, v_2 \in V_2, (v_1, v_2) \notin E(G). \) We claim that in this case 

\[ |I| \geq \frac{12}{17}n. \]

\[ 2|V_2| + \sum_{v \in V_{2 \geq 3}} \deg(v) = \sum_{v \in V} \deg(v) = 2|E(G)| = 2m < \frac{12}{17}n. \quad (3) \]

Since no two vertices in \( V_2 \) are adjacent, all the vertices in \( V_2 \) are adjacent to vertices in \( V_{2 \geq 3} (V_1 = \emptyset) \); hence

\[ \sum_{v \in V_2} \deg(v) = 2|V_2| = \sum_{v \in V_{2 \geq 3}} \deg(v). \quad (4) \]

From Eq. (4) + 5 × (3), we have

\[ 12|V_2| + 5 \sum_{v \in V_{2 \geq 3}} \deg(v) \leq \sum_{v \in V_{2 \geq 3}} \deg(v) + \frac{60}{17}n, \]

i.e. \( 3|V_2| + \sum_{v \in V_{2 \geq 3}} \deg(v) \leq \frac{15}{17}n, \) which implies

\[ 3|V_2| + 3|V_3| \leq 3|V_2| + \sum_{v \in V_{2 \geq 3}} \deg(v) \leq \frac{15}{17}n. \]

So \( |V_2| \leq |V_3| \leq \frac{5}{17}n; \) therefore, 

\[ |I| = n - |V_2| - |V_3| \geq \frac{12}{17}n. \]

By Lemma 8, either \( s(f) \geq |I(G)|/2 \geq \frac{6}{17}n \) or for all \( e \in G, f(G - e) = f(G). \) But we know that \( G \) has the minimum number of edges, so \( f(G - e) \neq f(G) \); thus \( s(f) \geq \frac{6}{17}n. \) This ends the whole proof.
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