A Practical Cross-Device Federated Learning Framework over 5G Networks

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Abstract

The concept of federated learning (FL) was first proposed by Google in 2016. Since then, FL has been widely studied for the feasibility of application in various fields due to its potential to make full use of data without compromising privacy. However, limited by the capacity of wireless data transmission, the employment of FL on mobile devices has been making slow progress in practice. The development and commercialization of the 5G generation (5G) mobile networks has shed some light on this. In this article, we analyze the challenges of existing FL schemes for mobile devices and propose a novel cross-device FL framework that utilizes the anonymous communication technology and ring signature to protect the privacy of participants while reducing the communication overhead. Although existing technologies such as anonymous communication, differential privacy, and public key encryption can be used to alleviate the risk of privacy leakage to some extent, the latter cannot be solved at the same time [2].

Federated learning (FL) is a promising AI technology to solve the above problems. However, in practical, due to the limited capacity of wireless communication and computing power of mobile devices, the application of FL for mobile devices is restricted [3]. The emergence of 5G networks brings new opportunities for FL on mobile devices. FL coupled with fast and reliable 5G wireless communications is ideal for secure and practical data sharing among mobile devices [4].

Introduction to Federated Learning

Federated learning is a distributed ML technology that provides privacy preservation. In FL, multiple participants collaborate to train an ML model, with the participants’ raw data kept locally to themselves. In the server-client-based horizontal FL, each participant uses local data to train the model and uploads the model parameters to an aggregation server. The server is responsible for aggregating the model parameters uploaded by each participant, generating the global model parameters and returning them to each participant. The above process iterates until the model parameters converge or meet the preset conditions.

In terms of training samples, the types of FL mainly include horizontal FL and vertical FL. Horizontal FL is for horizontally partitioned data that has the same feature space but different sample spaces; for example, the same type of information from different users in different banks. Vertical FL is for vertically partitioned data that has the same sample space but different feature spaces; for example, different types of information from the same user in a bank and in a medical care system. In this article, we mainly talk about horizontal FL.

In terms of application scenarios, the types of FL mainly include cross-device FL and cross-silo FL. Cross-device FL is usually used in mobile device applications and has the characteristics of a large number of participants with a small amount of raw data owned by each participant. In contrast to cross-device FL, only certain reliable organizations are involved in cross-silo FL. In this article, we mainly study cross-device FL [5].

Furthermore, in addition to the server-client FL, some researchers have proposed peer-to-peer (P2P) FL. The key idea of P2P FL is to avoid the potentially untrusted third party by using P2P com-
munication between the peer participants. However, the excessive communication overhead has become a huge obstacle to P2P FL.

In addition to using the cross-device FL to optimize 5G wireless communications, there are many potential application scenarios of cross-device FL in the context of 5G networks, such as autonomous driving, vehicle-to-everything, medical care, smart grid, and other IoT-based applications [4].

**Challenges of Cross-Device FL and Our Motivation**

Although the development of 5G networks makes it possible for FL to be efficiently carried out between mobile devices, there are still some challenges.

**Privacy Leakage:** Researchers found that the output vectors, model parameters, and gradients of an ML model may reveal sensitive information of the training data and the parameters of the model. In the application process of ML models, there are some attacks (e.g., model extraction attack, model inversion attack, membership-inference attack) that may cause the leakage of model parameters or the training data [5]. In the training process of FL, participants need to send the updated gradients or the model parameters of each iteration to the server or other participants, which may also reveal the private information of the training data. Privacy leakage is still a challenge that cannot be ignored in FL.

**Unreliable Mobile Devices with Limited Computing Power:** Most existing FL schemes use the following privacy preservation techniques to solve the above privacy leakage problem during the FL training process.

- **Pairwise Additive Masking:** Adding masks to the local gradients and model parameters is a commonly used privacy preservation technique in FL.

- **Differential Privacy:** Using differential privacy to add noise to the local gradients and model parameters is also a good solution to protect privacy. However, mobile devices usually have less training data, and adding noise may cause data to be inefficient [7].

- **Secure Multi-Party Computation:** Some researchers have proposed FL privacy preservation schemes based on secure multi-party computation such as garbled circuits, homomorphic encryption, and secret sharing, which aggregate the gradients and parameters in the form of encrypted circuits or ciphertexts. [8]. These methods are computationally expensive and not suitable for devices with limited computing power (e.g., mobile devices).

In general, the above methods are suitable for cross-silo FL with only a few stable participants: each participant has sufficient computing capability and a large training dataset, and the communication between participants is stable (e.g., FL for several banks). On the contrary, most mobile devices rely on wireless networks for communication and are often widely distributed. In addition, the computing capability of mobile devices is limited, and the training dataset is relatively small. Therefore, a more practical privacy preservation scheme for mobile devices is needed.

**Incentive and Fairness:** Due to concerns about privacy leakage or simply unwillingness to devote computing resources, mobile users may be reluctant to participate in FL. In addition, participants with different contributions to the model are rewarded with the same global model parameters, which may discourage active participants. In order to motivate more mobile users to participate and ensure fairness, a reasonable incentive mechanism needs to be added. The existing incentive mechanisms for FL mainly include the contribution-based incentive mechanism [9], reputation-based incentive mechanism, and resource allocation incentive mechanism [10, 11]. There are also some FL schemes that consider both privacy preservation and performance when implementing the incentive mechanism [10]. These schemes use game theory, blockchain, and other technologies to achieve novel incentive mechanisms. However, most of them motivate users by monetary reward, ignoring the role of the models. In addition, some incentive mechanisms mainly focus on resource allocation, How to quantify the value of participants’ local data (e.g., data quality and data quantity) for FL training privately and ensure the fairness of FL is also a challenge [12].

To address the above challenges, we propose a practical cross-device FL framework and provide a case study on autonomous driving. Our framework has the following features:

- It adopts anonymous communication technology, and participants do not need to interact multiple times and waste additional computing resources, which can provide privacy preservation while reducing the computational overhead.
- Considering that there may be adversaries posing as participants to affect the training of the model, we adopt the ring signature to verify the identities of participants.
- It utilizes a contribution-based incentive mechanism that can quantify the value of participants’ training data privately. Different from existing incentive mechanisms that use monetary rewards, model-based rewards can help to improve and/or optimize the mobile applications and services on their devices.

**The General Framework**

**Description of the Proposed Framework**

Our FL framework contains two layers: the local training layer and the aggregation layer, as shown in Fig. 1. In the local training layer, participants (mobile devices) use their local data to update the global model and get different local models. In the aggregation layer, the aggregation server aggregates the local models uploaded by participants to generate/update the global model. This is an iterative process; the detailed steps are as follows:

1. The aggregation server sets a unified initial global model and distributes the model parameters to the mobile devices participating in FL.
2. Each participant contributes to the global model by training its own local data and generates the local model. Since participants use their own local data for the training, their trained local models vary from each other.

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3. Each participant then uploads the local model parameters to the aggregation server through the anonymous communication network. As a result, the aggregation server and the adversary cannot find out the true identities of the owners of the local model parameters collected in a certain iteration.

4. The aggregation server aggregates the local model parameters uploaded by the participants and generates/updates the global model. There are multiple aggregation rules, including federated averaging (FedAvg), centroid distance weighted FedAvg, and so on. The aggregation server distributes the global model parameters to the participants. When the global model parameters converge or meet the preset requirements, the iteration terminates. Otherwise, repeat steps 2–4.

5. The aggregation server sends the final global model to the incentive center.

6. The incentive center distributes the contribution scores for each participant and ranks each global model according to the preset rules.

7. Participants with a certain degree of contribution can access the corresponding model. This step is implemented by an access control scheme.

**Characteristics of the Proposed Framework**

Considering the features of the mobile device environment, our proposed FL framework for mobile devices has the following characteristics.

**Privacy Preservation:** As mentioned earlier, privacy leakage may happen not only in the application of the model, but also in the training and iteration of FL. The main focus of this article is to prevent privacy leakage in the training and iteration of FL. To protect the privacy of participants, the anonymous communication technology and ring signature are adopted. When a participant submits updated model parameters to the aggregation server, the network address can be anonymized to protect the participants’ identities. In this way, the adversaries cannot figure out who the model parameters belong to, so that they cannot infer participants’ privacy through the process of iterative updates.

**Trade-off between Privacy and Computation Overhead:** In the mobile device environment, due to the limited computing capability, reducing the computation overhead is always a top priority. Therefore, we abandon the conventional privacy preservation methods, such as homomorphic encryption (HE), and instead make a trade-off between the level of privacy and the computation overhead.

In terms of the computation overhead, we take the HE-based FL scheme as an example. Before uploading the model parameters to the aggregation server, participants need to encrypt each element in the vectors of the parameters using HE so that the parameters can be aggregated in the form of ciphertext. In some deep neural network models, the number of elements can reach millions, which means each participant needs to perform millions of encryption operations. Although some works have proposed batch encryption, there is still a limitation on the number of parameters that can be encrypted at one time [8]. In this article, the ring signature we use does not need to calculate the elements one by one; instead, it uses cascade or hash function to map all elements to one element to achieve verification.

In terms of privacy, under the security guarantee of encryption techniques, neither the server nor the adversaries can obtain any information about the parameters. In our article, due to the use of anonymous communication technology, neither the server nor the adversaries can know the owner of the parameters in each round. Therefore, even if the server receives the parameters, it cannot infer any private information as the owners of these values.
are unknown. Furthermore, the ring signature used in our scheme can prevent the adversaries from posing as participants and submitting fake parameters.

**System Robustness**: Since the large number of participants in cross-device FL can be widely distributed, the communication among the participants may be unstable. Privacy preservation methods such as adding a mask require multiple rounds of interactions among the peer participants to prevent data from becoming unavailable. However, participants’ intentional or unintentional withdrawals may affect the accuracy of the final model. In our FL framework, participants only need to communicate with the server, which has better tolerance for single-device failure or disconnection.

**Incentive**: Due to the concerns about privacy leakage, or simply the unwillingness to devote computing resources, mobile users may be reluctant to participate in the federated learning. In order to get more mobile devices to participate the FL, we propose a contribution-based incentive mechanism with access control. Different from existing incentive mechanisms, sharing the outcome of federated learning the global model with the participants can help to improve and/or optimize the mobile applications and services on their devices. This can motivate the mobile users to actively participate and provide high quality data to the FL. Avoiding monetary incentives can also prevent some legal issues.

**Case Study: Application in Autonomous Driving**

In recent years, autonomous driving has made some progress. However, it is still a huge challenge for autonomous driving to deal with complex and unforeseen environments. One of the main reasons is that the amount of training samples used for autonomous driving learning algorithms is not sufficient. Federated learning, as a promising solution, can use the actual data collected from each autonomous car for model training while protecting the privacy of each individual participant.

**Security Assumption**

First, we define the security of the system according to the actual conditions in autonomous driving.

**Participant**: We assume that the participants (autonomous cars) are honest but curious. They do not submit fake model parameters maliciously, but they may try to figure out the private information of other participants.

**Aggregation Server**: The aggregation server is a semi-honest third party; it may return wrong aggregation results due to laziness and is curious about the privacy of the participants.

**Malicious Adversary**: Malicious adversaries may try to recover participants’ private information from their model parameters. Additionally, they may impersonate legitimate participants to send fake model parameters to the aggregation server to corrupt the global model.

**Key Generation Center (KGC)**: The key generation center is responsible for generating the system parameters of ring signature. It is a fully trusted party and does not participate in the training of FL. After it generates the system parameters, it goes offline.

**Preliminary**

**Ring Signature**: The ring signature is a digital signature scheme that can achieve the anonymity of the signer’s identity. The core idea of the ring signature is that there are n users, and each user has a public key and a private key. When a user signs a message m, it needs to use the public key of other users and her/his own private key to generate the signature. The verifier can verify that the signature is generated by one of the n signers, but the actual signer cannot be located. A user can choose any possible set of signers to produce a valid ring signature, and use the public key of these signers and her/his own private key to complete the signing operation. We adopt ring signature to prevent adversaries from masquerading as legitimate participants.

**Homomorphic Hash**: The homomorphic hash function is a kind of collision-resistant hash function satisfying the homomorphic property. Given an additive homomorphic hash function H, there are several random numbers a₁, a₂, ..., aₙ. According to the data field of the corresponding hash function, the value of H(a₁) + H(a₂) + ... + H(aₙ) is equal to the value of H(a₁ + a₂ + ... + aₙ). This special hash function can verify the correctness of the calculation result without knowing the raw data. The verifier only needs to obtain the hash value of each parameter to verify whether the calculation result (the sum of these parameters) is correct. Our framework conducts the correctness verification for the aggregation results using homomorphic hash.

**Description of the Scheme**

**System Initialization**: When a new FL task needs to be initiated, the KGC first uses the number of participants n and the aggregation server to decide a unified initial model and parameters. The KGC needs to generate the following parameters:

- A pair of public and private keys (pkᵢ, skᵢ) for each participant i, which is used for the ring signature
- A hash function H with homomorphic property that is used to verify the correctness of the aggregation results

The KGC sends the key pair (pkᵢ, skᵢ) to the corresponding participant i, and announces pkᵢ and the hash function H to all participants and the aggregation server.

**Local Training**: The local training phase includes the following steps:

- Each participant downloads the unified initial model and parameters (represented by φ₀) from the aggregation server.
- Each participant i uses the local datasets and parameters φ₀ to perform the local model training operation: LocalUpdate(φ₀, φ₁) → φ₁ᵢ. Due to the different local datasets used for training, the local model constructed by each participant is different.
- Each participant i calculates the ring signature of the local model parameters, as shown in Fig. 2: RSig(φ₁ᵢ, pkᵢ, pk₀, ..., pk₀, skᵢ) → Rᵢ. Participant i can select the public keys for the ring signature from all of the n participants (the greater the number of public keys selected, the better for privacy preservation, but the greater the computation overhead) and use the public keys as well as her/his own private key skᵢ to sign the parameters φ₁ᵢ. Then it uploads the local parameters φ₁ᵢ, the ring signature Rᵢ and the signers’ public keys used for ring signature to the aggregation server via the anonymous communication network. In order to verify the correctness of the aggregation results, each participant i calculates the homomorphic hash of the local model parameters H(φ₀ᵢ), and mul-
FIGURE 3. Contribution-based incentive mechanism.

**Incentive:** The incentive mechanism is shown in Fig. 3. Its detailed description is as follows.

Before participating in FL training, the user first uses her/his local data to train a local machine learning model and proves the quality of the model to the incentive center in the manner of zero-knowledge. The user holds the model, and the incentive center holds the data to be inferred. They perform secure inference over the ML model using secure two-party computation (2PC) such as oblivious transfer (OT) and garbled circuits [13]. 2PC can ensure that the incentive center cannot obtain the user’s model parameters in order to protect the privacy of the user. The user also cannot get the inferred data, and thus the deliberately modified inference results become meaningless (step 1). The incentive center distributes a contribution weight to the user according to the inference accuracy, which, to a certain extent, characterizes the possible contribution that the user’s data made to the corresponding FL model (step 2).

After the FL task is completed, a global model will be generated. The incentive center seeks the users’ consent, adds tags to the trained model, and grades it according to the usage, accuracy, and so on. Assume that these models are classified into four levels: A, B, C, and D. The incentive center encrypts the model to implement the access control scheme. Each level corresponds to an attribute. For example, the access policy of the D-level model is set to A or B or C or D, and the access policy of the B-level model is set to A or B. Only users who have reached the corresponding contribution level can decrypt the model. The encrypted models are stored in the model market (step 3). The participants in the model can gain credits of contribution according to the number of times the model is accessed, the model level and their respective contribution weight ε (step 4).

After reaching a certain contribution level, the user can request a secret key (SK) of the access control scheme from the KGC to access models of the same level. In the access control scheme, even if the users are of the same level, the granted secret keys are different, which can prevent abuse of the SK.

**Performance Evaluation**

In this part, we evaluate the performance of our proposed framework from two perspectives: the impact of the number of participants on accuracy, and when there is an adversary, the impact of verification of participants on accuracy.

We build the FL environment with Python (version 3.6.2) and TensorFlow (version 2.3.2). A multi-layer perceptron model is conducted as the experimental subject for the training on the MNIST dataset of handwritten digits with a training set of 60,000 examples and a test set of 10,000 examples. From Fig. 4, we can conclude that when a user conducts learning only based on her own local data, the accuracy of the model is much lower than that of the FL. Additionally, when the sample number of each user is certain, the more users involved in learning, the higher accuracy the overall global model can achieve. This also highlights the importance of using the incentive mechanism.
In the case study, we use the ring signature to protect privacy and verify the identity of participants to prevent adversaries from impersonating legitimate participants. Here, we construct a malicious adversary in the experiment to show the importance of verifying participants. As shown in Fig. 5, in the FL scheme without the verification function, a malicious adversary may greatly downgrade the accuracy of the model.

To better show the advantages of our scheme in terms of computation overhead, we also give a comparison of the computation overhead between the privacy preservation technique used in our scheme (i.e., ring signature) and the HE commonly used in FL.

We choose Paillier as the HE algorithm, and the encryption time of each parameter is about 0.037 s. For the linear regression model, assuming that the feature dimension is 10, the computation overhead of encryption for each participant in one round is 0.407 s. For a fully connected layer with 300 input neurons and 100 output neurons, the number of parameters can reach 330,100, and the corresponding computation overhead is 12,213.7 s. Similarly, some practical convolution layers also have tens of thousands of parameters. At present, the parameters of some popular deep neural networks can reach the level of 1 million or even hundreds of millions, in which the HE can hardly work.

The computation overhead of the ring signature used in our scheme is only related to the number of public keys used for signatures; for example, 2 public keys for 0.0165 s, 10 public keys for 0.0192 s, and 100 public keys for 0.056 s.

**Open Issues**

**Participants May Submit Fake Parameters**

To the best of our knowledge, none of the existing studies have successfully solved the problem of participants submitting fake parameters. Some related studies [14] have tried to solve this issue. However, these studies only judge whether the participant is honest based on the parameters submitted by the participant. It may make a misjudgment, causing injustice to the honest participants, and may lead to overfitting of the model. (The model performed well on the raw dataset, but poorly on the new dataset). Zero-knowledge proof may be a promising solution.

**Realizing Efficient Federated Learning for Vertically Partitioned Data**

Most of the current FL schemes are for horizontally partitioned data, but there are few studies on FL for vertically partitioned data. It is relatively difficult to implement FL for vertically partitioned data [15]. However, in cross-device FL, there are some scenarios that require vertical FL, for example, the medical data and traffic data of the same user. It is necessary to carry out more in-depth research on vertical FL.

**Conclusion**

In this article, we employ the anonymous communication technology to construct a cross-device FL framework based on 5G mobile networks. Our framework has lower computation overhead while protecting the privacy of mobile users. We give a case study of autonomous driving. The ring signature is used to verify the identity of participants and the hash homomorphism is used for the correctness verification for the calculation results of the aggregation server. In addition, we implement a contribution-based incentive mechanism with access control to encourage mobile users to participate in federated learning. The performance evaluation proves the practicality of our scheme. Finally, we discuss some open issues in federated learning.

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