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Bas Lemmens and Christopher Parsons





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In this note, it is shown that the maximum number of pairwise touching translates of an  $n$ -simplex is at least  $n + 3$  for  $n = 7$ , and for all  $n \geq 5$  such that  $n \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$ . The current best known lower bound for general  $n$  is  $n + 2$ . For  $n = 2^k - 1$  and  $k \geq 2$ , we will also present an alternative construction to give  $n + 2$  touching simplices using Hadamard matrices.

## 1. Introduction

A classic problem in discrete geometry is to determine for a given convex body  $K$  in  $\mathbb{R}^n$  the maximum number of pairwise touching translates of  $K$ . This number is called the *touching number of  $K$*  and is denoted by  $t(K)$ . It is well known that for any convex body  $K$  in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ ,

$$t(K) \leq 2^n,$$

and equality holds if, and only if,  $K$  is a parallelotope; see [Danzer and Grünbaum 1962; Petty 1971; Soltan 1975]. On the other hand, it is unknown if for each convex body  $K$  in  $\mathbb{R}^n$  the inequality  $t(K) \geq n + 1$  holds when  $n \geq 4$ ; see [Bezdek 2010, Section 2.3].

This paper concerns the touching number of  $n$ -dimensional simplices,  $\Delta_n$ . This number was studied by Koolen, Laurent and Schrijver [Koolen et al. 2000]. They showed, among other things, that  $t(\Delta_n) \geq n + 2$  for all  $n \geq 3$  and  $t(\Delta_3) = 5$ , see Figure 1. Lemmens [2007] gave examples that showed that  $t(\Delta_4) \geq 7$  and  $t(\Delta_5) \geq 9$ .

The main goal of this short note is to present a construction that gives the following small improvement of the lower bound for  $t(\Delta_n)$ .

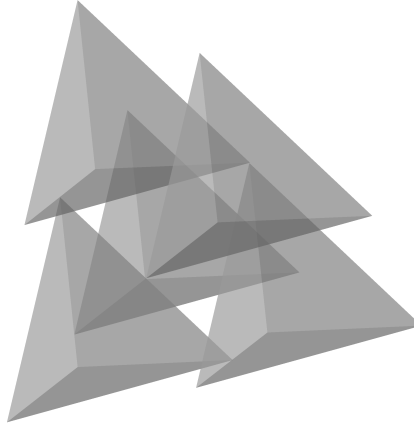
**Theorem 1.1.** *For  $n = 7$  and  $n \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$ , with  $n \geq 5$ , we have that*

$$t(\Delta_n) \geq n + 3.$$

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**Figure 1.** Five pairwise touching tetrahedra.

The problem of determining  $t(\Delta_n)$  is known to be equivalent to finding the maximum size of  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral sets in a hyperplane [Koolen et al. 2000; Lemmens 2007]. We will discuss the equivalence between these two problems in the next section.

## 2. Equilateral sets

A convex body  $K$  in  $\mathbb{R}^n$  which is centrally symmetric, i.e.,  $x \in K$  if and only if  $-x \in K$ , is the unit ball of a norm  $\|\cdot\|_K$  on  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . Indeed, for  $x \in \mathbb{R}^n$ , we can define the norm by

$$\|x\|_K = \inf\{\lambda > 0: x \in \lambda K\}.$$

A set  $S$  in a normed space  $(\mathbb{R}^n, \|\cdot\|)$  is called an *equilateral set* if there exists a constant  $\delta > 0$  such that

$$\|s - t\| = \delta \quad \text{for all } s \neq t \text{ in } S.$$

The maximum size of an equilateral set in  $(\mathbb{R}^n, \|\cdot\|)$  is the *equilateral dimension* of  $(\mathbb{R}^n, \|\cdot\|)$  and is denoted by  $e(\mathbb{R}^n, \|\cdot\|)$ . Note that the constant  $\delta > 0$  does not play a role, as we can always scale the equilateral set. Clearly, if  $K$  is a centrally symmetric body in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ , then  $S = \{s_1, \dots, s_p\}$  is an equilateral set in  $(\mathbb{R}^n, \|\cdot\|_K)$  with pairwise distance 2 if, and only if, the set of unit balls with centers  $s_1, \dots, s_p$  is a configuration of  $p$  pairwise touching translates of  $K$ .

The equilateral dimension has been studied for many normed spaces; see, for example, [Alon and Pudlák 2003; Swanepoel 2004a; Swanepoel 2004b]. Particular attention has been given to so-called  $\ell_p$ -norms which are defined as follows. For  $1 \leq p < \infty$ , the  $\ell_p$ -norm on  $\mathbb{R}^n$  is given by  $\|x\|_p = (\sum_i |x_i|^p)^{1/p}$ . For the  $\ell_1$ -norm,

$n = 5$	$n = 6$	$n = 8$
(4, 0, 1, 1, 2)	(4, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1)	(0, 4, 2, 2, 0, 4, 2, 2)
(0, 4, 1, 1, 2)	(0, 4, 1, 1, 1, 1)	(4, 0, 2, 2, 4, 0, 2, 2)
(1, 1, 4, 0, 2)	(1, 1, 4, 0, 1, 1)	(2, 2, 0, 4, 2, 2, 0, 4)
(1, 1, 0, 4, 2)	(1, 1, 0, 4, 1, 1)	(2, 2, 4, 0, 2, 2, 4, 0)
(2, 2, 0, 0, 4)	(1, 1, 1, 1, 4, 0)	(8, 2, 1, 1, 0, 2, 1, 1)
(0, 0, 2, 2, 4)	(1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 4)	(4, 4, 4, 4, 0, 0, 0, 0)
(2, 2, 2, 2, 0)	(2, 2, 2, 2, 0, 0)	(4, 4, 0, 0, 4, 4, 0, 0)
	(2, 2, 0, 0, 2, 2)	(4, 4, 0, 0, 0, 0, 4, 4)
	(0, 0, 2, 2, 2, 2)	(4, 0, 4, 0, 0, 4, 0, 4)
		(4, 0, 0, 4, 0, 4, 4, 0)

**Table 1.** Equilateral sets.

it has been conjectured by Kusner that  $e(\mathbb{R}^n, \|\cdot\|_1) = 2n$  [Guy 1983], but at present this has only been confirmed for  $1 \leq n \leq 4$ ; see [Bandelt et al. 1998; Koolen et al. 2000]. Obviously,  $2n$  is a lower bound for  $e(\mathbb{R}^n, \|\cdot\|_1)$ , as the set of standard basis vectors and their opposites form an equilateral set. The best known upper bound is  $Cn \log n$ , where  $C > 0$  is a constant, which was obtained using probabilistic methods by Alon and Pudlák [2003].

Finding the touching number for the  $n$ -dimensional simplex turns out to be equivalent to determining the maximum size of an  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral set contained in a hyperplane. More precisely, if  $h(n)$  is the maximum size of an  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral set in  $H_\alpha = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : \sum_i x_i = \alpha\}$  for some  $\alpha \in \mathbb{R}$ , then

$$t(\Delta_n) = h(n + 1) \quad \text{for all } n \geq 1; \tag{2-1}$$

see [Koolen et al. 2000; Lemmens 2007]. For example, the  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral set

$$S = \{(2, 0, 1, 1), (0, 2, 1, 1), (1, 1, 2, 0), (1, 1, 0, 2), (2, 2, 0, 0)\} \tag{2-2}$$

in the hyperplane  $H_4 \subseteq \mathbb{R}^4$  corresponds to the configuration of five pairwise touching translates of a tetrahedron depicted in Figure 1. The examples of equilateral sets in Table 1 were found with the aid of a computer. In particular, we see that  $t(\Delta_7) \geq 10$ , which settles the  $n = 7$  case in Theorem 1.1.

It is interesting to note that in these examples all the nonzero coordinates are powers of 2. We have looked into those type of examples in more detail, which let to the construction in Proposition 4.1. At present, however, we have no clear understanding of why these coordinate values generate large examples.

Before we prove Theorem 1.1, we mention that the inequalities

$$h(n) \leq e(\mathbb{R}^n, \|\cdot\|_1) \leq h(2n - 1)$$

are known to hold for all  $n \geq 1$  [Koolen et al. 2000; Lemmens 2007]. Thus,  $e(\mathbb{R}^n, \|\cdot\|_1)$  grows linearly in  $n$  if, and only if,  $h(n)$  does.

### 3. Proof of Theorem 1.1

For each  $n \equiv 2 \pmod{4}$  with  $n \geq 6$ , we shall construct an  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral set in  $H_\alpha = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n : \sum_i x_i = \alpha\}$  of size  $n+2$ , where  $\alpha = (n-2)^2/2$ . The result then follows from Equation (2-1). So let  $n \equiv 2 \pmod{4}$  with  $n \geq 6$ . Define

$$\begin{aligned} v^1 &= (b, 0, a, a, \dots, a, a), \\ v^2 &= (0, b, a, a, \dots, a, a), \\ v^3 &= (a, a, b, 0, \dots, a, a), \\ v^4 &= (a, a, 0, b, \dots, a, a), \\ &\vdots \\ v^{n-1} &= (a, a, a, a, \dots, b, 0), \\ v^n &= (a, a, a, a, \dots, 0, b), \end{aligned}$$

in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ , where  $a = (n-4)/2$  and  $b = n-2$ . Furthermore let

$$v^{n+1} = (\overbrace{y, y, \dots, y}^k, \overbrace{z, z, \dots, z}^{n-k}) \quad \text{and} \quad v^{n+2} = (\overbrace{z, z, \dots, z}^{n-k}, \overbrace{y, y, \dots, y}^k)$$

in  $\mathbb{R}^n$ . We now show that if we take

$$k = \frac{n-2}{2}, \quad y = \frac{n-6}{2}, \quad \text{and} \quad z = \frac{n-2}{2},$$

then  $V = \{v^1, \dots, v^{n+2}\}$  is an  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral set in  $H_\alpha$ , where  $\alpha = (n-2)^2/2$  and the distance is  $2(n-2)$ .

To verify this we note first that  $b \geq z \geq a \geq y \geq 0$ . For  $i = 1, \dots, n$ , the coefficient sum of  $v^i$  is given by

$$b + (n-2)a = n-2 + \frac{(n-2)(n-4)}{2} = \frac{(n-2)^2}{2}.$$

Similarly the coefficient sum for the vectors  $v^{n+1}$  and  $v^{n+2}$  is equal to

$$(n-k)z + ky = \frac{(n+2)(n-2)}{4} + \frac{(n-2)(n-6)}{4} = \frac{(n-2)^2}{2}.$$

Let  $1 \leq i \neq j \leq n$ . For  $i = 2k-1$  and  $j = 2k$ , the distance between  $v^i$  and  $v^j$  is given by

$$\|v^i - v^j\|_1 = |b-0| + |0-b| = 2(n-2),$$

and for all other  $i \neq j$ ,

$$\|v^i - v^j\|_1 = |b - a| + |0 - a| + |a - b| + |a - 0| = 2(b - a) + 2a = 2(n - 2).$$

Also

$$\|v^{n+1} - v^{n+2}\|_1 = k|z - y| + k|y - z| = (n - 2)\left(\frac{n-2}{2} - \frac{n-6}{2}\right) = 2(n - 2).$$

Finally the distance between any of the first  $n$  vectors and the last two is calculated as in either the case of  $v^1$  and  $v^{n+1}$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} \|v^1 - v^{n+1}\|_1 &= |b - y| + |0 - y| + (k - 2)|a - y| + (n - k)|a - z| \\ &= n - 2 + \frac{n-6}{2} + \frac{n+2}{2} \\ &= 2(n - 2), \end{aligned}$$

or, as in the case of  $v^1$  and  $v^{n+2}$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} \|v^1 - v^{n+2}\|_1 &= |b - z| + |0 - z| + (n - k - 2)|a - z| + k|a - y| \\ &= n - 2 + \frac{n-2}{2} + \frac{n-2}{2} \\ &= 2(n - 2). \end{aligned}$$

Thus,  $V$  is an  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral set in  $H_\alpha$  of size  $n + 2$ . Table 2 shows examples in dimensions  $n = 6, 10$  and  $14$ .

#### 4. Hadamard matrices

In this section, we will give an alternative construction that shows that  $t(\Delta_n) \geq n + 2$  for all  $n = 2^k - 1$  with  $k \geq 2$  using  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral sets and Hadamard matrices. Recall that an  $n \times n$  matrix  $H = [h_{ij}]$  with entries  $h_{ij} \in \{-1, 1\}$  for all  $i$  and  $j$  is called a *Hadamard matrix* if  $HH^T = nI$ . There exists a simple well-known construction of Hadamard matrices of size  $2^k$ . Define  $H_1 = [1]$  and

$$H_{2^{k+1}} = \begin{bmatrix} H_{2^k} & H_{2^k} \\ H_{2^k} & -H_{2^k} \end{bmatrix}$$

for all  $k \geq 1$ . So,

$$H_2 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & -1 \end{bmatrix}, \quad H_4 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & -1 & 1 & -1 \\ 1 & 1 & -1 & -1 \\ 1 & -1 & -1 & 1 \end{bmatrix}, \quad \dots$$

$n = 6$	$n = 10$	$n = 14$
(4, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1)	(8, 0, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3)	(12, 0, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5)
(0, 4, 1, 1, 1, 1)	(0, 8, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3)	(0, 12, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5)
(1, 1, 4, 0, 1, 1)	(3, 3, 8, 0, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3)	(5, 5, 12, 0, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5)
(1, 1, 0, 4, 1, 1)	(3, 3, 0, 8, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3)	(5, 5, 0, 12, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5)
(1, 1, 1, 1, 4, 0)	(3, 3, 3, 3, 8, 0, 3, 3, 3, 3)	(5, 5, 5, 5, 12, 0, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5)
(1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 4)	(3, 3, 3, 3, 0, 8, 3, 3, 3, 3)	(5, 5, 5, 5, 0, 12, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5)
(2, 2, 2, 2, 0, 0)	(3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 8, 0, 3, 3)	(5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 12, 0, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5)
(0, 0, 2, 2, 2, 2)	(3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 0, 8, 3, 3)	(5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 0, 12, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5)
	(3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 8, 0)	(5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 12, 0, 5, 5, 5, 5)
	(3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 0, 8)	(5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 0, 12, 5, 5, 5, 5)
	(4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 2, 2, 2, 2)	(5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 12, 0, 5, 5)
	(2, 2, 2, 2, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4)	(5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 0, 12, 5, 5)
		(5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 12, 0)
		(5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 0, 12)
		(6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4)
		(4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6)

**Table 2.** Equilateral sets of size  $n + 2$ .

Now suppose  $k \geq 2$ . Let  $v^1, \dots, v^{2^k} \in \mathbb{R}^{2^k}$  denote the rows of the Hadamard matrix  $H_{2^k}$ , and define the set

$$V_k = \{v^3\} \cup \{v^i : i = 5, \dots, 2^k\}.$$

Furthermore, let  $W_k = \{w^1, w^2, w^3, w^4\} \in \mathbb{R}^{2^k}$  be given by

$$\begin{aligned} w^1 &= (1, -1, 0, 0, 1, -1, 0, 0, \dots, 1, -1, 0, 0), \\ w^2 &= (-1, 1, 0, 0, -1, 1, 0, 0, \dots, -1, 1, 0, 0), \\ w^3 &= (0, 0, 1, -1, 0, 0, 1, -1, \dots, 0, 0, 1, -1), \\ w^4 &= (0, 0, -1, 1, 0, 0, -1, 1, \dots, 0, 0, -1, 1). \end{aligned}$$

**Proposition 4.1.** *For each  $k \geq 2$ , the set  $V_k \cup W_k$  is an  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral set of size  $2^k + 1$  in  $H_0 = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^{2^k} : \sum_i x_i = 0\}$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $k \geq 2$ . It is easy to show that each  $u \in V_k \cup W_k$  lies in  $H_0$ . Also note that any two distinct points  $v^i$  and  $v^j$  in  $V_k$  satisfy

$$\|v^i - v^j\|_1 = 2^k,$$

as the rows in  $H_{2^k}$  differ in exactly  $2^{k-1}$  places. The reader can check that

$$\|w^i - w^j\|_1 = 2^k \quad \text{for all } 1 \leq i \neq j \leq 4.$$



So, it remains to show that

$$\|v^i - w^j\|_1 = 2^k \quad \text{for all } v^i \in V_k \text{ and } w^j \in W_k. \quad (4-1)$$

We use induction on  $k$ . Note that if  $k = 2$ , we have that

$$V_2 \cup W_2 = \{(1, 1, -1, -1), (1, -1, 0, 0), (-1, 1, 0, 0), (0, 0, 1, -1), (0, 0, -1, 1)\},$$

which is an  $\ell_1$ -norm equilateral set with distance 4. Now suppose that (4-1) holds for  $k$ . Denote the points in  $V_{k+1}$  by  $\bar{v}^i$  and the points in  $W_{k+1}$  by  $\bar{w}^j$ . Note that for  $j = 1, \dots, 4$ , we have  $\bar{w}^j = (w^j, w^j)$ , where  $w^j \in W_k$ . Also observe that for  $i = 3, 5, \dots, 2^k$ , we have  $\bar{v}^i = (v^i, v^i)$ , and for  $i = 2^k + 1, \dots, 2^{k+1}$ , we have  $\bar{v}^i = (v^{i-2^k}, -v^{i-2^k})$ , where  $v^i \in V_k$ .

So, for  $i = 3, 5, \dots, 2^k$  and  $j = 1, \dots, 4$ , we have that

$$\|\bar{v}^i - \bar{w}^j\|_1 = \sum_{l=1}^{2^{k+1}} |\bar{v}_l^i - \bar{w}_l^j| = 2 \sum_{l=1}^{2^k} |v_l^i - w_l^j| = 2 \cdot 2^k = 2^{k+1}$$

by the induction hypothesis. Also for  $i = 2^k + 1, \dots, 2^{k+1}$  and  $j = 1, \dots, 4$ , we have that

$$\|\bar{v}^i - \bar{w}^j\|_1 = \sum_{l=1}^{2^k} (|v_l^{i-2^k} - w_l^j| + |v_l^{i-2^k} + w_l^j|) = \sum_{l=1}^{2^k} (1 - w_l^j + 1 + w_l^j) = 2^{k+1},$$

as  $v_l^i \in \{-1, 1\}$  and  $-1 \leq w_l^j \leq 1$  for all  $l$ . □

The reader should note that the equilateral set  $V_k \cup W_k$  can be seen as a generalization of the equilateral set  $S$  in (2-2), as  $V_2 \cup W_2 = S - (1, 1, 1, 1)$ . Furthermore, the example in Table 1 with  $n = 8$  is also of this type, if one ignores the point  $(8, 2, 1, 1, 0, 2, 1, 1)$ .

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
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no. 3

Colorability and determinants of $T(m, n, r, s)$ twisted torus knots for $n \equiv \pm 1 \pmod{m}$	361
MATT DELONG, MATTHEW RUSSELL AND JONATHAN SCHROCK	
Parameter identification and sensitivity analysis to a thermal diffusivity inverse problem	385
BRIAN LEVENTHAL, XIAOJING FU, KATHLEEN FOWLER AND OWEN ESLINGER	
A mathematical model for the emergence of HIV drug resistance during periodic bang-bang type antiretroviral treatment	401
NICOLETA TARFULEA AND PAUL READ	
An extension of Young's segregation game	421
MICHAEL BORCHERT, MARK BUREK, RICK GILLMAN AND SPENCER ROACH	
Embedding groups into distributive subsets of the monoid of binary operations	433
GREGORY MEZERA	
Persistence: a digit problem	439
STEPHANIE PEREZ AND ROBERT STYER	
A new partial ordering of knots	447
ARAZELLE MENDOZA, TARA SARGENT, JOHN TRAVIS SHRONTZ AND PAUL DRUBE	
Two-parameter taxicab trigonometric functions	467
KELLY DELP AND MICHAEL FILIPSKI	
${}_3F_2$ -hypergeometric functions and supersingular elliptic curves	481
SARAH PITMAN	
A contribution to the connections between Fibonacci numbers and matrix theory	491
MIRIAM FARBER AND ABRAHAM BERMAN	
Stick numbers in the simple hexagonal lattice	503
RYAN BAILEY, HANS CHAUMONT, MELANIE DENNIS, JENNIFER MCLLOUD-MANN, ELISE MCMAHON, SARA MELVIN AND GEOFFREY SCHUETTE	
On the number of pairwise touching simplices	513
BAS LEMMENS AND CHRISTOPHER PARSONS	
The zipper foldings of the diamond	521
ERIN W. CHAMBERS, DI FANG, KYLE A. SYKES, CYNTHIA M. TRAUB AND PHILIP TRETTENERO	
On distance labelings of amalgamations and injective labelings of general graphs	535
NATHANIEL KARST, JESSICA OEHRLEIN, DENISE SAKAI TROXELL AND JUNJIE ZHU	



1944-4176(2015)8:3;1-4