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On homomorphisms of planar signed graphs and absolute cliques

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Abstract

A simple signed graph \((G, \Sigma)\) is a simple graph with a + or a \(-\) sign assigned to each of its edges where \(\Sigma\) denotes the set of negative edges. A closed-walk is unbalanced if it has an odd number of negative edges, it is balanced otherwise. Homomorphisms of simple signed graphs are adjacency and balance of a closed-walk preserving vertex mappings. Naserasr, Rollova and Sopena (Journal of Graph Theory 2015) posed the important question of finding out the minimum \(|V(H)|\) such that any planar signed graph \((G, \Sigma)\) admits a homomorphism to \((H, \Pi)\). It is known that if this minimum value is equal to 10, then every planar signed graph must admit homomorphism to a particular unique signed graph \((P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\) on 10 vertices.

A graph \(G\) is an underlying absolute signed clique if there exists a signed graph \((G, \Sigma)\) which does not admit any homomorphism to any signed graph \((H, \Pi)\) with \(|V(H)| < |V(G)|\).

We characterize all underlying absolute signed planar cliques upto spanning subgraph inclusion. Furthermore, we show that every signed planar graph having underlying graphs obtained by (repeated, finite) \(k\)-clique sums \((k \leq 3)\) of underlying absolute signed planar cliques admits a homomorphism to \((P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\). Based on this evidence, we conjecture that every planar signed graph admits a homomorphism to \((P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\).

Keywords: signed graphs, graph homomorphisms, absolute signed cliques, planar graphs.

1 Introduction and main results

The work of Naserasr, Rollová and Sopena [10], based on the work of Zaslavsky [13], have generated attention to the topic of homomorphisms of signed graphs in recent times [12, 7, 6, 2, 11, 9].

A signed graph \((G, \Sigma)\) is a graph with set of vertices \(V(G)\) and set of edges \(E(G)\) where each edge is assigned one of the two possible signs, + or –, and the signature \(\Sigma\) is its set of negative edges.

Furthermore, \(N(u)\) denotes the set of neighbors of \(u\). Also the set of vertices adjacent to \(u\) using a positive (or a negative) edge, that is, the set of \(+\)-neighbors (or \(-\)-neighbors) of \(u\), is denoted by \(N^+(u)\) (or \(N^-(u)\)).

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Moreover, resigning a vertex $v$ of $(G, \Sigma)$ is to switch the signs of the edges incident to $v$. One may do this on a set $S$ of vertices and that is the same as resigning the signs of all edges of an edge-cut (edges with exactly one endpoint in $S$) of $(G, \Sigma)$.

One may regard the signs $+$ and $-$ as the elements $+1$ and $-1$, respectively, of the multiplicative group $\mathbb{F}_2$ of order 2. Thus, resigning a vertex $v$ of $(G, \Sigma)$ is to multiply the signs of the edges incident to $v$ by $-1$.

A closed-walk $C$ of a signed graph $(G, \Sigma)$ is unbalanced if the product of the signs of $E(C)$ (repetition considered) is negative and $C$ is balanced otherwise. Informally speaking, homomorphisms of simple signed graphs are adjacency and balance of a closed-walk preserving vertex mappings.

As we are only interested in simple signed graphs in this article, we provide only the definition of homomorphisms of simple signed graphs instead of presenting the generalized definition (available in the website of HOSIGRA\textsuperscript{1}).

Formally, a homomorphism of a signed graph $(G, \Sigma)$ to a signed graph $(H, \Pi)$ is a function $f : V(G) \rightarrow V(H)$ such that the following conditions are satisfied:

(i) if $x, y \in V(G)$ are adjacent, then $f(x), f(y)$ are also adjacent,

(ii) if $C_G = (x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_k)$ is a closed walk in $(G, \Sigma)$, then $C_H = (f(x_1), f(x_2), \ldots, f(x_k))$ is a closed-walk in $(H, \Pi)$ having the same balance as $C_G$.

Furthermore, we will use the notation $(G, \Sigma) \rightarrow (H, \Pi)$ to mean that $(G, \Sigma)$ admits a homomorphism to $(H, \Pi)$.

The chromatic number $\chi_s(G, \Sigma)$ of the signed graph $(G, \Sigma)$ is the minimum cardinality of $|V(H)|$ such that $(G, \Sigma) \rightarrow (H, \Pi)$. Furthermore, for a family $\mathcal{F}$ of simple signed graphs the chromatic number is $\chi_s(\mathcal{F}) = \max\{\chi_s(G, \Sigma) | G \in \mathcal{F}\}$.

One of the important open problems in this area is to find the chromatic number of planar signed graphs. The best known bounds regarding this problem is the following.

**Theorem 1.1** (Ochem, Pinlou and Sen 2017 [12]). For the family $\mathcal{P}_3$ of planar graphs we have $10 \leq \chi_s(\mathcal{P}_3) \leq 40$.

It is known [12] that if $\chi_s(\mathcal{P}) = k$, then there exists a signed graph $(H, \Pi)$ on $k$ vertices such that $G \in \mathcal{P}_3$ implies $(G, \Sigma) \rightarrow (H, \Pi)$ for any signature $\Sigma$ of $G$. Such an $(H, \Pi)$ is called an optimized universal target of $\mathcal{P}_3$.

We are going to describe an alleged such optimized universal target graph. Let $(H, \Pi)$ be a signed graph. Let $(H^+, \Pi^+)$ be the signed graph obtained by adding one vertex $\infty$ to $(H, \Pi)$ and positive edges joining each vertex of $(H, \Pi)$ to the new vertex $\infty$. Let $C_3 \square C_3$ be the Cartesian product of two 3-cycles. The signed Paley graph $(P_9, \Gamma)$ on 9 vertices is the signed graph having $V(P_9) = V(C_3 \square C_3)$, $E(P_9) \setminus \Gamma = \{xy | xy \in E(C_3 \square C_3)\}$ and $\Gamma = \{xy | xy \notin E(C_3 \square C_3)\}$. The graph of our interest is the graph $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$.  

**Theorem 1.2** (Ochem, Pinlou and Sen 2017 [12]). If $\chi_s(\mathcal{P}_3) = 10$, then $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$ is the unique optimized universal target of $\mathcal{P}_3$.

An integrally important concept related to chromatic number of signed graphs is the notion of absolute signed cliques [10]. A signed graph $(C, \Lambda)$ is an absolute signed clique if $\chi_s(C, \Lambda) = |V(C)|$.

\textsuperscript{1}https://www.irif.fr/ hosigra/pmwiki/pmwiki.php
A handy characterization of absolute signed cliques was given in the same paper [10]. A signed graph \((C, \Lambda)\) is an absolute signed clique if and only if each pair of non-adjacent vertices of \((C, \Lambda)\) is part of an unbalanced 4-cycle.

An undirected simple graph \(C\) is an underlying absolute signed clique if there exists a signature \(\Lambda\) such that \((C, \Lambda)\) is an absolute signed clique. Despite such a characterization, the problem of recognizing underlying absolute signed cliques is an NP-complete decision problem.

**Theorem 1.3** (Bensmail, Duffy and Sen 2017 [3]). Given an undirected simple graph \(C\), it is NP-complete to determine if it is an underlying signed clique or not.

Turning our heads towards the family of planar graphs, we know that an absolute signed planar clique has at most 8 vertices.

**Theorem 1.4** (Naserasr, Rollova and Sopena 2015 [10]). If an absolute signed clique \((C, \Lambda)\) is a signed planar graph, then \(|V(C)| \leq 8\).

A related useful tool for studying absolute signed cliques is the notion of absolute 2-edge-colored clique. A signed graph \((C, \Lambda)\) is an absolute 2-edge-colored clique if each pair of non-adjacent vertices of \((C, \Lambda)\) is connected by a 2-path having two differently signed edges. Furthermore, an undirected simple graph \(C_2\) is an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored clique if there exists a signature \(\Lambda\) such that \((C, \Lambda)\) is an absolute 2-edge-colored clique. We prove a useful result on this which will help us in the context of our work.

**Theorem 1.5.** An undirected outerplanar graph is an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored clique if and only if it contains one of the graphs belonging to \(L_{2e}\) as a spanning subgraph, where \(L_{2e}\) is the set of underlying graphs of the signed graphs depicted in Fig. 1.

Figure 1: A list of absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar cliques. Here “solid lines” denote edges with positive sign and “dashed lines” denote edges with negative signs. The set of the underlying simple graphs of the above signed graphs is denoted by \(L_{2e}\).
Figure 2: A list of absolute signed planar cliques. Here “solid lines” denote edges with positive sign and “dashed lines” denote edges with negative signs. The set of the underlying simple graphs of the above signed graphs is denoted by $L_s$.

Using the above result we provide a list $L_s$ of all minimal (with respect to spanning subgraph inclusion) underlying absolute signed planar cliques.

**Theorem 1.6.** An undirected planar graph is an underlying absolute signed clique if and only if it contains one of the graphs belonging to $L_s$ as a spanning subgraph, where $L_s$ is the set of underlying graphs of the signed graphs depicted in Fig 2.

Let $G_1$ and $G_2$ be two simple graphs with $x_1 \in V(G_1)$ and $x_2 \in V(G_2)$. The 1-sum of $G_1$ and $G_2$ with respect to $x_1$ and $x_2$ is the graph obtained from $G_1$ and $G_2$ by gluing the vertex $x_1$ with $x_2$.

Let $G_1$ and $G_2$ be two simple graphs with $x_1y_1 \in E(G_1)$ and $x_2y_2 \in E(G_2)$. The 2-sum of $G_1$ and $G_2$ with respect to $(x_1, y_1)$ and $(x_2, y_2)$ is the graph obtained from $G_1$ and $G_2$ by gluing the vertex $x_1$ with $x_2$, the vertex $y_1$ with $y_2$ and the edge $x_1y_1$ with $x_2y_2$.

Let $G_1$ be a simple graph with a facial 3-cycle $F_1 = x_1y_1z_1x_1$ and $G_2$ be another simple graph with a facial 3-cycle $F_2 = x_2y_2z_2x_2$. The facial 3-sum of $G_1$ and $G_2$ with respect to $F_1$
and $F_2$ is the graph obtained from $G_1$ and $G_2$ by gluing the vertices $x_1, y_1, z_1$ with $x_2, y_2, z_2$, respectively, and the edges $x_1y_1, y_1 z_1, z_1 x_1$ with $x_2y_2, y_2 z_2, z_2 x_2$, respectively.

Let $\mathcal{L}_s$ denote the set of all planar graphs having one of the elements of $\mathcal{L}_s$ as a spanning subgraph. Let $\mathcal{L}_{ext}$ be the set of all signed graphs whose underlying graphs can be obtained by performing (repeated, but finitely many) 1-sums, 2-sums and facial 3-sums recursively on the elements of $\mathcal{L}_s$. Observe that the elements of $\mathcal{L}_{ext}$ are planar graphs. Thus we present the following as an evidence that $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$ might actually be the unique optimized universal target of $\mathcal{P}_3$.

**Theorem 1.7.** For each $C \in \mathcal{L}_{ext}$ and for each signature $\Lambda$ of $C$, $(C, \Lambda)$ admits a homomorphism to $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$. 

In this article, we present the proofs of the above three theorems in three separate sections and conclude after that.

## 2 Proof of Theorem 1.5

First of all, note that an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored clique is a connected graph having diameter at most two. Also observe that each of the eleven signed graphs depicted in Fig. 1 is an absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar clique.

Bensmail, Duffy and Sen [3] defined and studied $(m, n)$-cliques (we are omitting the definition). An absolute 2-edge-colored clique is the same as a $(0, 2)$-clique. As they have shown that an outerplanar $(m, n)$-clique can have at most $3(2m + n) + 1$ vertices whenever $2m + n \geq 2$, an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar clique has at most seven vertices.

Another useful definition is that of $(0, 2)$-colored mixed coloring and chromatic number. It is better known as 2-edge-colored coloring and chromatic number [1]. A 2-edge-colored $k$-coloring of a signed graph $(G, \Sigma)$ is $k$-vertex-coloring of $G$ such that all the edges of any bichromatic subgraph of $(G, \Sigma)$ have the same sign. The 2-edge-colored chromatic number $\chi_2((G, \Sigma))$ of $(G, \Sigma)$ is the minimum $k$ such that $(G, \Sigma)$ admits a 2-edge-colored $k$-coloring.

**Observation 2.1** (Bensmail, Duffy and Sen 2017 [3]). A signed graph $(C, \Lambda)$ is an absolute 2-edge-colored clique if and only if $\chi_2((C, \Lambda)) = |V(C)|$. Therefore, if $(C, \Lambda)$ is an absolute 2-edge-colored clique, then $|V(C)| \leq \chi_2((C, \Lambda))$.

After that we prove a useful result.

**Lemma 2.2.** Let $G^+$ be a graph obtained by adding a new vertex $\infty$ to $G$ and making it is adjacent to each vertex of $G$. If $\chi_2((G, \Sigma)) \leq k$, then $\chi_2((G^+, \Sigma^*)) \leq 2k + 1$ where the signature $\Sigma^*$ restricted to $G$ is the same as $\Sigma$.

**Proof.** Let $f : V(G) \to \{1, 2, \ldots, k\}$ be a 2-edge-colored $k$-coloring of $(G, \Sigma)$. Then

$$f^*(v) = \begin{cases} 
0 & \text{if } v = \infty, \\
(f(v), +) & \text{if } v \in N^+(\infty) \subseteq V(G), \\
(f(v), -) & \text{if } v \in N^-(\infty) \subseteq V(G). 
\end{cases}$$

is a 2-edge-colored $(2k + 1)$-coloring of $(G^+, \Sigma^*)$. \hfill \quad \square

Given a signed graph $(G, \Sigma)$, two vertices $u$ and $v$ see each other if they are adjacent or are endpoints of a 2-path with edges having different signs. Also if $u$ and $v$ are endpoints of a 2-path with edges having different signs and the third vertex of the 2-path is $w$, then we say that $u$ and $v$ see each other through $w$. 

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Lemma 2.3. If $O$ is an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar clique having $|V(O)| = 7$, then $O$ contains $O_{11}$ as a spanning subgraph.

Proof. Suppose that $|V(O)| = 7$ with $(O, \Omega)$ being an absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar clique. Thus $\delta(O) \in \{1, 2\}$.

Let $\delta(O) = 1$ with a vertex $u$ having degree one and let $v$ be its only neighbor. Furthermore, let $v$ be an \(\alpha\)-neighbor of $u$ for some $\{\alpha, \bar{\alpha}\} = \{+, -\}$. Therefore we must have $N^\alpha(v) = V(O) \setminus \{u, v\}$ in order for a vertex $x \in V(O) \setminus \{u, v\}$ to see $u$. Observe that a pair of vertices from $V(O) \setminus \{u, v\}$ sees each other without using $u$ or $v$. Thus the graph induced by $N^\alpha(v)$ is an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored clique. Moreover it is a path as $O$ is an outerplanar graph. As we know that $[1]$ a signed forest $(F, \Phi)$ has $\chi_2((F, \Phi)) \leq 3$, by Observation 2.1 we have $|V(O)| \leq 5$. Therefore, $\delta(O) = 2$.

Let $\delta(O) = 2$ with a vertex $u$ having degree two and let $v, w$ be its neighbors. Furthermore, let $v$ be an \(\alpha\)-neighbor and $w$ be a \(\beta\)-neighbor of $u$ for some $\{\alpha, \bar{\alpha}\} = \{\beta, \bar{\beta}\} = \{+, -\}$. Therefore we must have $N^\alpha(v) \cup N^\beta(w) = V(O) \setminus \{u, v, w\}$ in order for a vertex $x \in V(O) \setminus \{u, v, w\}$ to see $u$. Note that $|N^\alpha(v) \cap N^\beta(w)| \leq 1$, as otherwise it will create a $K_{2,3}$-minor contradicting the fact that $O$ is an outerplanar graph.

If $|N^\alpha(v) \cap N^\beta(w)| = 0$, then a pair of vertices from $V(O) \setminus \{u, v, w\}$ sees each other without using $u$, $v$ or $w$. Moreover, the vertices of $V(O) \setminus \{u, v, w\}$ induce a forest. Thus the vertices of $V(O) \setminus \{u, v, w\}$ must induce an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored clique of order four which is a forest. This is not possible. Hence we must have $|N^\alpha(v) \cap N^\beta(w)| = 1$.

Finally, let $|N^\alpha(v) \cap N^\beta(w)| = 1$. Moreover, let $N^\alpha(v) \cap N^\beta(w) = z$. Assume that $A = N^\alpha(v) \setminus \{z\}$ and $B = N^\beta(w) \setminus \{z\}$. Note that any edge between $A$ and $B$ will force a $K_{2,3}$-minor contradicting the fact that $O$ is an outerplanar graph.

Without loss of generality assume that $|A| \geq |B|$. If $|B| > 0$, then the only way for the vertices of $A$ to see the vertices of $B$ is through $z$. This creates a $K_{2,3}$-minor, contradicting the outerplanarity of $O$. Hence $|B| = 0$.

If $|B| = 0$, then $|A| = 3$. The only two options for a vertex $x \in A$ to see $w$ are through $v$ or $z$. If all three vertices of $A$ see $w$ through $z$, then a $K_{2,3}$-minor is created, a contradiction. Thus at least one vertex from $A$ sees $w$ through $v$ forcing the edge $vw$ in $O$.

Observe that the vertices of $A$ induce a forest. Furthermore, the vertices of $A$ cannot see each other only by going through $u, v, w$. Also it is not possible that all three vertices of $A$ see each other through $z$. Therefore, at least two vertices of $A$ see through the third vertex of $A$ forcing a 2-path in the graph induced by $A$.

However, this forces the graph $O_{11}$ inside $O$ as a subgraph.

Finally, we prove the remaining part of the result.

Lemma 2.4. Let $O$ be an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar clique. If $|V(O)| \leq 6$, then $O$ contains one of $O_1, O_2, \ldots, O_{10}$ from $L_{2e}$ as a spanning subgraph.

Proof. Suppose $(O, \Omega)$ is an absolute 2-edge-colored clique.

As any absolute 2-edge-colored clique is connected, if $|V(O)| = 1, 2$ or $3$, then $O$ contains $O_1, O_2$ or $O_3$ as a spanning subgraph, respectively.

Next suppose that $|V(O)| \in \{4, 5, 6\}$. Thus $O$ is either hamiltonian or has a cut vertex $v$.

Let us first suppose that $O$ has a cut vertex $v$. Assume that $O \setminus \{v\}$ has components $C_1, C_2, \ldots, C_k$. Then the vertices of $C_i$ must see the vertices of $C_j$, for all $i \neq j$, through $v$ in $(O, \Omega)$. Therefore, $k = 2$ and $V(C_1) \subseteq N^\alpha(u)$ and $V(C_2) \subseteq N^\alpha(u)$ for some $\{\alpha, \bar{\alpha}\} = \{+, -\}$. Thus the graph induced by $V(C_i)$ from $(O, \Omega)$ is an absolute 2-edge-colored clique for each $i \in \{1, 2\}$. Moreover, as $O$ is outerplanar, $C_i$’s are paths. As $\chi_2((F, \Phi)) \leq 3$ when $F$ is a forest,
$|V(C_i)| \leq 3$. Thus if $O$ has a cut vertex, then $O$ must contain $O_5, O_7, O_8$ or $O_{10}$ as a spanning subgraph.

If $|V(O)| = 4$ and $O$ is hamiltonian, then $O$ must contain $O_4$ as a spanning subgraph.

If $|V(O)| = 5$ and $O$ is hamiltonian, then $O$ contains a 5-cycle. However, any signature on a 5-cycle forces two incident edges of the same sign. The endpoints of the 2-path induced by those edges cannot see each other. Thus $O$ must have at least one chord in this case forcing $O_6$ as a spanning subgraph.

If $|V(O)| = 6$ and $O$ is hamiltonian, then $O$ contains a 6-cycle. However, a 6-cycle does not have diameter two. If we add some chords to a 6-cycle in order to construct an outerplanar graph having diameter two, then we are forced to have $O_9$ as a spanning subgraph.

Thus the proof of Theorem 1.5 follows directly from the above two lemmas and the fact that an absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar clique can have at most seven vertices due to Bensmail, Duffy and Sen [3].

3 Proof of Theorem 1.6

First observe that each of the fifteen signed graphs depicted in Fig 2 is an absolute signed planar clique.

For the rest of this section we will assume that $(H, \Pi)$ is an absolute signed planar clique.

Let $u, v$ be a pair of vertices of an undirected simple graph $G$. We say that $u$ reaches $v$ if either $u$ and $v$ are adjacent or $u$ and $v$ have at least two common neighbors. Furthermore, when writing that $u$ reaches $v$ through $w$, we will mean that $w$ is a common neighbor of $u$ and $v$. Also if each pair of vertices of $G$ reaches each other, then we say that $G$ is reach-complete. This motivates our first observation.

**Observation 3.1.** An underlying absolute signed clique is reach-complete.

We are going to list a series of observations and lemmas to aid our proof.

**Observation 3.2.** A reach-complete graph $G$ cannot have a cut vertex. Moreover, if $|V(G)| \geq 3$, then $\delta(G) \geq 2$.

**Proof.** If a reach-complete graph $G$ has a cut vertex $v$, then the vertices from different components of $G \setminus \{v\}$ are neither adjacent nor have at least two common neighbors in $G$.

If $|V(G)| \geq 3$ and $\delta(G) = 1$, then the neighbor of a vertex having degree one is a cut vertex. \qed

Note that a reach-complete graph is either a complete graph or contains a 4-cycle. Thus the following is immediate.

**Lemma 3.3.** If $(H, \Pi)$ is an absolute signed planar clique having $|V(H)| \leq 4$, then $H$ contains one of $O_1, O_2, O_3, O_4$ from $L_s$ as a spanning subgraph.

Now let us consider the case of graphs having five vertices.

**Lemma 3.4.** If $(H, \Pi)$ is an absolute signed planar clique having $|V(H)| = 5$, then $H$ contains $A_5$ from $L_s$ as a spanning subgraph.
**Lemma 3.8.** Observe that

**Proof.** As \( H \) does not have a cut vertex, \( H \) contains either a 5-cycle or a \( K_{2,3} \). We know that a 5-cycle is not an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored clique, and thus obviously not an underlying absolute signed clique. Therefore, we need to add at least one chord to make the graph an underlying absolute signed clique. In that case, the subgraph \( A_5 \) is created.

On the other hand, a \( K_{2,3} \) is not an underlying absolute signed clique as the vertices from the partite set of cardinality three cannot reach each other. Thus we need to add at least one edge in the concerning partite set. This creates the subgraph \( A_5 \). \( \square \)

We already know that if \( (H,\Pi) \) is an absolute signed planar clique having \( |V(H)| \geq 6 \), then \( \delta(H) \geq 2 \). First we analyse the case when \( \delta(H) = 2 \).

**Lemma 3.5.** If \( (H,\Pi) \) is an absolute signed planar clique having \( |V(H)| \geq 6 \) and \( \delta(H) = 2 \), then \( H \) contains \( A_6 \) from \( L_s \) as a spanning subgraph.

**Proof.** Let \( u \) be a vertex of \( H \) having exactly two neighbors \( v \) and \( w \). Then each non-neighbor of \( v \) must be adjacent to both \( v \) and \( w \), resulting in a \( K_{2,|V(G)|-2} \). For being an absolute signed clique, \( v \) (or \( w \)) must be adjacent to each non-neighbor of \( u \) by edges of the same sign. Now note that the only way for \( (H,\Pi) \) to be an absolute signed planar clique is to have the non-neighbors of \( u \) induce a 2-path with edges having different signs. In that case, \( |V(H)|-2 = 4 \) and thus \( H \) contains \( A_6 \) as a subgraph. \( \square \)

We provided a list of edge-minimal outerplanar underlying absolute 2-edge-colored cliques (see Fig. 1). If an absolute signed planar clique \( (H,\Pi) \) has a dominating vertex \( v \), then we can resign the \(-\)-neighbors of \( v \) to obtain a new signature \( \Pi^* \) of \( H \). As absolute signed cliques are invariant under resigning operations, \( (H,\Pi^*) \) is also an absolute signed planar clique. Observe that the signed graph obtained by deleting \( v \) from \( (H,\Pi^*) \) is an absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar clique. Hence:

**Observation 3.6.** A signed graph \( (H,\Pi) \) is an absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar clique if and only if \( (H^+,\Pi^+) \) is an absolute signed planar clique.

Recall that \( (O_k^+,\Omega_k^+) \) denotes the \( k^{th} \) graph in Figure 1. Then:

**Observation 3.7.** If \( \subseteq \) denotes spanning subgraph inclusion, then \( A_2 \subseteq O_1^+, A_3 \subseteq O_2^+, A_4 \subseteq O_3^+, A_5 \subseteq O_4^+, A_6 \subseteq O_5^+, A_8 \subseteq O_7^+, A_9 \subseteq O_8^+, A_{10} \subseteq O_9^+, A_{13} \subseteq O_{11}^+ \),

Due to the above results, we need to only focus on the edge-minimal underlying absolute signed planar cliques having at least six vertices with minimum degree three and domination number at least two.

Now let us introduce a few graphs. Let \( P_2 \) and \( P_4 \) denote the paths on two and four vertices, respectively. Let \( A \) be the graph obtained by taking two vertices \( \infty \) and \( -\infty \) along with the disjoint union of \( P_2 \) and \( P_4 \), and making each \( \infty \), \( -\infty \) adjacent to each vertex of \( P_2 \) and \( P_4 \). Also let \( B \) be the graph obtained from \( A \) by adding an edge between the vertices \( \infty \) and \( -\infty \). Furthermore, let \( C \) denote the graph obtained by taking a 5-cycle and a vertex \( \infty \) and adding edges between \( \infty \) and each of the vertices of the 5-cycle.

**Lemma 3.8.** The graphs \( A, B \) and \( C \) are not underlying absolute signed cliques.

**Proof.** Observe that \( A \) is a subgraph of \( B \). Thus if we prove that \( B \) is not an underlying absolute signed clique, then it will imply that \( A \) is also not an underlying absolute signed clique.

Assume that \( B \) is an underlying absolute signed clique and \( \Sigma \) is a signature of \( B \) such that \( (B,\Sigma) \) is an absolute signed clique. Now resign vertices of \( (B,\Sigma) \) to obtain the signed graph
(B, $\Sigma^*$) such that the edges incident to $\infty$ are all positive and one edge between $-\infty$ and a vertex $x$ of $P_2$ is also positive. We know that $(B, \Sigma^*)$ is also an absolute signed clique. Therefore, in order for $x$ to reach the vertices of $P_4$, the edges between $-\infty$ and the vertices of $P_4$ must be negative. In this case, the endpoints of $P_4$ cannot reach each other.

Observe that $C$ is a planar graph. If $C$ is an underlying absolute signed planar clique, then by Observation 3.6 a 5-cycle is an underlying absolute 2-edge-colored outerplanar clique. This is a contradiction due to Theorem 1.5. □

As $A, B$ and $C$ are not underlying absolute signed planar cliques, one may wonder what happens if we add some edges to them. If we add any edge to $B$ to obtain a graph $B^*$, then $B^*$ contains $A_{13}$ as a spanning subgraph. Similarly, if we add any edge to $C$ to obtain a graph $C^*$, then $C^*$ contains $A_6$ as a spanning subgraph. Therefore:

**Lemma 3.9.** If an underlying absolute signed planar clique $H$ contains $A, B$ or $C$ as a spanning subgraph, then $H$ must contain either $A_6$ or $A_{13}$ as a spanning subgraph.

Finally, we conclude the proof of Theorem 1.6 using the following result which is implicitly proved by Bensmail, Nandi and Sen [4] (please note the erratum [5] as well).

**Lemma 3.10.** If $H$ is a planar edge-minimal reach-complete graph having at least six vertices, minimum degree at least three and domination number at least two, then $H$ contains one of $A_6, A_8, A_9, A_{10}, A_{11}, A_{12}, A_{13}, A_{14}, A_{15}, A, B, C$ as a spanning subgraph.

**Proof.** This proof is implicitly present in Section 5 of [4]. Let $H$ be as in the statement.

If $|V(H)| = 6$, then Lemma 5.6 proves that $H$ contains one of $A_6, A_7, A_8, C$ (which are the graphs $H_7, H_6, H_9, H_8$ in [4], respectively).

If $|V(H)| = 7$, then Lemma 5.9 proves that $H$ contains one of $A_9, A_{10}, A_{11}$ (which are the graphs $H_{10}, H_{11}, H_{12}$ in [4], respectively).

If $|V(H)| = 8$, then Lemma 5.9 proves that $H$ contains one of $A_{12}, A_{13}, A_{14}, A_{15}, A$ (which are the graphs $H_{13}, H_{14}, H_{15}, H_{16}, A$ in [4], respectively). □

### 4 Proof of Theorem 1.7

A signed graph $(G_1, \Sigma_1)$ is edge-transitively homomorphic to $(G_2, \Sigma_2)$ if for each $x_1y_1 \in E(G)$ and each $x_2y_2 \in E(H)$ there exists a homomorphism $f : (G_1, \Sigma_1) \rightarrow (G_2, \Sigma_2)$ such that $f(x) = w$ and $f(y) = z$.

A signed graph $(G_1, \Sigma_1)$ is triangle-transitively homomorphic to $(G_2, \Sigma_2)$ if for each unbalanced (respectively, balanced) 3-cycle $x_1y_1z_1x_1$ in $(G_1, \Sigma_1)$ and each unbalanced (respectively, balanced) 3-cycle $x_2y_2z_2x_2$ in $(G_2, \Sigma_2)$, there exists a homomorphism $f : (G_1, \Sigma_1) \rightarrow (G_2, \Sigma_2)$ such that $f(x_1) = y_2$, $f(y_1) = y_2$, and $f(z_1) = z_2$.

An isomorphism is a bijective homomorphism whose inverse is also a homomorphism. An isomorphism of a signed graph $(G, \Sigma)$ to itself is an automorphism.

We know that $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$ is edge- and triangle-transitive [12], or, in other words, that $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$ is edge- and triangle-transitively automorphic to itself. Thus if a signed $(E, \Lambda)$ admits a homomorphism to $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$, then $(E, \Lambda)$ is also edge- and triangle-transitively homomorphic to $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$. Recall that $\bar{L}_s$ is the set of all planar graphs having one of the elements of $L_s$ as a spanning subgraph. Let $L_{tri}$ denote the set of all triangulations of the elements of $L_s$. Observe that every element of $L_s$ is a subgraph of an element of $L_{tri}$. If we can show that $(E, \Lambda) \rightarrow (P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$ for any $E \in L_{tri}$ and any signature $\Lambda$, then we are done as $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$ is edge- and triangle-transitive.
Lemma 4.1. For each $C \in L_{tri}$ and for each signature $\Lambda$ of $C$, $(C, \Lambda)$ admits a homomorphism to $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$. The proof of the above lemma is contained in some observations and lemmas presented in the following. We will use the following computer-assisted observation from [12] as a tool to our proof.

Observation 4.2 (Ochem, Pinlou and Sen 2015 [12]). Any 4-connected planar signed graph with at most fifteen vertices admits a homomorphism to $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$. As any triangulation of $A_1, A_2, A_3$ and $A_4$ is 4-connected, then:

Lemma 4.3. Any signed planar graph whose underlying graph is a triangulation of $A_1, A_2, A_3$ or $A_4$ admits a homomorphism to $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$. Let $G$ be a planar graph. Let $E_1$ and $E_2$ be two embeddings of $G$ on a sphere. If it is possible to continuously deform the sphere along with the embedding $E_1$ to obtain a sphere along with the embedding $E_2$, then the two embeddings of $G$ are congruent. Furthermore, let $f$ be an automorphism of $G$. Now in the embedding $E_2$ of $G$, rename each vertex $f(v)$ to $v$ for all $v \in V(G)$. If the embedding $E_2$, after renaming, is congruent to $E_1$, then $E_1$ is equivalent to $E_2$. Lemma 4.4. Each of the planar graphs $A_5, A_6, \cdots, A_{15}$ has a unique embedding on a sphere upto equivalence.

Proof. Notice that $A_5, A_6, \cdots, A_{15}$ are hamiltonian planar graphs as each of them has the hamiltonian cycle $abc\cdots a$. This hamiltonian cycle, under any planar embedding, becomes a closed curve.

Now the other edges, called extras, of these graphs are either inside the cycle (closed curve) or outside. Let in-extras be the extras drawn inside the hamiltonian cycle(s) in Fig. 2 and let the other extras be out-extras.

Observe that we may select any such edge of the graph and assume without loss of generality that the edge will be inside the cycle. For any $X \in \{A_5, A_6, A_7, A_9, A_{11}, A_{12}, A_{14}, A_{15}\}$ and any in-extra $e$ of $X$, if we draw $e$ inside the hamiltonian cycle of $X$, then we are forced to draw each in-extra of $X$ inside the hamiltonian cycle and each out-extra of $X$ outside the hamiltonian cycle.

Thus $A_5, A_6, A_7, A_9, A_{11}, A_{12}, A_{14}, A_{15}$ have unique embeddings on a sphere upto equivalence.

Let $S$ be two disjoint vertices and let $T$ be two disjoint paths. Add all the edges between the vertices of $S$ and $T$. Observe that $A_5, A_8, A_{10}$ and $A_{13}$ are planar graphs of the above types. They have unique embeddings on a sphere upto equivalence. First we handle the signed planar graphs whose underlying graphs are triangulations of $A_5, A_8, A_{10}$ and $A_{13}$.

Lemma 4.5. Any signed planar graph $(A, \Pi)$ whose underlying graph is a triangulation of $A_5, A_7, A_8, A_{10}$ or $A_{13}$ admits a homomorphism to $(P_9^+, \Gamma^+)$. Proof. Any triangulation of $A_5, A_7, A_8, A_{10}$ or $A_{13}$ is either a 4-connected graph or a planar graph with domination number one.

If $A$ (as in the lemma) is 4-connected, then we are done by Observation 4.2.

Otherwise $A$ has a dominating vertex $v$. We may resign some of the neighbors of $v$ to obtain a signed graph $(A, \Pi^*)$ where all the edges incident to $v$ are positive. Observe that the graph
obtained by deleting the vertex \( v \) from \((A, \Pi^*)\) is a signed outerplanar graph. We know that every signed outerplanar graph admits a vertex-mapping to \((P_9, \Gamma)\) preserving edge signs [8]. Thus we can extend the mapping by mapping the vertex \( v \) to the vertex \( \infty \) of \((P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\) to obtain \((A, \Pi^*) \to (P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\).

A couple of necessary observations follow.

**Observation 4.6.** Any triangulation of \( A_6 \) or \( A_9 \) is a subgraph of \( A_{15} \) and any triangulation of \( A_{11} \) is a subgraph of \( A_{14} \).

**Observation 4.7** (Ochem, Pinlou and Sen 2017 [12]). Let \( v \) be a vertex of a signed graph \((A, \Pi)\) having degree at most three such that the neighbors of \( v \) induce a clique in \( A \). Then we can extend any homomorphism of \((A \setminus \{v\}, \Pi) \to (P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\) to a homomorphism of \((A, \Pi) \to (P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\).

Finally we handle the signed planar graphs whose underlying graphs are triangulations of \( A_{12}, A_{14} \) and \( A_{15} \).

**Lemma 4.8.** Any signed planar graph \((A, \Pi)\) whose underlying graph is a triangulation of \( A_{12}, A_{14} \) or \( A_{15} \) admits a homomorphism to \((P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\).

**Proof.** Any triangulation of \( A_{12} \) is 4-connected and thus we are done by Observation 4.2.

There are exactly two triangulations of \( A_{14} \), one by adding the edge \( ae \) and the other by adding the edge \( bf \). The graph \( A_{14} \cup \{bf\} \) is 4-connected, thus we are done by Observation 4.2. On the other hand, the graph \( A_{14} \cup \{ae\} \) is not 4-connected. Observe that the graph \( A_{14} \cup \{ae\} \) has exactly two vertices of \( b \) and \( f \) having degree three each. The neighbors of \( b \) and \( f \) are cliques of order three. Also if we delete the vertices \( b \) and \( f \) from \( A_{14} \cup \{ae\} \), then the graph we obtain is 4-connected. Therefore, we are done by Observations 4.2 and 4.7.

There are exactly four triangulations of \( A_{15} \), obtained by adding two edges from \( \{ag, bh\} \times \{ce, df\} \). The graph \( A_{14} \cup \{bh, df\} \) is 4-connected, thus we are done by Observation 4.2. On the other hand, the other triangulations have at most four vertices having degree three. The neighbors of each of these vertices are cliques of order three. Also if we delete the vertices having degree three from the triangulation(s), then the graph(s) we obtain are 4-connected. Therefore, we are done by Observations 4.2 and 4.7.

5 Conclusions

We would like to report that there are, in total, 47 non-isomorphic planar underlying push cliques (1 on 1 vertex, 1 on 2 vertices, 1 on 3 vertices, 3 on 4 vertices, 4 on 5 vertices, 10 on 6 vertices, 14 on 7 vertices and 13 on 8 vertices). See the lists in the webpage: http://jbensmai.fr/code/signed/ for details.

Moreover, we managed to show that an important infinite family of signed planar graphs all admit homomorphism to \((P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\). We feel confident enough to make the following conjecture:

**Conjecture 5.1.** Any signed planar graph \((E, \Sigma)\) admits a homomorphism to \((P_9^+, \Gamma^+)\).

In particular, the conjecture, if true, would imply that \( \chi_s(P_3) = 10 \).

References


