

Lecture 3 - Stochastic Multi-Armed Bandits

Guiliang Liu

The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen

DDA4230: Reinforcement Learning
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Course Page Link (all the course relevant materials will be posted here):

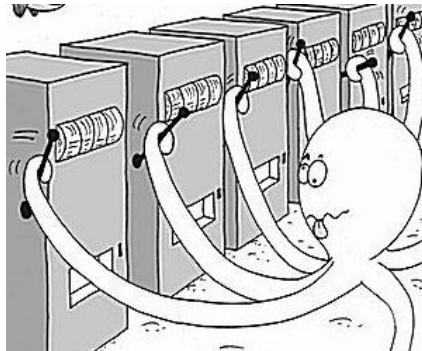
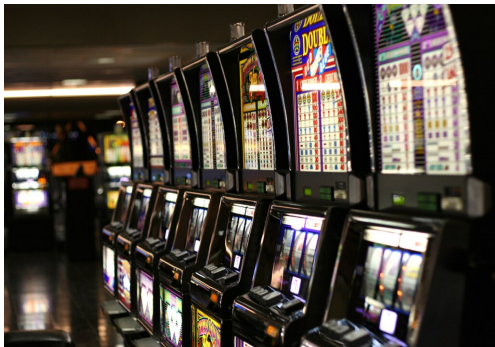
https://guiliang.github.io/courses/cuhk-dda-4230/dda_4230.html



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Multi-Armed Bandits



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Multi-Armed Bandits

The problem of **multi-armed bandits (MAB)** is a special case of the MDP (focusing on exploration), we defined

- $\mathcal{S} = \{1\}$; (degenerated to **dummy** state)
- $\mathcal{A} = [m] = \{1, 2, \dots, m\}$;
- $P_{\mathcal{T}}(s \mid s, a) = 1$;
- $P_{\mathcal{R}}(r \mid a)$ some unknown stochastic function;
- $\rho_0(s) = 1$;
- $\gamma = 1$.
- It terminates at $t = T$.



Multi-Armed Bandits

The key properties of a MAB problem are:

- The reward functions $P_{\mathcal{R}}(r \mid a)$ are not known and can only be inferred using historical observations.
- The multi-armed bandit problem is a simple MDP with a dummy state while we investigate it with model-based methods, recall $\mathcal{S} = \{1\}$, $P_{\mathcal{T}}(s \mid s, a) = 1$, and $r(a) \sim P_{\mathcal{R}}(r \mid a)$.
- The MAB has a finite horizon T . the optimal policy $\pi(\cdot, t)$ maps the historical data and the time t to an action.



Multi-Armed Bandits

The key properties of a MAB problem are:

- The optimal policy could be a stochastic policy that maps the historical data and the time t to an action.
- We can view the difference of $\pi(\cdot, t)$ and $\pi(\cdot, t+1)$ as if this policy is updated through historical data at time t .



Multi-Armed Bandits

The performance of an agent is characterized by the term **regret**: the difference between the **maximum possible expected return** and the **expected return of the agent**, as:

$$\overline{R}_t = (t+1) \max_a \mathbb{E}[r(a)] - \mathbb{E}\left[\sum_{t'=0}^t r_{t'}\right].$$

Remark:

1. $(t+1) \max_a \mathbb{E}[r(a)]$ is a constant.
2. Maximizing R_t (cumulative rewards) is equivalent to minimize \overline{R}_t .



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Multi-Armed Bandits

- The **mean** of the reward of the i -th arm (action): $\mu_i = \mathbb{E}[r(i)]$.
- The expected reward of an **optimal** arm: $\mu^* = \max_i \mu_i$.
- The optimality **action gap**: $\Delta_i = \mu^* - \mu_i$ (unity loss due to sub-optimality).
- The natural filtration: $N_{i,t} = \sum_{t'=0}^t \mathbb{1}\{a_{t'} = i\}$.

Based on the aforementioned definitions, we alternatively write the regret into:

$$\bar{R}_t = \sum_{i=1}^m \mathbb{E}[N_{i,t}] \Delta_i.$$



Some Examples of Bandits

- **Investment.** Each morning, you choose one stock to invest into, and invest \$1. In the end of the day, you observe the change in value for each stock. **Goal:** to maximize wealth.

Example	Action	Reward	Full feedback
Investment	a stock to invest into	change in value during the day	change in value for all other stocks



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Some Examples of Bandits

- **Dynamic Pricing.** A store is selling a digital good (e.g., an app or a song). When a new customer arrives, the store picks a price. Customer buys (or not) and leaves forever. **Goal:** to maximize total profit.

Example	Action	Reward	Partial feedback
Dynamic pricing	a price p	p if sale; 0 otherwise	sale \Rightarrow sale at any smaller price; no sale \Rightarrow no sale at any larger price



Some Examples of Bandits

- **News Site.** When a new user arrives, the site picks a news header to show, observes whether the user clicks. **Goal:** to maximize the number of clicks.

Example	Action	Reward	Bandit feedback
News site	an article to display	1 if clicked, 0 otherwise	none



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Type of Feedback

These examples correspond to the 3 types of feedback

- **Full feedback.** The reward is revealed for all arms;
- **Partial feedback.** The reward is revealed for some but not necessarily for all arms;
- **Bandit feedback.** The reward is revealed only for the chosen arm.



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In a MAB problem, the agent needs to both:

- Exploit the historical information to choose high-reward arms (exploitation)
- Deploy actions to collect more information (exploration).

The **exploration-exploitation tradeoff** is most important in RL!



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Type of Rewards

In our MAB, the reward function depends only on a , i.e. $\mathcal{R}(s, a) = r(a)$.

- **Rewards that are i.i.d.** The reward for each arm is drawn independently from a fixed distribution that depends on the arm but not on the round index t ;



Type of Rewards

In our MAB, the reward function depends only on a , i.e. $\mathcal{R}(s, a) = r(a)$.

- **Rewards that are i.i.d.** The reward for each arm is drawn independently from a fixed distribution that depends on the arm but not on the round index t ;
- **Adversarial rewards.** Rewards are chosen by an adversary (Maximize \bar{R}_t).
- **Strategic rewards.** Rewards are chosen by an adversary with known constraints, such as reward of each arm can change by at most B from one round to another.
- **Stochastic rewards.** Reward of each arm follows some stochastic process or random walk.



Concentration Inequalities

The setting:

- Let X_1, \dots, X_n be independent random variables and assume that $\mathbb{E}[X_i]$ exists.
- Let $\bar{X} = \frac{1}{n}(X_1 + \dots + X_n)$ denote the average.

Then, **the strong law of large number** indicates that when n approaches infinity,

$$\mathbb{P}(\bar{X} = \mathbb{E}[\bar{X}]) = 1.$$

A **concentration inequality** bounds both the error term and the probability term in the number n of samples:

$$\mathbb{P}(|\bar{X} - \mathbb{E}[\bar{X}]| \leq \varepsilon(n)) \geq 1 - \delta(n),$$

where $\varepsilon(n)$ and $\delta(n)$ converge to 0 when n approaches infinity.



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Concentration Inequalities

Lemma (Chebyshev's inequality)

Let X_1, \dots, X_n be i.i.d and assume that the variance $\mathbb{V}[X_i] = \sigma^2$ exists, then

$$\mathbb{P}(|\bar{X} - \mathbb{E}[\bar{X}]| \leq z) \geq 1 - \frac{\sigma^2}{nz^2}.$$

Note that $\frac{\sigma^2}{nz^2}$ is $O(\frac{1}{n})$, not very ideal for RL.

Proof: See *Chebyshev's inequality* on Wikipedia.



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Concentration Inequalities

Lemma (Hoeffding's inequality)

If $0 \leq X_i \leq c$ for each X_i , then for

$$\mathbb{P}(\bar{X} - \mathbb{E}[\bar{X}] \leq z) \geq 1 - \exp\left(-\frac{2nz^2}{c^2}\right).$$

Note that $\exp(-\frac{2nz^2}{c^2})$ is $O(\frac{1}{e^n})$, better for RL.

Proof: See *Hoeffding's lemma* on Wikipedia.



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Concentration Inequalities

Lemma (The Chernoff-Hoeffding inequality)

For $\alpha > 0$ and $t > 1$, if $X_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$ for each X_i , then for

$$\mathbb{P}(|\bar{X} - E[\bar{X}]| \leq \sqrt{\frac{\alpha \log t}{n}}) \geq 1 - 2t^{-\alpha/2}.$$



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Tail bounds

Lemma (Gaussian tail bound)

If $X \sim \mathcal{N}(0,1)$, then for $x > 0$,

$$\frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}} \left(\frac{1}{x} - \frac{1}{x^3} \right) \exp\left(-\frac{x^2}{2}\right) \leq \mathbb{P}(X \geq x) \leq \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}x} \exp\left(-\frac{x^2}{2}\right).$$



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Tail bounds

Lemma (Gaussian tail bound)

For a σ^2 -sub-Gaussian random variable X , for $z \geq 0$,

$$\mathbb{P}(X - \mathbb{E}[X] \leq z) \geq 1 - \exp\left(-\frac{z^2}{2\sigma^2}\right).$$



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Question and Answering (Q&A)



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