

HarvardX: PH125.9x Data Science

MovieLens Project Submission

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Contents

1 Overview	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Aim of the project	2
1.3 Dataset	2
2 Methods and Analysis	4
2.1 Data Analysis	4
2.2 Modelling Approach	9
2.2.1 I. Average movie rating model	9
2.2.2 II. Movie effect model	10
2.2.3 III. Movie and user effect model	11
2.2.4 IV. Regularized movie and user effect model	13
3 Results	16
4 Discussion	16
5 Conclusion	16
6 Appendix - Environment	17

1 Overview

This project is related to the MovieLens Project of the HarvardX: PH125.9x Data Science: Capstone course. The present report starts with a general idea of the project and by representing its objective. Then the given dataset will be prepared and setup. An exploratory data analysis is carried out in order to develop a machine learning algorithm that could predict movie ratings. Results that have been obtained through the application of the machine learning algorithms have been defined. Finally the report ends with some concluding remarks.

1.1 Introduction

Recommendation systems use ratings that users have given to items to make specific recommendations to the user on what they might potentially like. Companies that sell products to a wide range of customers and permit these customers to rate their products, like Amazon, are able to collect massive data dumps that can be used to predict what rating a particular user will give to a specific item. Items for which a high rating is predicted for a given user are then recommended to that user based on their past activity or likelihood to buy.

The same could be done for other items, as movies for instance in our case. Recommendation systems are one of the most used models in machine learning algorithms. In fact the success of Netflix is said to be based on its strong recommender system. The Netflix prize (open competition for the best collaborative filtering algorithm to predict user ratings for films, based on previous ratings without any other information about the users or films), in fact, represent the high importance of the algorithm for products recommendation system.

For this project we will focus on creating a movie recommendation system using the 10M version of MovieLens dataset, collected by GroupLens Research.

1.2 Aim of the project

The aim in this project is to train a machine learning algorithm that predicts user ratings (from 0.5 to 5 stars) using the inputs of a provided subset (edx dataset provided by the staff) to predict movie ratings in a provided validation set.

The value used to evaluate algorithm performance is the Root Mean Square Error, or RMSE. RMSE is one of the most used measure of the differences between values predicted by a model and the values observed. RMSE is a measure of accuracy, to compare forecasting errors of different models for a particular dataset, a lower RMSE is better than a higher one. The effect of each error on RMSE is proportional to the size of the squared error; thus larger errors have a disproportionately large effect on RMSE. Consequently, RMSE is sensitive to outliers. Four models that will be developed will be compared using their resulting RMSE in order to assess their quality. The evaluation criteria for this algorithm is a RMSE expected to be lower than 0.8775. The function that computes the RMSE for vectors of ratings and their corresponding predictors will be the following:

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N} \sum_{u,i} (\hat{y}_{u,i} - y_{u,i})^2}$$

Finally, the best resulting model will be used to predict the movie ratings.

1.3 Dataset

The MovieLens dataset is automatically downloaded

- [MovieLens 10M dataset] <https://grouplens.org/datasets/movielens/10m/>
- [MovieLens 10M dataset - zip file] <http://files.grouplens.org/datasets/movielens/ml-10m.zip>

```
#####
# Create edx set, validation set, and submission file
#####
# Note: this process could take a couple of minutes for loading required package: tidyverse and package
if(!require(tidyverse)) install.packages("tidyverse", repos = "http://cran.us.r-project.org") if(!require(caret))
install.packages("caret", repos = "http://cran.us.r-project.org")
dl <- tempfile()
download.file("http://files.grouplens.org/datasets/movielens/ml-10m.zip", dl)

ratings <- read.table(text = gsub(":", "\t", readLines(unzip(dl, "ml-10M100K/ratings.dat"))),

                      col.names = c("userId", "movieId", "rating", "timestamp"))

movies <- str_split_fixed(readLines(unzip(dl, "ml-10M100K/movies.dat")), "\t:", 3)
colnames(movies) <- c("movieId", "title", "genres")
movies <- as.data.frame(movies) %>% mutate(movieId = as.numeric(levels(movieId))[movieId], title =
                                as.character(title),
                                genres = as.character(genres))
movielens <- left_join(ratings, movies, by = "movieId")
```

In order to predict in the most possible accurate way the movie rating of the users that haven't seen the movie yet, the MovieLens dataset will be splitted into 2 subsets that will be the "edx", a training subset to train the algorithm, and "validation" a subset to test the movie ratings.

The Validation subset will be 10% of the MovieLens data.

```
set.seed(1)
test_index <- createDataPartition(y = movielens$rating, times = 1, p = 0.1, list = FALSE)
edx <- movielens[-test_index,]
temp <- movielens[test_index,]
#Make sure userId and movieId in validation set are also in edx subset:
validation <- temp %>%
  semi_join(edx, by = "movieId") %>%
  semi_join(edx, by = "userId")
```

Add rows removed from validation setback into edx set

```
removed <- anti_join(temp, validation)
edx <- rbind(edx, removed)
rm(dl, ratings, movies, test_index, temp, movielens, removed)
```

Algorithm development is to be carried out on the "edx" subset only, as validation subset will be used to test the final algorithm.

2 Methods and Analysis

2.1 Data Analysis

To get familiar with the dataset, we find the first rows of “edx” subset as below. The subset contain the six variables “userId”, “movieId”, “rating”, “timestamp”, “title”, and “genres”. Each row represent a single rating of a user for a single movie.

```
##      userId movieId rating timestamp                title
## 1         1     122      5 838985046          Boomerang (1992)
## 2         1     185      5 838983525            Net, The (1995)
## 4         1     292      5 838983421          Outbreak (1995)
## 5         1     316      5 838983392          Stargate (1994)
## 6         1     329      5 838983392 Star Trek: Generations (1994)
## 7         1     355      5 838984474    Flintstones, The (1994)
##
##              genres
## 1              Comedy|Romance
## 2              Action|Crime|Thriller
## 4 Action|Drama|Sci-Fi|Thriller
## 5              Action|Adventure|Sci-Fi
## 6 Action|Adventure|Drama|Sci-Fi
## 7              Children|Comedy|Fantasy
```

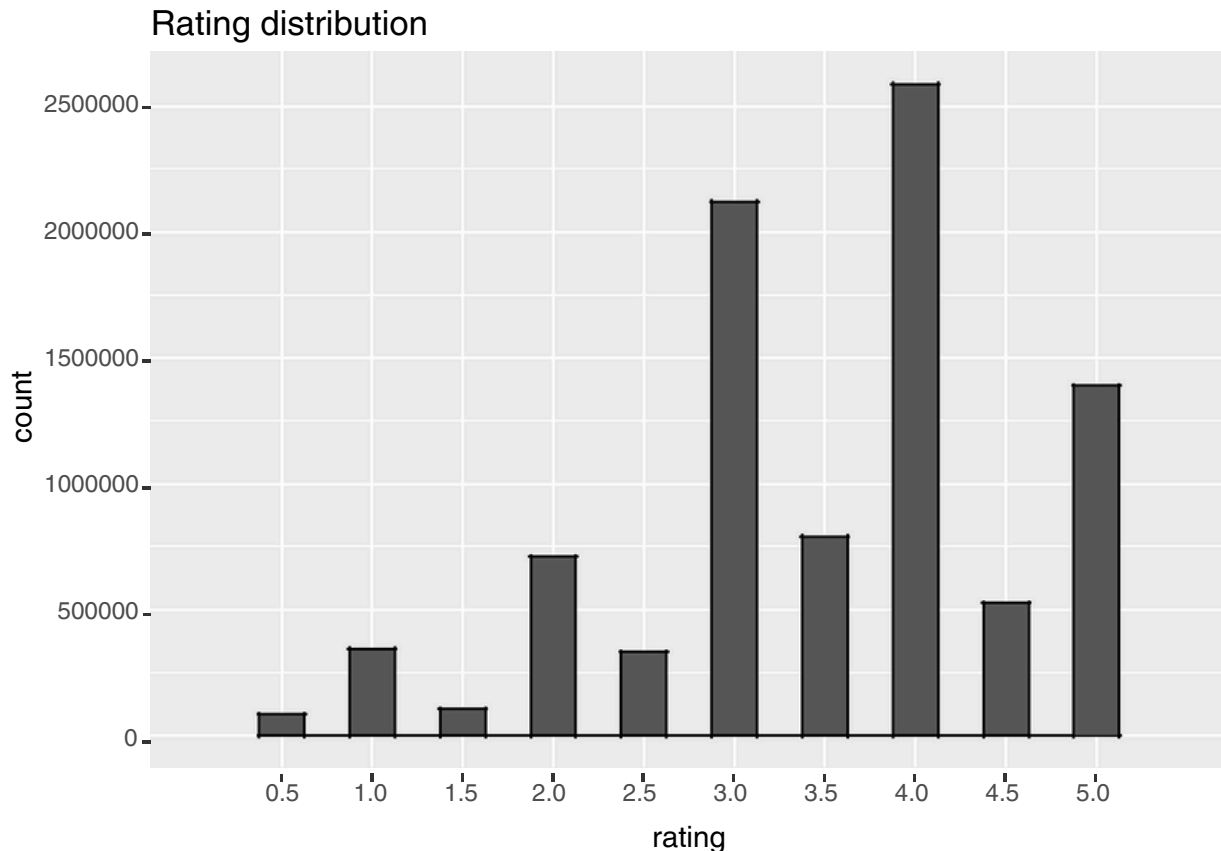
A summary of the subset confirms that there are no missing values.

```
##      userId      movieId      rating      timestamp
## Min.   :    1  Min.   :    1  Min.   :0.500  Min.   :7.897e+08
## 1st Qu.:18124  1st Qu.:   648  1st Qu.:3.000  1st Qu.:9.468e+08
## Median :35738  Median :  1834  Median :4.000  Median :1.035e+09
## Mean   :35870  Mean   :   4122  Mean   :3.512  Mean   :1.033e+09
## 3rd Qu.:53607  3rd Qu.:   3626  3rd Qu.:4.000  3rd Qu.:1.127e+09
## Max.   :71567  Max.   :  65133  Max.   :5.000  Max.   :1.231e+09
##
##      title      genres
## Length:9000055  Length:9000055
## Class :character  Class :character
## Mode  :character  Mode  :character
##
##
##
```

The total of unique movies and users in the edx subset is about 70.000 unique users and about 10.700 different movies:

```
##      n_users n_movies
## 1    69878    10677
```

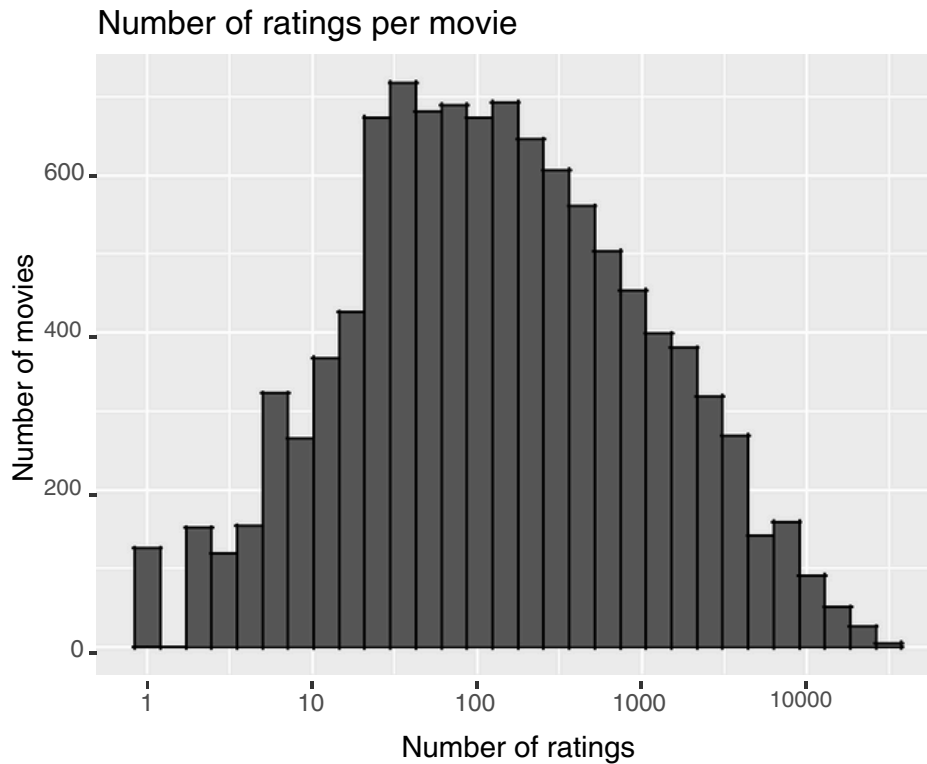
Users have a preference to rate movies rather higher than lower as shown by the distribution of ratings below. 4 is the most common rating, followed by 3 and 5. 0.5 is the least common rating. In general, half rating are less common than whole star ratings.



We can observe that some movies have been rated much more often than others, while some have very few ratings and sometimes only one rating. This will be important for our model as very low rating numbers might result in an untrustworthy estimate for our predictions. In fact 125 movies have been rated only once.

Thus regularisation and a penalty term will be applied to the models in this project. Regularizations are techniques used to reduce the error by fitting a function appropriately on the given training set and avoid overfitting (the production of an analysis that corresponds too closely or exactly to a particular set of data, and may therefore fail to fit additional data or predict future observations reliably). Regularization is a technique used for tuning the function by adding an additional penalty term in the error function. The additional term controls the excessively fluctuating function such that the coefficients don't take extreme values.

```
edx %>%
count(movie_id) %>%
ggplot(aes(n)) +
geom_histogram(bins = 30, color = "black") +
scale_x_log10() +
xlab("Number of ratings") +
ylab("Number of movies") +
ggtitle("Number of ratings per movie")
```



As 20 movies that were rated only once appear to be obscure, predictions of future ratings for them will be difficult.

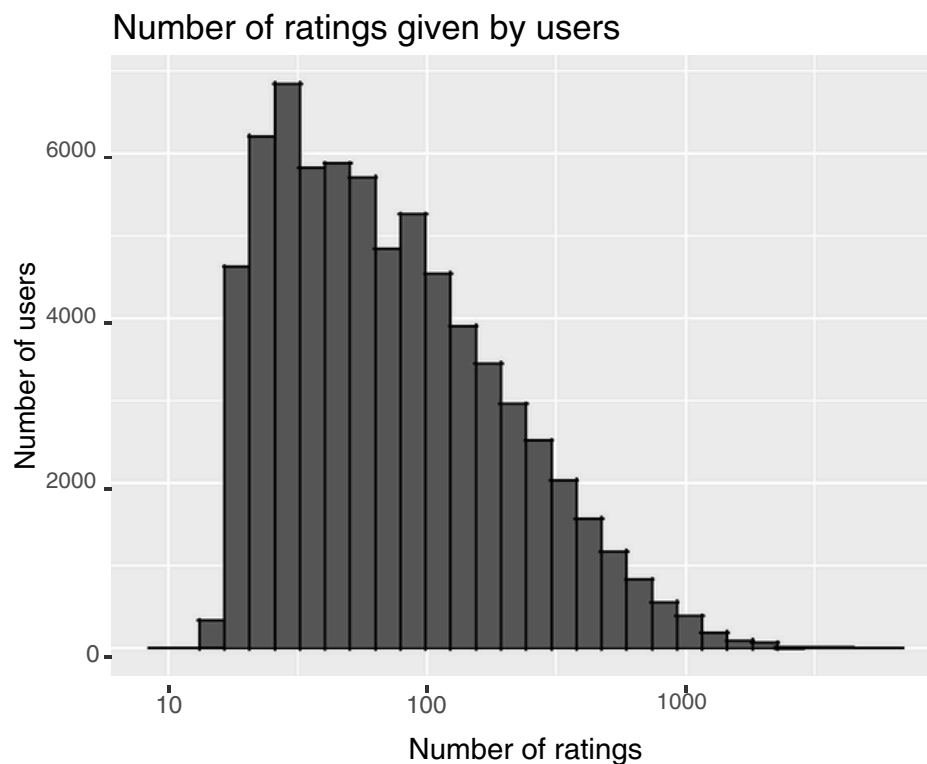
```
edx %>%
  group_by(movieid) %>%
  summarize(count = n()) %>%
  filter(count == 1) %>%
  left_join(edx, by = "movieid") %>%
  group_by(title) %>%
  summarize(rating = rating, n_rating = count) %>%
  slice(120) %>%
  knitr::kable()
```

title	rating	n_rating
1, 2, 3, Sun (Un, deux, trois, soleil) (1993)	2.0	1
100 Feet (2008)	2.0	1
4 (2005)	2.5	1
Accused (Anklaget) (2005)	0.5	1
Ace of Hearts (2008)	2.0	1
Ace of Hearts, The (1921)	3.5	1
Adios, Sabata (Indio Black, sai che ti dico: Sei un gran figlio di. . .) (1971)	1.5	1
Africa addio (1966)	3.0	1
Aleksandra (2007)	3.0	1
Bad Blood (Mauvais sang) (1986)	4.5	1
Battle of Russia, The (Why We Fight, 5) (1943)	3.5	1
Bellissima (1951)	4.0	1
Big Fella (1937)	3.0	1
Black Tights (1-2-3-4 ou Les Collants noirs) (1960)	3.0	1
Blind Shaft (Mang jing) (2003)	2.5	1
Blue Light, The (Das Blaue Licht) (1932)		1
	5.0	

title	rating	n_rating
Borderline (1950)		1
Brothers of theHead (2005)	3.0	1
Chapayev (1934)	2.5	1
Cold Sweat (De la part des copains) (1970)	1.5	1
	2.5	

We can observe that the majority of users have rated between 30 and 100 movies. So, a user penalty term need to be included later in our models.

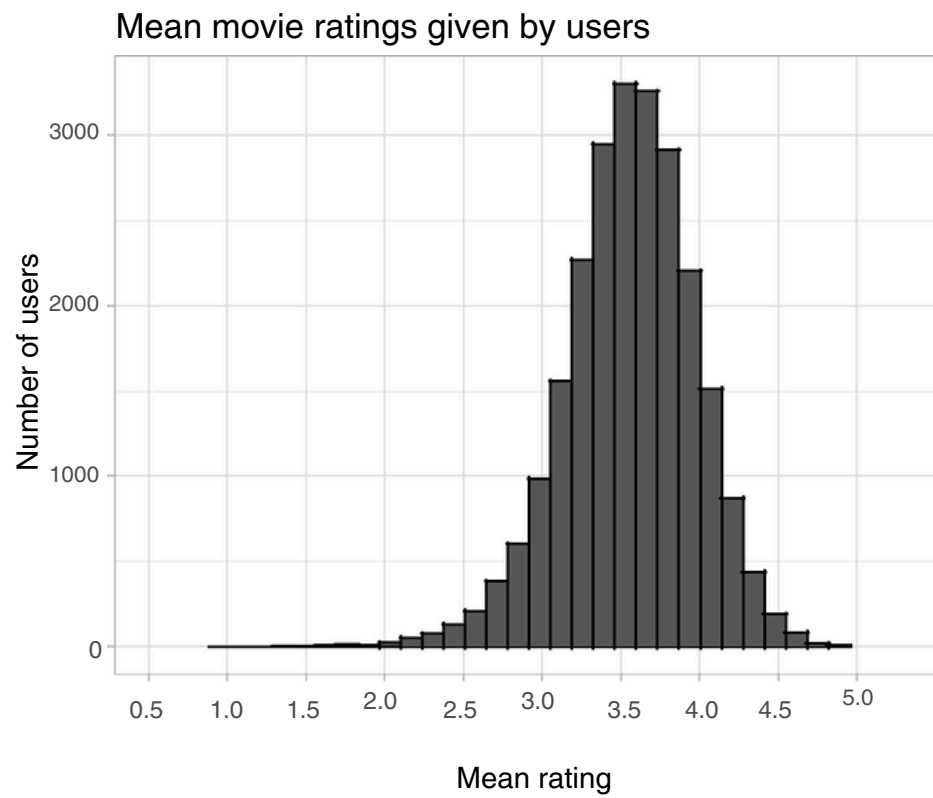
```
edx %>%
count(userId) %>%
ggplot(aes(n)) +
geom_histogram(bins = 30, color = "black") +
scale_x_log10() +
xlab("Number of ratings") +
ylab("Number of users") +
ggtitle("Number of ratings given by users")
```



Furthermore, users differ vastly in how critical they are with their ratings. Some users tend to give much lower star ratings and some users tend to give higher star ratings than average. The visualization below includes only users that have rated at least 100 movies.

```
edx %>%
group_by(userId) %>%
filter(n() >= 100) %>%
summarize(b_u = mean(rating)) %>%
ggplot(aes(b_u)) +
geom_histogram(bins = 30, color = "black") +
xlab("Mean rating") +
ylab("Number of users") +
```

```
ggtitle("Meanmovie ratings given by users") +  
scale_x_discrete(limits = c(seq(0.5,5,0.5))) +  
theme_light()
```



2.2 Modelling Approach

We write now the loss-function, previously anticipated, that compute the RMSE, defined as follows:

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N} \sum_{u,i} (\hat{y}_{u,i} - y_{u,i})^2}$$

with N being the number of user/movie combinations and the sum occurring over all these combinations. The RMSE is our measure of model accuracy. We can interpret the RMSE similarly to a standard deviation: it is the typical error we make when predicting a movie rating. If its result is larger than 1, it means that our typical error is larger than one star, which is not a good result. The written function to compute the RMSE for vectors of ratings and their corresponding predictions is:

```
RMSE <- function(true_ratings, predicted_ratings){  
  sqrt(mean((true_ratings - predicted_ratings)^2))  
}
```

The lower the better, as said previously.

2.2.1 I. Average movie rating model

The first basic model predicts the same rating for all movies, so we compute the dataset's mean rating. The expected rating of the underlying data set is between 3 and 4. We start by building the simplest possible recommender system by predicting the same rating for all movies regardless of user who give it. A model based approach assumes the same rating for all movie with all differences explained by random variation :

$$Y_{u,i} = \mu + \epsilon_{u,i}$$

with $\epsilon_{u,i}$ independent error sample from the same distribution centred at 0 and μ the “true” rating for all movies. This very simple model makes the assumption that all differences in movie ratings are explained by random variation alone. We know that the estimate that minimize the RMSE is the leastsquare estimate of $Y_{u,i}$, in this case, is the average of all ratings: The expected rating of the underlying data set is between 3 and 4.

```
mu <- mean(edx$rating)  
mu  
## [1] 3.512465
```

If we predict all unknown ratings with μ or mu, we obtain the first naive RMSE:

```
naive_rmse <- RMSE(validation$rating, mu)
naive_rmse
## [1] 1.061202
```

Here, we represent results table with the first RMSE:

```
rmse_results <- data_frame(method = "Average movie rating model", RMSE = naive_rmse)
rmse_results %>% knitr::kable()
```

method	RMSE
Average movie rating model	1.061202

This give us our baseline RMSE to compare with next modelling approaches.

In order to do better than simply predicting the average rating, we incorporate some of insights we gained during the exploratory data analysis.

2.2.2 II. Movie effect model

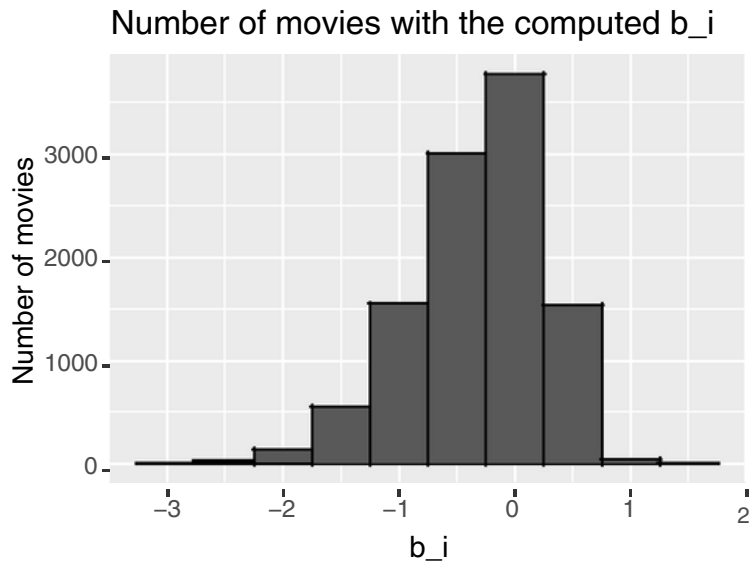
To improve above model we focus on the fact that, from experience, we know that some movies are just generally rated higher than others. Higher ratings are mostly linked to popular movies among users and the opposite is true for unpopular movies. We compute the estimated deviation of each movies' mean rating from the total mean of all movies μ . The resulting variable is called "b" (as bias) for each movie "i" b_i , that represents average ranking for movie i :

$$Y_{u,i} = \mu + b_i + \epsilon_{u,i}$$

The histogram is left skewed, implying that more movies have negative effects

```
movie_avgs <- edx %>%
```

```
  group_by(movieId) %>%
  summarize(b_i = mean(rating - mu))
movie_avgs %>% qplot(b_i, geom = "histogram", bins = 10, data = ., color = I("black"), ylab =
"Number of movies", main = "Number of movies with the computed b_i")
```



This is called the penalty term movieeffect.

Our prediction improve once we predict using this model.

```
predicted_ratings <- mu + validation %>%
  left_join(movie_avgs, by='movieId') %>%
  pull(b_i)
model_1_rmse <- RMSE(predicted_ratings, validation$rating)
rmse_results <- bind_rows(rmse_results,
  data_frame(method="Movie effect model",
    RMSE = model_1_rmse ))
rmse_results %>% knitr::kable()
```

method	RMSE
Average movie rating model	1.0612018
Movie eect model	0.9439087

So we have predicted movie rating based on the fact that movies are rated differently by adding the computed b_i to μ . If an individual movie is on average rated worse than the average rating of all movies μ , we predict that it will be rated lower than μ by b_i , the difference of the individual movie average from the total average.

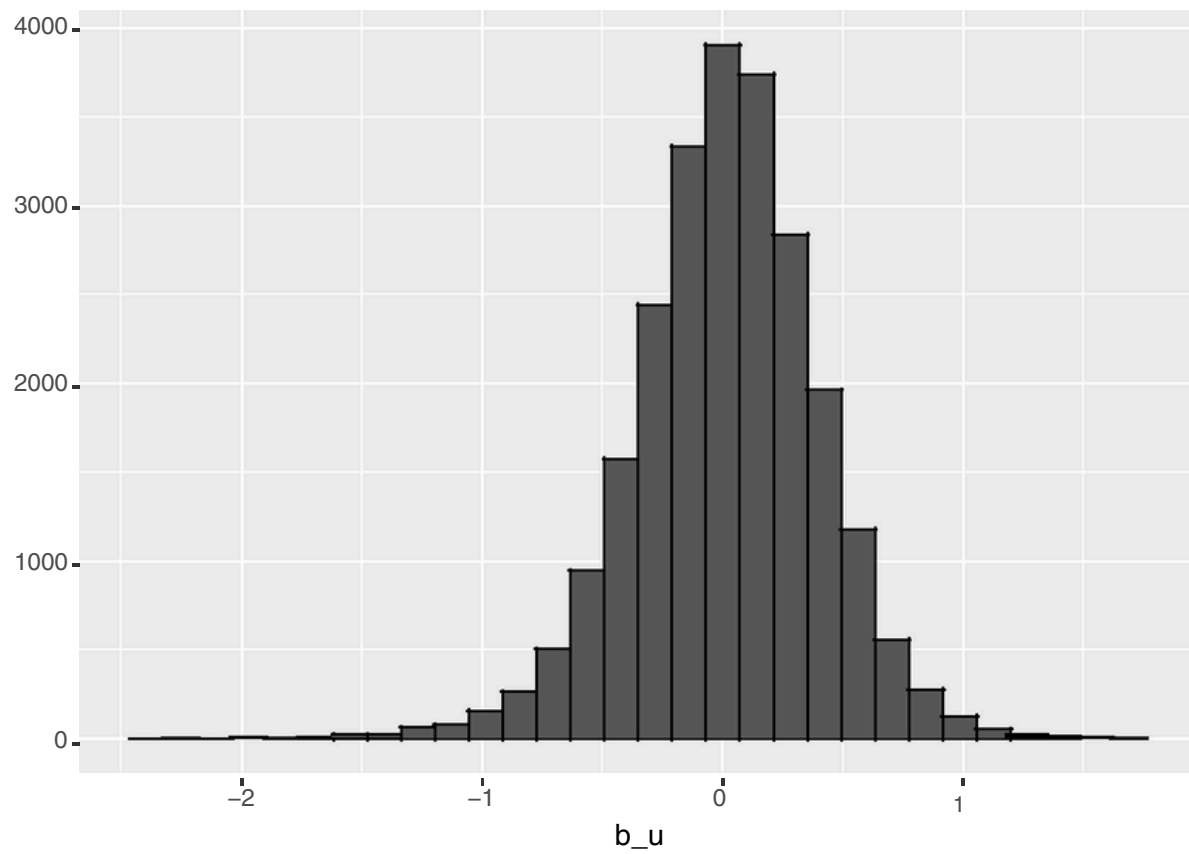
We can see an improvement but this model does not consider the individual user rating effect.

2.2.3 III. Movie and user effect model

We compute the average rating for user μ , for those that have rated over 100 movies, said penalty term user effect.

In fact users affect the ratings positively or negatively.

```
user_avgs <- edx %>%
  left_join(movie_avgs, by='movieId') %>%
  group_by(userId) %>%
  filter(n() >= 100) %>%
  summarize(b_u = mean(rating - mu - b_i))
user_avgs %>% qplot(b_u, geom="histogram", bins = 30, data = ., color = I("black"))
```



There is substantial variability across users as well: some users are very cranky and other love every movie.
This implies that further improvement to our model may be:

$$Y_{u,i} = \mu + b_i + b_u + \epsilon_{u,i}$$

where b_u is a user-specific effect. If a cranky user (negative b_u rates a great movie (positive b_i), the effects counter each other and we may be able to correctly predict that this user gave this great movie a 3 rather than a 5.

We compute an approximation by computing μ and b_i , and estimating b_u , as the average of

$$Y_{u,i} - \mu - b_i$$

```
user_avgs <- edx %>%
  left_join(movie_avgs, by='movieId') %>%
  group_by(userId) %>%
  summarize(b_u = mean(rating - mu - b_i))
```

We can now construct predictors and see RMSE improves:

```
predicted_ratings <- validation %>%
  left_join(movie_avgs, by='movieId') %>%
  left_join(user_avgs, by='userId') %>%
  mutate(pred = mu + b_i + b_u) %>%
  pull(pred)

model_2_rmse <- RMSE(predicted_ratings, validation$rating)
rmse_results <- bind_rows(rmse_results,
  knitr::kable(RMSE = model_2_rmse))
```

method	RMSE
Average movie rating model	1.0612018
Movie effect model	0.9439087
Movie and user effect model	0.8653488

ff

Our rating predictions further reduced the RMSE. But we made still mistakes on our first model (using only movies). The supposed “best” and “worst” movie were rated by few users, in most cases just one user. These movies were mostly obscure ones. This is because with a few users, we have more uncertainty. Therefore larger estimates of b_i , negative or positive, are more likely. Large errors can increase our RMSE.

Until now, we computed standard error and constructed confidence intervals to account for different levels of uncertainty. However, when making predictions, we need one number, one prediction, not an interval. For this we introduce the concept of regularization, that permits to penalize large estimates that come from small sample sizes. The general idea is to add a penalty for large values of b_i to the sum of squares equation that we minimize. So having many large b_i , make it harder to minimize. Regularization is a method used to reduce the effect of overfitting.

2.2.4 IV. Regularized movie and user effect model

So estimates of b_i and b_u are caused by movies with very few ratings and in some users that only rated a very small number of movies. Hence this can strongly influence the prediction. The use of the regularization permits to penalize these aspects. We should find the value of lambda (that is a tuning parameter) that will minimize the RMSE. This shrinks the b_i and b_u in case of small number of ratings.

```

lambdas <- seq(0, 10, 0.25)

rmsees <- sapply(lambdas, function(l){

  mu <- mean(edx$rating)

  b_i <- edx %>%
    group_by(movieId) %>%
    summarize(b_i = sum(rating - mu)/(n()+1))

  b_u <- edx %>%
    left_join(b_i, by="movieId") %>%
    group_by(userId) %>%
    summarize(b_u = sum(rating - b_i - mu)/(n()+1))

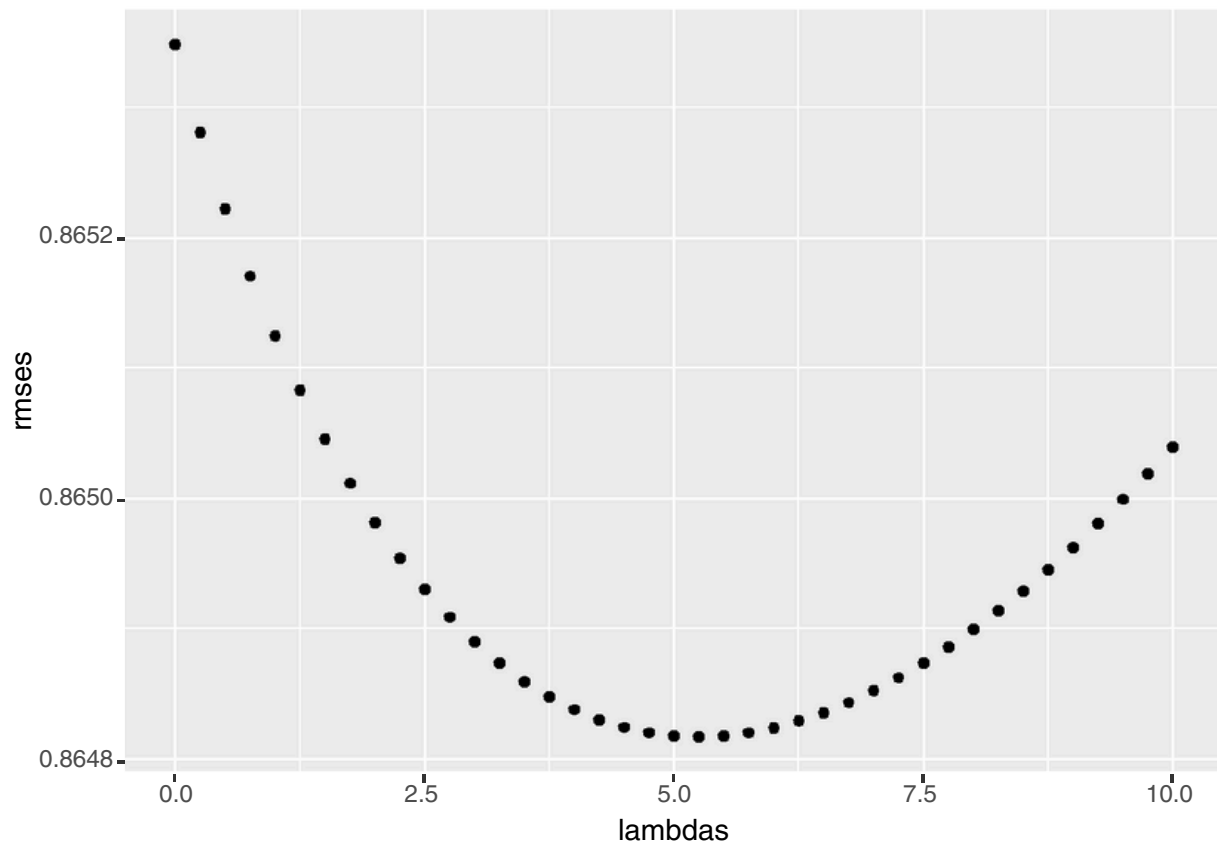
  predicted_ratings <-
    validation %>%
    left_join(b_i, by = "movieId") %>%
    left_join(b_u, by = "userId") %>%
    mutate(pred = mu + b_i + b_u) %>%
    pull(pred)

  return(RMSE(predicted_ratings, validation$rating))
})

```

We plot RMSE vs lambdas to select the optimal lambda

```
qplot(lambdas, rmse)
```



For the full model, the optimal lambda is:

```
lambda <- lambdas[which.min(rmse)]
lambda
```

```
## [1] 5.25
```

For the fullmodel, the optimal lambda is: 5.25

The new results will be:

```
rmse_results <- bind_rows(rmse_results,
  data_frame(method="Regularized movie and user effect model",
    RMSE = min(rmse)))
rmse_results %>% knitr::kable()
```

method	RMSE
Average movie rating model	1.0612018
Movie effect model	0.9439087
Movie and user effect model	0.8653488
Regularized movie and user effect model	0.8648170

ff

3 Results

The RMSE values of all the represented models are the following:

method	RMSE
Average movie rating model	1.0612018
Movie effect model	0.9439087
Movie and user effect model	0.8653488
Regularized movie and user effect model	0.8648170

ff

We therefore found the lowest value of RMSE that is 0.8648170.

4 Discussion

So we can confirm that the final model for our project is the following:

$$Y_{u,i} = \mu + b_i + b_u + \epsilon_{u,i}$$

This model work well if the average user doesn't rate a particularly good/popular movie with a large positive b_i , by disliking a particular movie.

5 Conclusion

We can affirm to have built a machine learning algorithm to predict movie ratings with MovieLens dataset. The regularized model including the effect of user is characterized by the lower RMSE value and is hence the optimal model to use for the present project. The optimal model characterised by the lowest RMSE value (0.8648170) lower than the initial evaluation criteria (0.8775) given by the goal of the present project. We could also affirm that improvements in the RMSE could be achieved by adding other effect (genre, year, age,...). Other different machine learning models could also improve the results further, but hardware limitations, as the RAM, are a constraint.

6 Appendix - Enviroment

```
print("Operating System:")
```

```
## [1] "Operating System:"
```

```
version
```

```
##
```

```
## platform      _  
## arch          x86_64-pc-linux-gnu
```

```
## os            x86_64
```

```
## system        linux-gnu
```

```
## status        x86_64, linux-gnu
```

```
## major         4
```

```
## minor         5.1
```

```
## year          2025
```

```
## month         06
```

```
## day           13
```

```
## svn rev       88306
```

```
## language      R
```

```
## version.string R version 4.5.1 (2025-06-13)
```

```
## nickname      Great Square Root
```