

# Thresholding Bandits with Augmented UCB

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# Overview

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# Problem Definition of TBP

- **Primary aim:** Identify *all* the arms whose expected mean of the reward distribution ( $r_i$ ) is above a particular threshold  $\tau$  given as input.

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- **Condition:** This has to be achieved within  $T$  timesteps of exploration and this is termed as a fixed-budget problem.

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- Let  $\hat{S}_\tau$  denote the recommendation of a learning algorithm after  $T$  time units of exploration, while  $\hat{S}_\tau^c$  denotes its complement.
- The goal of the learning agent is to minimize the **expected** loss at the end of budget  $T$ :

$$\mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}(T)] = \mathbb{P}\left( \underbrace{\{S_\tau \cap \hat{S}_\tau^c \neq \emptyset\}}_{\text{Rejected good arms}} \cup \underbrace{\{\hat{S}_\tau \cap S_\tau^c \neq \emptyset\}}_{\text{Accepted bad arms}} \right)$$



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- Lesser the budget  $\Rightarrow$  Harder the problem.
- Higher the variance of an arm's reward distribution  $\Rightarrow$  Harder the problem.

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# Contributions

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- It is the **first variance-based arm elimination algorithm** for the considered TBP settings.
- It **addresses an open problem** discussed in Auer and Ortner (2010) of designing an algorithm that can eliminate arms based on variance estimates.
- We also define a **new problem complexity** which uses empirical variance estimates along with arm's mean for giving the theoretical bound.



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# APT Approach

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- Theoretically they proved this algorithm to be almost optimal when only mean estimation is used as a metric of comparison.
- Empirically it outperformed other state-of-the-art algorithms which were modified to perform in the TBP setting.

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## Algorithm 1 APT

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**Input:** Time horizon  $T$ , threshold  $\tau$ , tolerance factor  $\epsilon \geq 0$

Pull each arm once

**for**  $t = K + 1, \dots, T$  **do**

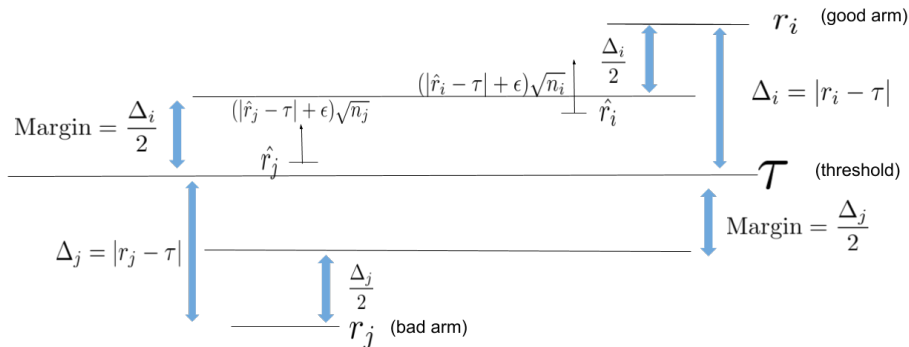
    Pull arm  $j \in \arg \min_{i \in A} \left\{ (|\hat{r}_i - \tau| + \epsilon) \sqrt{n_i} \right\}$  and observe the reward for arm  $j$ .

**end for**

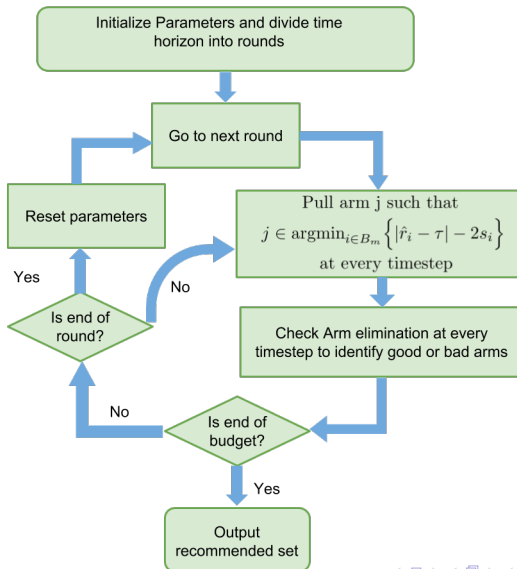
**Output:**  $\hat{S}_\tau = \{i : \hat{r}_i \geq \tau\}$ .

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# Intuition of APT

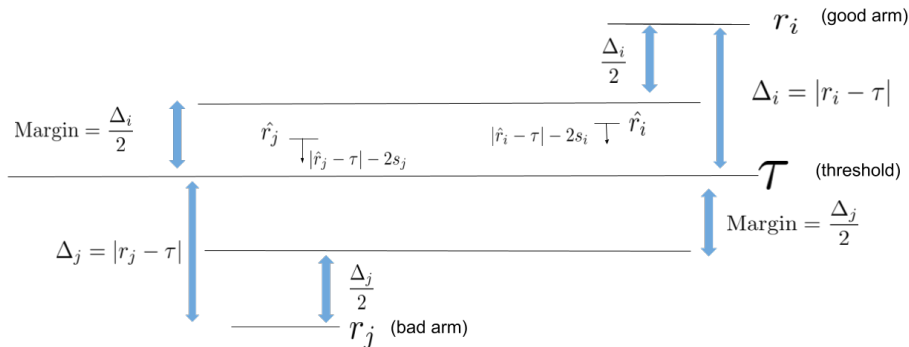


# AugUCB algorithm



# AugUCB algorithm (Intuition, Arm pulling)

- Like UCB-Imp, AugUCB also divides the time budget  $T$  into rounds.
- At every timestep we pull arm  $j$  s.t.  $j \in \arg \min_{i \in B_m} \left\{ |\hat{r}_i - \tau| - 2s_i \right\}$  (like APT).

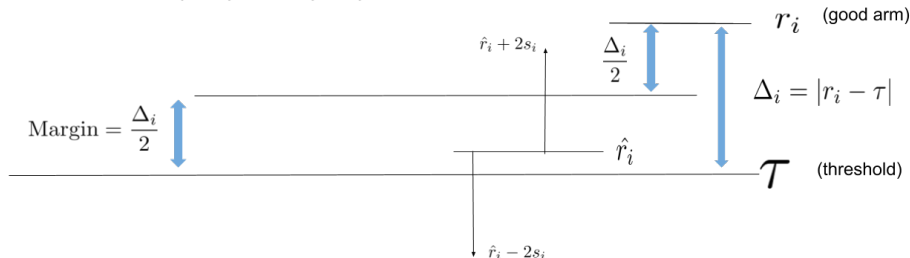




# AugUCB algorithm (Intuition, Arm Elimination)

- We eliminate an arm when we are sure that  $\hat{r}_i$  is close to  $r_i$  with high probability and hence identify it as good or bad arm.
- It's risky to eliminate an arm when  $\hat{r}_i$  is inside *Margin*.
- Confidence interval  $s_i$  will make sure arm  $i$  is not eliminated while inside Margin with a high probability.

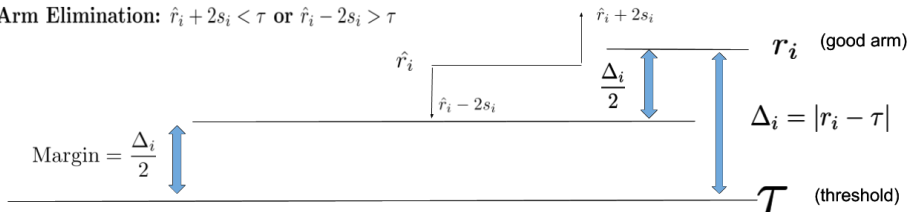
Arm Elimination:  $\hat{r}_i + 2s_i < \tau$  or  $\hat{r}_i - 2s_i > \tau$



# AugUCB algorithm (Intuition, Arm Elimination)

- Now we see that  $\hat{r}_i$  has moved close to its true estimate  $r_i$ .
- We eliminate  $i$  and re-allocate the remaining budget to pull arms close to the threshold

Arm Elimination:  $\hat{r}_i + 2s_i < \tau$  or  $\hat{r}_i - 2s_i > \tau$



- We pull the arm that minimizes  $j \in \arg \min_{i \in B_m} \left\{ |\hat{r}_i - \tau| - 2s_i \right\}$

# Arm pull

- We pull the arm that minimizes  $j \in \arg \min_{i \in B_m} \left\{ |\hat{r}_i - \tau| - 2s_i \right\}$
- We define the confidence interval  $s_i = \sqrt{\frac{\rho \psi_m(\hat{v}_i + 1) \log(T \epsilon_m)}{4n_i}}$ .

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- $s_i$  decreases with more  $n_i$  and  $\psi_m$  and  $\rho$  ensures that it decreases at a correct rate.
- Note that  $\hat{v}_i$  estimated variance in  $s_i$  makes the algorithm pull the arm which shows more variance.

# Expected Loss of AugUCB

## Theorem

For  $K \geq 4$  and  $\rho = 1/3$ , the expected loss of the AugUCB algorithm is given by,

$$\mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}(T)] \leq 2KT \exp \left( - \frac{T}{4096 \log(K \log K) H_{\sigma,2}} \right).$$

Table: AugUCB vs. State of the art

Algorithm	Upper Bound on Expected Loss	Oracle
AugUCB	$\exp \left( - \frac{T}{4096 \log(K \log K) H_{\sigma,2}} + \log(2KT) \right)$	No
UCBEV	$\exp \left( - \frac{1}{512} \frac{T-2K}{H_{\sigma,1}} + \log(6KT) \right)$	Yes
APT	$\exp \left( - \frac{T}{64H_1} + 2 \log((\log(T) + 1)K) \right)$	No
UCBE	$\exp \left( - \frac{T-K}{18H_1} - 2 \log(\log(T)K) \right)$	Yes

- We compare with APT, AugUCB, UCBE, UCBEV, UA.



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- APT, AugUCB, UA do not require access to  $H_1$  or  $H_{\sigma,1}$ .

# Experimental Setup

- This setup involves Gaussian reward distributions with  $K = 100$ ,  $T = 10000$  and  $\tau = 0.5$  with the reward means set in two groups.

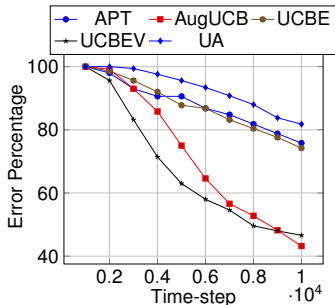
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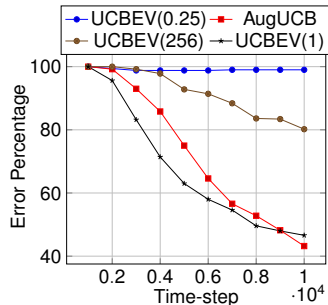
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- The means of arms  $i = 11 : 100$  are chosen same as  $r_{11:100} = 0.4$ .
- Variances are set as  $\sigma_{1:5}^2 = 0.3$  and  $\sigma_{6:10}^2 = 0.8$ ;  $\sigma_{11:100}^2$  are independently and uniformly chosen in the interval  $[0.2, 0.3]$ .

# Experimental Results

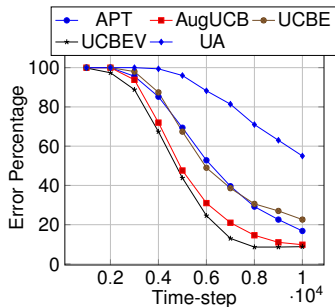


(a) Expt-1: Two Group Setting (Advance)

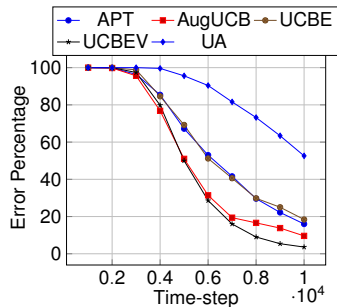


(b) Expt-2: Two Group Setting (Advance)

# Experimental Results



(c) Expt-1: Arithmetic Progression (Gaussian)



(d) Expt-2: Geometric Progression (Gaussian)

# Conclusions

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- Further studies are required to establish a lower bound on the expected loss of AugUCB.
- A more detailed analysis of the non-uniform arm selection and parameter selection is also required.

# Thank You