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Co-clustering for Federated Recommender System

XINRUI HE, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL, United States

SHUO LIU, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong

JACKY WAI KEUNG, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong

JINGRUI HE, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL, United States

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Xinrui He
University of Illinois
at Urbana Champaign
USA
xhe33@illinois.edu

Shuo Liu
City University
of Hong Kong
China
sliu273-c@my.cityu.edu.hk

Jacky Keung
City University
of Hong Kong
China
Jacky.Keung@cityu.edu.hk

Jingrui He
University of Illinois
at Urbana Champaign
USA
jingrui@illinois.edu

ABSTRACT

As data privacy and security attract increasing attention, Federated Recommender System (FRS) offers a solution that strikes a balance between providing high-quality recommendations and preserving user privacy. However, the presence of statistical heterogeneity in FRS, commonly observed due to personalized decision-making patterns, can pose challenges. To address this issue and maximize the benefit of collaborative filtering (CF) in FRS, it is intuitive to consider clustering clients (users) as well as items into different groups and learning group-specific models. Existing methods either resort to client clustering via user representations—risking privacy leakage, or employ classical clustering strategies on item embeddings or gradients, which we found are plagued by the curse of dimensionality. In this paper, we delve into the inefficiencies of the K-Means method in client grouping, attributing failures due to the high dimensionality as well as data sparsity occurring in FRS, and propose CoFedRec, a novel **Co-clustering Federated Recommendation** mechanism, to address clients heterogeneity and enhance the collaborative filtering within the federated framework. Specifically, the server initially formulates an item membership from the client-provided item networks. Subsequently, clients are grouped regarding a specific item category picked from the item membership during each communication round, resulting in an intelligently aggregated group model. Meanwhile, to comprehensively capture the global inter-relationships among items, we incorporate an additional supervised contrastive learning term based on the server-side generated item membership into the local training phase for each client. Extensive experiments on four datasets are provided, which verify the effectiveness of the proposed CoFedRec.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Information systems** → **Recommender systems**; **Clustering**.

KEYWORDS

Federated recommendation, Co-clustering, Supervised contrastive learning

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1 INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of e-commerce and digital services, people have become increasingly digital-centric [35]. They now spend a significant amount of time online, exploring products, content, and services tailored to their interests. Traditional recommender systems (RS) [1, 46] have proven to be indispensable for e-commerce giants and various digital service providers. However, these systems usually operate by consolidating vast amounts of user data centrally, leading to potential privacy concerns. Federated learning (FL) [5, 25, 40] is a method where multiple clients collaboratively train a deep learning model using their local data. This decentralized approach promotes efficient information exchange and ensures that each participant's data remains private, without being exposed to a central authority or other participants. The Federated Recommender System (FRS) [56, 61] is built on this idea.

FRS is a specialized implementation of FL for recommendation tasks. Instead of directly sending user interaction data to a central server, FRS processes the data locally on users' devices and only the essential model updates are sent back to the central server for global aggregation. Unlike other applications of FL [45, 63], where there are fewer clients and each client possesses a large amount of data from multiple individuals (known as cross-silo FL [21]), in FRS, each user acts as a client constituting only one single user's profile (also known as cross-device FL [22]).

There is an increasing number of works [2, 29, 58] exploring solutions for FRS. A typical approach involves the utilization of FedAvg [40] to generate a global model and then fine-tune the model on the client side [66]. However, this single global aggregation is inherently designed for IID data. In practical scenarios, the data available on each device is generated or produced by users, usually non-IID [15], reflecting users' different preferences or decision habits. To model the heterogeneity across the clients (users), there are works [11, 36, 64] that assume the whole population could be partitioned into distinct clusters or groups, characterized by analogous preferences. On the other hand, collaborative filtering (CF) [18, 41] has proven successful in recommender systems whose power is confined in the federated setting where the entire dataset is not available. However, we can expect an increase in accuracy by finding out the neighbors of users through clustering and then gathering collaborative insights. In this light, learning a group-level model customized for each user group can boost the algorithm's

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adaptability to heterogeneous clients' data and the ability to transfer positive knowledge among clients by factoring in collaborative insights. In this paper, however, we observe that the widely deployed clustering method which groups the clients using a distance function applied to the updates uploaded by clients [34, 43, 49] in FL is inefficient in the FRS setting since querying neighbors of high quality is nearly impossible when the feature space is sparse.

To address the challenges mentioned above, we propose a co-clustering mechanism CoFedRec for FRS to effectively group clients without accessing their profiles. The core insights come from (i) the heterogeneity across clients in FR (ii) the understanding of CF whose key idea is to predict the interests of a user by collecting preferences from many neighborhoods. Specifically, we turn to the experiment results to analyze the inherent limitations of the classical clustering strategies and introduce the co-clustering mechanism. In each communication round, the global aggregation is performed as a preliminary step to gather the global item relationship, which yields an item membership via the K-Means clustering technique upon the global item representation. The server algorithm then implements the co-clustering by computing similarity scores among clients regarding a selected item category, which allows a specific item category to cluster users into two distinct groups, the similar group, and the dissimilar group. Within the similar group, users tend to react similarly towards that type of item. All the clients in the similar group will update their item embedding network with the aggregated group model while those in the dissimilar group will retain their local model waiting for the subsequent communication rounds. In addition to the group model, the item membership will be distributed to all the clients. Inspired by the theory of Supervised Contrastive Learning (SCL) [23], a local supervised contrastive term is integrated into the local training phase, ensuring that the locally learned item representations retain the global item insights.

Our contributions are summarized as follows:

- We analyze the failure of classical clustering technique K-Means in the federated recommendation setting and propose a novel co-clustering federated recommendation mechanism CoFedRec which groups users based on specific item categories within each communication round and generates an intelligent group model containing the collaborative information from the neighbors. Our proposed paradigm applies to different backbones.
- We introduce a supervised contrastive term into the local training phases to encode the global item relationship in the user individual item network. This ensures that our proposed CoFedRec not only effectively leverages user collaborative information, but also seamlessly integrates global insights into the local training process.
- We conduct extensive experiments on four real-world datasets with various settings, which demonstrate the effectiveness and rationality of CoFedRec.

2 PRELIMINARY

2.1 Problem Statement

We consider a federated recommender system consisting of a central server and multiple distributed clients where each client represents an individual user. We use $U = \{u_1, u_2, \dots, u_{|U|}\}$ to represent all

users and $I = \{i_1, i_2, \dots, i_{|I|}\}$ to represent all items where $|U|$ and $|I|$ denote the total number of users and items respectively. Each client corresponds to a user, and each client has its own rating vector $[r_{ui}]_{i=1}^m$ which is given by a user u to an item i and m is the number of items that the user u has interacted with. To protect user privacy, only recommendation models, instead of user data, can be exchanged between the server and the user devices. Thus, the goal of federated recommender systems is to collaboratively train models for each user to predict its rating for each item i without sharing the individual interaction records.

2.2 Failure in User Clustering

The prevailing federated recommender systems draw inspiration from FedAvg [40], i.e., sharing the clients' recommendation models by a global aggregation, and then the clients perform the local fine-tuning upon the global model [10]. However, due to the diverse preferences among different users, item distribution across clients can be discrepant, leading to potential imbalances. The global aggregation without taking into account the discrepancy of these user preferences might introduce undesirable noise in the recommendation results. Additionally, Collaborative Filtering (CF) has proven effective in recommendation systems by leveraging the ratings or interactions of neighbor users who have exhibited similar preferences or behaviors to the target user in the past. Thus, it is intuitive to introduce the clustering to group clients and items before the server-side aggregation, potentially bringing out and leveraging underlying patterns or similarities among them. The typical clustering methods like the K-Means approach [33, 37], works by computing distances between points, which have shown its strong performance in centralized recommendation scenarios [4, 52, 67] while posing challenges in federated recommendation scenarios.

In the realm of federated recommendation, to protect privacy, direct access to user embeddings on the server side becomes restricted. Instead, we must rely on updates provided by participant clients to execute user clustering. If traditional clustering algorithms are used to solve the above problem, matrix-object data need to be transformed. One of the most significant issues encountered is the curse of dimensionality [20, 26], a problem that arises when we attempt to flatten item embedding matrices. In high-dimensional spaces, the data points become increasingly sparse and the distances between data points grow larger. This sparsity can make clustering algorithms, like K-Means, less effective as points in high-dimensional spaces tend to be almost equidistant to each other, reducing the algorithm's ability to discern distinct clusters.

To illustrate the challenges further, we analyze the results of applying the K-Means method with $k = 2$ and $k = 10$ on the MovieLens-100k dataset for client clustering upon their item networks. The result of $k = 2$ reveals a highly imbalanced clustering outcome, with user counts drastically skewed: one cluster contains only a single user, and the other contains 942 users. When $k = 10$, the situation does not improve significantly. 8 out of the 10 clusters contain just a single user, the figure illustration is attached in Appendix E. This phenomenon verifies the conclusion before, K-Means tends to cluster all the points into one single cluster as the distances between data points become more uniform, which underscores the difficulties of applying typical clustering techniques to high-dimensional data in federated recommendation scenarios.

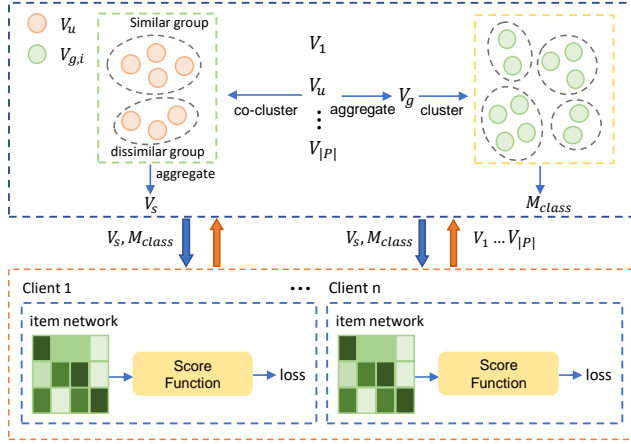


Figure 1: The overall framework of CoFedRec. The pink dots represent the individual models uploaded by participant clients and the green dots are the item embedding vectors of the global aggregation results. Two key parts in CoFedRec are (i) Co-clustering mechanism to cluster participant clients into similar group and dissimilar group and an intelligent group model is generated within the similar group; (ii) Supervised contrastive term upon the global item membership is integrated into the loss function of the local training phase to include the global item insights.

Therefore, we can conclude that using the typical clustering method like K-Means does not necessarily lead to good performance on client grouping under the federated recommendation setting.

3 PROPOSED METHOD

In this section, we present CoFedRec, as shown in Figure 1, a novel **Co-clustering Federated Recommendation** mechanism which groups clients w.r.t the item categories on the server side and introduces a supervised contrastive term in the local training phase.

3.1 Co-clustering for User Partitioning

We’ve discussed the importance of user clustering and the challenges it brings under the federated recommendation scenario in Section 2.2. In this section, to address this challenge, we propose to group users upon a specific item category and generate a group model by aggregating the updates within a potentially similar user group.

In light of the observation that it is improbable for users to possess identical interests across all items but rather shared preferences for specific types of items, it becomes natural to classify users based on their affinities for different item categories. Specifically, during each communication round, we focus on a single item category and divide users into two distinct groups based on their likeness or dislikeness for that particular category. To integrate collaborative effects into the learning processes, aggregation is conducted within the user group displaying similar preferences because if users demonstrate shared tastes for a particular category of items, probably, they will also have some other common preferences. As such, this aggregation method facilitates the transmission

of beneficial knowledge, incorporating collaborative steps while safeguarding user privacy. Notably, this approach obviates the need to discern that it is the predilection or antipathy a congruous group exhibits towards a specific item type.

At each round t , the server is required to serve a core client $c \in U$ and an item category k , specifically, to find the neighbors of the client c w.r.t the item category k . To achieve this, the server first performs a global aggregation over all the item networks uploaded by the participant clients and then generates an item membership M (which will be elaborately explained in Section 3.2) detailing which items fall under which categories. By specifying the item category k , we could have all the items belonging to category k , denoted as $M_k = \{i | i \in I, M[i] = k\}$. Then we compute the similarity among the core client and all other participants on the selected item category of their item networks. Here we adopt the cosine similarity:

$$s_u = \sum_{i \in M_k} \frac{V_{c,i} \cdot V_{u,i}}{|V_{c,i}| \cdot |V_{u,i}|}, u \in P \quad (1)$$

where $V_{c,i}$ and $V_{u,i}$ represent the vectors of item i under the category k of the core client c and the participant user u respectively. s_u is the similarity score of the core client c and the participant user u w.r.t the items category k . P is the participant client set. With this equation, we could obtain the similarity score list $S = \{s_1, s_2, \dots, s_{|P|}\}$.

Upon computing the cosine similarity scores for all participants, to identify the similar group D_s and dissimilar group D_{dis} , we propose to use the first elbow point of the similarity scores to divide the participant clients into D_s and D_{dis} , which is essentially the point at which the rate of progression of the similarity scores marks a significant change.

To find the split, we first sort similarity scores as $\{s_{1'}, s_{2'}, \dots, s_{|P|'}\}$ (here $s_{1'}$ is no longer corresponding to the similarity score of the user 1 but the user with the highest similarity score.) and construct a line that links the first and last points of the similarity scores.

$$L(x) = s_{1'} + x(s_{|P|'} - s_{1'}) \quad (2)$$

where x is a scalar parameter that determines a point’s position along the line $L(x)$.

For each point s_u in similarity scores, we calculate its orthogonal distance to the line $L(x)$, which is achieved by projecting s_u onto $L(x)$ and computing the Euclidean distance between s_u and its projection. Let $h_u = s_u - s_{1'}$ be the vector from the first point $s_{1'}$ to a point s_u . The scalar projection of h_u onto $L(x)$ is given by:

$$x_u = \frac{h_u \cdot (s_{|P|'} - s_{1'})}{|s_{|P|'} - s_{1'}|^2} \quad (3)$$

The orthogonal distance d_u from point s_u to $L(x)$ can then be computed as:

$$d_u = |h_u - x_u(s_{|P|'} - s_{1'})| \quad (4)$$

the point e with the maximum distance d_e to the line $L(x)$ is considered as the elbow point. This point essentially delineates the optimal neighbors for the core client on the selected item category, denoted as similar group D_s , otherwise, dissimilar group D_{dis} :

$$\begin{cases} u \in D_s, & \text{if } d_u \geq d_e, \\ u \in D_{dis}, & \text{if } d_u < d_e. \end{cases}$$

Once groups are formed, a group aggregation is performed to transfer the collaborative information within the similar group:

$$V_s \leftarrow \frac{1}{|D_s|} \sum_{u \in D_s} V_u \quad (5)$$

All the participants in the similar group will update their item embedding networks with the group model V_s . With this co-clustering approach, users in the same group might have similar preferences, and thus the information can be shared among them more confidently. The clients within the dissimilar group will be disregarded to prevent the transfer of low-quality knowledge among heterogeneous data.

3.2 Local Supervised Contrastive Learning

In the previous section, we propose co-clustering to discover common preferences across clients and then cluster them into the similar group and the dissimilar group, excluding the latter during the aggregation phase. However, this could result in ignoring some diverse information, as the global insight might partially originate from the dissimilar clients that were disregarded.

To consider the inter-relationships among items globally, we generate an item membership vector M on the server side through item clustering. Recall that at each round, for N participant clients, the server will receive N individual item embedding matrices $V_u \in \mathbb{R}^{|I| \times d}$, $u = \{1, 2, \dots, N\}$ and d is the dimension of the item embedding, uploaded by the participant clients. The server first performs the global aggregation over N local item embedding matrices:

$$V_g \leftarrow \frac{1}{N} \sum_{u=1}^N V_u \quad (6)$$

To categorize items, the global item embedding vectors $\{V_{g,i}\}_{i=1}^{|I|}$, where $V_{g,i} = V_g[i, :]$ for $i = \{1, 2, \dots, |I|\}$, will be grouped into K clusters. We adopt the K-Means to do the item clustering. Assuming that the number of clusters is K , the K-Means method aims to find K centroids $C = \{c_1, \dots, c_K\}$, $c_k \in \mathbb{R}^{1 \times d}$, $\forall k \in [K]$ that it uses to define clusters by minimizing the objective:

$$\phi_c(V_{g,i}; C) = \|V_{g,i} - C\|_F^2 \quad (7)$$

where $\|\cdot\|_F$ denotes the Frobenius norm. Then the set of centroids $C^* = \{c_1^*, \dots, c_K^*\}$ gives rise to an optimal segmentation, denoted as $\bigcup_{k=1}^K C_k^*$, where $\forall k \in [K]$, $C_k^* = \{V_{g,i} : \|V_{g,i} - c_k^*\|_F \leq \|V_{g,i} - c_m^*\|_F, \forall i \in [|I|], m \in [K]\}$.

Upon obtaining the global item clusters, the server returns an item membership vector $M \in \mathbb{R}^{1 \times |I|}$ to all the participant clients, where the value $M[j]$ at a specific index j indicates the cluster to which the corresponding item j belongs.

Considering that the client updates the local item network based on the group model which solely contains the information from its similar neighbor clients after partitioning, it becomes rather restrictive, lacking a comprehensive view that the global information can provide. To harness the inherent similarity and diversity of the items, we enhance the local training by incorporating a supervised contrastive learning objective utilizing global item membership.

Supervised Contrastive Learning (SCL) [23] integrates the strengths of both supervised learning and contrastive learning. Utilizing label information, SCL learns representations that bring positive

pairs closer together and push negative pairs apart, which hence improves the quality of the representation. In our case, items categorized within the same cluster are considered positive pairs, while those from disparate clusters are treated as negative pairs. We can bring together the representation among items that share similarities, and concurrently, push apart the representation between those belonging to distinct clusters by minimizing the following SupContrast term (e.g. for the user u):

$$L_{sup} = - \sum_{i \in I} \log \left\{ \frac{1}{|Z(i)|} \sum_{z \in Z(i)} \left(\frac{\exp(V_{u,i} \cdot V_{u,z}/\tau)}{\sum_{a \in I \setminus \{i\}} \exp(V_{u,i} \cdot V_{u,a}/\tau)} \right) \right\} \quad (8)$$

where $Z(i) \equiv \{z \in I \setminus \{i\} : \tilde{y}_z = \tilde{y}_i\}$ is the set of the indices of all positive items w.r.t item i . τ is the temperature parameter to control the uniformity of the representation in the embedding space. \cdot is the dot product.

By incorporating global information into the local training process, the client can update their personalized model with valuable group-level information while integrating intricate global relationships among items within a federated framework.

3.3 Overall Workflow

We subsequently develop our federated recommendation via the proposed co-clustering mechanism, detailed in Algorithm 1.

To illustrate the overall workflow of the co-clustering federated recommendation mechanism, we employ a personalized federated recommendation algorithm [66] as our backbone model in the ensuing discussion.

3.3.1 Local training. We first discuss the local training process. In a typical FRS with implicit feedback, each user u has its rating vector $[r_{ui}]_{i=1}^{|I|}$ where $r_{ui} = 1$ if the user u interacted with item i , otherwise, $r_{ui} = 0$. The actual ratings provided by the user are represented by r_{ui} , while the predicted ratings are denoted as \hat{r}_{ui} .

Each client (user) u holds its own personalized item network V_u and score function θ_u , which is implemented as a one-layer multilayer perceptron (MLP) here. The client's local dataset D_u is organized as a set of user-item interactions where each interaction is represented as a tuple (u, i, r_{ui}) . During each communication round, the client's individual item embedding module V_u is updated by the server-side generated model if it belongs to the similar group, otherwise, retains the model from the local training. The objective of the local training on client u is to minimize the binary cross-entropy loss plus the supervised contrastive learning term:

$$L_u(V_u, \theta_u) = - \sum_{(u,i) \in D_u} \log \hat{r}_{ui} - \sum_{(u,i') \in D_u^-} \log(1 - \hat{r}_{ui'}) + \lambda L_{sup} \quad (9)$$

where \hat{r}_{ui} is computed through the score function θ_u . The client first updates its θ_u using stochastic gradient descent (SGD) and then updates item embedding network V_u via SGD as a post-tuning process. λ is a hyperparameter to control the linear weight.

3.3.2 Server Update. The server initiates one global model, specifically an item embedding network, used as initial parameters for all client models. During each round, the server begins by randomly selecting a subset of participant clients P and acquiring their item

embeddings $V_u, u = \{1, 2, \dots, |P|\}$. Then, the server randomly identifies a core user and selects an item category after computing the item membership M introduced in Section 3.2. Utilizing the user co-clustering technique presented in Section 3.1, the server, for the chosen item category, calculates the similarities between the core user and other participant clients and divides them into the similar group and the dissimilar group. Within the similar group, aggregation takes place to derive a group-specific model. Subsequently, the group model is distributed back to the corresponding clients for their local updates.

4 EXPERIMENTS

In this section, we conduct experiments to evaluate the performance of our proposed method. Our experiments intend to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** How does CoFedRec perform in the federated recommendation task compared with the baseline models?
- **RQ2:** How do different components in our mechanism contribute to the performance?
- **RQ3:** How good is the generalizability of our proposed CoFedRec?
- **RQ4:** Do all the clients (users) effectively participate in the group-specific aggregation and how good are the clustering results?

4.1 Datasets

To evaluate our proposed CoFedRec, we conduct experiments on four datasets with different scales: MovieLens-100K, MovieLens-1M¹ [17], FilmTrust² [16], and LastFM-2K³ [7]. The detailed statistics of each dataset, the preprocessing procedures, and the construction of the training, validation and test sets are shown in Appendix A.1.

4.2 Experimental Settings

4.2.1 Evaluation metrics. We evaluate the model performance with Top-K evaluation metrics [28, 59], including Hit Ratio (HR) and Normalized Discounted Cumulative Gain (NDCG). Following the previous work setting, we fix K as 10 and adopt an efficient sampling strategy that randomly selects 99 unobserved items for each user, performing a ranking evaluation among 100 items (including the test item).

4.2.2 Baselines. We compare our proposed CoFedRec with the general and state-of-the-art baselines containing both centralized and federated methods. For the model GPfedRec [65], we present outcomes obtained on the FilmTrust dataset using our implementation, and for all other datasets, we directly cite the results as provided by the authors of GPfedRec. The details of the baseline methods are described in Appendix A.2.

4.2.3 Experimental settings. Following the methodology in [18], we sample four negative instances for every positive instance. Test results are presented based on the optimal validation outcomes. The reported best-performing baseline models are significant w.r.t. the second best performing with p-value < 0.05 . Given the inherent variability in our approach, we conducted five runs of our method on each dataset. To provide a conservative estimate, we consistently

Algorithm 1 federated recommendation with CoFedRec

Server Update:

```

1: Initialize item embedding  $V_0$ , item cluster number  $K$ 
2: for each round  $t = 1, 2, \dots$  do
3:    $P \leftarrow$  (randomly select participant clients for each round from all clients)
4:   for client  $i \in P$  in parallel do
5:      $V_i \leftarrow$  ClientUpdate( $i, V_s, M$ ) or ClientUpdate( $i, M$ )  $\{V_s = V_0$  for all the clients at round 0 $\}$ 
6:   end for
7:   /* Item clustering */
8:    $V_g \leftarrow \frac{1}{|I|} \sum_{u=1}^{|P|} V_u$  {global aggregation}
9:    $M \in R^{1 \times |I|} \leftarrow Kmeans(\{V_{g,i}\}_{i=1}^{|I|})$  {obtaining item membership vector}
10:  /* User partitioning */
11:   $c \leftarrow$  (randomly select a core user for this round from all participant clients  $P$ )
12:   $[indices_k] \leftarrow$  (randomly select an item category  $k$  from item membership and obtain the corresponding indices vector)
13:  for client  $u \in P$  do
14:     $similarity \leftarrow$  SimilaritySocre( $V_u[indices_k], V_c[indices_k]$ )
15:  end for
16:   $D_s, D_{dis} \leftarrow$  (find the elbow point of all the similarities and split the clients into similar group and dissimilar group)
17:   $V_s \leftarrow \frac{1}{|D_s|} \sum_{u \in D_s} V_u$  {aggregating within similar group}
18: end for
Client Update:
1: Download item embedding  $V_s$  and item membership  $M$  from server if the client is in the similar group; Otherwise, only download the item membership  $M$ 
2: Initialize  $V_u$  with the latest update
3: Sample negative instances set  $D_u^-$  from  $I_u^-$ 
4:  $\mathcal{B} \leftarrow$  (split  $D_u \cup D_u^-$  into batches of size  $B$ )
5: for local epoch  $e = 1, 2, \dots$  do
6:   for batch  $b \in \mathcal{B}$  do
7:     Compute loss  $L_u(V_u, \theta_u)$  with Eq. 9
8:     Model parameters update
9:   end for
10: end for
11: Return  $V_u$  to server

```

reported the lowest value from these five iterations. Detailed hyperparameter settings for each dataset across models can be found in the Appendix A.3.

4.3 Main Results & Discussion (RQ1)

In this section, we investigate the overall performance of our proposed CoFedRec and the detailed results are shown in Table 1. From Table 1, we derive several insightful findings: (i) CoFedRec demonstrates superior and consistent performance across all datasets. Specifically, it outperforms baseline methods, achieving the highest scores on MovieLens-100K and MovieLens-1M. For FilmTrust dataset, our model performs best in terms of HR@10 and ranks second in NDCG@10. Similarly, on LastFM-2K dataset, it ranks third

¹<https://grouplens.org/datasets/movielens/>

²<https://guoguibing.github.io/librec/datasets.html>

³<https://grouplens.org/datasets/hetrec-2011/>

in HR@10 and second in NDCG@10, narrowly trailing the best-performing model by only 0.01%. Additionally, the improvements made by our method are substantial. A salient one is its performance on MovieLens-100k: $72.85 \rightarrow 77.52$ on HR@10 and $43.89 \rightarrow 50.65$ on NDCG@10. It indicates the superiority of our co-clustering mechanism (including the user co-clustering and local supervised contrastive learning) in exploring the neighbors of both the users and items to enlighten the personal recommendations. (ii) In the experiment, the four datasets we selected are representative, two relatively large datasets and two on a smaller scale. Our proposed CoFedRec secures the top position on these four datasets, which proves the robustness of our approach. (iii) If we take a look at the results of the FedPerGNN which lags behind all other baselines, we could conclude that the privacy-protect nature of FRS limits the graph models to capture high-order user-item interactions, potentially constraining their full potential in this task. Thus, it is compelling to use co-clustering methods to capture collaborative insights and neighbor information. (iv) The clustering-based baseline PerFedRec shows excellent performance on several metrics, which confirms the necessity of applying the clustering in FRS. (v) We note that on some datasets, CoFedRec even outperforms the centralized methods. We attribute the result to the following reasons. Firstly, in the centralized setting, all users share the same item embeddings and score function and only user embeddings are kept for personalization capture, which may lose the ability to maintain a sufficient personal preference for each user. In comparison, our backbone method keeps user embeddings and score functions as private components to learn user characteristics. Secondly, in federated scenarios, where user-item interactions are processed across scattered local datasets, the co-clustering mechanism can facilitate more insightful aggregation and discover deeper user-user and item-item associations across clients, effectively bridging the gap between centralized and federated approaches.

4.4 Abalation Study (RQ2)

In this section, we investigate the effectiveness of each component in our proposed CoFedRec. We denote the strong baseline method PFedRec as the original method (Origin in Table 2), which aggregates users without distinguishing user clusters. We note that our proposed CoFedRec has two main components, server-side client co-clustering and client-side local supervised contrastive learning term. We denote these two parts as User_P and Item_SC respectively in Table 2. For comparison, we also consider client-side item similarity learning (denoted as component Item_S) whose learning objective is defined as:

$$L_s = -\frac{1}{|D_u|} \frac{1}{|Z(i)|} \sum_{i \in D_u} \sum_{i' \in Z(i)} \left(\frac{V_{u,i} \cdot V_{u,i'}}{\|V_{u,i}\| \cdot \|V_{u,i'}\|} \right) \quad (10)$$

then the local training loss is replaced with:

$$L_u(V_u, \theta_u) = - \sum_{(u,i) \in D_u} \log \hat{r}_{ui} - \sum_{(u,i') \in D_u^-} \log(1 - \hat{r}_{ui'}) + \lambda L_s \quad (11)$$

From Table 2, we can observe that all the components are very important and designed reasonably. Note that integrating User_P results in a notable performance boost, which verifies the importance of distinguishing similar users and the generation of a group-level model. When we compare the extra local training loss terms, Item_S

and Item_SC, the results show that both of these two components have a positive effect on the performance while the latter yields a greater improvement. The primary difference is that the Item_S considers only the alignment between the positive item pairs while the Item_SC focuses solely on aligning positive item pairs, while Item_SC takes into account both alignment and uniformity during local item representation learning. This outcome emphasizes the significance of including the global view information as well. In sum, our co-clustering mechanism, containing the co-clustering and the local supervised contrastive learning, facilitates the transfer of high-quality knowledge by identifying the effective neighbors while capturing the global item collaborative information.

4.5 Generalization Analysis (RQ3)

4.5.1 Effects on different backbones. To evaluate the generalization ability of our proposed CoFedRec, we incorporate our method with three different backbones. The performance is shown in Table 3. Although different models are trained locally, a consistent improvement can be observed when incorporating our mechanism. It indicates that our proposed CoFedRec is independent of the specific local model, and the potential of CoFedRec can be explored extensively with more powerful local models. The improvement in MovieLens-100K is more apparent when compared with MovieLens-1M. We attribute it to its smaller quantity of items which enables more faithful item clustering, subsequently leading to more strategic user partitioning and therefore, more effective aggregation within the similar group.

4.5.2 Privacy protection with virtual rating. The primary goal of the FRS is to predict the rating of an item i for a client u without disclosing their rating behaviors or records. The task of federated recommendation with the implicit data naturally protects user privacy to a certain extent for the reason: (i) it can be seen from the objective function of local training that when using the local dataset to train the model, all items that have not generated actions are treated as negative samples, which indirectly protects the user's behavioral privacy; (ii) we adopted dual personalized proposed by PFedRec as the backbone to preserve the user-specific personalization, meaning that the score function is always kept locally, which prevents the server from inferring the user's behavior through the item network itself. Moreover, FedRec [29] proposes to use virtual scoring during the local training phase together with the true interactions to prevent the leakage of user interaction history when uploading gradients. To rigorously assess the robustness of CoFedRec, we employed the virtual rating strategy, sampling items at varying ratios and randomly assigning virtual ratings (either 0 or 1) during local training phases. As shown in Table 4, as the virtual rating ratio increases from 0 to 0.4, CoFedRec experiences a slight performance drop and even at a noise ratio of 0.4, our model consistently outperforms the majority of baseline models.

4.6 A Close Look at CoFedRec (RQ4)

4.6.1 Randomness analysis. In every training round, a user is selected at random to act as the core user. Simultaneously, an item category is randomly chosen to categorize the users. This inherently introduces randomness into the training process. Therefore,

Table 1: Experimental results on the four real-world datasets through different methods with % omitted. The best results are highlighted in boldface. Underlined values indicate the second best.

Models		MovieLens-100K		MovieLens-1M		FilmTrust		LastFM-2K	
		HR@10	NDCG@10	HR@10	NDCG@10	HR@10	NDCG@10	HR@10	NDCG@10
Centralized	MF [27]	65.43	40.16	68.61	41.33	92.09	81.99	82.88	70.81
	NCF [18]	66.17	39.82	68.76	41.90	92.42	82.70	85.06	73.75
Federated	FedMF [9]	65.11	39.13	67.52	38.12	89.49	76.31	68.44	52.97
	FedeRank [3]	45.81	25.56	45.05	24.50	90.95	82.25	72.75	66.09
	FedNCF [44]	60.13	34.31	65.78	38.67	92.34	79.87	80.19	70.11
	FedPerGNN [57]	35.84	19.15	43.87	24.33	92.01	82.53	72.06	57.51
	FedRecon [50]	65.01	38.49	60.43	34.89	91.76	81.94	82.65	67.85
	MetaMF [30]	66.06	39.82	45.08	25.07	<u>92.50</u>	82.89	81.81	66.39
	FedFast [42]	43.69	23.22	43.71	22.99	88.92	69.79	75.62	70.41
	PerFedRec [36]	60.23	42.05	61.01	43.11	92.34	88.80	63.19	50.70
	PFedRec [66]	71.05	<u>43.89</u>	<u>73.62</u>	<u>44.35</u>	91.44	82.36	82.06	73.14
	GPFedRec [65]	<u>72.85</u>	43.77	72.17	43.61	90.14	80.88	<u>83.44</u>	74.11
	CoFedRec	77.52	50.65	77.75	48.81	94.05	<u>85.20</u>	82.75	<u>74.10</u>

Table 2: Effectiveness of different components of CoFedRec on MovieLens-100K and MovieLens-1M.

Models	MovieLens-100K		MovieLens-1M	
	HR@10	NDCG@10	HR@10	NDCG@10
Origin	71.05	43.89	73.62	44.35
User_P	75.93	47.23	73.92	45.72
Item_S	72.75	44.26	73.66	44.67
Item_SC	73.91	44.78	74.09	44.45
CoFedRec	77.52	50.65	77.75	48.81

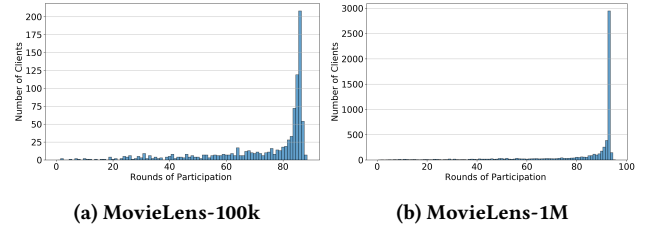
Table 3: Experiment comparisons of CoFedRec on MovieLens-100K and MovieLens-1M with different backbones.

Models	MovieLens-100K		MovieLens-1M	
	HR@10	NDCG@10	HR@10	NDCG@10
FedMF [9]	65.11	39.13	67.52	38.12
w/ Ours	77.09	49.90	71.39	45.10
	↑ 18.40%	↑ 27.52%	↑ 5.73%	↑ 18.31%
FedNCF [44]	60.13	34.31	65.78	38.67
w/ Ours	71.58	51.29	66.16	41.88
	↑ 19.04%	↑ 49.49%	↑ 0.58%	↑ 8.30%
PFedRec [66]	71.05	43.89	73.62	44.35
w/ Ours	77.52	50.65	77.75	48.81
	↑ 9.11%	↑ 15.40%	↑ 5.61%	↑ 10.06%

in this section, we assess the involvement of each client in the aggregation of the group model. We evaluated the number of times each client participated in over 100 training rounds on both the MovieLens-100k and MovieLens-1m datasets. The results are presented in Figure 2. From the results, all clients have had an opportunity to contribute to the aggregation of the group models. Specifically, for the MovieLens-100k dataset, 69.64% of the clients

Table 4: Performance on MovieLens-100K with varying ratios of virtual rating added to the individual local datasets.

Models	Noise size	$\lambda=0$	$\lambda=0.1$	$\lambda=0.2$	$\lambda=0.3$	$\lambda=0.4$
PFedRec [66]	HR@10	71.05	72.00	72.96	72.53	70.52
	NDCG@10	43.89	44.66	44.26	44.67	43.69
CoFedRec	HR@10	77.52	75.50	75.18	75.72	72.43
	NDCG@10	50.56	46.33	45.20	45.97	45.31

**Figure 2: Distribution of Clients' Participation Rounds on MovieLens-100k and MovieLens-1M Datasets**

participated in more than 70 rounds. In contrast, for the MovieLens-1m dataset, 82.53% of the clients engaged in over 70 rounds. The results highlight that the introduced randomness by our approach does not entirely preclude any client from participating in group aggregation. Instead, it facilitates user selection, allowing them to partake in an aggregation process that aligns with their preferences.

4.6.2 Visualization of clustering effects. In this section, we analyze the clustering results with our proposed CoFedRec to provide more insights. In Figure 3, we utilize t-SNE [54] to visualize the item embeddings of the global model on MovieLens-100k and FilmTrust (For clear visualization, We randomly select 8 and 10 item categories from the total 30 clusters for two datasets respectively). We can observe that the item embeddings are well scattered with the extra local supervised contrastive learning. Then we consider the quality

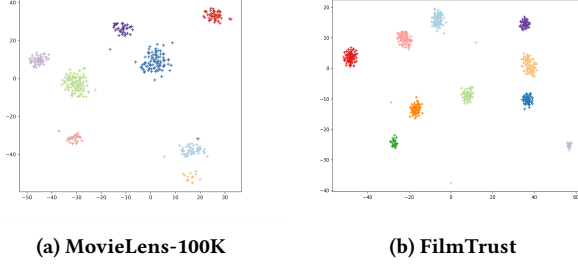


Figure 3: Visualization of the clustering results on items.

of the user clustering. Following what we discussed in Section 2.2, in very high-dimensional spaces, even arbitrary data can appear to have structure. While t-SNE is designed to preserve local structures in the data, there’s a significant risk of misreading patterns when flattening the individual item embedding matrices into a very high dimension, especially when the number of samples is much smaller than the number of dimensions. Therefore, visualizing the item embedding matrices uploaded by the clients through t-SNE technique may not yield intuitive results. The detailed analysis for this can be found in Appendix E.

5 RELATED WORK

5.1 Clustered Federated Learning

Federated learning (FL) is a distributed machine learning paradigm which allows a bunch of clients to jointly train a global model without revealing clients’ private data to other participants [34, 51, 62]. Based on the participating clients, FL can be classified into cross-device FL [53], involving numerous individual users, and cross-silo FL, which typically considers organizations as clients [19]. Many research efforts in FL address diverse concerns such as communication efficiency [25], privacy [13], data heterogeneity [12], and the cold start problem [55]. **Clustered Federated Learning (CFL)** [6, 14, 60] enhances FL scenarios with diverging, or non-IID, data distributions by clustering similar clients for joint training, mitigating interference from heterogeneous clients. To identify the cluster partitions, Briggs et al. [6] propose a hierarchical clustering step that calculates the similarity of client models to the global model. Sattler et al. [49] introduce a bi-partition method based on the cosine similarity of the client gradients. Mansour et al. [39] assign each client a cluster model that has the minimum loss. Ruan et al. [48] indicate each client can also follow a mixture of multiple distributions and follow this setting to train both local and cluster models. However, all the above-mentioned methods focus on the cross-silo setting. There’s less exploration of the CFL in cross-device settings due to the large quantities and the sparsity of the clients’ models. In this paper, we focus on cross-device CFL, especially the problem of federated recommendation (FR), enhancing the FR with the idea of co-clustering.

5.2 Federated Recommendation

Federated Recommendation System (FRS) protects user privacy in recommendations by leveraging the strengths of FL [61]. FCF [2] first applies the thought of collaborative filtering to FRS, followed

by FedMF [9] and FedNCF [44]. They expand upon centralized techniques [18, 27] in the federated context. FedRec [29] studies explicit feedback problems in FRS. FedFast [42] samples participating users in each training round and accelerates the learning to convergence. FedeRank [3] allows users to control the portion of data that can be shared, and train a personal factorization model of each user. To enhance personalization, PFedRec [66] retains the score function module locally and integrates a post-tuning procedure. Other techniques like GNNs [32, 38, 57, 65] and meta-learning [30] are also explored to improve the performance of the FRS under various subtopics. Notably, the aforementioned FRS studies aggregate a singular global model at the server end and integrate this global model into clients’ local training processes accordingly, potentially introducing noise when user data distribution is discrepant. In response to this challenge, there’s a shift towards creating group-specific models using clustering techniques that better cater to diverse user preferences [11, 68]. PerFedRec [36] clusters similar users by user embeddings. FPPDM [31] focuses on multi-domain recommendation, aligning users by their attributes. SemiDFEGL [47] introduces device-to-device collaborations to improve scalability, where users within the group form a local communication graph to perform collaborative learning. However, these methods may risk user profile exposure as user representations are disseminated either to servers or other clients. In our research, we develop a co-clustering mechanism that operates on clients’ updates rather than specific user profiles, generating an intelligent group model each round while integrating the global insights simultaneously thereby improving the precision and relevance of recommendations.

6 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we revisit the significance of clustering in federated recommendation. We analyze the failure of directly applying typical clustering method K-Means in FRS and propose a pioneering **Co-clustering Federated Recommendation mechanism (CoFedRec)** for FRS which incorporates two key ideas: (i) To deal with the heterogeneity across clients and harness user collaborative insights, we group clients into similar and dissimilar groups concerning item classifications. This allows for generating a group-specific model tailored to the similar group during each communication round. (ii) Local supervised contrastive learning term is further introduced to include the global item insights. Extensive experiments on 4 real-world datasets demonstrate the superior performance of our proposed method, which outperforms a bundle of baselines. One direction extension of our work is to perform nested client partitioning w.r.t more item categories via our co-clustering mechanism in a single communication round. Moreover, the adaptability of CoFedRec ensures its easy integration with existing FRS. In the future, we’d like to test our model with more advanced backbones.

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A EXPERIMENT SETUP

A.1 Dataset Details

In this section, we introduce the details of the datasets used and how we preprocess the data and construct the training, validation and test set. The two MovieLens datasets record the users’ interactions with the MovieLens website over the course of years. Only users who have at least 20 ratings are reserved. FilmTrust is also collected from a movie-rating website. But interactions in FilmTrust are less, and accordingly, its sparsity is comparatively high. LastFM-2K contains users’ music listening information from the music streaming service Last.fm, where users’ listening behavior results in corresponding tags. For FilmTrust and LastFM-2K, we filter out users with less than 5 interactions. The statistics of the four datasets are detailed in Table 5. Given our focus on implicit feedback recommendation in this study, we converted the explicit ratings in each dataset into implicit feedback, specifically, designating a “1” to signify that an item was rated by a user. According to the time stamp of interactions, we employ each user’s latest rating record to construct the testing set, the next latest records to constitute the validation set, while all remaining records form the training set.

Table 5: Dataset Statistics.

Dataset	Interactions	Users	Items	Sparsity
MovieLens-100K	100,000	943	1,682	93.70%
MovieLens-1M	1,000,209	6,040	3,706	95.53%
FilmTrust	34,888	1,227	2,059	98.62%
LastFM-2K	185,650	1,600	12,454	99.07%

A.2 Baselines

We compare our proposed CoFedRec with the following baselines containing both centralized and federated methods.

Centralized methods:

- **Matrix Factorization (MF)** [27]: Upon the user-item rating matrix, MF maps users and items to a joint latent space, so that the interactions are modeled as the inner product of user and item embeddings.
- **Neural Collaborative Filtering (NCF)** [18]: It proposes to utilize an MLP to model the user-item interaction function.

Federated methods:

- **FedeRank** [3]: FedeRank learns a personal factorization model onto every user device and allows users to share a portion of their private data, which helps protect the privacy of the user.
- **FedMF** [9]: It is a framework implemented based on Federated Collaborative Filtering (FCF) [2] where user embedding is maintained locally and item embeddings are aggregated globally.
- **FedNCF** [44]: It is a federated version of NCF. A generalized MF (GMF) and an MLP are used to represent user embeddings and item embeddings respectively.
- **FedPerGNN** [57]: It assigns GNN models for each client to utilize its superiority in capturing high-order user-item information.
- **FedRecon** [50]: Utilizing a reconstruction-based approach, FedRecon re-initializes local user embedding every 2 rounds in our implementation and aggregates item network globally.

Table 6: Learning rate of all models across four datasets.

Models	ML-100K	ML-1M	FilmTrust	LastFM-2k
MF	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
NCF	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
FedMF	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
FedeRank	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
FedNCF	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
FedPerGNN	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
FedRecon	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
MetaMF	0.0001	0.0001	0.0005	0.0001
FedFast	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
PerFedRec	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
PFedRec	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.05
GPFedRec	* ⁴	*	0.05	*
CoFedRec	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.05

- **MetaMF** [30]: MetaMF introduces a meta-network to generate private item embedding and rating prediction function so that user model parameters can be reduced. We modify the final layer to adapt to federated recommendations with implicit feedback.
- **FedFast** [42]: FedFast introduces two components, ActvSAMP and ActvAGG, which enable a more intelligent selection of users to participate in each round of training.
- **PerFedRec jointly** [36]: PerFedRec trains a federated GNN to cluster users and then learns models for each cluster. Finally, each user learns a personalized model via model adaptation.
- **PFedRec** [66]: PFedRec proposes a dual personalization mechanism that emphasizes capturing personalized information through a post-tuning procedure.
- **GPFedRec** [65]: GPFedRec constructs a user relationship graph based on the item embeddings received and learns user-specific item embeddings as a regularizer for users' local training.

A.3 Hyperparameter Settings

To ensure a fair comparison across all methods, we maintain a consistent setting: a batch size of 256, an embedding size of 32, and a training round capped at 100. The only exceptions are FedMF, whose convergence needs 300 training rounds, and FedRecon, which does so within 500 rounds. We search for the appropriate learning rate for each model based on the validation sets and the details are shown in Table 6. The hyperparameter λ is fine-tuned within the range of [0.0005, 0.001, 0.005, 0.01, 0.05, 0.1, 0.3, 0.5] and the hyperparameter τ for the local supervised contrastive learning in the range [0.1, 0.5] with the step of 0.1. The Specifics for CoFedRec are shown in Table 7. We optimize the centralized MF, NCF, and FedNCF with Adam optimizer [24] and SGD [8] for all the other models.

B COMMUNICATION EFFICIENT ANALYSIS

In this section, we systematically evaluate the communication efficiency of our proposed CoFedRec. Due to the inherent characteristics of federated learning, multiple iterations of parameter exchanges are necessary between the server and the clients to finalize the training procedure. Hence, the efficiency of communication plays a pivotal role in FRS implementations.

To elucidate the superior communication efficiency of our proposed CoFedRec, we'll dissect it step by step. At each round t , a subset of participant clients P_t is selected. Each participant client u sends its updated item embedding V_u to the server. Thus, the communication cost for collecting item embeddings from all the participant clients would be proportional to the size of P_t multiplied by the size of each item network. During the client update phase, the server sends the item embedding V_s to a subset of participant clients identified as the "similar group" and the item membership A to all the participants. Depending on the fraction of clients in the similar group, this could be a varying portion of P_t . The communication cost here is the sum of the size of V_s multiplied by the number of clients in the similar group and the size of A multiplied by P_t where A is a vector in the real implementation and is quite small in size compared with the model V_s . Hence, when compared with other baseline models, the efficiency of our proposed CoFedRec stems from the fact that we eliminate the need to distribute the aggregated model back to all the participating clients.

Table 7: Specifics of our proposed CoFedRec on four datasets.

	ML-100K	ML-1M	FilmTrust	LastFM-2k
λ	0.005	0.005	0.05	0.001
τ	0.1	0.5	0.5	0.5
item clusters	30	45	30	500
best round	93	70	78	68

Table 8: Performance of varying weights of the local supervised contrastive learning term (@K=10).

Datasets	λ	0.001	0.005	0.01	0.05	0.1	0.3
ML-100K	HR	72.85	77.52	75.08	74.87	74.02	66.17
	NDCG	45.43	50.56	48.86	49.01	47.36	41.05
ML-1M	HR	72.93	77.75	74.02	72.25	62.68	56.90
	NDCG	45.60	48.81	45.66	46.15	37.11	33.41

C STUDY OF THE HYPERPARAMETERS

In this section, we study the two main factors of our methods, the effect of the number of item clusters and the effect of the local supervised contrastive learning term.

In our co-clustering mechanism, users are grouped based on item categories. Consequently, the quality of item classification directly affects user partitioning. The optimal number of clusters can indeed vary significantly across different datasets, as it is closely tied to the intrinsic characteristics of each dataset. In our method, we regarded it as a hyperparameter and we have conducted extensive hyperparameter tuning to find the most suitable number of clusters. Drawing from practical experience, we consider that after partitioning items, each category should, on average, contain no fewer than ten items. Depending on the size of the dataset, we therefore search for the optimal number of item clusters within the respective range.

⁴We cite the results of GPFedRec directly from the original paper.

As illustrated in Figure 4, we plot the performance variations of our proposed method on the MovieLens-100K and MovieLens-1M datasets as the number of item clusters changes. It can be observed that performance declines when the number of item clusters is either too large or too small, due to either over-segmentation or overly broad classification.

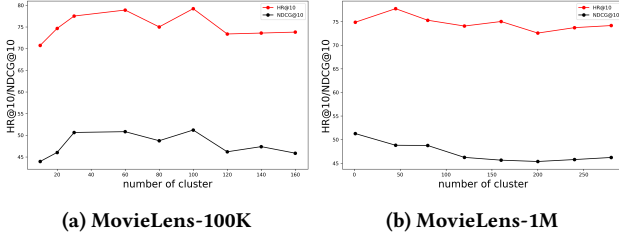


Figure 4: Effect of the number of the item clusters.

We adjusted the weight of the local supervised contrastive learning term from 0.0005 to 0.5 to examine its impact on model performance. The outcomes on MovieLens-100K and MovieLens-1M are presented in Table 8. We found that, when incorporating this extra learning term with an appropriate weight, they can enhance local item representation learning by capturing more global information.

Table 9: Experiment results on full rank evaluation (@K=10). The best results are highlighted in boldface. Underlined values indicate the second best.

Models	ML-100K		ML-1M		FilmTrust	
	HR	NDCG	HR	NDCG	HR	NDCG
MF	16.76	9.26	8.84	4.47	69.44	50.35
NCF	18.98	<u>11.56</u>	9.67	4.89	68.87	49.00
FedMF	14.10	7.16	6.61	3.14	59.66	37.10
FedNCF	15.91	8.18	7.81	3.91	48.17	35.57
FedPerGNN	5.73	3.15	4.21	2.16	68.95	47.31
FedRecon	16.44	8.40	8.51	4.16	68.87	49.08
MetaMF	16.33	9.52	9.00	<u>6.97</u>	70.09	49.91
PFedRec	<u>19.19</u>	11.02	<u>10.13</u>	5.04	<u>71.37</u>	<u>51.82</u>
CoFedRec	21.63	12.64	13.20	8.90	72.78	52.93

D RESULTS ON FULL RANK EVALUATION

In the main experiment, we adopt an efficient sampling strategy. It samples 100 items per user for evaluation, which contain a positive item and 99 randomly selected negative items. In this section, we evaluate CoFedRec in the full ranking list, which is more challenging because the involved items increase dramatically. We evaluate CoFedRec with typical baselines on MovieLens-100K, MovieLens-1M and FilmTrust. The experimental results are shown in Table 9. It can be seen that our proposed CoFedRec outperforms all baselines, verifying its effectiveness.

E USER PARTITIONING ANALYSIS

In our endeavor to understand the problem of K-Means clustering on the MovieLens-100K dataset, as mentioned in Section 2.2, we

applied the K-Means algorithm with two different cluster counts: $k = 2$ and $k = 10$. Figure 5 showcases the extremely imbalanced clustering outcome. For example, in Figure 5a, green stars denote cluster 1, while the solitary orange star, representing cluster 2, is nestled within cluster 1. This observation reaffirms our insights from Section 2.2 about the inherent challenges of K-Means in high-dimensional spaces, where data points tend to be near-equidistant, rendering them challenging to distinguish effectively.

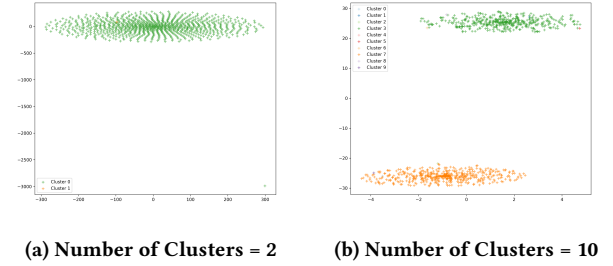


Figure 5: Visualization for clustering results on MovieLens-100K via K-Means.

We next turn our attention to evaluating the quality of user clustering. As discussed in Section 2.2, traditional data processing methods often underperform when dealing with high-dimensional data. This issue becomes particularly pronounced in our settings, where the dimensionality of each sample is considerably larger than the total number of available samples. High dimensionality with a relatively small number of data points can lead to noise in the data and potential overfitting. Specifically, high-dimensional spaces, due to their inherent vastness, can often be deceptive. Imagine having only a few points scattered in an immense space, even if these points were placed randomly, it might seem like they form some sort of pattern or structure simply because there are so many possibilities for them to potentially align in certain ways. This noise, when interpreted as genuine data structure, can cause models or techniques, like t-SNE, to overfit.

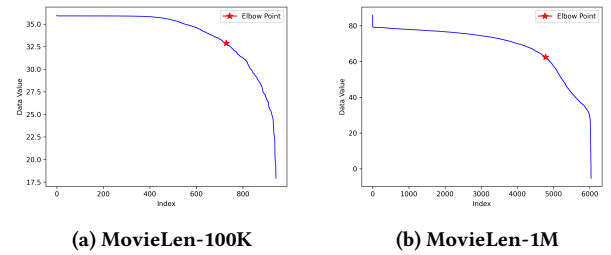


Figure 6: Visualization of the elbow point corresponding to the optimal performance round for both MovieLens-100K and MovieLens-1M datasets.

Examining the 'elbow point' used to segregate the similar and dissimilar groups offers further insights. As shown in Figure 6, an evident turning point exists, facilitating the clear differentiation between these groups. This observation underscores the efficacy of our co-clustering mechanism in user partitioning, notably without necessitating access to individual profiles.