

1 Model Based Systems

The systems based on methods discussed earlier in the lab have been widely used and produce good results. But such algorithms have been shown to have several limitations.

- Sparsity - Nearest Neighbor (NN) Algorithms need exact matches. As a result algorithms sacrifice recommender system coverage and accuracy [TODO FIXME ref1]. To be more precise, correlation coefficient is only defined between customers who have few products (movies in our database) in common. In an ecommerce environment where there are large number of items, one may find many customers who do not have any correlation with other customers [TODO FIXME ref2]. As a result Nearest Neighbor based algorithms are not able to recommend anything to these customers. This problem is known as the reduced coverage problem. The sparsity could also a recommender system from detecting certain obvious neighbors.

For example - John and Susan are highly correlated, while Susan and Jack are highly correlated. Conventional wisdom might suggest John and Jack should also have similar choices, however if John and Jack have very few ratings in common, such patterns could be easily missed

- Synonym Problem - In real life scenarios, different product names can refer to similar items. Correlation based recommender systems cannot find such latent association and thus end up treating these objects as two separate entities.

For example, let us consider two customers one of whom rates 10 different writing pad products as "high" and another customer rates 10 different notepads as "high". NN based recommender system will not capture their association.

One of the methods used to handle both the problems is the low rank approximation method.

1.1 Singular Vector Decomposition

The Singular Value Decomposition (SVD) is a well known matrix factorization method. Formally, the SVD of an $m \times n$ matrix A is a factorization of the form $A = U\Sigma V^T$ where U is an $m \times m$ orthogonal matrix, Σ is an $m \times n$ diagonal matrix with non-negative terms on the diagonal, and V is an $n \times n$ orthogonal matrix. The diagonal entries of Σ are known as the singular values of A . The m columns of U and the n column of V are known as the left and right singular vectors of A respectively.

The SVD gives the 'best' low-rank approximation of a matrix. To put this in a more formal notation, it minimizes the Frobenius form of the difference

between the approximation and the original matrix (i.e. the sum of squared errors).

Assume that matrix $A \in R^{m \times n}$ with rank $r > k$. The Frobenius norm approximation problem $\min ||A - Z||_F$ where $\text{rank}(Z) = k$ has the solution:

$$Z = A_k = U_k \Sigma_k V_k^T$$

where U_k , Σ_k and V_k are the matrices obtained by truncating the SVD to contain only the first k singular vectors/values.

The SVD is implemented by the function *svd* in MATLAB. You can try the following code in matlab to get an idea:

```
A = magic(3)
[U,D,V] = svd(A)
```

You should observe that the columns of the matrices U and V are orthonormal, i.e. orthogonal unit vectors. Also note that Σ is a diagonal matrix with non-negative and monotonically decreasing entries along the diagonal. These are the singular values of A . The i^{th} singular value (Σ_{ii}) represents the energy content, or variance of the columns of A along the i^{th} left singular vector or the rows of A along the i^{th} right singular vector.

1.2 Generating Predictions

We can use SVD in recommender system to capture certain latent relationship between customers and products/movies. We can use this relationship to capture the predicted likeliness of a certain product/movie by a consumer. However, how do you calculate the SVD of an incomplete matrix? In order to handle this, we will study various approximations. We will then run these methods and collect empirical evidence to validate their effectiveness.

1.2.1 Latent Factor Model

1.2.2 Average Value Based SVD Completion

Below is the description of steps used to generate predictions using Average Values for SVD Completion -

1. Let R be the original sparse matrix where rows represent the user and columns represent the movies
2. Fill the empty cells in each column with average values of the product/movies in that column.
3. Calculate the average rating for each customer \bar{C} using the non zero values

4. Let $R_{norm} = R - \bar{C}$
5. Factor R_{norm} using SVD and obtain U , S and V
6. Truncate U , S and V to U_k , S_k and V_k .
7. Compute the resultant matrix $Pred_{norm} = U_k * S_k * V_k$
8. Add the average customer value calculated in Step 3 to this matrix $Pred = Pred_{norm} + \bar{C}$

EXERCISE: Implement a function for average value SVD completion. Use the matrix generated from table ??. Compare the result with our implementation located in Examples/ToyExampleAverageValueSVD.m

1.2.3 Iterative SVD Completion

Another simple approach to complete a matrix and generate predictions is to use iterative SVD.

1. Let R be the original sparse matrix where rows represent the user and columns represent the movies
2. Fill the empty cells in each row with 0. Let this new Matrix be R_{next}
3. Factorize R_{next} using SVD and obtain U , S and V
4. Truncate U , S and V to U_k , S_k and V_k .
5. Compute the resultant matrix $R_{next} = U_k * S_k * V_k$
6. Use the known values in R to replace values in R_{next}
7. Repeat the process from Step 3 t number of times.

EXERCISE: Implement a function for iterative SVD completion. Use the matrix generated from table ??. Compare the result with our implementation located in Examples/ToyExampleIterativeSVD.m

1.3 Nearest Neighbor

1.3.1 Using Predicted Matrix

Once we have a prediction for all the movies/products for all the users, we can use nearest neighbors to generate item recommendation for a user. One may ask what use is this method if we already have a prediction? Well, nearest neighbor method can lead to something called as "Serendipity". We will discuss the meaning of Serendipity in a later section. This method is based on the assumption - given a high accuracy of prediction, we might find better neighbors and thus better ratings.

1.3.2 Original Matrix in Lower Dimension

Another work around to find better neighbors is to look for neighbors in a lower dimension space of the original sparse matrix. The motivation here is that a lower dimension space will lead to a denser matrix and might help us find better neighbors.

1.3.3 Which Nearest Neighbor approximation to Use?

To answer this question we will resort to the golden answer to life, universe and anything non concrete - *"It Depends!!!"*. For the purpose of this lab we used Nearest Neighbor approach in a lower dimension space of predicted matrix. Empirically, it worked better. In general, one tries different approaches and sees what works best for their environment and their preference of error metrics.