

Amazon Review Sentiment Analysis

Alan Q. Pereze-Rathke Gary Turovsky

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0.1 Introduction

There are quite a few unsolved problems in the field of data mining. But sentiment analysis presents us with a special challenge. Sentiments are subtle and context-dependent. They demand a depth of understanding of the underlying meaning that even the state-of-the-art can't provide.

But, of course, such information has value. For example, it would be handy for a product manufacturer to automatically collect sentiment data about its product. This can help improve the product and direct advertising efforts.

Amazon is a large online retailer which naturally has such product sentiment data. For some of the more popular products they carry, people post reviews - and often people reply to such reviews with comments. We were given the specific problem of classifying these comments into two classes. One class was to contain the comments which expressed some opinion about the product review. And the other class contained those comments which did not. See the accompanying figure for an example from each class.

Sentimental Review	Non-sentimental Review
Great review, all of the information is really helpful and I think you and your wife helped me in making my decision! I am ordering my Kindle 3 very soon, thanks!	Question - I saw on your cover review that you got both the grey and the white versions. Which one do you prefer and how much difference is there between the two?

Figure 1: Examples from the two classes of reviews

We believed that the simplest approach would be the best approach here. Or, at the very least, would allow us to create a baseline from which to improve our results.

0.2 Techniques Used

During our initial brainstorm about this problem we decided to focus on writing our program to construct a generic feature vector which we would run through several classifiers. We discussed using naive bayes, SVM, and decision trees. As it turned out, naive bayes gave us the best and most consistent results. Initial implementations that used the decision tree were discouraging and we stopped experimenting with it early on. Only SVM and naive bayes were consistently experimented with. Though, almost every time naive bayes performed best for us. So, all results we will discuss were achieved by using a naive bayes classifier.

The first and most obvious thing to try was to work out which single words in the comments signalled some opinion about the review. We collected all the

Feature	Class
Phrase: "great review"	Sentimental
Phrase: "thank time"	Sentimental
Number of comments by user: 1, Words: "thanks" and "review", Starts with: "thank"	Sentimental
Number of comments by user: 1, Words: "review", Starts with: "thank"	Sentimental
Phrase: "help review"	Sentimental
Phrase: "review thank"	Sentimental
Comment author is review author	Non-sentimental
Word: "delet"	Non-Sentimental
Starts with: "excel"	Sentimental

Figure 2: Ten of the typically most useful features in our feature set

single words from each review and this turned out to be a set that numbered in the thousands. This was far too large to be our features so we decided to arbitrarily grab the first few hundred.

There were a few words with the same root among the features, so we started to stem the words before adding them to the feature vector. In addition, we removed all punctuation. This gave us a surprisingly high baseline of approximately 70%.

It seemed that we should care more about comments which had phrases like "great review" in the text. This gave us the idea of paying attention to nouns and adjectives only. We filtered our feature vector to include only the single words which were nouns and adjectives. Now "great" and "review" (along with words like "thanks" and "informative") came up near the top of the most helpful features for classification. We wanted to make sure to capture any occurrence of the two words together now so we started merging the most common single words into phrases whenever they occurred next to each other. That is, if the adjective "great" occurred in a sentence and then the next noun word in the sentence was "review", we counted that as the feature "great review". This allowed us to also count the sentences "great review" and "review was great" as the same (as word order didn't matter in our analysis either). We also made the fact that a review started with a word to be a feature in itself.

This improved our accuracy but we were still getting garbage phrases in our feature vector, such as "ipod nano", which clearly would only help discriminate for particular reviews. We needed to focus on the most important phrases and words. For this, we decided to use a tf-idf score for each word and phrase. Strangely, this introduced a lot of garbage words and phrases into our feature vector and eliminated others that we thought would be good discriminators. We decided to compare this to a straight threshold. That is, we would only consider words and phrases that occurred in response to several different reviews. Experimentally, we settled on a threshold of about 30% of the reviews. And

this worked a lot better to eliminate extraneous features than the tf-idf score.

At this point, incorporating the helpfulness of a review, the length of a review, and the frequency of a commenter in a comment thread were added to the feature vector but had very little effect on the accuracy. We also tried to see whether a review's star rating for a product was different from that product's average star rating. Perhaps the comments in such a review are more likely to feel one way or another about the review, but it had little effect on the accuracy. One feature which worked was whether the author of a comment was the author of the review (since authors will rarely express any feeling about how good or bad their review was).

Here we ran into the dilemma of where to go from here. In our testing, we were hovering around 75% accuracy on average. To do any better, it would seem we would need a new approach. But switching to another technique seemed risky. Was there some other way of improving the naive bayes classifier?

Since there is an intrinsic assumption of conditional independence in the naive bayes approach, we knew we were missing some features which, together, could be important. In order to find these, we decided to use the CAR algorithm. For each class class, we extracted the features that co-occured together and used the fact that these co-occur as a feature in itself to add to the feature vector. For example, it turned out to be informative when there was only a single comment from a certain user and they started this comment with the word "great". This was far more significant than the two features separately.

We made one more attempt to improve the feature vector. We attempted to create two clusters out of the feature vectors. Once we found the mean of both clusters, we added a feature to each feature vector with the standard deviation from the mean. This, unfortunately, did not help our accuracy, so we removed these features from our feature vector when doing the final classification.

One final note here about using an SVM for classification. We used the libsvm package which comes with a handy little python script which makes the classification process "fool-proof". This script first estimates parameters for an rbf kernel before doing the actual classification. Each such run took a much longer time than the naive bayes classifier (which made working on improving this classifier quite a bit more difficult) and it also never outperformed the naive bayes classifier, besides being inconsistent to boot. We saw accuracies of anywhere between 60% and 80%, which we thought would not be acceptable if we were to be competitive with the other teams. We really wanted the SVM to work, but it would always disappoint.

0.3 Experiments

0.4 Conclusion and Further Work

Our work on this project has mainly revolved around creating the optimum feature vector such that a naive bayes classifier would be able to better discriminate between the two classes. In a way this is a bit of a boring approach and

it would have felt a lot better to find something more interesting and innovative that did far better. Without having a good way to understand language, this seemed like a daunting task. In order to really understand sentiment, we have to be able to extract meaning from a text. One could even venture to say that in a lot of ways, knowing the feeling in a sentence is a huge step towards understanding its meaning.

In the course of working on this project, we regret that we could never get SVM accurate to the extent that we were sure it could be. It seemed, by all accounts we were aware, that an SVM would be perfect for dealing with text data. Perhaps further tweaking or using a different kernel could have yielded better results. Maybe a simpler kernel could have also reduced the training time.

It also seems that we could have taken more risks. Something interesting to try would be a sort of Hidden Markov Model approach. Let's say that, in our HMM, each word is a state. It has a transition probability between it and another state that depends on how often these words co-occur in a sentence. The observation for each state would be the word for each state.

Two HMMs could be trained. One for comments with sentiments about the review and one for comments without sentiments about the review. When doing the testing, the classifier would calculate which HMM the word sequence was most likely to come from. Such a set of models might also be interesting since we could use them to generate examples of comments from either class.