Optimizing NYC Taxi Gratuities with ML

Modeling NYC Taxi Data in the Cloud with BigQuery

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Outline

Can we predict tips for cab drivers in NYC?

- Public transportation is down, and ride-sharing usage is up. (Pew Research)
- Why care about tips?
  - Identify high value times and places
  - Help MTA understand traffic patterns
- Insights could help optimize driver earnings and identify areas that need more bus or metro access.

Research questions

- Patterns in taxi usage over time
  - When are taxis most heavily used?
  - Which geographic zones rely most heavily on taxis?
- What factors are correlated with high tips?
  - What are the strongest predictors of tips?
  - What other data contribute, e.g., weather or demographics?

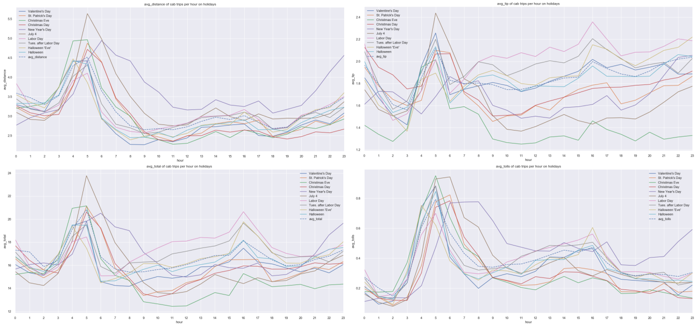
NYC Yellow Cab Data

- Taxi and Limousine Commission data from 2018
  - The TLC released public taxi data from 2009 to present.
  - Available free to access on Google BigQuery.
- What's in the ride data?
  - For 2018, the database contains 112,234,626 records of Yellow Cab rides
  - Records include pick-up and drop-off dates /times, locations, trip distances, itemized fares, rate types, payment types, and driver-reported passenger counts

Data Preparation

- Data Cleaning
  - We must eliminate erroneous records before modeling—some data were poorly collected or transmitted by the sensors.
  - We find and remove observations with negative ride durations, negative tip, fare, or distance, duplication, zero passengers, etc.
  - Make note of outliers, for later modeling
- Data Exploration
  - We queried the public data with BigQuery's native SQL to find the distributions and correlations of the variables of interest.
  - Some notable outliers seemed like errors, but others raised interesting questions
    - Why is there a series of $10,000 trips all with plausibly long distances?
    - What's the pattern behind the 3 million trips between 0 and 1 mile?

The average day vs. selected holidays in 2018



BigQuery for Machine Learning

- Why BigQuery?
  - BigQuery is a serverless, scalable, and democratic cloud data warehouse.
  - It hosts many public datasets that users can join to their uploaded data.
  - Its data structure for nested records and distributed, tree-based query engine mean that it can execute ad-hoc SQL faster than if the data were stored in a more usual format.
- Training ML models in the cloud
  - We queried the public data and trained a model natively to take advantage of Dremel and the wealth of public data.
  - BigQuery's native SQL integrates with Python and R to visualize and additionally analyze queries.

Feature Engineering

- Time and geographic data
  - Extracting the hour, day, and month allows us to granularly analyze trip patterns over time by neighborhood and borough.
  - We can check whether a given (lat, long) is inside a taxi zone polygon by solving a system of linear equations.
- Additional features
  - holidays
  - days of week
  - rush hour
  - overnight trip
  - weekend
  - airport trip

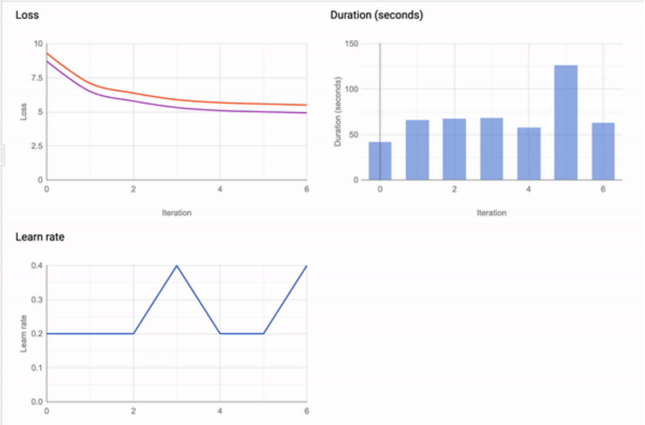
Basic linear regression

- Base model
  - We trained a linear regression model using L1 regularization and batch gradient descent.
  - Using a hash function on unique row timestamps, we pseudorandomly and reproducibly split the data into train-test and evaluation sets.
- Training and evaluating
  - We trained the model in the cloud using ML.CREATE, with 20% of data for testing.
  - The base model explained 0.63 percent of the variance in the outcome (but we wouldn't expect linear regression to be the optimal model for tips).
  - Using ML.EVALUATE on the holdout data, we see that our R^2 value increased by 0.3, indicating that we have avoided overfitting.
  - With ML.PREDICT, we can see the model's actual numerical predictions.

A sample query to evaluate a model

```
SELECT tip_amount, predicted_tip_amount
FROM ML.PREDICT(MODEL `nyc-transit-256016.nyc_taxi.tips_model_L1`, (
       SELECT
         --datetime info
         EXTRACT(MONTH FROM pickup_datetime) AS pickup_month,
         FORMAT_DATE('%A',DATE(pickup_datetime)) as weekday_name,
         EXTRACT(DAY FROM pickup_datetime) AS p_day,
         EXTRACT(HOUR FROM pickup_datetime) AS p_hour_of_day,
         EXTRACT(DAY FROM dropoff_datetime) AS d_day,
         EXTRACT(HOUR FROM dropoff_datetime) AS d_hour_of_day,

         --general ride info
         passenger_count,
         trip_distance,

         --dollar info
         fare_amount,
         mta_tax,
         tolls_amount,

         --categorical variables
         payment_type,
         is_weekend,
         is_airport,
         is_peak,

         --geographical info
         pickup_location_id,
         dropoff_location_id,
         tip_amount

       FROM
         `nyc-transit-256016.nyc_taxi._model_data_table` -- the table I created
       WHERE
         trip_distance > 0 AND fare_amount BETWEEN 0.01 AND 3000.0
         AND DATETIME_DIFF(dropoff_datetime, pickup_datetime, HOUR) > 0 -- Filters out all the stuff we
don't want to train on
         AND passenger_count > 0
         AND tip_amount >= 0
         AND MOD(ABS(FARM_FINGERPRINT(CAST(pickup_datetime AS STRING))),10) >= 8
       )
      )
```

Batch gradient descent



Top tips

- Queens tops the tip list.
  1. Westerleigh
  2. Newark Airport
  3. Saint Michaels Cemetery/Woodside
  4. Astoria Park
  5. Jamaica Bay
  6. Flushing Meadows-Corona Park
  7. Randalls Island
  8. LaGuardia Airport
  9. Rikers Island
  10. Baisley Park

Low rides

- Staten Island is the most negatively correlated borough.

1. Arden Heights
2. Stapleton
3. Bloomfield/Emerson Hill
4. Far Rockaway
5. Charleston/Tottenville
6. Port Richmond
7. New Dorp/Midland Beach
8. Saint George/New Brighton
9. Rosedale
10. Mariners Harbor

Interesting findings

- Thursday has the highest correlation with tips. Saturday has the lowest.
- The feature most strongly correlated with tips was the engineered airport variable.
- Toll amount, trip distance, fare amount, and hour of the day were the next most correlated.

Next steps

- The target and the cardinality of the data mean that a multinomial regression or other model will likely perform better.
- We will visualize the ride map and engineer features such as distance from metro stops.
- Examining the model's coefficients surfaced interesting patterns in the data that will improve the input data.
- BigQuery allows for uploading TensorFlow models, which may be a fruitful avenue to pursue.

Thank you!