

CEE 616: Probabilistic Machine Learning
M5 Unsupervised Learning:
L5A: Principal Components Analysis

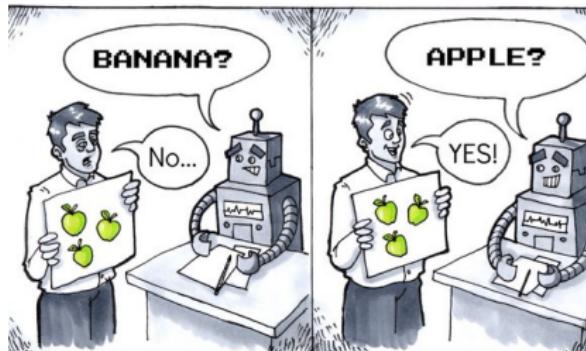
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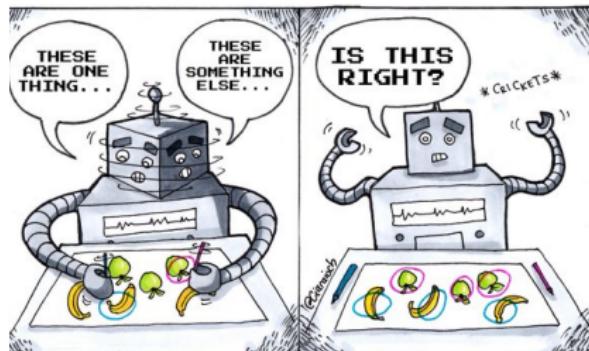
Thu, Nov 20, 2025

Outline

Unsupervised vs. supervised learning



Supervised Learning



Unsupervised Learning

- Supervised learning: given response y and p features measured on the same observations, predict y on the x_i ;
- Unsupervised learning: only p features; no given response; what then can we learn about the data?

Learning tools

Supervised

Goal: predict or infer a response (regression or classification)

- multiple linear regression
- logistic regression
- linear/quadratic discriminant analysis
- decision trees
- support vector machines

Unsupervised

Goal: exploration (e.g. grouping, pattern discovery, dimensional analysis)

- dimensionality reduction
- clustering

Dimensionality reduction

Dimensionality reduction seeks to learn a suitable mapping from a high-dimensional feature space $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^D$ to a low-dimensional **latent space** $\mathbf{z} \in \mathbb{R}^L$.

- **Parametric approach:** estimate $\mathbf{z} = f(\mathbf{x}; \theta)$
- **Nonparametric approach:** compute embedding \mathbf{z}_n for each input \mathbf{x}_n
- Uses:
 - data pre-processing
 - model simplification
- Algorithms:
 - principal components analysis (PCA)
 - factor analysis (FA)
 - autoencoders

Principal components analysis (PCA)

PCA is a dimensionality reduction technique that seeks an L -dimensional basis that best captures the variance in a D -dimensional dataset

- The direction with the largest projected variance is the *first principal component*
- The orthogonal direction capturing the second largest projected variance is the *second principal component*
- The direction that maximizes the variance is that which also minimizes the mean squared error

Interpreting principal components

The first principal component of a design/feature matrix \mathbf{X} can be considered as the “best-fit” (closest) line to all the datapoints.

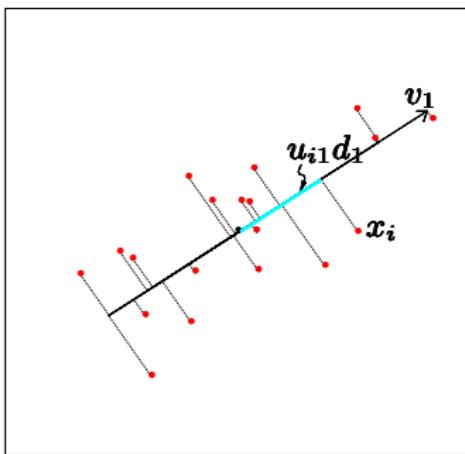


Figure: First principal component (PC) of a dataset. The PC minimizes the total squared distance from each point to its orthogonal projection onto the line

Interpreting principal components (cont.)

The first two principal components of a dataset span the [2D] plane closest to the data.

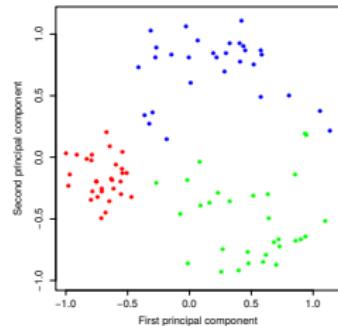
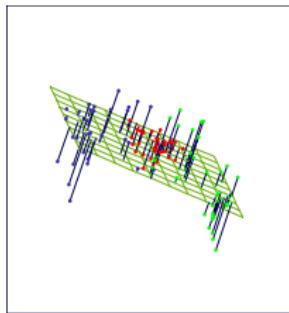
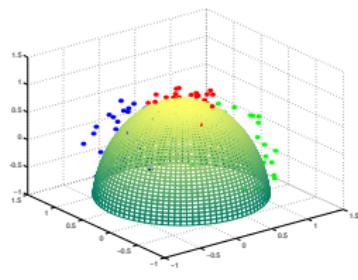


Figure: (L) Simulated dataset near surface of half-sphere. (C) Best 2-dimensional representation of data. (R) Projected points on the plane ($U_2\Gamma_2$)

Sample covariance matrix (review)

The sample covariance matrix is given by:

$$\widehat{\Sigma} = E[(\mathbf{X} - \hat{\mu})(\mathbf{X} - \hat{\mu})^T] = \begin{pmatrix} \hat{\sigma}_1^2 & \hat{\sigma}_{12} & \cdots & \hat{\sigma}_{1D} \\ \hat{\sigma}_{21} & \hat{\sigma}_2^2 & \cdots & \hat{\sigma}_{2D} \\ \cdots & \cdots & \cdots & \cdots \\ \hat{\sigma}_{D1} & \hat{\sigma}_{D2} & \cdots & \hat{\sigma}_D^2 \end{pmatrix} \quad (1)$$

If \mathbf{X} is mean centered, then we can write:

$$\widehat{\Sigma} = \frac{1}{N}(\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X}) = \frac{1}{n} \begin{pmatrix} \mathbf{x}_1^T \mathbf{x}_1 & \mathbf{x}_1^T \mathbf{x}_2 & \cdots & \mathbf{x}_1^T \mathbf{x}_D \\ \mathbf{x}_2^T \mathbf{x}_1 & \mathbf{x}_2^T \mathbf{x}_2 & \cdots & \mathbf{x}_2^T \mathbf{x}_D \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \mathbf{x}_D^T \mathbf{x}_1 & \mathbf{x}_D^T \mathbf{x}_2 & \cdots & \mathbf{x}_D^T \mathbf{x}_D \end{pmatrix} \quad (2)$$

The sample covariance matrix is given as the pairwise inner/dot products of the centered attribute/feature vectors, normalized by the sample size N .

Projection of \mathbf{X} onto first L basis vectors

The expression $\tilde{\mathbf{x}}_j = \sum_{k=1}^L a_{jk} \mathbf{v}_k$ is a projection of \mathbf{x}_j onto the first L basis vectors.

We derive a compact representation as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\tilde{\mathbf{x}}_j &= \mathbf{V}_L \mathbf{a}_L \\ \mathbf{a}_L &= \mathbf{V}_L^T \mathbf{x}_j \\ \implies \tilde{\mathbf{x}}_j &= \mathbf{V}_L \mathbf{V}_L^T \mathbf{x}_j = \mathbf{P}_L \mathbf{x}_j\end{aligned}$$

where $\mathbf{P}_L = \mathbf{V}_L \mathbf{V}_L^T$ is the orthogonal **projection matrix** for the subspace spanned by the first L basis vectors.

- We can compute the error vector as the projection of \mathbf{x}_j onto the subspace spanned by the remaining basis vectors:

$$\epsilon_j = \sum_{k=L+1}^D a_{jk} \mathbf{v}_k = \mathbf{x}_j - \tilde{\mathbf{x}}_j \tag{3}$$

Direction of max variance

We seek the unit vector \mathbf{v} that maximizes the projected variance of the points.

If \mathbf{X} is centered and Σ its covariance matrix, then the projection of X_j on \mathbf{v} is:

$$X_j = \left(\frac{\mathbf{v}^T \mathbf{X}_j}{\mathbf{v}^T \mathbf{v}} \right) \mathbf{v} = (\mathbf{v}^T \mathbf{X}_j) \mathbf{v} = a_j \mathbf{v} \quad (4)$$

Across all points, the **projected variance** along \mathbf{v} is:

$$\sigma_{\mathbf{v}}^2 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{j=1}^n (a_j - \mu_{\mathbf{v}})^2 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_j \mathbf{v}^T (X_j X_j^T) \mathbf{v} = \mathbf{v}^T \Sigma \mathbf{v} \quad (5)$$

The optimal basis that maximizes the projected variance $\sigma_{\mathbf{v}}^2$ subject to $\mathbf{v}^T \mathbf{v} = 1$ is:

$$\max_{\mathbf{v}} J(\mathbf{v}) = \mathbf{v}^T \Sigma \mathbf{v} - \lambda(\mathbf{v}^T \mathbf{v} - 1) \quad (6)$$

Direction of max variance (cont.)

Taking the derivative of $J(\mathbf{v})$ w.r.t. \mathbf{v} and setting to zero, we obtain:

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{\partial(\mathbf{v}^T \Sigma \mathbf{v} - \alpha(\mathbf{v}^T \mathbf{v} - 1))}{\partial \mathbf{v}} &= \mathbf{0} \\ \implies 2\Sigma \mathbf{v} - 2\lambda \mathbf{v} &= \mathbf{0} \\ \Sigma \mathbf{v} &= \lambda \mathbf{v}\end{aligned}$$

Thus λ is an eigenvalue of Σ and \mathbf{v} the eigenvector.

Recall that the projected variance is given by $\sigma_{\mathbf{v}}^2 = \mathbf{v}^T \Sigma \mathbf{v}$. Thus:

$$\sigma_{\mathbf{v}}^2 = \mathbf{v}^T \lambda \mathbf{v} = \lambda \quad (7)$$

To maximize $\sigma_{\mathbf{v}}^2$ we set λ to the largest eigenvalue λ_1 of Σ ; \mathbf{v}_1 indicates the direction of max variance (first principal component).

Iris dataset: first principal component

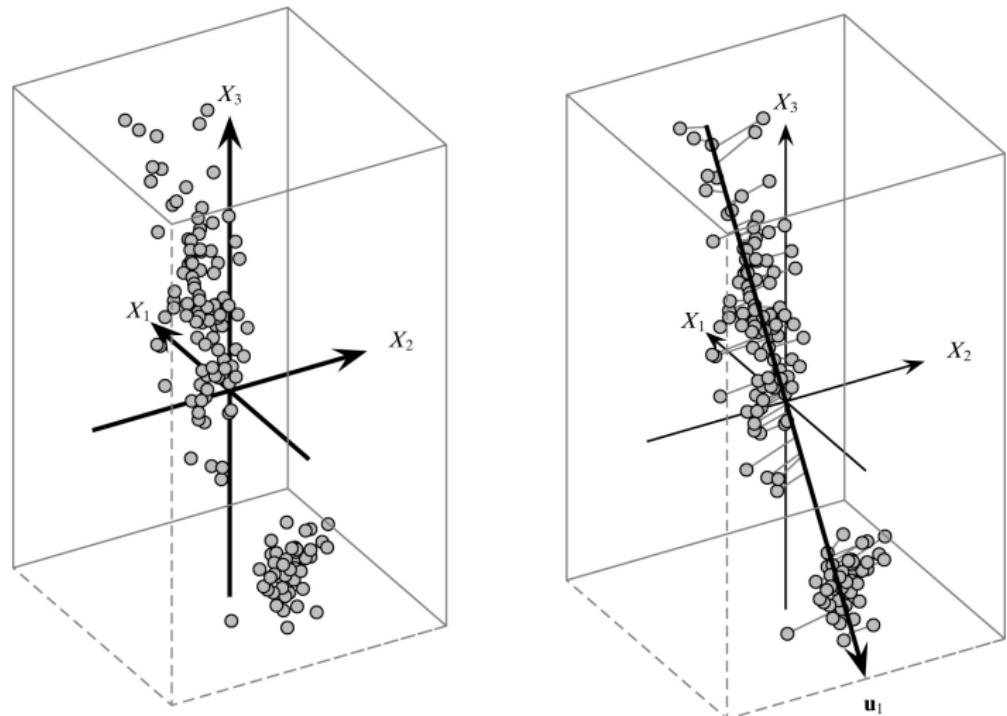


Figure: (Left) Iris dataset showing original basis: sepal length (X_1), sepal width (X_2) and petal length (X_3). (Right) First principal component u_1 superimposed

Two dimensions

If we solve a similar optimization problem for two basis vectors \mathbf{u}_1 and \mathbf{u}_2 , we obtain the first and second principal components whose total projected variance is $\lambda_1 + \lambda_2$.

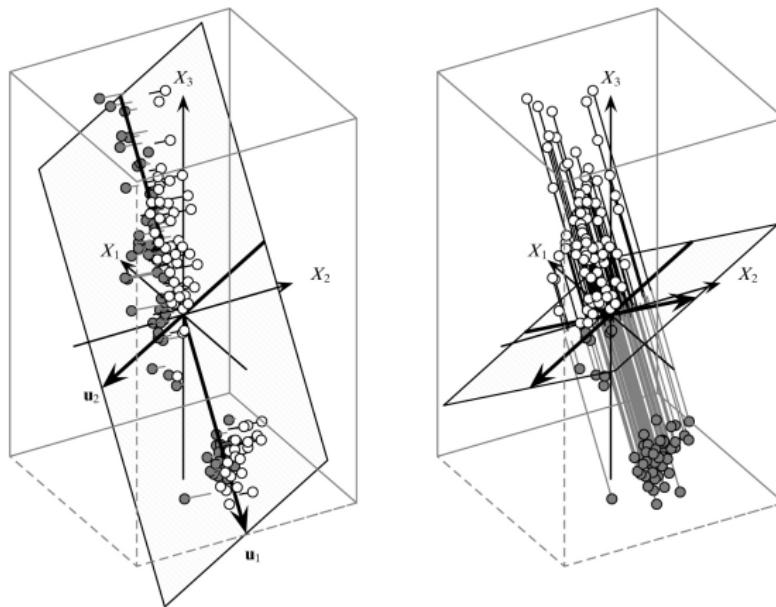


Figure: (Left) Optimal two-dimensional basis for Iris data. (Right) Non-optimal basis

Singular value decomposition (SVD)

Recall the singular value decomposition of \mathbf{X} :

$$\mathbf{X} = \mathbf{U} \mathbf{S} \mathbf{V}^T \quad (8)$$

where:

- \mathbf{X} is an $N \times D$ data matrix, whose entries have been centered ($x_{nj} \leftarrow x_{nj} - \bar{x}_j$)
- \mathbf{U} is an $N \times D$ orthogonal¹ matrix. The columns of \mathbf{U} are called *left singular vectors*
- \mathbf{S} is a $D \times D$ diagonal matrix (whose elements are called *singular values*)
- \mathbf{V} is an $D \times D$ orthogonal² matrix. The columns of \mathbf{V} are called *right singular vectors*
- The columns of \mathbf{US} are called the **principal components** of \mathbf{X} .

¹i.e. $\mathbf{U}^T \mathbf{U} = \mathbf{I}$ and $\mathbf{U}^T = \mathbf{U}^{-1}$

²i.e. $\mathbf{V}^T \mathbf{V} = \mathbf{I}$ and $\mathbf{V}^T = \mathbf{V}^{-1}$

SVD (cont.)

$$\underbrace{\begin{pmatrix} x_{11} & \cdots & x_{1D} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ x_{N1} & \cdots & x_{ND} \end{pmatrix}}_X = \underbrace{\begin{pmatrix} u_{11} & \cdots & u_{1D} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ u_{N1} & \cdots & u_{ND} \end{pmatrix}}_{U: \text{eigenvectors of } XX^T} \underbrace{\begin{pmatrix} \sqrt{\lambda_1} & \cdots & 0 \\ 0 & \ddots & 0 \\ 0 & \cdots & \sqrt{\lambda_D} \end{pmatrix}}_S \underbrace{\begin{pmatrix} v_{11} & \cdots & v_{1D} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ v_{D1} & \cdots & v_{DD} \end{pmatrix}}_{V: \text{eigenvectors of } X^T X} \quad (9)$$

- The columns $\mathbf{u}_1, \dots, \mathbf{u}_D$ are the left singular vectors of \mathbf{X}
- The columns $\mathbf{v}_1, \dots, \mathbf{v}_D$ are the right singular vectors of \mathbf{X}
- The elements $\sqrt{\lambda_1} \geq \dots \geq \sqrt{\lambda_D} = 0$ are the singular values of \mathbf{X}
- $\lambda_1 \geq \dots \geq \lambda_D = 0$ are the eigenvalues of \mathbf{XX}^T and also of $\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X}$

PCA via SVD

- In the SVD framework, this means we find the best number L of principal components $\mathbf{u}_k s_k$, where $k = 1, \dots, L, L+1, \dots, D$.³
- The transformed (reduced) dataset is given by:

$$\mathbf{Z} = \mathbf{U}_L \mathbf{S}_L = \mathbf{X} \mathbf{V}_L \quad (10)$$

where $\mathbf{Z} \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times L}$ is the **score matrix** and \mathbf{U}_L , \mathbf{S}_L and \mathbf{V}_L are the L -truncated matrix components of the SVD of \mathbf{X}

- \mathbf{V}_L is also referred to as the **weight matrix** \mathbf{W}
- The data matrix \mathbf{X} can be approximately recovered from the transformation by:

$$\tilde{\mathbf{X}} = \mathbf{Z} \mathbf{V}_L^T \quad (11)$$

where $\mathbf{V}_L^T \in \mathbb{R}^{L \times D}$ (**loadings matrix**) is the transpose of the first L columns of \mathbf{V}

- Thus, PCA is considered the L -truncated SVD approximation of \mathbf{X} :

$$\tilde{\mathbf{X}} = \mathbf{U}_L \mathbf{S}_L \mathbf{V}_L^T \quad (12)$$

³Note that $s_k = \sqrt{\lambda_k}$ in our notation.

PCA via SVD (cont.)

Since $\mathbf{Z} = \mathbf{X}\mathbf{V}_L$, we can also recover \mathbf{X} by:

$$\tilde{\mathbf{X}} = \mathbf{Z}\mathbf{V}_L^T = \mathbf{X}\mathbf{V}_L\mathbf{V}_L^T \quad (13)$$

The matrix $\mathbf{V}_L\mathbf{V}_L^T$ is called the **projection matrix**.

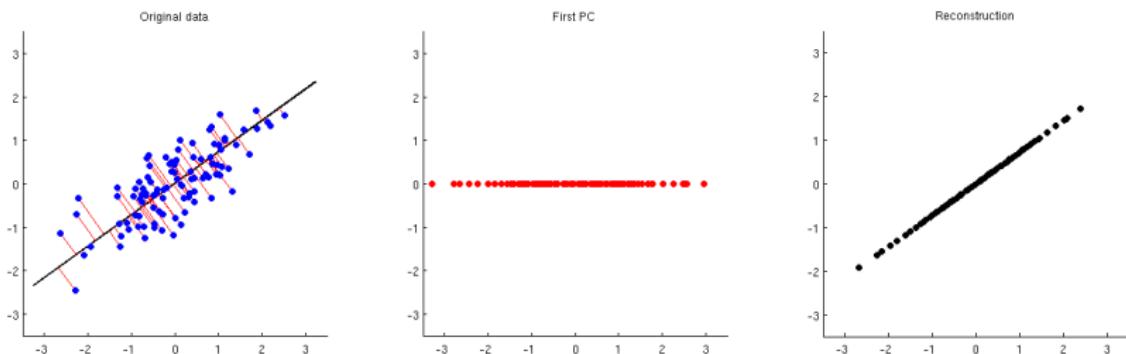


Figure: 1D projection of dataset onto first PC and reconstruction

- When $L = D$, then $\mathbf{V}_L\mathbf{V}_L^T = \mathbf{I}_D$ ($D \times D$ identity matrix) and \mathbf{X} is recovered exactly
- A great illustration can be found [here](#).

Proportion of variance explained

The total variance present in the dataset (mean-centered) is given by:

$$\sum_{j=1}^D \mathbb{V}(\mathbf{x}_j) = \sum_{j=1}^D \lambda_j \quad (14)$$

That is, the eigenvalues of the covariance matrix $\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X}$ sum up to the total variance. Since $\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X}$ is positive semidefinite, its eigenvalues are non-negative:

$$\lambda_1 \geq \lambda_2 \cdots \lambda_L \geq \lambda_{L+1} \cdots \geq \lambda_D \geq 0 \quad (15)$$

The total projected variance in the L -dimensional subspace is given by:

$$\mathbb{V}(\tilde{\mathbf{X}}) = \sum_{j=1}^L \lambda_j \quad (16)$$

The **proportion of variance explained** by the j th PC is then given by:

$$PVE = \frac{\lambda_j}{\sum_{j=1}^D \lambda_j} \quad (17)$$

- $\sqrt{\lambda_j}$ are the diagonal (non-zero) elements of the singular value matrix \mathbf{S}

Selecting the “best” L -dimensional approximation

For a given number of dimensions L , the **cumulative PVE** is given by:

$$CVPE_L = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^L \lambda_j}{\sum_{j'=1}^D \lambda_{j'}} \quad (18)$$

We choose M (number of PCs) such that the CVPE is greater than a reasonably large threshold:

$$L^* = \min L \quad (19)$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad CVPE_L \geq \tau \quad (20)$$

where τ is the desired threshold (e.g. 0.9)

- This can also be visualized using a **scree plot**

Dimensionality reduction for regression

- Previous methods to control variance:
 - Subset selection
 - Coefficient shrinkage
- All used original predictors in dataset $\mathbf{x}_1, \mathbf{x}_2, \dots, \mathbf{x}_D$.
- We can also improve a fit by training a model on a transformation of the input space: $\mathbf{z}_1, \mathbf{z}_2, \dots, \mathbf{z}_L$:

$$\mathbf{z}_j = \sum_{j=1}^L \mathbf{X} v_j, \quad L < D \quad (21)$$

- if $L \ll D$, variance of coefficients can be significantly reduced
- The estimation problem is thus reduced from estimating $D + 1$ coefficients to $L + 1$ coefficients
- Consider **principal components analysis (PCA)** as an approach for regression
 - In selecting the number of principal components as regressors, we can use cross-validation to choose the L which gives the lowest error estimate.

Principal components regression (PCR)

Let the columns \mathbf{z}_k be the linear combinations (principal components) of the original inputs X_j (or \mathbf{x}_j).

In PCR, we regress the response \mathbf{y} onto the subspace spanned by $\mathbf{z}_k = \mathbf{X}v_k$, where $L \leq D$ and \mathbf{z}_k are the principal components of \mathbf{X} :

$$\hat{\mathbf{y}}_{(L)}^{pcr} = \bar{y}\mathbf{1} + \sum_{j=1}^L \hat{\theta}_j \mathbf{z}_j \quad (22)$$

The coordinates of $\tilde{\mathbf{x}}_j$ in the new L -dimensional basis are then given by:

$$\mathbf{z}_j = \mathbf{V}_L^T \mathbf{x}_j \quad (23)$$

and the estimates are:

$$\hat{\theta}_j = \frac{\mathbf{z}_j^T \mathbf{y}}{\mathbf{z}_j^T \mathbf{z}_j} \quad (24)$$

We can then express the solution in terms of PCR coefficients of \mathbf{x}_j :

$$\hat{\mathbf{y}}_{(L)}^{pcr} = \bar{y}\mathbf{1} + \mathbf{X} \hat{\mathbf{w}}^{pcr} \quad (25)$$

Partial least squares regression

This is a supervised and iterative form of PCR in which the construction of z_j is informed by the correlation of each x_j with y .

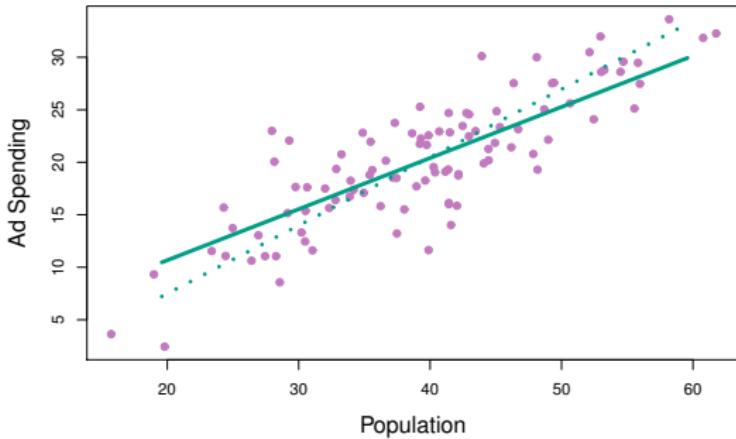


Figure: An example showing the first PLS direction (solid line) and first PCR direction (dotted line)

Summary of PCA steps

- Perform singular value decomposition of $N \times D$ data matrix \mathbf{X} :

$$\mathbf{X} = \mathbf{U} \mathbf{S} \mathbf{V}^T \quad (26)$$

- Determine the number of principal components M to extract/retain using the cumulative proportion of variance explained:

$$CVPE_L = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^L \lambda_j}{\sum_{j'=1}^D \lambda_{j'}} \quad (27)$$

- Get loadings matrix \mathbf{V}_L^T by truncating \mathbf{V}^T
- Find score matrix $\mathbf{Z} = \mathbf{X} \mathbf{V}_L = \mathbf{X} \mathbf{W}$ (transformed data into reduced subspace). Use \mathbf{Z} for regression, clustering, etc
- Approximation of original data matrix can be obtained via:

$$\tilde{\mathbf{X}} = \mathbf{Z} \mathbf{V}_L^T = \mathbf{Z} \mathbf{W}^T \quad (28)$$

Outlook

Key points

- PCA is a technique used for reducing the dimensionality of a dataset and exploring underlying patterns in the variables
- PCA identifies a low-dimensional subspace that captures the largest fraction of the input data variance
- Standardizing (mean centering and scaling by standard deviation) is desired to ensure that variances are not dominated by features on a larger scale

Reading

- **PMLI** 20.1
- **ESL** 14.5 (note that in the book D corresponds to the S used in this lecture)
- **PMLCE** 10.2

Ridge estimates

Recall the ridge regression estimate:

$$\hat{\mathbf{w}}^R = (\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X} + \lambda \mathbf{I})^{-1} \mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{y} \quad (29)$$

The **singular value decomposition** of \mathbf{X} can yield important insights into the nature of the solution:

$$\mathbf{X} = \mathbf{U} \mathbf{D} \mathbf{V}^T \quad (30)$$

where $\mathbf{U}_{N \times D}$ and $\mathbf{V}_{D \times D}$ are orthogonal matrices. Recall that an orthogonal matrix is one whose columns/rows are orthogonal unit vectors (i.e. all rows and columns have only one non-zero element: ± 1); $\mathbf{U}^T \mathbf{U} = \mathbf{I}$

\mathbf{D} is a $D \times D$ diagonal matrix; $d_j \geq 0$

$$\begin{aligned}\hat{\mathbf{y}} &= \mathbf{X} \hat{\mathbf{w}}^{OLS} = \mathbf{X} (\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X})^{-1} \mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{y} \\ &= \mathbf{U} \mathbf{S} \mathbf{D} \mathbf{V}^T (\mathbf{V} \mathbf{D} \mathbf{U}^T \mathbf{U} \mathbf{S} \mathbf{V}^T)^{-1} \mathbf{V} \mathbf{S} \mathbf{U}^T \mathbf{y} \\ &= \mathbf{U} (\mathbf{S}^2)^{-1} \mathbf{S}^2 \mathbf{U}^T \mathbf{y} \\ &= \mathbf{U} \mathbf{U}^T \mathbf{y}\end{aligned}$$

Ridge estimate decomposition

We can then write the ridge solutions as:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbf{X} \hat{\mathbf{w}}^R &= \mathbf{X}(\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X} + \lambda \mathbf{I})^{-1} \mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{y} \\ &= \mathbf{U} \mathbf{S} (\mathbf{S}^2 + \lambda \mathbf{I})^{-1} \mathbf{S} \mathbf{U}^T \mathbf{y} \\ &= \sum_{j=1}^p \mathbf{u}_j \frac{d_j^2}{d_j^2 + \lambda} \mathbf{u}_j^T \mathbf{y}\end{aligned}$$

where \mathbf{u}_j are the columns of \mathbf{U} .

Thus, we see that ridge regression shrinks the coordinates of \mathbf{y} in the basis \mathbf{U} by

$$\frac{d_j^2}{d_j^2 + \lambda}.$$

- As d_j decreases, the term $\frac{d_j^2}{d_j^2 + \lambda}$ increases.
- Thus, more shrinkage is applied to the coordinates whose basis vectors correspond to smaller d_j .

Principal components

Keeping in mind that \mathbf{X} is a centered matrix, then the sample covariance matrix is given by:

$$\mathbf{S} = \frac{\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X}}{N} \quad (31)$$

Substituting \mathbf{X} with its SVD we obtain:

$$\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X} = (\mathbf{U} \mathbf{D} \mathbf{V}^T)^T \mathbf{U} \mathbf{D} \mathbf{V}^T = \mathbf{V} \mathbf{D} \mathbf{U}^T \mathbf{U} \mathbf{D} \mathbf{V}^T = \mathbf{V} \mathbf{D}^2 \mathbf{V}^T \quad (32)$$

- The columns \mathbf{v}_j of \mathbf{V} are the **eigenvectors** of \mathbf{X} (or **principal components**).
- The expression $\mathbf{V} \mathbf{D}^2 \mathbf{V}^T$ is called the **eigendecomposition** of \mathbf{S} .

First principal component

Given the eigen decomposition:

$$\mathbf{X}^T \mathbf{X} = \mathbf{V} \mathbf{S}^2 \mathbf{V}^T \quad (33)$$

The first principal component⁴ of \mathbf{X} satisfies the property:

$$\mathbb{V}(\mathbf{z}_1) = \mathbb{V}(\mathbf{X} \mathbf{v}_1) = \frac{s_1^2}{N} = \frac{\lambda_1}{N} \quad (34)$$

- The variable \mathbf{z}_1 is the **first principal component** of \mathbf{X} :

$$\mathbf{z}_1 = \mathbf{X} \mathbf{v}_1 = \mathbf{u}_1 s_1 \quad (35)$$

where the vector \mathbf{u}_1 is the normalized first principal component.

- The last principal component has minimum variance.
- Since this corresponds to the lowest s_k , this corresponds to the direction shrunk the most by the ridge regression

⁴Also known as Karhunen-Loeve direction

Principal components — 2 dimensions

Ridge regression projects \mathbf{y} onto the principal components, shrinking the coefficient of the low-variance component more than the high-variance component.

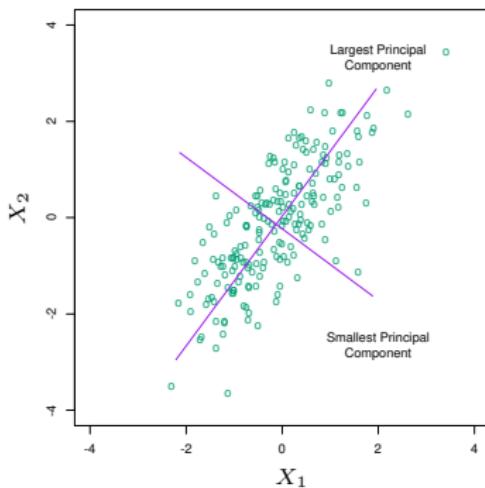


Figure: Principal components of a two-dimensional input dataset. The largest principal component (PC) maximizes the variance of the projected data. The smallest PC minimizes that variance.

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