

# Why Convolution Is Important in Modeling Graph Topology for Computationally Complex Problems

## Introduction

In recent years, neural networks have increasingly become the go-to modeling method for formulating and solving computationally complex problems of high-dimensionality. In essence, neural networks themselves are graphs. Therefore, I am convinced that adopting a better understanding of graph theory will open up our interface with the world to more effective ways of solving problems.

In this paper I will attempt to parse out why the mathematical branch of graph theory is an essential component in this new generation of solving computationally expensive problems, most immediately to my topic of interest, neural networks, and beyond. I am going to explore convolution as a method to manipulate the form of graph isomorphism, effectively preserving or changing the topology of a graph. I think this is a very interesting topic, the understanding of which can open up new ways to solve complex high-dimensional problems.

## Graphs as An Effective Modeling Tool

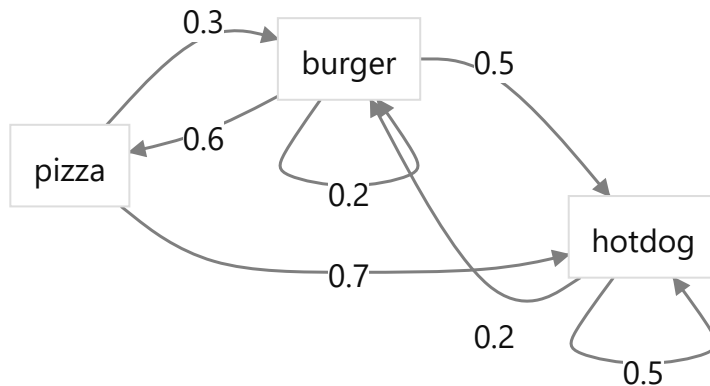
Graphs are very robust representation for complex systems.

For problems of flow optimization, a directed graph is a wonderful tool for modeling the critical nexuses and the traffic flow, i.e. input and output towards and away, at these nexuses.

On the other hand, a tree is a very useful graphic structure for modeling a filtering or aggregating process. In machine learning, popular tree structures are adopted in the form of decision trees and random forests. Outside of this field, tree graphs also enjoy generous adoption. In the field of software requirement engineering, a software application can be explicitly modeled as one or more aggregations of functional and nonfunctional requirements. These aggregations are also frequently extended beyond software architecture to include other requirements such as environmental (both physically and digitally), financial, in terms of human resources, and so on.

Another type of graph, a Markov chain, can be used to represent a probabilistic model for decision making based on prior evidence. Let's say we want to go out and get pizza at a

restaurant that is known to serve only one type of food each day. Our only clue for guessing which it would serve today is food it sells on the previous day. This problem can be modeled as a directed graph with three nodes for the types of food and the edges connecting them are the dependent probabilities.



Graphs can also be extremely useful where modeling the hierarchical structure of a system is necessary.

Even prior to the rise of neural networks, graphs have appeared in a more static form: images. However, in a neural network, the architecture is very important. The inner layers of a neural network can actually be abstracted into a vector of hyperparameters which then can be tweak to influence the network's performance. This becomes even more apparent when one employs the ensemble method, which involves using mutliple learning methods concurrently and let them vote for the best results.

## Extending Convolution to Graphs

In the context of neural networks for processing images, an image can be represented by a matrix. In other words, a matrix is a special kind of graph. An image is a graph with a very regular grid-like structure, where the individual pixels are nodes, and the RGB channel values at each pixel are the node features. At the core of image processing is the mathematical procedure of convolution.

The [convolution](#) of a function  $f$  and another function  $g$  is written  $f * g$ , with the symbol  $*$  as the convolution operator.

In essence, convolution is defined as **the integral of the product of the two functions after one is reflected about the y-axis and shifted**. As such, it is a particular kind of integral transform:

$$(f * g)(t) := \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(\tau) \cdot g(t - \tau) \cdot d\tau$$

or (due to commutativity):

$$(f * g)(t) := \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(t - \tau) \cdot g(\tau) \cdot d\tau$$

where  **$t$  is the amount at which the function  $f(\tau)$  weighted by the function  $g(-\tau)$  is shifted**. As  $t$  changes, the weighting function  $g(t - \tau)$  emphasizes different parts of the input function  $f(\tau)$ :

- **for  $t > 0$ :**
  - $g(t - \tau) = g(-\tau)$  that shifts by the amount  $t$  along the  $\tau$ -axis towards  $+\infty$
- **for  $t < 0$ :**
  - $g(t - \tau) = g(-\tau)$  that shifts by the amount  $|t|$  along the  $\tau$ -axis towards  $-\infty$

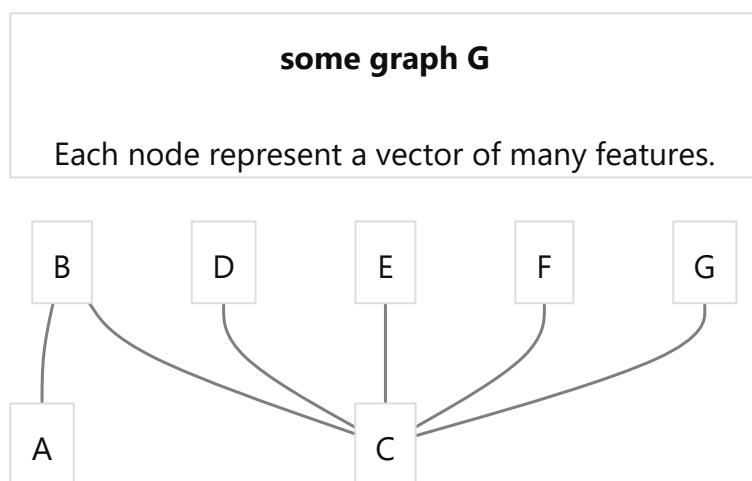
However, this form is for continuous functions. We want to [extend this to be applicable on graphs](#), which are discrete structures.

In the context of graph theory, we know that, much like an image, a graph can be represented in matrix form with degree matrix  $D$  and adjacency matrix  $A$ . Thus, we perform a linear combination on the Laplacian matrix of the graph with some vector. We produce the following polynomials:

$$p_w(L) = w_0 I_n + w_1 L + w_2 L^2 + \dots + w_d L^d = \sum_{i=0}^d w_i L^i$$

where  $w$  is the coefficient vector. Each of these polynomial is effectively a filter in convolutional neural networks, and therefore  $d$  is the degree of filter.

For example, we consider a simple graph in which each node represents a vector of features.



Let's say we normalize and simplify all nodes in the graph, such that each has only a representative one-dimensional feature. We then map each node to a coefficient in a new feature vector  $\vec{x}$ :

$$\vec{x} : \{x_v\} \quad \text{for each vertex } v \in V.$$

Now we then can finally define the convolution operation for some filter  $p_w$  on the Laplacian matrix with some feature vector as the following dot product:

$$Conv = p_w(L) \cdot \vec{x}$$

First, we consider the special case where  $w_0 = 1$  (0) and  $w_1 = 1$  (1). In both cases, we hold all other coefficients to be 0.

(0):

$$Conv(\vec{x}) = p_w(L) \cdot \vec{x} = \sum_{i=0}^{d=0} w_i L^i \cdot \vec{x} = (1) \cdot I \cdot \vec{x} = \vec{x}$$

(1):

$$Conv(\vec{x}) = p_w(L) \cdot \vec{x} = \sum_{i=0}^{d=1} w_i L^i \cdot \vec{x} = (1) \cdot L \cdot \vec{x} = L \cdot \vec{x}$$

Note that in the case of (1) we apply this convolution for some vertex  $v$ :

$$\begin{aligned} Conv(\vec{x})_v &= (L \cdot \vec{x})_v = L_v \cdot \vec{x} \\ &= \sum_{u \in G} L_{vu} \cdot x_u \\ &= \sum_{u \in G} (D_{vu} - A_{vu}) \cdot x_u \\ &= D_v \cdot x_v - \sum_{u \in G} x_u \end{aligned}$$

because for any Laplacian matrix:

$$L_{i,j} = \begin{cases} \deg(v_i) & \text{if } i = j \\ -1 & \text{if } i \neq j \text{ and } v_i \text{ is adjacent to } v_j \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Thanks to the last property, we know that when there are no edges between two nodes  $u$  and  $v$ , or when the distance between them are larger than some previously picked degree

$i$ , we have an all-zero Laplacian matrix for any node  $u$  and  $v$ :

$$\text{dist}_G(u, v) > 1 \quad \text{leads to} \quad L_{vu}^i = 0$$

This leads to the realization that a convolution between the feature vector and some polynomial filter of degree  $d$  produces:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Conv}(\vec{x}) &= p_w(L) \cdot \vec{x} = \sum_{i=0}^d w_i L^i \cdot \vec{x} \\ &= \sum_{i=0}^d w_i \sum_{u \in G} L_{vu}^i x_u \\ &= \sum_{i=0}^d w_i \underbrace{\sum_{u \in G} L_{vu}^i x_u}_{\text{dist}_G(v, u) \leq i} \end{aligned}$$

In other words, a convolution at node  $v$  only happens with nodes  $u$  that are not more than  $d$  hops away from  $v$ . This implies that the polynomial filters are localized and the degree  $d$  is the upperbound to the degree of localization.

From this foundation, we can extend this into **spectral convolution** to apply for the global graph. In short, by utilizing some [magic](#) and the eigenvector of  $L$ , we can effectively manipulate the topology of a graph and produce smoothed out or roughed up versions of it.

This extension of convolution to graphs is a breakthrough, because it allows for the localization of nodes and mapping them into equivariants, effectively preserving the topology of the global graph.

## Cutting-Edge Applications

Going in a step further, this advance in research has opened up a new direction into building meta-networks that can operate on the computational graph representation of other neural networks. Thanks to node representation/embedding learning, i.e. the mapping of individual nodes to fixed-size real-valued vectors, we can simplify a complex system into a computational graph presentation. In other words, a feature vector can be abstracted away into a representative node in a meta-network.

This leads us to [HyperNetwork](#). HyperNetworks are indeed very useful in operating on manifolds, i.e. high dimensional object, which are increasingly becoming more relevant

with the exponential generation of data and the accompanying demand for computational throughput.

One important property associated with manifolds is **homeomorphism**, or topological isomorphism, which is an isomorphism from some subdivision of a graph  $G$  to some subdivision of another graph  $G'$ . In other words, where the graphic structure is preserved in isomorphism, the topological structure is preserved in homeomorphism. For example, performing a subdivision (adding a new node) on some edge in graph  $G$  should mean that the same action happens on some edge in the graph  $G'$  and simultaneously preserve their isomorphic relation, and thus preserving their local topological mapping.

I understand that this is a very advanced topic which is beyond my undergraduate knowledge. Therefore, I will not dig too deep into this area. However, I think it is worth noting that manifolds are high-dimensional topologies and that they are very often mapped to low-dimensional topologies. For example, the topological gradient of a 3D object is a simple point on a 2D plane in space (which can be obtained via a linear transformation). Following this train of thought, we can apply this to the biological neural network: the brain. Indeed, some  $N$ -dimensional manifold mapped out from some collections of neurons can represent neural activities (i.e. local states in space-time and various biological feedbacks such as temperature, humidity, and so on). This manifold in turn can be abstract out into a decision making process in Euclidian space. Furthermore, the graph of  $N$  neurons are indeed composed of some  $M$  subgraphs of related neurons (neurons that are typically in close proximity and activate on the same input). Thus, it could be further be mapped to a sort of HyperNetwork of connected components.

This really ties it to why HyperNetworks and the ability to use them to operate on other networks are an incredible breakthrough. In a recent paper, [Graph HyperNetworks for Neural Architecture Search](#), researchers have been able to predict the performance of any unseen neural networks by operating on top their computational graph representations. Most importantly, Graph HyperNetworks can be generalized and applied to anytime-prediction and have shown to outperform existing manually designed models.

This is another breakthrough in solving complex computational problems in itself. The reason is because traditionally neural network architecture search has been expensive for the simple reason that Stochastic Gradient Descent is expensive to compute. However, with the advent of graph modeling, a trained HyperNetwork is well correlated with Stochastic Gradient Descent, and thus can effectively surrogate the weight generation for the main network while being much more intuitive and simpler. This allows for the explicit modeling of topology of an architecture. Furthermore, it is intuitive to understand and can be easily extensible to various graph sizes.

## Closing Thoughts

Given the increasingly more complex and massive problems that our interconnected and data-driven world is experiencing rapidly, I strongly believe that it is extremely important to gain and equip myself with better understanding of graph theory and state-of-the-art researches and applications.

There has been a lot of fear and worries in regards to the development of artificial intelligence as the next technological event horizon. However, in my opinion they will become another new technology in service to mankind just as the printing press, the combustion engine, the Internet and the vast many other technologies have and continued to help use create a more abundant world.

Obviously, greater and more advanced technologies come with great danger of abuse and thus even greater vigilance and responsibility. However, only by equipping ourselves with better knowledge, can we be at the forefront of managing our technologies wisely and utilizing them effectively. This has always been true throughout history and there is no reason to believe otherwise.

## References

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  - <https://arxiv.org/abs/1810.05749>